

Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

VOL. 10, NO. 3



Saranagati



MARCH 2016
VOL. 10, NO. 3

IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The month of February proved poignant and heart-rending with the loss of several devotees amidst the tragic events of 8th February at the sacred Ayyankulam Thirtha near Arunachaleswarar Temple. (See pages 7-9.) And yet, Lord Arunachala and Bhagavan Ramana find ways of granting blessing even in the midst of sorrow.

On Friday, the 12th February, Munagala Venkataramiah Day was observed at his samadhi and on 27 February puja in memory of Sundaram Iyer was performed in the Mother's Shrine.

Featured in this issue is the story of early Ashram publications beginning in the late 1920s with the arrival of scholars and scribes from around South India, and eventually, from around the world. (See *In the Kitchen with Bhagavan, pt. XIV: Floodtides from the Pen* on page 2.)

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org. See our YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>.

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

7th March (Mon) Mahasivaratri
18th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Homa/Punarvasu
22nd March (Tues) Full Moon
8th April (Fri) Telugu New Year
14th April (Thurs) Tamil New Year/Punarvasu
15th April (Fri) Rama Navami

17th April (Sun) Major Chadwick Day
21st April (Thurs) Full Moon
4th May (Weds) Sri Bhagavan's 66th Aradhana
11th May (Weds) Punarvasu
21st May (Sat) Full Moon
30th May (Mon) Mahapuja





In the Kitchen with Bhagavan (Part XIV): Floodtides from the Pen

With his relocation to the foot of the Hill in 1922, the Maharshi began to be known to seekers all over South India. People now made pilgrimage to Tiruvannamalai not just for Lord Arunachala's blessings but to see Bhagavan Ramana. As newcomers arrived and experienced for the first time the Swami's grace and beneficence, the word soon spread. Rumours of things said, seen and done in the Maharshi's presence rippled out and caught the ears of seekers, soon to be visitors, who came in ever-increasing numbers. Some would never leave again, or did so only in order to make preparations to come and stay permanently at or near the Ashram.

Viswanatha Swami, a family relative, came in 1923 and stayed on as did Kunjuswami three years earlier. Echammal had been there from the early days on the Hill and continued her cooking which, though simple and by some people's standards, not so tasty and only half-cooked, was nonetheless cherished by Bhagavan who prized the love she put into preparing her food.

Rao Bahadur Veerappa Chettiar, the hereditary trustee of Arunachaleswarar Temple, responsible in part for getting Bhagavan to remain at Mother's Shrine in December 1922, took it upon himself to arrange annual bhikshas at the Ashram after Karthigai

Deepam. On the day of his bhiksha he set off fireworks in the Ashram and the townspeople would invariably know that it was Veerappa Chettiar's bhiksha day.

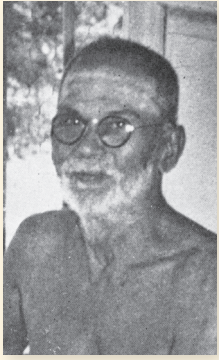
B. V. Narasimhaswami, a lawyer and politician, came in 1928 and built a small cottage near the neighbouring spring called Palakothu, from where he began compiling Bhagavan's biography which would be published as *Self-Realisation*. Lakshmana Sarma, the lawyer who wrote *Nature Cure*, also came in 1928 and, 'mesmerized by a single glance' from the Maharshi, settled in long-term. In the same year, Shantammal, a widow from Muruganar's native Ramanathapuram, came to visit at the poet's suggestion and found she could not leave again. M. R. Krishnamurthi Iyer, the first Ashram doctor, had come the year before in 1927. Krishna Bhikshu followed in 1929, and when seeing the manuscript of B.V. Narasimha's biography on Bhagavan, got Bhagavan's blessing to write a Telugu biography, later published as *Sri Ramana Leela*.

K. Natesan came as a boy in 1923 and during his years at the Municipal High School where Sri T. K. Sundaresa Iyer was his teacher, began to come more regularly at TKS's behest.

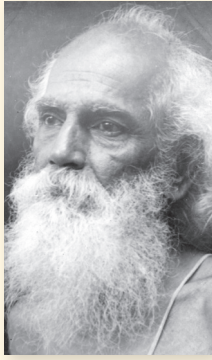
Paul Brunton (Raphael Hurst) arrived in 1931 and went back to England to publish his best-selling *A Search in Secret India* which single-handedly put Bhagavan on the international map. In the wake of its publication in 1934, Brunton sent his scholar-friends Evans-Wentz and Grant Duff, the former famed for his translations of the Tibetan classics—*Life of Milarepa* and *Tibetan Book of the Dead*; and the latter, an elderly Scots nobleman well-connected in Raj India where his uncle served as Governor of Madras and whose grandfather had been Governor of Maharashtra, was a poet, translator, critic and diplomat as well as an expert in the works of the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce.

Maurice Frydman (dubbed 'Bharatananda' by Gandhi) was the Polish polyglot and engineering genius that designed the charka that Mahatma Gandhi would take up as the standard model during his nationwide boycott of British textiles. He came from France to Bangalore and stayed three years at the Ashram during which time he compiled and edited *Maharshi's Gospel*. Also in the wake of the publication of Brunton's book Major Chadwick





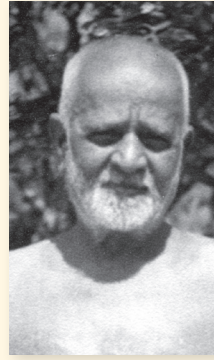
Muruganar



B.V. Narasimhaswami



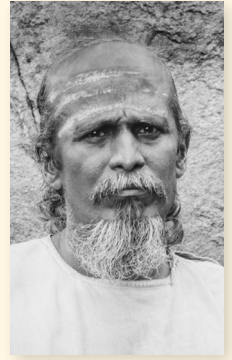
Maurice Frydman



Munagala Venkataramiah



Paul Brunton



Ganapathi Muni

and S. S. Cohen appeared, devotees who would live out their days, and finally be buried, in Sri Ramanasramam.

Munagala Venkataramiah, after an early visit as a boy in 1918, returned in 1927 and eventually shifted permanently to the Ashram in the early 1930s. He sat in the hall and recorded the dialogues between Bhagavan and devotees which would later be compiled and comprise the 600-plus page *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Along with the Buddha Bhikshu Prajnanananda, Viswanatha Swami, Muruganar, Ramanatha Brahmachari, Kavyakantha Ganapathi Muni, Mouni Srinivasa Rao, S.S. Cohen and Paul Brunton, Munagala built a *kutir* at the budding sadhu colony on the banks of Palakothu tirtham adjacent to the Ashram.

With people of such capacity appearing before the Master, it was just a question of time before Ramana Maharshi would become a household name the world over. Indeed, these visitors wrote of their experiences, transcribing the Maharshi's very words, and in some cases, succeeding in getting the Master to write himself.

Already in the early days at Virupaksha in 1901-02, Sivaprakasham Pillai put questions to the Swami who though in silence, was willing to write down his answers in pencil. Pillai later transcribed the text that would form the all-important twenty-eight question-and-answer booklet published in 1923 under the title, *Who Am I?*

In 1908 Krishna Iyer published the first edition of Bhagavan's Tamil translation of *Vivekachudamani* which went through numerous prints before being included in 1927 in the first edition of *Sri Ramana Nutrirattu (Collected Works of Sri Ramana)* in Tamil prose, later translated into English by Arthur Osbourne aided by a Tamil scholar.

These early volumes were published by individuals like Echammal, Narayana Reddiar and the publishing house, Vani Vilas, with proceeds going to the Ashram. Ramana Padananda financed the publication of Muruganar's *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* in 1931. Books like *Ramana Geeta* were sold at a book shop called *Ramaneeya Vaani Pushtakaalayam* in the northeast corner mantapam of the Arunachaleswar Temple and earnings given to the

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Nada

M.: The adherents of [meditation on *nada*] claim a very special virtue for it. According to them it is the easiest and the most direct method. Just as a child is lulled to sleep by lullabies, so *nada* soothes one into the state of samadhi; again just as a king sends his state musicians to welcome his son on his return from a long journey, so also *nada* takes the devotee into the Lord's Abode. *Nada* helps concentration. After it is felt, the practice should not be made an end in itself. *Nada* is not the objective; the subject should firmly be held, otherwise blankness will result. In order to be aware even in that blankness one must remember his own self. *Nada upasana* (meditation on sound) is good [but] it is better if associated with investigation (*vichara*).

— Talks §148





Ashram. In 1925 Sri Ramanasramam got its own book stall which was managed by Somasundara Swami (and later by Sivarama Reddiar). Finally, by the early 1930s, the Ashram started to publish its own books.

With Muruganar coming to stay permanently in 1926, Bhagavan was prompted to compose. *Upadesa Undiyar*, for example, came at Muruganar's insistence. The poet-devotee had written prefatory verses and asked Bhagavan to add the main part which eventually came to thirty. In 1927 *Upadesa Saram* and *Arunachala Pancharatnam* appeared in Sanskrit, born of Ganapathi Muni's initiatives. *Self-Enquiry*, a compilation of Bhagavan's teachings, appeared in 1931 under the title, *A Catechism of Enquiry*.

In 1928 Muruganar pressed Bhagavan with regard to stray verses composed by him that he feared might one day be lost if not compiled and published. Here is one of many instances where Bhagavan and Muruganar collaborated, in this case, the latter serving as editor. Muruganar urged Bhagavan to write new verses so that the collection of stray ones might number forty. But as Bhagavan composed, Muruganar invariably requested additional verses, evidently having a literary vision and strategy for the whole. About the genesis of *Ulladu Narpadu*, Bhagavan had this to say:

“[Muruganar] gathered about thirty stanzas and requested me to compose the remainder, bringing the total to forty. I did so, composing a few stanzas on various occasions as the mood came upon me. When the number came to forty, Muruganar went about deleting one or another of the old collection, on the pretext that they were not quite germane to the subject at hand and requested me to make fresh ones in place of the deleted ones¹. When this process was completed², I found that in the forty there were but two stanzas out of the [original thirty], all the rest having been newly composed. It was not made according to any set scheme, nor at a stretch, nor systematically. I composed different stanzas on different occasions and Muruganar and others afterwards arranged them in some order according to the thoughts expressed in them to give some appearance of connected and regular treatment of the subject, viz., Reality.³”

(to be continued)

1 The deleted verses were compiled into a supplement called *Ulladu Narpadu Anubhandam*, totaling 40 verses, and was published in 1942.

2 Most of the new verses were composed between July and August of 1928.

3 *Day by Day*, 7-12-45.

Wordwise: Nada

नाद

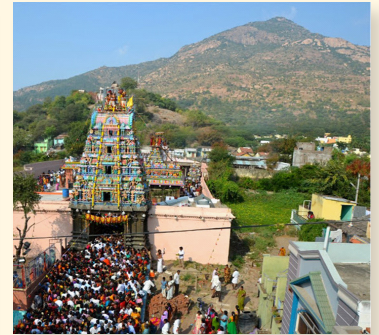
Nada (from *nad* meaning 'to flow', as in *nadi*= 'river'): sound, tone, vibration, resonance; *nadabindu*: the original vibration, the primordial sound from which the universe emerged; *nadabrahman* or 'Om', the sound of Brahman, the original sound that is Brahman.

The ancient art of *nada yoga* uses sacred sound as in mantra or japa. In *dhyana sadhana*, focusing on sound is a means of quietening the mind and enhancing memory, hearing, concentration, mental clarity and inner harmony. More broadly, *nada* is primordial sound, the *adhara sruti* or fundamental note that Bhagavan refers to when talking of his boyhood death experience at Madurai. In another place, when speaking of *nada* as *sadhana*, Bhagavan says: "He who meditates on [*nada*] feels it. *Nada*, *ijoti* [and] *enquiry* thus take one to the same place. (The former [two] are indirect and the last, direct.) The peace gained is your natural and permanent state. By continuous practice it will become natural. That is called the 'current' [and] is your true nature." (*Talks* §303).





Events in Tiruvannamalai: Durga Amman Temple Mahakumbhabhishekam



Courtesy of arunachalagrace.blogspot.in

On Friday morning the 29th, January, Mahakumbhabhishekam was performed at the Durga Amman Temple adjacent to the Pavala Kunru Temple where Bhagavan stayed in 1898. The Durga temple has an illustrious history and the *Arunachala Puranam* tells that its waters, called Khadga Tirtham, were formed when Durga plunged her sword (*khadga*) into the earth to bring up fresh water to wash her hands of the sin of killing Mahishasura who, while a demon that threatened the whole earth, was nonetheless a devotee of Mahesvara.

Events in Tiruvannamalai: Update on Pavala Kunru Repairs

Owing to major structural repairs, Pavala Kunru's Mahakumbhabhishekam planned for February 2016 has been indefinitely postponed. Repairs turned out to be more extensive than expected and involve key stone beam replacements. The scheduled Mahakumbhabhishekam of the Arunachaleswarar Temple has also been delayed as major work on gopurams and other temple structures is being carried out.



Announcements: Krishna Das Concert Videos and Audio



Please find below links for the remixed and professionally edited video recording of the January 14th concert by Krishna Das at Sri Ramanasramam. This video was taken by a professional team from Chennai videoing live-stream for the HD monitors at the outdoor concert sites. Owing to the editing process, these final edited versions are late in coming. For the new video, please go to: *Kirtan with Krishna Das, Part I* at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06okMPZo0Us>. For *Part II*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6PMsCclywg>. For other Ashram videos, see: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>. For the video team's remix of audio files of the concert in mp3 format, please go to the Ashram website for free downloading: www.sriramanamaharshi.org.





Courtesy of arunachalagrace.blogspot.in

Mahodaya Maha Punyakalam and the Tragedy at Ayyankulam Tank

In the very early hours of 8th February, devotees gathered at Annamalai's Shrine for mahabhishekam of the *utsavamurti* of Apeetha Kuchambal Samede Sri Arunachaleswarar leading to the celebrations of the *Mahodaya Punyakala thirthaurchavam* (ritual immersion). The muhurtha occurs only once in 25-30 years or longer and is considered a crore times more auspicious than a solar eclipse. *Mahodaya Maha Punya Kalam* is said to occur when at sunrise, the the middle phase (*vyathipadam*) of Sravana nakshatra prevails on a Monday or *soma vaara* (the day of the week dear to Lord Siva), in the month of Thai (mid-January to mid-February) on a New Moon day.

Following mahabhishekam at one o'clock in the morning and deeparadhana, a little after 5 am, the deities

made their way out for procession through the Big Temple and on to Ayyankulam Thirtham (also known as Indira Thirtham) where Arunachaleswarar and Ambal were placed under the Ayyankulam mantapam while the Trisulam was prepared for *tirthavari* (holy dip).

Ayyankulam Thirtham is where Bhagavan Ramana dispossessed 120 years ago in September 1896 upon his arrival to Tiruvannamalai, casting his sacred thread, clothing and money into the waters of the tank.

By sunrise at 6.40 am on 8th February, unexpected thousands had gathered outside the West Gate of Ayyankulam Tank to witness the holy dip of Lord Siva's Trident. When the gate was opened and priests entered the water with the Holy Trisulam, the 7,000-plus crowd of devotees outside—overcome with spiritual fervour—rushed forward, hurriedly trying to gain access to the tank's holy waters through the narrow passageway, inadvertently forcing participants into the water. Unaware of the danger they were posing, the enthusiastic crowd at the rear pressed forward as people up front were forced into the water atop those struggling amidst the confusion





<http://arunachalagrace.blogspot.in>

to get out. Many were pulled out by onlookers. Some were able to swim to safety. Others, lamentably, had no chance to escape the weight of the onrushing crowd and met with impossible circumstances, losing their lives.

Four participants perished in the mayhem, among them, a very close devotee of the Ashram, Prof. Manikantan. Manikantan had been one of those who bore the deities to Ayyankulam that morning and stood in the water behind the Trisulam. When the crowd surged forward, the head-priest standing with the Trisulam in his hands just in front of Manikantan was pushed over into the water. Manikantan who was already pulling people to safety, rescued the head-priest who by this time was drowning. Finally, the last earthly act Manikantan was seen performing was rescuing the Trisulam itself which had become dislodged from the head-priest's hands in the chaos and lay at the bottom of the tank.

Manikantan's cousin brother, Siva, the 28 year-old software engineer from Chennai, devotee of Bhagavan Ramana and Lord Arunachaleswara, also perished with Manikantan. Venkataraman, age 41, who regularly came for Bhagavan's Jayanti and Aradhana celebrations, was also among those who succumbed. Yet another partner in this transition from earthly life was Punniyakodi, the friendly mustachioed Chettiar that temple-goers know from temple abhishekams, always serving in the *sanctum sanctorum* in his signature red dhoti.

In the aftermath of the onrush, it was not immediately known that serious injuries had been sustained, and ceremonies continued unhindered. Only later did the reality reveal itself.

Three temple priests subsequently said that they owed their lives to Manikantan who selflessly pulled them up out of the water only moments before he went under.

Devotees everywhere expressed shock and sorrow over what happened on the morning of February 8th and the grief and outpouring of emotion from bereaved family members is heart-rending to behold. By anyone's standard, the incident at Ayyankulam is a great tragedy. However, if one is destined to leave this earth while still young, then a more auspicious way to go can hardly be imagined. Those who left us, sacrificed their lives bearing the Lord on His Palanquin to the holy waters of Ayyankulam Tank with the divine name on their lips and, might we add, at a most favourable hour—a moment dear to Maheswara which occurs only once in several decades. But if that were not enough, giving your life so that others might live in turn is singularly the most auspicious departure any earthly soul could aspire to.

Let us trust that all that occurred that morning at Ayyankulam Tank was the will of the Lord and that those who gave their lives remain safely ensconced in the Lord's perfect embrace. —

Announcements: Ashram YouTube Channel

Sri Ramanasramam has its own YouTube channel and is regularly posting videos of events including the recent Jayanti celebrations for free download. Please visit the channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>





Events at Tiruvannamalai: Remedial Rites at Ayyankulam Tank



Parihara rites were performed at Ayyankulam Tirtham on 12th February following the unfortunate events of Monday the 8th. The rites were intended to clear obstacles and difficulties related to loss of life during the Mahodaya Maha Punyakala ceremonies.

Obituary: Sri Manikantan



Manikantan served in the Ashram and was put in charge of Sri Ramanasramam's Alankarams during the annual Navaratri festival. He also served as priest at the Ashram's annual Sri Vidya Homam and was indispensable during Bhagavan's Jayanti and Aradhana Day pujas where he guided the very elaborate alankarams at Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam.

Born in Tiruvannamalai in 1974 to Smt. Vimala and Sri Subramanian under Arunachala's nakshatra, Kritika, Sri Manikantan was very close to Arunachala from his earliest years. As a child, his father made a point of carrying him along to temple festivals and on giri pradakshina. An inborn faith cultivated by a pious father stood the child in good stead and the boy succeeded in every endeavour, including his early and higher studies. Eventually he earned his Ph.D, became a professor of chemistry and was loved by students at the SKP

Engineering College where he taught. In the mornings before going to the college, he performed ancestral rites at home followed by Sri Chakra puja at the nearby Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple. At sunrise and sunset he could be found at the abhishekams in Arunachaleswarar Temple where he also served. The swollen humps on Manikantan's shoulders testified to his devotion as one of the bearers of the temple *utsavamurties* during Kartigai Deepam and other temple festivals.

On the fateful day of 8th February, at the moment of the Mahodayam Punya muhurtha, a propitious jyotishical arrangement of the celestial bodies occurring only once in several decades, Manikantan attained *jalasamadhi* and merged with the Lord at 6.40 am, just moments after rescuing drowning priests and devotees during the chaos at Ayyankulam Tank. Those who attended the funeral saw a face of serene repose without the least sign of struggle.

Sri Manikantan is survived by his wife, Uma Parvati, his brothers, Ganesan and Hari Kumar, and his mother, Vimala. He will be sorely missed by family, friends, Ashramites and students alike, and shall be remembered by the denizens of Tiruvannamalai for his great witness, in life, and in the manner of his parting. —





Obituary: Smt. Savitri Sabhahit



Born in Gokarna, Karnataka in December 1937, Smt. Savitri Sabhahit (born Prasad) first visited Sri Ramanasramam on Deepam Day in 1981. Married in 1961, she served as a teacher in the Education Department in the Gokarna/Kumta area and taught primary and secondary school for 33 years. Known for her sincerity, when once in the mid-1980s, she decided to take an early retirement, the school district opened a position at a new school to coax her back into service in order to avail themselves of her many valuable teaching qualities.

From a family of agnihotris, she earned Arunachala-Ramana's grace and upon her retirement at the end of December 1995, supported her husband in the decision to leave their native Gokarna and settle at the Feet of Holy Annamalai. She served a number of years in the Ramanasramam library. In the fall of 2015, Smt. Sabhahit fell sick and on Deepam Day, the 25th November, took to the bed. At 7pm Saturday the 6th of February, she uttered her last words, "Ramana, Ramana" and just after midnight, in the presence of her caring family, peacefully merged into the heart of Arunachala. She is survived by her husband, Vishnu Sabhahit, her son, Narayana, and daughters, Lakshmi and Lalitha, and will be missed by devotees who esteemed her gentle and deeply loving nature. —

Saranagati's Suggestion Box

Please send your comments and suggestions for *Saranagati Magazine*, Sri Ramanasramam's official e-monthly, to the following address:
[<saranagati.suggestionbox@gmail.com>](mailto:saranagati.suggestionbox@gmail.com)

Obituary: Sri M.G. Balu



Born on 25th July, 1942, Sri M.G. Balu graduated from the College of Engineering, Guindy, in Electrical Engineering and started his active career with Mettur Thermal Power. He joined Carborundum Universal Limited of the Murugappa Group and worked in Kerala in its Electro Minerals projects in Edappally, Koratty, and helped to set up a Hydro-Electric Project in Maniar. He was associated with special project in Palakkad and Electrical Engineering projects in other plants of CUMI, and was known for his systematic approaches and perfection in all activities. Drawn to spiritualism from a very young age and in constant interaction with various spiritual persons during his stay in Kerala, he became a devotee of Sri Bhagavan in the 1980s and dreamed of coming to stay in Ramanasramam upon his retirement. He took retirement CUMI on 31st December 2000 and

fulfilled his dream of serving in Bhagavan's Ashram. He served three years in the Ashram library and then in 2004, shifted to the new archives building where he systematised and streamlined functioning of engineering units and instrumentation. In 2014 he suffered a minor cerebral hemorrhage and underwent treatment. His condition appeared to be stable and in recent months he seemed to be improving. As had been his lifelong wish, he lived out his days in Sri Ramanasramam until Sunday, 28th February, when he passed away peacefully in his Ashram room at the Feet of Holy Annamalai. —

