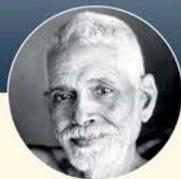


Saranagati



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SRI RAMANASRAMAM
FEBRUARY 2014



Photos this page from V. Karthik and Suresh Menon



Saranagati



FEBRUARY 2014
VOL. 8, NO. 2

IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

During this Aksharamanamalai Centenary Year, each morning at 6am in the New Hall and each evening at 5.45 pm in the Samadhi Hall, devotees are reciting the 108-couplets of Bhagavan. Evening Vedaparayana has been moved to 4.45pm for the duration of the year.

Pongal fell on the 14th January as did Ramaswami Pillai's Samadhi Day. Sivaprakasham Pillai's Samadhi Day was observed the 12th in the New Hall and that of Rajeswarananda on the 19th. 15th January saw a full schedule with Mattu Pongal celebrations and Chinnaswami's Aradhana Day coinciding with Pournami. The following day, the 16th, Lord Arunachaleswara went in procession round the Hill, which this year fell on Punarvasu Day. A classical flute recital by Lyse Luran took place that evening in the New Hall.

A three-day Vedaparayana programme from the students of the Ashram Veda Patasala led by Sri Senthilnatha Ganapathigal completed the month of January.

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

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Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: The Atman

D.: The Vedas contain conflicting accounts of Cosmogony. Ether is said to be the first creation in one place; vital energy (prana) in another place; water in still another, and so on. How are these to be reconciled? Do not these impair the credibility of the Vedas?

M.: Different seers saw different aspects of truths at different times, each emphasising some one view. Why do you worry about their conflicting statements? The essential aim of the Veda is to teach us the nature of the imperishable Atman and show us that we are That.

— Talks §30





The Origins of Pradakshina (part three)

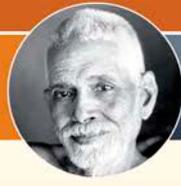
With Vajrangada's labours of love at Arunachala, temples and lingas sprang up around the Holy Hill, marking each step of the way along the circuit. With new gopurams, Annamalai and Adiannamalai Temples, said to be connected by hidden underground tunnels, shone in full splendour like two glowing magnets at each end of the East-West axis running through the centre of the Hill. The astha lingas were established by the guardian deities (*dikpalakas*) of the four cardinal and four minor directions, drawing the attention of the entire universe towards its inner core. In making their circuits, once reaching one of the eight lingas, devotees would prostrate to the Hill and then do prostration before the Lord of the direction¹. On their morning pilgrimages, Arunachala's devotees instinctively kept to the left, making way for gods and siddhas in subtle form as the pre-dawn air wafted with the scent of *siddha* herbs and the fragrance of frangipani

¹ The gods of the directions are: Indra (the East), Yama (the South), Varuna (the West), Kubera (the North), Easanyam (the north-east), Agni (the South-east), Nirruti (the South-west) and Vayu (the North-west).

blossoms. The dust below their feet ever imbued with the holy power of countless crores of gods, sages and saints who had gone in pradakshina before them, they understood implicitly why the puranas declare that each stone on Arunachala is itself a lingam, each tree dotting Its landscape, the wish-fulfilling tree of devaloka. A mere step taken on the footway at Arunachala, the scripture tells, confers the benefit of a *yaga* and two steps, the fruit of *rajasuuya yaga*. As they made their way round, pilgrims noticed the ever-changing facets of Arunachala's stone-form and yet, with each step, they became increasingly aware of the changeless stillness that pervaded His subtle-form. As their girivalam progressed, a deep silence welled up within them and grew in intensity so that once having completed the circuit and returned to the morning bustle of the town, it remained undisturbed.

Though they learned by rote the sacred writ pertaining to Arunachala, they knew from their own direct experience the benefits of pradakshina and never missed going in *girivalam* on Sivaratri Day or New Year's Day (14th April) or the first day of the Tamil months. They knew that the punya of Arunachala *girivalam* was magnified in untold measure when performed on solstice days, solar eclipse days, full-moon days or on Kartigai Deepam Day. They also knew that going in the early morning hours before sunrise (*brahma muhurtam*) was the most auspicious time of all.





As the Holy Hill was not merely a linga but the 'source of all lingas', and as the path around its base was the sacred *yonī* enshrining and conjoining It, devotees performed the circumambulation in great awe, trepidation and humility, knowing It to be Lord Siva Himself. They went on foot, unaided by any conveyance, moving slowly like 'a queen in her ninth month', keeping silence within and without, compelling their attention be directed to Him alone, repeating His name, offering prayers of supplication or reciting hymns in His praise.

Golden Age of Arunachala Pradakshina

As the centuries passed, the numbers increased. Pilgrims came from distant places in order to perform the sacred rite. They revered the shrines and temples that punctuated the auspicious pathway facing the Lord and purified themselves by bathing in its tirthams.

In time the number of temples equaled the number of days of the year. Spending but one day in meditation at each shrine meant that a full year would be required just to complete a single circuit of the Hill.

Thus the golden age of Arunachala pradakshina had arrived. It was a time when devotees knew the Lord's Greatness. And they knew His true name—*giri pradakshinapriya* ('the Lord who loves giri pradakshina')². It was an age when the great Tamil saints, with kings in their wake, came to do the circumambulation and be blessed by Holy Annamalai.

Jnanasambandar, led by the 'old Brahmin' (who

² One of the names given to Arunachala by Adi Sankara.

turned out to be Lord Arunachala in disguise), came after being despoiled of his possessions, left with nothing but his hymns in praise of the Hill.

Appar visited and eulogized Arunachala as did Manickavachakar who sang *Ammanai* and his world-renowned *Tiruvembavai* while on the pradakshina path near Adi Annamalai Temple³.

The Age of Forgetfulness

But this propitious age was not to endure and in spite of the great devotion and sacrifices made by King Vajrangada and the countless thousands and millions of devotees over vast stretches of time before him and those who came after him, the light of a gilded era, alas, slowly faded as succeeding generations slipped into the shadows of ignorance, losing sight altogether of the wisdom and devotion of their forbears. To be sure, some of the citizens of Tiruvannamalai and its immediate environs remained true to the Lord's exhortation to go regularly in pradakshina and were keen to honour Him at Kartigai Deepam. But for the majority, forgetfulness like a deep slumber or a slow-acting narcotic crept up and quietly overtook them, dimming their sight.

By the late 19th century with the advent of the modern era, the world had fallen fast asleep while the Lord of Fire, the Unmoving Seat of Awareness sat alone in His consummate stillness, unremembered, even unknown, to a drowsy, ailing humanity.

(to be continued)

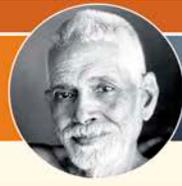
³ See *Halasya Mahatmyam*. See also *Letters* (20th September, 1947). A small temple on the pradakshina road in Adiannamalai marks the spot where the two poems were first recorded.

Reality in Forty Verses

31. For him who is the bliss of Self arising from extinction of the ego, what is there to do? He knows nothing other than this Self. How to conceive the nature of his state?

— Sri Bhagavan





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mattu Pongal and Nandi Puja



Following Bhogi, the last day of Margazhi, Makara Sankranti Pongal was observed on the 14th January, the first of Thai, marking the 'crossing' (*sankranti*) of the Sun to its northern course. The following day, Mattu Pongal or Cow Pongal (the festival dedicated to cattle) commenced with an elaborate alankaram of fruits, murukku and sweetmeats followed by puja to Nandi. By tradition, devotees should view and worship the Lord through the horns of Nandi. Pre-eminent among devotees of Lord Siva, Nandi is venerated twice each month on pradosham day commemorating a Puranic legend: When a deadly poison emerged at the time of the churning of the Ocean of Milk, Lord Siva drank it in order to protect creation. But when Nandi saw some of it spill out onto the ground from Siva's mouth, he immediately lapped it up. Onlookers worried what would happen to the Lord's devotee, but just then Mahadeva calmed their fears: "Nandi has surrendered to me so completely that he has all my power and protection".

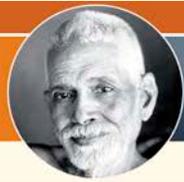
Wordwise: *Atman*

आत्मन्

Atman: to breathe, to move, to blow; the breath, the individual soul, the self, essence, nature, character, the person, the highest principal of life; reflexive pronoun for 'self-', 'auto-'; Ger. *atmen*, Old Saxon *athom*, Dutch *adem*: breathing, breath; *paramatman*: Absolute Atman or Supreme Soul/Spirit, primordial Self, Brahman; *atiti atman*: 'its eats up everything', i.e. there is nothing else.

Bhagavan says, "If the Atman is realised to be only unitary, there is no second and therefore no cause for fear. The man, as he is now, confounds the *anatma* (non-Self) dharma with *atma* (the Self) dharma and suffers. Let him know the Self and abide in it; there is the end of fear, and no doubts remain. (Talks §58)





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Nochur Sri Venkataraman on *Aksharamanamalai*



Nochur Venkataraman during the 7-day discourse in the Grantalaya Auditorium

In the first month of this Aksharamanamali Centenary Year, Nochur Sri Venkataraman gave a series of discourses on the genesis and meaning of Sri Bhagavan's 108-verse hymn. The gripping seven-day programme (20th - 26th January) was among the first complete series of discourses given by Nochur in English at the Ashram, allowing Andhras, Kannadigas, Gujaratis, N. Indians and Westerners unfamiliar with Tamil the opportunity to benefit from the deep insights of this speaker. Known for his acquaintance with the subtler aspects of Bhagavan's teaching, Nochur focused on the essence of the teaching as contained in *Aksharamanamalai* while drawing from Bhagavan's other compositions. Anecdotes from Bhagavan's life and the early days at Virupaksha Cave as well as from the puranas and shastras, i.e. *Srimad Bhagvatam*, *Ramayana*, the works of Adi Shankara, the Vedas and Upanishads were the

seasoning for a sumptuous fare. Venkataraman's familiarity with Sanskrit, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and English afforded him the possibility of interspersing his English commentary with songs or recited verses in their original languages. Devotees have wondered what the relation was between Bhagavan Ramana and Holy Arunachala. The speaker says, "When Arunachala, the holy Unmoving One, looked at the youngster from Tiruchuli, he rejoiced in beholding one that was even more Unmoving than Himself!"

As Bhagavan was 'bewitched' by Arunachala, participants of this 7-day programme on *Aksharamanamalai* were bewitched by this potent commentary. Taking leave on Sunday the 26th and facing the prospect of no discourse the following day, devotees maintained their serenity by harbouring the silent hope that a sequel series (picking up with v. 9) might appear later in the Centenary year.

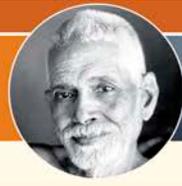
[Editor's note: while streamed live from the Ashram website, those who missed the seven days of talks may still hear them by downloading the audio recordings in mp3 format from the Ashram website [CLICK HERE](#)]

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Kolam at the Pongal Celebrations



Colourful kolam adorned the Ashram during the days of Pongal (14th-16th Jan), and especially at the Ashram Gosala and Cow Lakshmi's Samadhi on Mattu Pongal Day. Indeed the ground where saints have trod is holy ground and kolam, sometimes called 'rangoli', is a way of demarcating sacred space. On ordinary days, this ancient Tamil art serves to adorn entrances to buildings and homes, protecting their inhabitants from evil spirits. But on days of special significance like Sankranti Pongal, the harvest festival, they mark the suspension of ordinary time and the transition to something new. Ideally drawn in the pre-dawn hours, kolam is applied by hand onto a geometric grid of dots according to traditional patterns. They may take shape as yantras or depict themes from the Puranas or from the festival at hand. A common kolam design at Pongal, for example, is the depiction of an overflowing pot of rice (pongal means to "boil over" or "overflow" [like the European cornucopia], signifying abundance). Made from rice flour (often with chalk or limestone), kolam powder can be mixed with natural or synthetic dyes to give richly coloured designs.





From Periapuranam: Arivattaya Naayanaar

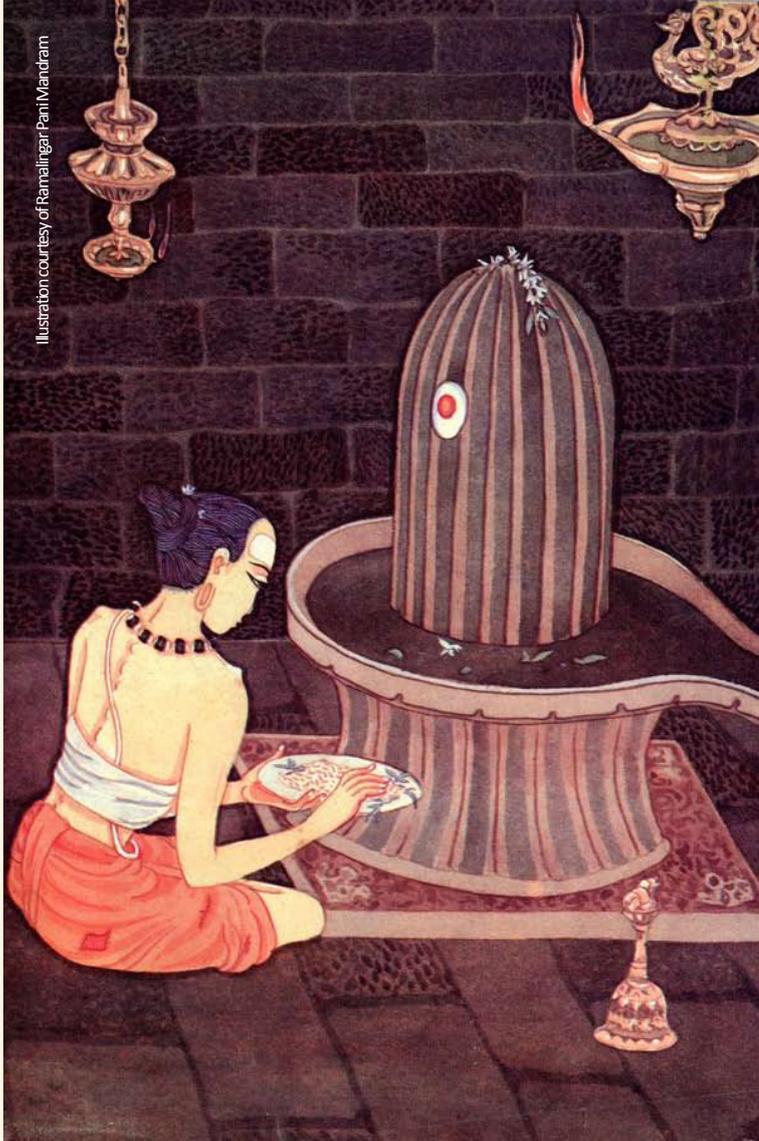


Illustration courtesy of Ramalingar Panimandram

On the banks of the Kaveri in the town of Kannamangalam lived one Taayanaar. He was deeply devoted to Lord Siva and made a vow to offer Him daily a meal of cooked red rice along with greens and tender mango. He said that if he did not receive some indication that the Lord had tasted the offerings, then he would assume they had not been pleasing to the Lord, in which case, he would be obliged to make an end of his life by cutting his throat with a sickle (*arivaal*).

The Lord was evidently willing to go along with the demands of his servant for each day after Taayanaar made his offerings, crunching and chewing noises could be heard in the temple. Sixteen years passed this way till one day, the Lord decided to test his devotee. He decreed that a famine should strike the Chola land and waited to see what Taayanaar would do. As the devotee's crops failed, he offered what little rice he had to the Lord while he and his wife subsisted on the coarse grain left over in the field. When the coarse grain ceased to be available, his wife, steadfast in her love, fed him on simple greens or gave him water to drink. Finally, even though the drought was unbearable, Taayanaar put the last available offerings in a basket and, carrying it on his head, walked towards the temple. Following him, his wife invariably slowed her pace due to physical weakness caused by long fasting. When Taayanaar turned to urge her on, he inadvertently tripped on a stone and stumbled to the ground, scattering the offerings which fell into a deep crevice in the sun-parched earth. Well out of

Calendar of Upcoming Events

12th February (Wed) Punarvasu
 14th February (Fri) Full Moon
 20th February (Thu) Sundaram Iyer
 27th February (Thu) Mahasivratri
 10th March (Mon) Sri Rama Navami
 11th March (Tues) Punarvasu

15-16th March (Sat) Full Moon
 21st March (Fri) Sri Vidya Homa
 31st March (Mon) Ugadi/Telugu New Year
 14th April (Mon) Tamil New Year
 14th April (Mon) Bhagavan's Aradhana (Western Calendar)
 27th April (Sun) Bhagavan's 64th Aradhana





From Periapuranam: Arivaattaaya Nayanar (cont.)

reach, Taayanaar laid face down and contemplated the futility of the moment. Uttering his final prayers, he drew out his sickle and put it to his throat. As he made ready to fulfill the promise he'd made long-ago, the weapon was mysteriously snatched from his hand. Just then crunching and chewing sounds could be heard rising up from the deep crevice. As Taayanaar lifted his gaze, the Lord emerged from the fissure and appeared before him. Taayanaar and his loving wife fell prostrate before Him, rejoicing at His graciousness. The Lord declared: "For your noble act you two shall dwell forever in our own blessed abode". As He vanished from their sight, the landscape around them transformed. The cracks in the ground closed up and bright green vegetation sprouted in all directions whilst a gentle rain fell from above. This hallowed spot became known as the place where 'the Lord dwelt relishing the offerings of devotees' and Taayanaar came to be known as 'Arivaattaayanaar' (Sickle Taayanaar), a name hallowed to the present day. (*Arivattaya Naayanaar's aradhana day fell on the 11th January.*)

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mattu Pongal and Go Puja



After Cow Lakshmi's and Nandi's pujas, devotees moved to the Ashram gosala for Go Puja. Garlanded with flowers and adorned with brightly-painted horns, the Ashram dairy cows were honoured this day for their service to devotees throughout the year. After the rites, the 115 cows were hand-fed sweet pongal, agathi keerai and bananas.

Announcements: 100 Years of Aksharamanamalai & Ramananjali 500th

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FEST: Dances of India- 300 young students

Feb 14-15th, 2014 (2.30-7.30pm) Ramana Maharshi Heritage Campus, Sanjaynagar.

CONTEST: The last date for uploading contest entries has been extended to Feb 28th.

Entries will be webcast on the contest portal and telecast on Sri Sankara TV.

To know more click contest/events.ramanacentre.com or send a mail to ra-info@ramanacentre.com. To view entries and vote for them, click videos.ramanacentre.com > The URL to the contest page is <http://events.ramanacentre.com/contest>

