

Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

Seasonal rains have made the mountain green and the Ashram Well is full to the brim. This month, Muruganar's Samadhi Day fell on the 5th and Ganesh Chaturthi was celebrated on the 9th. On the 24th devotees heard bansuri bamboo flute performed in the New Hall by Sri Anubodh, a disciple of Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia. The last weekend of September brought a two-day Vedaparayana programme beginning on Bhagavan's Punarvasu Day, the 28th.

This issue sees the first part of a retrospective on Tiruchuli (p.2) in commemoration of the recent Bhuminathesvar Kovil Kumbhabhishekam (p.4), Bhagavan's birth temple.

Ashram Heritage Sites features the continuation of the history of Skandasramam.

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

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Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Heaven and Hell

D.: Are there heaven (swarga) and hell (naraka)?

M.: There must be someone to go there. They are like dreams. We see time and space exist in dream also. Which is true, dream or wakefulness?

D.: So we must rid ourselves of lust (kama), anger, (krodha).

M.: Give up thoughts. You need not give up anything else. You must be there to see anything. It is the Self. Self is ever-conscious.

— Talks §41





The Springs of Tiruchuli (part one)

As Bhagavan's birth home, Tiruchuli is a pre-eminent pilgrimage site for devotees. However, while the birth of the Maharshi within its walls is perhaps the city's crowning achievement, Tiruchuli nonetheless has a long and illustrious history, figuring prominently in the Puranas. While Sundaramurthi sang of its glory in his *Tiruchulial Padikam* (Thevaram) as did Manickavachakar in his *Tirukovaiyar* and while references appear in *Periapuranam*, the legend of Tiruchuli receives its fairest treatment in the *Skanda Purana* in a tract called the 'Trisulapura Mahatmyam'.

The story of Tiruchuli begins with the Pralaya or universal flood in the immortal past at a spot where Lord Siva hurled his *trisul* (trident) into the earth to drain the floodwaters that threatened the land (hence *chuli* which means 'eddy'). During a subsequent flood the Lord saved Tiruchuli by raising it up high on his trident (hence the name *trisulapuri*).

Though situated in a hot, arid region of the Tamil land, water is a central theme in the saga of this 'city that grants liberation'. Flanked on its western boundary by a huge lake and on its eastern border by the sacred Goundinya River (Gundaru in Tamil), Tiruchuli's environs and topography exhibit peculiar features. For instance, where the river passes Tiruchuli, it flows from north to south in the direction of its origin. And regarding the lake, Bhagavan remarks: "The bund of the lake is of clay and runs about three miles in all. The lake is, strangely enough, twenty feet over the level of the village. Even when it is in spate, the waters escape in other directions leaving the village unaffected."

More remarkable still is a phenomenon Bhagavan describes with respect to Trisula Tirtham, the sacred tank just opposite Bhagavan's family home in Karthigai St. During the waxing fortnight just prior to full-moon in the month of Masi (mid-Feb to mid-March), at the time of the annual temple festival, the waters of the tank rise for ten days at the rate of one foot per day. Bhagavan says:

"The abhishekam festival of the deity is celebrated on that day, that is, on the 10th day of the Brahmotsavam [and]





is brought to the mantapam [where] the abhishekam is performed with the water of Trisula Tirtham. After abhishekam, all bathe in the tank. In my boyhood days, [we] used to join together and mark the steps in order to see how much the water rose each day. It used to be amusing. The rising of the water would start ten days earlier and submerge one step per day. The tank would become full by the full-moon day. To us it was great fun.”

After full moon for ten days or so, the water gradually recedes to reach its previous level by new-moon day. It is commonly believed that the phenomenon occurs even during years when the monsoon fails. It is considered highly auspicious to bathe in the holy tank during this time of year and pilgrims come from near and far. The water of the tank has unusual qualities. Bhagavan again remembering his boyhood says of it: “When we bathed in the tank our silver bangles all turned black, and we had to scrub them well with mud before going back home, lest our parents should blame us for bathing in the tank. The water contains sulphur.”

It is said that the Goddess Ganges bathes in Trisula Tirtham, the spring is formed by Siva’s trident, each

year on this same full-moon day in the month of Masi.

Known throughout history as *Papahari* or ‘destroyer of sins’, the waters of Trisula Tirtham and the River Goundinya revealed their healing properties when sufferers of all variety of physical or mental debility bathed in them and were cured. After an exhaustive search the Pandyan King, Parakrama Pandya, who was in the agony of deep mental unrest caused by numerous physical illnesses, came to Tiruchuli and was instantly cured. He then made Tiruchuli his capital and ruled his kingdom from there, attributing the miracle to Bhuminatheswara, River Goundinya and to the sacred waters of Trisula Tirtham.

Sage Gautama, who had a hermitage at Tiruvannamalai, suffered similar mental distress and travelled the entire breadth of Bharat in search of relief, but to no avail. However, when he came to Tiruchuli, he found peace and immediately set about building a hermitage there where he could do penance in a gesture of thanksgiving.*

(to be continued)

*Material for this article is freely adapted from the Ashram literature.

From Periapuranam: Rudra Pasupathi Nayanaar

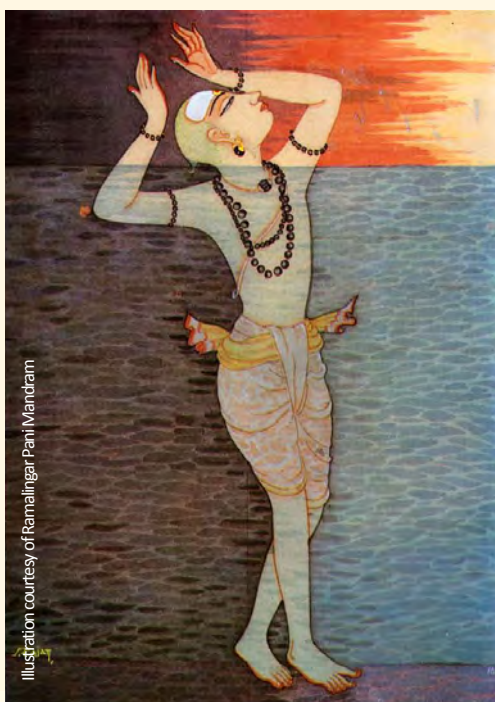


Illustration courtesy of Ramalingar Pani Mandram

Pasupati hailed from Tiruttalaiyur in the land of the Holy Kaveri. Born to a noble family of Brahmins dedicated to Vedic learning, he served the Lord with earnestness and a heart overflowing with love. Daily he chanted the centerpiece of the Krishna Yajur Veda in praise of the Lord, the Holy Rudram. Before dawn each day, he made his way down to a pool adjoining the sacred river where lotus blooms lifted their heads at the sight of the saint’s approach. He would let himself down into the water up to his neck and then raising his folded hands above his head, would intone the Rudram in a clear, sonorous voice. After each recitation he worshipped the lingam of the Lord with tender vilva leaves, fresh drona, lotus and samyaka flowers and sacred darbha grass. By such devotion, evil spirits within three yojanas obtained release. Pasupati repeated his chant at noon and night and in due time, he shone like Brahma. Though offered the eight siddhis, he was not the least enticed by them but steadfastly persisted in his recitations. The Lord showered him with his grace and took him to the gates of Svargaloka and beyond, to Sivapuri, the abode of the Lord. The saint became known throughout the world as, ‘Rudra Pasupatiyaar’. (*Rudra Pasupati Nayanaar’s aradhana day fell on the 22nd September*)





Bhuminatha Kovil Mahakumbhabhishekam: 1st September, 2013

In 1957 kumbhabhishekam was performed at the Bhuminatha Kovil of Tiruchuli by one Subramaniam Chettiar. More than forty years would elapse before the next kumbhabhishekam in 1999, organised by Sathyasanti Seva Trust headed by Swami Satyananda, a disciple of Swami Sahajananda. In 2011, it was determined that the mantapam at the main entrance of the temple was leaking and required repairs. A team from the Ashram consisting of masons and workers under the supervision of Sri Anjaneyalu carried out the re-tiling of the 22,000 sq. ft. mantapam roof. Ashram logistical support and financial resources from devotees sustained the efforts. Further repairs were carried out following the roof work, leading to a general renovation while support began to pour in from various quarters. Two years of renovation work culminated in the performance of Mahakumbhabhishekam in the presence of the Rani of Ramanapuram and hundreds of pilgrims and devotees on Bhagavan's Advent Day, September 1st, which this year coincided with Punarvasu Day. Recent rains left Trisula Tirtham filled to capacity and all were happy at the good augury.

Reality in Forty Verses

27. We are 'That' when 'I' has not arisen. Without searching whence the 'I' arises, how can one attain the self-extinction where no 'I' arises? Without attaining self-extinction, how can one stay in one's true state where the Self is 'That'?

— Sri Bhagavan





Ashram Heritage Sites: Skandasramam (part two)

Kandaswami left Tiruvannamalai ('with no further news') shortly after the completion of Skandasramam, which had been his labour of love for more than a decade.¹ After his departure, further work was taken up by other resident-devotees. Kandaswami's original construction consisted of the front verandah, mother's room and the two rooms adjoining the verandah. The puja room came only toward the latter part of Bhagavan's stay on the hill when one Vridhachala Gurukkal from Tiruvannamalai made the small room at the rear utilising the large boulder behind the Ashram as its western wall. There he installed an idol of Goddess Yogambika.

Over the years, Skandasramam saw a number of ardent devotees who came to live with Bhagavan on the hill, among them Bhagavan's mother, Alagammal, as well as Ganapati Muni, Palaniswami, Sivaprakasham Pillai, Ramanatha Brahmachari, Kunjuswami, Aiyaswami, Viswanatha Swami, Mastanswami, among others. The daily routine began at 3am and devotees rose and sat in meditation near Bhagavan. Kunjuswami recounts: "Bhagavan's mother would get up around 4 a.m. and sing devotional songs. Sri Bhagavan would go out at five and be back an hour later. We would begin to recite *Aksharamanamalai* and finish by six. Sri Bhagavan would go for his bath and we would also go out and have our bath and be ready to eat with Sri Bhagavan at eight. In the evenings we would sit before Sri Bhagavan at 6.30 p.m. and would again recite *Aksharamanamalai*. Sri Bhagavan used to close his eyes reclining on the pillow. We would finish the recitation at 7.30 p.m. when we generally had our supper."² Once in two or three days, during the parayana, Sri Bhagavan would go into deep meditation. Even at the end

¹ Sivaprakasam Pillai said that Kandaswami left the mountain before living at the newly built ashram. (See *Power of the Presence, Part One*, p. 41.)

² This tradition lives on today in Sri Ramanasramam with Tamil parayana at 6.15pm followed by the evening meal at 7.30pm.





Ashram Heritage Sites: Skandasramam (cont.)

of the parayana, he would not open his eyes. We used to call him gently, but Sri Bhagavan would be completely oblivious to his surroundings. To wake him, Perumalswami, Akhandananda, Mastanswami and I would take out conches and blow on them. The sound of the conch used to slowly bring him back to the external world. On such days, we would eat at 9 p.m.”

During the day, Bhagavan would sit outside beneath a large fruit tree. Though fully mature, the tree never bore fruit. When this was brought to Bhagavan’s attention, he remarked, jokingly: “What to do? It is all due to its association with us! It has become like us,” i.e. childless like a sadhu.

One curious resident at Skandasramam was ‘Soldierswami’. He had been Village Officer at Vaniambadi and felt it was his duty to act as Bhagavan’s bodyguard. He would get up in the morning, take his bath, dress as a soldier, salute Bhagavan and stand guard at the entrance to Skandasramam, holding his walking stick as if it were a gun.

During the years at Skandasramam, Bhagavan was in his best state of health and visitors who climbed the hill to meet with him found just reward for their efforts, as the small Ashram in these early days before large crowds convened around Bhagavan provided a quiet, intimate setting in which to drink in the bliss of his presence.

IN LATER YEARS

In the aftermath of the death of Bhagavan’s mother in May 1922, Bhagavan shifted down to the huts near her shrine in what would come to be known as Sri Ramanasramam. After that he visited Skandasramam less and less and in time the buildings fell into decline. In 1940, the grandson of Skandasramam’s builder, the late Kandaswami, carried out necessary repairs. But in 1945, a Rajah from the United Provinces visited Skandasramam and, finding it needed extensive renovation, offered to finance a complete restoration. By the third week of September, the repairs were already underway and Bhagavan got the urge to go up and have a look at the work not having seen Skandasramam for many years. Two months later when repairs were nearing completion and the path from





Ashram Heritage Sites: Skandasramam (cont.)



Bhagavan at Skandasramam with devotees (26th Nov. 1945)

Skandasramam has since been declared an historical and cultural treasure of India under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act of 1958.

Some months back, Ramanasramam began maintenance work on the path up the hill, providing water lines to meet the formidable need for watering hundreds of saplings recently planted by Ashram staff and volunteers from nearby engineering colleges along the path up the hill. *Vilvam*, *pungai*, and *maghizham* trees are ever-green, keeping their leaves even in the heat of summer and thus providing shade for pilgrims ascending the hill to Skandasramam. Additional work includes a stone barricade constructed above Skandasramam to prevent avalanches during torrential rains.

Ramanasramam was re-laid, a group trip up the hill was organised with hundreds of devotees.

Bhagavan was covered with a shawl as the weather, though sunny, was quite cool. He sat on a couch placed in front of the verandah where he began to narrate his life on the hill and the years at Skandasramam, indicating various places associated with its history. Nagamma wrote to her brother of this awe-inspiring sight: "Bhagavan seated on the sofa underneath the shade of trees looked grander than an emperor anointed for coronation. With Arunachala as the throne, the thinly clouded sky as the white umbrella, the trees fanning a gentle breeze on either side, the spray of the Hill-stream as the oil, that Emperor of Yogis sat as in coronation durbar while the maiden Nature raised to him the camphor-flame of sunshine. How can I describe this scene, my brother?" (*Letters*, 26th Nov. 1945)

SKANDASRAMAM TODAY

In 1966 one Ashram inmate, Sri Sai Das, took up the task of white-washing the buildings and repainting the woodwork as well as other general repairs. The renovation work was followed up with a small rededication ceremony performed on 4th June that year.

Wordwise: Svarga स्वर्ग

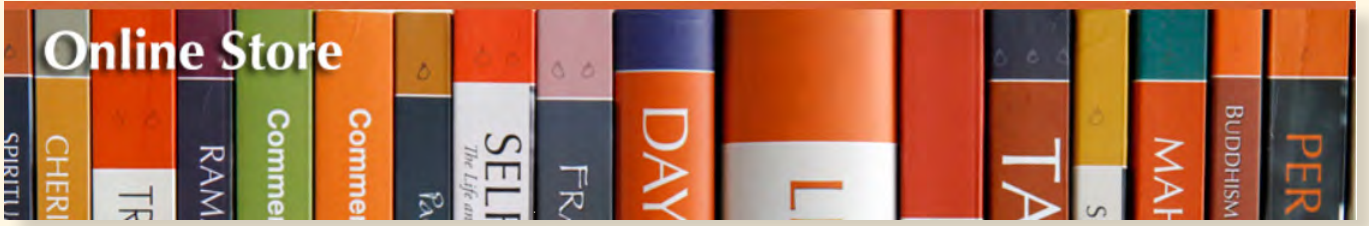
Svar (sva): sun, sunshine, light, lustre, bright space, sky, heaven, paradise, abode of gods and temporary abode of the virtuous, the space above the sun, region of the planets; *svarga*: leading to or being in the light or in heaven, abode of light and gods, heavenly bliss, Indra's paradise.

Traditionally, *svarga* or *svargaloka* is seen as one of the seven heavenly realms where righteous souls go after death, the aimed-for by seekers. But Bhagavan warns against too much involvement with other-worldly paradises. Rather, he says, "enquire who [you] are and discover the Self. What need is there to think of heaven? ... Find out who is born and who has the trouble of existence now. When you are asleep do you think of rebirths or even the present existence? Find out whence the present problem arises and there is the solution [as well]. You will discover that there is no birth, no present trouble nor any unhappiness." (*Talks* §31)





Announcements: Online Store



The Ashram has set up a new online store (<http://worldstore.sriramanamaharshi.org>) for international customers to purchase diaries and calendars for calendar year 2014 and to subscribe to the Mountain Path by paying in US dollars. Orders will be shipped directly from the Ashram. Additional titles in regional languages will be available soon.

English books and other items will continue to be offered from the New York based online store (<http://bookstore.arunachala.org>). Customers with shipping addresses in India can continue to shop at <http://bookstore.sriramanamaharshi.org> by making payments in Indian Rupees.

It should be added that devotees have noticed online requests for donations in the name of Ramana Maharshi. We would like to remind readers that the Ashram's official website of Sri Ramana Maharshi does not solicit donations either directly or through surrogates. Please be wary of any website or organisation soliciting funds in Bhagavan's name.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

4th October (Fri) Goddess Yogambika Comes Out in Procession
 5th October (Sat) Navratri Pujas Begin
 12th October (Thurs) Mandalabhishekam (completion)
 13th Oct (Sun) Saraswati Puja/Vijaya Dasami
 18th October (Fri) Full Moon
 22nd Oct (Tues) Viswanathaswami Samadhi Day

26th October (Sat) Punarvasu
 2nd November (Sat) Deepavali
 8th November (Fri) Karthigai Festival Begins
 16th November (Sat) Full Moon
 17th November (Sun) Karthigai Deepam
 22nd November (Fri) Punarvasu

Obituary: Sri T. R. Srinivasan



In 1978 while working as a stenographer for the management of a Chennai engine and valve factory, Sri T. R. Srinivasan got a diagnosis from physicians that he had only six months to live. Thinking his life was at an end, he took time off and came to Sri Ramanasramam for a week's stay. During the visit he found himself called to stay on and was blessed to begin service in the Ashram office. Meanwhile, in Bhagavan's Ashram, his health was restored and 'TRS', as he came to be known, faithfully served the Ashram for the next 32 years. Known for his diligence, TRS was said to be ever mindful of Bhagavan's injunction regarding Ashram correspondence: letters should be answered the same day. TRS was meticulous in his duties and gracious in his service to Ashram devotees.

In 2010, following a fall which left him with an impaired hip, TRS withdrew from active life. His health was in decline for the last year until the afternoon of the 26th September, at the age of 78, when he peacefully drew his last breath.

