

Saranagathi



eNewsletter from www.sriramanamaharshi.org

In this Issue

Dear Sri Bhagavan Devotees,

It has been hot and blazing in Tiruvannamalai.

Sri Kunju Swami in his recollections says, "Sri Bhagavan would walk barefoot at the same pace, whatever the season or weather. During the summer, on His usual walks to Palakothu when the ground was scorching He would encourage His attendants to run ahead and take shelter under the shade of a tree while He walked at His usual pace."

This is our Bhagavan, always considerate and kind towards all.....including his attendants.

In this issue we continue the series on Sri Bhagavan's 'attendants' featuring Sri Kandaswami, who helped build Skandasharam and have a write-up from SS Cohen's '*Guru Ramana*' which gives us a glimpse of Sri Bhagavan's daily routine.

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We end with a report from Sri Ramanasramam.

We would again like to draw attention to some new additions to the website like the [Old Devotees Interviews](#). We welcome your feedback on how to improve the website further. We hope to hear from you, about your [satsangs](#) and experiences of Him. Please email them to saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

Yours in Sri Bhagavan,

The Editorial Team.

The Essence of Instruction

*Absorption is of two sorts;
Submergence and destruction.
Mind submerged rises again;
Dead, it revives no more.*

— Upadesa Saram by Sri Bhagavan (Verse 13)

Kandaswami

Kandaswami was the devotee who single handedly raised an Asramam for Sri Bhagavan on the south-eastern slopes of Arunachala. In gratitude for Kandaswami's labours Sri Bhagavan named the Asramam after him as Skandasramam. Sri Bhagavan stayed here from 1916 to 1922 before moving permanently to the present Ramanasramam at the foot hills of Arunachala.

At Virupaksha cave besides Pazhaniswami, others like Perumalswami and Kandaswami began to attach themselves permanently to the Sri Bhagavan and to live with Him. 'Share and share alike' was always Sri Bhagavan's motto; and food had to be found for all of them. Since they could not feel sure of feeding all the visitors, Pazhaniswami and other dependants would start from the Hill and go to the town to beg food. They used to go about begging in the streets for food and bring it up the Hill and everyone used to share it. Sometimes there used to be just rice, sometimes a mixture of everything from sweetmeats to savouries, but the Swami used to make it so tasty that whatever they got, they used to be extremely satisfied with. Perumalswami and Kandaswami used to blow in concert on the conch. When leaving thus they would blow a long blast on their conches. This was an announcement to the townspeople that Swami's party had left the cave on their begging mission. They would give another blast when they reached the foot of the Hill, a third call would be sounded at the entrance to the street. All the residents of the street would be ready with their offerings and the party would march along the street singing Siva *namavalis* and collecting the offerings. This would suffice to feed the Swami, his attendants, visitors and all the monkeys, both day and night.

Kandaswami was anxious to build a separate Asramam for Bhagavan. The number of visitors had also begun to increase. There was no water facility near the cave at that time. There was not enough room to cook or for people to stay. Some

of the visitors were ladies and Virupaksha was too small to accommodate all of them, hence Kandaswami's decision to build a new Asramam. In fact, as Bhagavan had mentioned in his deposition to the commission, the work on Skandasramam began as early as 1902. Kandaswami inspected various places on the Hill and in the forests to select a site.

To the west of Virupaksha Cave, there is a black rock. Once when Bhagavan went towards the rock, he saw some water oozing from under the rock. Bhagavan showed the moist area to Jadaswami and said there might be a spring there. Jadaswami had the place dug, and out came pure, sweet water. Whenever Bhagavan went there, he used to collect the pure water in his Kamandala for use later. Kandaswami finally suggested this site for the new Asramam and with Sri Bhagavan's approval he began work on the new Asramam single handedly.

Kandaswami began converting what was a thick forest of prickly pear on the Mountain slope. He removed the stones around the spring and cut down the thorny shrubs and leveled the ground. The result of his labour & great self-sacrifice, unaided by any at the time, is the Skandasramam we see now. Regarding this Sri Bhagavan has said, "You cannot imagine the state the site was in originally. Kandaswami worked with almost superhuman effort, achieved by his own hands what even four people together could not have done. He removed all the prickly pear, reduced stone and boulder to level ground created a

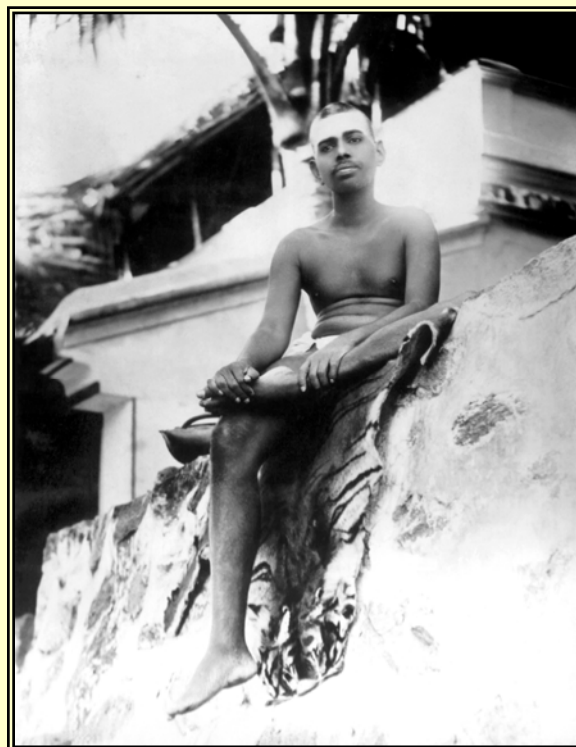
garden and raised the Asramam. We got four coconut trees for planting. To plant them properly Kandaswami dug huge square pits about ten feet deep. That would give you an idea of the amount of labour he put into the work he took on hand. He was a strong, well-built man.” He put up a structure and planted mango, jackfruit, coconut trees and some plants in front of it. Since that Asramam was constructed in a spirit of service to Ramana, in a quiet manner and without any self advertisement, it came to be called Skandasramam in memory of his name.

Later, with the help of Perumalswami, he completed the present brick building and requested Sri Bhagavan to come and stay there. Sri Bhagavan stayed at Skandasramam from 1916 to 1922. Kandaswami spent some time with Sri Bhagavan and later returned to his birth place. Kandaswami never returned to Tiruvannamalai. There was no further news of him.

Once, in later years after moving down to live in Ramanasramam, Bhagavan showed devotees a group photo in which Kandaswami, Perumalswami, Pazhaniswami, Sivaprakasam Pillai, Narayana Reddi, Iswara Swami, etc., are sitting with Sri Bhagavan. The photo was taken on a rock behind Virupaksha Cave. He then added, “Kandaswami looks like a weak and lean man in this photo. That is because he went away from us for more than a month and was doing *tapas* at *Ezhu Sunai* (Seven Springs) and was purposely underfeeding himself. Before that, he was a muscular, well-built man. He went away with only some flour and a little jaggery to Seven Springs and lived there for about one and a half months, living only on these scanty provisions. One night at about 7 p.m. myself, Perumalswami, Nagappa Chetti and possibly one or two others went in search of Kandaswami and found him sleeping inside the rocks at Seven Springs.

Perumalswami went inside and brought out Kandaswami’s conch. Kandaswami and Perumalswami were adept at blowing long, continuous blasts on the conch. Perumalswami blew a loud, long blast outside the cave. Kandaswami woke up and, recognising that it was Perumalswami that was blowing the conch, came out. Seeing me, he prostrated himself. We all spent the night there. We finished what was left of the flour and jaggery which he had, and burnt away the firewood he had gathered, made it impossible for him to continue there and persuaded him to come away with us. It was because of his fasting and *tapas* that you find him lean in this photo.”

Kandaswami’s humble offering to Sri Bhagavan, Skandasramam is still looked after by Ramanasramam and is a place of pilgrimage for the devotees of Sri Bhagavan.



Sri Bhagavan's Daily Routine

Extracted from the book Guru Ramana by S. S. Cohen

The years 1936–1938 were very blissful, indeed. Bhagavan was then enjoying the sound, robust health of middle age, and could very well afford to be available at almost all hours of the day to devotees. We could gather round his couch and speak to him as intimately as to a beloved father; tell him all our troubles and show him our letters without let or hindrance.

Some disciples and his attendants used to sleep on the floor of the hall at night. Bhagavan's sleep was very light: he woke every now and then, and almost always he found an attendant nearby fully awake to say a few words to, and slept again. Once or twice he would go out for a few minutes, and, by 5 a.m., when the Veda chanters came from the township, they found him fully awake and chatting in a soft, subdued voice. Now the parayanam would get started and go on for a little less than an hour, during which everybody abstained from talking, and Bhagavan often sat cross-legged and completely indrawn. Then he went out for bath, breakfast, and a little stroll on the hill, and returned at about 7.30, when visitors and devotees began trickling in – men, women and children – till they filled the hall by about 9 a.m. This morning hour of the parayanam was the best time of the day for meditation: the congregation was small, women and children were absent, the weather cool, and the mind had not yet completely emerged to run its usual riot. Over and above this Bhagavan then shone in the stillness of his samadhi, which permeated the hall and the meditation of the disciples. But unfortunately I could not keep up this attendance, nor could I benefit by it even when present, for my mind remained in the fog of somnolence. Being a life-long bad sleeper I never succeeded in making the requisite six-hour sleep before six in the morning. Another tendency which I could not completely overcome was intolerance to

noise, of which the hall was seldom free. Apart from the free access to it by all and sundry there was also the freedom of singing, which at times took one by surprise at a moment when the hall was plunged in silence and the atmosphere conducive to meditation. All of a sudden a soprano voice rose from somewhere in the hall intoning some hymn or other, or reciting some shloka in a South-Indian language, to be succeeded by a tenor or another soprano, often the latter, in competition with a male of the species, till Bhagavan went out at his usual hours. These were: 9.45 for a few minutes, 11 o'clock for luncheon, followed by the midday stroll in Palakottu, evening 4.45 on the hill, preceding the evening Veda parayanam, and 7 o'clock for dinner.

After 8 p.m. when the hall contained only the local residents, we sat round him for a 'family chat' till about 10 o'clock. Then he related to us stories from the Puranas or the lives of Saints, yielding to transportations of emotions when he depicted scenes of great bhakti, or great human tragedies, to which he was sensitive to the extreme. Then he shed tears which he vainly attempted to conceal.

On one occasion Bhagavan recited from memory a poem of a Vaishnava Saint, in which occurred the words "Fold me in thy embrace, O Lord," when the arms of Bhagavan joined in a circle round the vacant air before him, and his eyes shone with devotional ardour, while his voice shook with stifled sobs which did not escape our notice. It was fascinating to see him acting the parts he related, and be in such exhilarated moods as these.

Discourse by Sri Nochur Venkataraman



Sri Nochur Venkataraman held the audience packing Sri Ramanasramam's New Hall spellbound as he discoursed on Sri Bhagavan's '*Ulladu Narpadu*' (Forty Verses on Reality) from the 16th to 23rd June 2009. Expounding the first benedictory verse, Venkataraman showed the profound significance of the word '*Ulladu*' (that which is). Sri Bhagavan has used words stemming from the root '*ul*' fourteen times in this verse with different meanings, namely, being, that which is, thinking and Heart to draw us inward to the very Being-Awareness, sat-chit. Venkataraman's exposition of the second benedictory verse '*Maranabhayam*' was equally exhaustive and it became clear to many that total surrender to *Ramanesan*, who is our *Mahesan* (Supreme Lord) will surely deal a deathblow to the fear of death.

Depth of knowledge, understanding, devotion and experience and a rare facility and felicity of expression marked young Venkataraman's explanation of the first five verses of *Ulladu Narpadu*. He is unselfconscious and lets Sri Bhagavan's words explain themselves proving himself to be a true devotee of the 'Mighty Impersonality' that Sri Bhagavan is. He often pointed out that Bhagavan's words have such unique power because they issue from his direct experience of Reality and constant abidance in It.

The week-long exposition was arranged at the request of Sri Mohan and Smt. Lakshmi Mohan, Bhagavan's devotees, on the occasion of Sri Mohan's Shashtiabdapoorti.

Everyone is eagerly looking forward to Venkataraman's exposition of the remaining 35 verses of '*Ulladu Narpadu*'.

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