

Saranagati



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SRI RAMANASRAMAM
JUNE 2015



Photos this page from V. Karthik and Suresh Menon



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ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

Veda Patasala students have now returned from their summer vacation. This year marks the completion of 80 years since the Vedapatasala's inception, with enrolment currently at a record high. In June, Vedic students will come from all over South India to participate in examinations at the Ashram Veda Patasala.

May continues with unseasonable rains in what has been a relatively cool 'hot season', now drawing to a close.

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

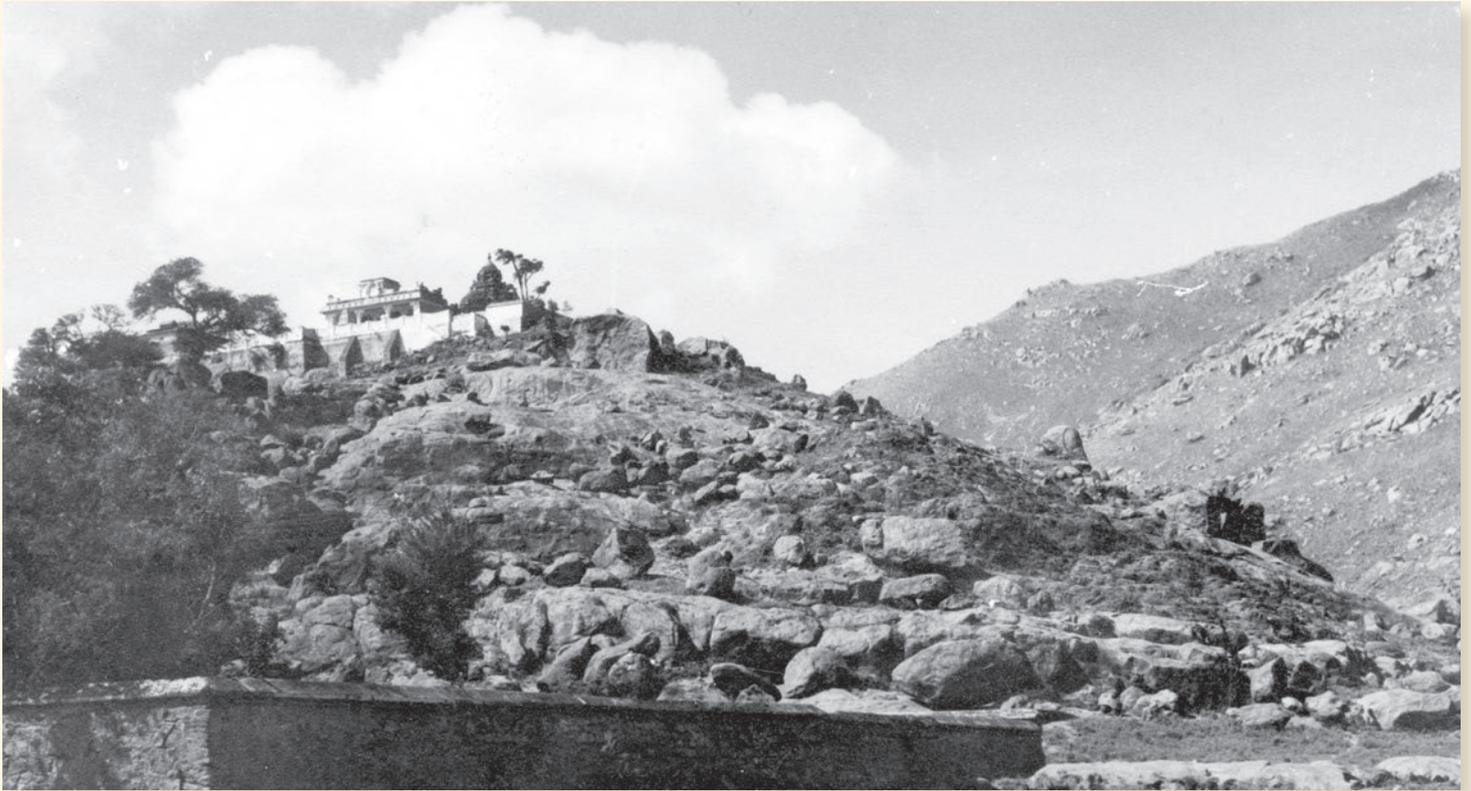
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Calendar of Upcoming Events

1st - 2nd June (Mon-Tues) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
10th June (Wed) Mahapuja Day
18th June (Thurs) Punarvasu Day
28th June (Sun) Cow Lakshmi Day
1st July (Wed) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
16th July (Thurs) Punarvasu Day
23rd July (Thurs) H.C. Khanna Day

30th July (Thurs) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
31st July (Fri) Guru Purnima
7th August (Fri) Kunjuswami Day
12th August (Wed) Punarvasu Day
29th August (Sat) Full Moon/Sri Chakra Puja
1st September (Tues) Bhagavan's Advent Day
8th September (Tues) Punarvasu Day





In the Kitchen with Bhagavan Part V: Meeting at Pavala Kunru

After a month's stay at Arunagiri temple and a week's stay in the towers of the big temple and the *alari* garden, the young Brahmana Swami and Palaniswami shifted to Pavala Kunru (Coral Hill) in an effort to find a quiet out-of-the-way place. The ancient site proved suitable in every way, shielding them from the constant influx of visitors. Lying up at some elevation on the eastern spur of the Holy Hill, the move marked the beginning of the Swami's withdrawal from the town up onto the Hill which would come to serve as his home for the next 23 years.

Battlements on the Spur

The inconvenience of the lengthy climb up to Pavala Kunru deterred casual passersby. A bamboo-pole barrier was constructed to supplement Pavala Kunru's fortress-

like compound walls and the shrine's locking door all which served to discourage the more stout-hearted and stubborn would-be well-wishers and provided the Swami with the protection he needed for his continued states of self-absorption. Indeed the site in its long and illustrious history had once served as a fort. In the late 18th century, Tipu Sultan, the 'Tiger of Mysore', ruler of a kingdom in Karnataka, had engaged in a decades-long struggle with the *British East India Company*.¹ He once used Pavala Kunru as a fort, and installed a large cannon near it in order to harass the northern wall of the main temple which was occupied by the enemy².

The young Brahmana Swami saw signs of the former struggle on the hillock, surmising that Pavala Kunru's shrine

¹ Renowned for his bravery, Tipu Sultan died defending his kingdom's capital on 4 May, 1799. Greatly outnumbered and faced with certain annihilation by attacking British soldiers, it was suggested he escape by underground routes in order 'to fight another day'. The Tipu replied: "One day of life as a tiger is greater than a thousand years living as a jackal".

² Pockmarks from cannon fire can still be discerned on the northern temple wall.





had been completely destroyed during Tipu's invasion and was thus likely rebuilt sometime in the mid-19th century.³

Parvati's Penance

But Pavala Kunru's history is greater than any story of kings and earthly battles, and indeed far more ancient. In antiquity Gautama Rishi had established his hermitage just to the east of its foot. It was here that Goddess Parvati came clad in tree bark with matted tresses and smeared with sacred ash in order to do penance under the Rishi's supervision.

It was also here that she took the form of Durga and fought the demon Mahishasura, and upon her victory, plunged her sword into the earth to form Khadka Tirtha, the tank known to have the purifying power to destroy the five great transgressions for those who bathed in it.⁴ Here she bathed to expiate the sin of having inadvertently slain one who worshipped the Lord—though corrupt, Mahishasura had been a devotee of Lord Siva.

The Goddess installed an image of the Lord on the Pavala hilltop. On Kartikai Deepam day, after she went for *giripradakshina*, the Lord appeared before her there and granted the cherished request that she merge with him and become half of his body.

The Long-awaited Encounter

In September 1898 the Brahmana Swami and Palaniswami climbed the hillock and took up residence at Pavala Kunru's Iswara temple. Replete with cave and spring, the temple consisted of a Siva Linga (Pavalagiriswarar) and, at right angles, a separate Shrine for Goddess Muthambikai and a beautiful icon of Arthanariswara behind the Linga.⁵

During this period, the Swami begged for food in town to avoid, as he later said, "devotees bringing [him] special rich food". Going from door to door anonymously proved spiritually efficacious, he said, as "you [felt] yourself to be indifferent to everything worldly. It [had] a purifying effect on the mind."⁶

³ Bhagavan Ramana found Tipu's cannon. When this was conveyed to government authorities, they came and removed it in order to preserve it for posterity.

⁴ This tank is situated inside the Durgai Amman Temple.

⁵ The icons of Ganesha and Subrahmanya were replaced when the temple was renovated by Sri Ramanasramam in August, 2004.

⁶ Viswanatha Swami's reminiscences, *Mountain Path*, July 1979, p. 141.

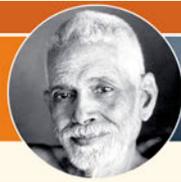


Tipu Sultan, the 'Tiger of Mysore' (1750–1799)

On days when Palaniswami went to town to beg, the priest looking after Pavalagiriswarar sometimes locked the Swami within the shrine as he went away. Thus any visitor venturing up the spur might find only locked doors and a pervasive silence with not a soul in sight.

As the months passed, the young Swami would have imagined that his family had accepted the reality of his renunciate life, content to leave him in peace. But meanwhile in Manamadurai, there was no peace in the heart of one mother. Only when she had beheld her son with her own eyes and persuaded him to come home at last would she find rest. After twenty-eight months since their separation, she packed her things and together with her eldest son Nagaswami, a clerk in a government office free for the Christmas holidays, set off for Tiruvannamalai in December 1898. Once having arrived at Arunachala and learned of his whereabouts, the two climbed the spur to Pavala Kunru and the distressed mother saw her boy sitting on a rock before the holy shrine. Though changed in





appearance with long hair and long nails, nothing could conceal his identity from her. She recognised her son at once and cried out in joy. The young Swami, however, simply gazed at her, showing no signs of emotion and not even replying to her many questions. Day after day her continued petitions only met with the same detached silence. Even the tasty dishes she brought did not entice him. One day, she could bear it no longer and broke down in tears. The Swami made no visible response but stood up and walked away, no doubt keen to maintain his composure during his mother's moving display of affection. Finally Alagammal appealed to devotees, pouring out her heart and begging them for assistance. Pachaiyappa Pillai said to the Swami, "Your mother is weeping and praying, why do you not at least give her an answer? Whether it is yes' or 'no', you can reply to her. Swami need not break his vow of silence. Here are pencil and paper. Swami can write down what he has to say."

Taking the pencil and paper and in utterly impersonal language, the Swami wrote: "The Ordainer controls the

fate of souls in accordance with their *prarabdhakarma*⁷. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent."⁸

These words effectively ended this round of encounters between son and mother. The latter gave up her suit and returned, sore of heart, to Manamadurai. But the love of a mother never dies and this mother would return one day as we shall see when we read further.

Further up the Hill

By the beginning of the following year, the young Swami together with Palaniswami left Pavala Kunru and made their way further up the hill, settling at last in the famed Virupaksha, the cave which would serve as their home for the next decade and a half.

(to be continued)

⁷ Destiny to be worked out in this life, resulting from the balance sheet of actions in past lives.

⁸ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-knowledge*, pp. 39-40.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Atma Vichara

D.: Why is *Atma vichara* necessary?

M.: If you do not make *Atma vichara*, then *loka vichara* creeps in. That which is not, is sought for. When once you have found what you seek, *vichara* (enquiry) also ceases and you rest in it. As long as one is confusing the body with the Atman, Atman is said to be lost and one is said to seek for it, but the Atman itself is never lost. It always exists. A body is said to be Atman, an *indriya* is said to be Atman, then there is the Jivatman and Paramatman and what not. There are a thousand and one things called Atman. The search for Atman is to know that which is really Atman. — *Talks* §186





Favourite Stories of Bhagavan: Arunagirinathar

[When Bhagavan recited verses from the Tiruppugal composed by the 15th-century poet-saint Arunagirinathar, he often narrated dramatic incidents from the saint's life. (See Devaraja Mudaliar's My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana, p. 48, 52, 119.)]

Already as a baby, the boy lost his father. Later, when his mother lay on her death bed, she made her daughter promise to take care of her younger brother. She should give him whatever he wanted. The boy was Arunagirinathar. He grew up a sturdy youth in the care of his elder sister. But in his late teens, he went astray and embarked on an indulgent life, crossing all acceptable limits, even succumbing to pleasures of the flesh. He stole his sister's hard-earned money to enjoy himself in gambling halls and brothels

and soon enough, the family home was in jeopardy of being forfeited in order to repay outstanding debts.

One day he pestered his sister for money with such vigour that the chaste girl broke down in tears. Seeing what had become of her baby brother caused her great anguish. But remembering the promise she had made to her dying mother, she offered to help him. Since there was no money left in the house, she offered herself to be sold in the streets for profit. At her words his eyes were opened and, in a flash, as if waking from a bad dream, he realised what he had done and ran with all speed to Arunachala Temple. Having passed through the Eastern gate, he pounded his head on the columns within the temple and cried out in anguish for forgiveness. But in utter despair and seemingly beyond all help, he resorted to the one measure left to him. He climbed the temple gopuram and cursing the debauched life he had chosen, grieving his mistreatment of his innocent sister and acknowledging his betrayal of the family name, he peeped over the tower's apex to glimpse the living world one last time. Finally rejoicing at making an end of his miserable existence, he stepped off the edge. But as he plunged from the heights downward toward the granite pavement below, something extraordinary happened: Lord Murugan appeared and extended His holy hand. Just as the body would meet the earth, he snatched the falling man midair, and protecting him from gravity's crushing blow, set him gently on the temple floor. With a mixture of grief, relief and astonishment, the bewildered youth could only look up and behold the shining eyes of the Lord who presented him with a rosary of Rudraksha beads. The Lord then initiated him by writing a secret script onto the prodigal youth's tongue: it was the mystic six-lettered invocation, *Saravanabhava*, one of the Lord's names.

Was he dreaming, should he not be in hell by now, he thought to himself? And yet, what he saw before him was plain as day, if not at the same time other-worldly given the divine presence of the Lord. But yes, against all odds, he had been saved, undeserving though he knew he was. Joy for the first time surged up from within him and song burst forth in effulgence from his lips. Sacred lines of devotion and praise cascaded from his throat as





if he were possessed of an angel or a divine spirit. Indeed, the goddess of music had intervened and made his tongue the vehicle of divine composition. He sang thousands of lovely rhythmic verses which welled up of their own accord, one after the other, exuberant and vivid, expressing his soul's gratitude, not just for being spared certain death but for release from the living hell that had been his life, for instant forgiveness of what he had done and for being ushered into a world of sanctity. How could his heart not sing perpetual praises of the Lord? "I rely on none except you and will follow none except you", the Saint sang. The shrine beneath the tower where this happened became known as *Gopura Subrahmanya Sannidhi*.

The Legend of Arunagirinathar

At the Lord's behest, Arunagirinathar travelled extensively singing the glory of Muruga. Upon hearing Arunagirinathar's devotional songs, devotees sang them as far as Chidambaram and beyond. Prabhuda Deva Rayar, king of the region, an avid devotee of Lord Subrahmanya, showered his affection upon the poet. But such kindnesses roused jealousy in the court and the court-poet Sambandha Andan tried to instigate distrust against Arunagirinathar. He said to the king, "If he is such a great devotee, why is he keeping the king from having darshan of the Lord?" When the king made a formal request that Arunagirinathar arrange a darshan with the Lord, Arunagirinathar appealed

to Lord Muruga. Swaminatha appeared before him but gave a strong caution: "If the king beholds my luminous form, his past misdeeds will cause him to go blind on the spot". Nevertheless the sovereign persisted in the request. Arunagirinathar invoked Lord Muruga through his prayers and devotion and Swami appeared on the front pillar of the temple dancing hall.¹ There was a momentary flickering of light in the eyes of Prabhuda Deva Rayar who rejoiced at the sight while the splendour of Arunagirinathar's devotion shone everywhere. But no sooner had the vision come than darkness overtook the king's sight and his eyes were closed.

The court-poet, however, did not give up. At his instigation, the blind king requested Arunagirinathar to fetch Parijata flowers from heaven, the juice of which was believed to restore sight. Due to his love for the king, Arunagirinathar used his occult powers to take leave of his body, assume the form of a parrot and fly to heaven where he obtained the desired flowers. But after delivering them to the royal court, he discovered the treachery of the court-poet. By stealth and cunning, Sambandha Andan had stolen Arunagirinathar's human body and cremated it. Left with no alternative, the saint continued his life as a parrot inhabiting the temple tower now called Kili Gopuram or *tower of the parrot*.—

¹ The pillar on which the Lord manifested is known as Pillar Subrahmanya Swami temple (*kambattu ilayanar*).

Wordwise: Vichara

विचार

Vichara from vi: 'special' + char: 'to move', 'to roam', 'to practise', 'to conduct oneself' = (lit) 'the special or best way to engage oneself'. Vichara means discrimination, deliberation, examination or investigation.

Among the highest expressions of the spiritual search, *vichara* focuses on solving the problem of mistaking the Self for conditioned phenomena such as the body, the egoic mind. It consists in 'turning the mind back on itself', using the mind to see through the mind's own self-delusion by returning to the source and dispensing with all that is 'non-Self'. Bhagavan says, "He who engages in investigation starts holding on to himself, asks 'Who am I?', and the Self then becomes clear to him. That ends in Realisation of the Self. Engage in Self-investigation, then the non-self will disappear. Vichara is the ultimate route." (See *Talks* §251, 172)





In the Frame

GRO 65 (from P.R. Subramanian) dates to 1st June, 1935: 1st Row, Sitting (left to right): 1. Ramani; 2. Gomati; 3. (Immediately behind children): P.R. Subramanian; 4. Niranjananda Swami; 5. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi; 6. Vishwanatha Swami; 7. Venkataraman, son of Manamadurai Sundaram Iyer; 8. (Undentified); 9. Seramban Venkittu; 2nd Row, Standing (left to right): 1. Vakil Sundaram Iyer; T.N. Venkataram carrying V. S. Ramanan; 3. (Young boy – not identified); 4. Chellam Iyer; 5. Pitchu Iyer, husband of Alamelu Ammal (sister of Bhagavan); 6. Vaidyanathan; 7. Easwaran; 8. Sholavandan Swami Iyer; 9. P.R. Nagasundaram Iyer, Kandanur Rajulu Iyer; 3rd Row, Standing, (left to right): 1. Anandam; 2. (Behind Chellam Iyer) Lakshmi; 3. Annammal; 4. Lakshmi; 5. Athai (Alamelu Ammal) sister of Bhagavan; 6. Lakshmi Ammal sister of Nagalakshmi Ammal; 7. Angachi Ammal; 8. Nagalakshmi Ammal.



Nagalakshmi Ammal, affectionately called 'Nagu' by Sri Bhagavan, later earned the epithet, 'Mahalakshmi' owing to the abundance born of her spirit of selfless service. Third daughter of Pasalai Ramachandra Iyer, the maternal uncle of Sri Bhagavan, Nagu was wife to T.N. Venkataraman, the first President of Sri Ramanasramam, and became a staunch devotee after her first darshan of Bhagavan at the age of 14. She lived permanently in Tiruvannamalai with her husband and children from 1938 till her death in 1984 and attributed her unfailing strength to the perpetual image of Bhagavan's eyes she kept in her imagination throughout the long days managing a household of seven children and feeding and accommodating devotees. Consistent with her indomitable spirit, from her death-bed, she made the following request, "First promise me that under no circumstances will you take me away from Arunachala, no matter what. Secondly, I must die in a state of full consciousness. Please do not allow doctors to give me morphine or any other sedative".





In the Frame (cont)



P. R. Nagasundaram Iyer of Karaikudi was entrusted with the duty of bringing cooks to the Ashram on special occasions like Jayanti and Mahapuja. He would work along with them so intimately that even a permanent resident like Devaraja Mudaliar took him to be the head-cook. On one such Jayanti after having worked all night, Nagasundaram Iyer, utterly exhausted, with his usual short towel around his waist, had stretched himself out near the kitchen under the open sky without any bedding or covering. Being December it was quite cold. Bhagavan who got up very early in the morning (2 or 3 a.m.) noticed Nagasundaram Iyer sprawled out there uncovered. Full of compassion, Bhagavan stopped near him and asked the attendant to go and bring his woollen shawl and with it, he covered Nagasundaram Iyer, saying, "Poor Nagasundaram, having worked all day and night, he is totally exhausted and doesn't even notice the heavy dew!"

Moments Remembered, p. 10.



V. Narayanaswami Iyer, commonly known as 'Chellam Iyer' was a distant cousin of Sri Bhagavan and served the Ashram for 17 years, some of which were spent as cashier. He was of great assistance in the years immediately following Bhagavan's Mahanirvana. He passed away in 1964.

Vakil Sundaram Iyer, Bhagavan's cousin, son of Bhagavan's paternal uncle, Subbiar. An attorney in Manamadurai, he looked after Venkatoo in his youth up until the 9th standard after the death of the boy's uncle.



Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Chitra Purnima Neivedyam



This year's Chitra Purnima fell on the 3rd May and drew an estimated fifteen lakhs. The Ashram took the opportunity to offer Bhagavan's prasada to passing pilgrims. Starting in the morning up till lunchtime, pongal, sweet pongal, tomato rice, tamarind rice, sambar rice and curd rice were served to some 5,000 pilgrims. After dinner that evening, an additional 1,000 pilgrims received *upma* at the Ashram's front gate.



Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Chinmaya Sisters

Radhika-Uma, popularly known as the Chinmaya Sisters, presented a Carnatic vocal music recital on Monday 27th April in the Library Auditorium. Being Sadasiva Brahmendra's Day, they sang two of the sage's Sanskrit compositions. They also gave a heartfelt rendering of Bhagavan's *Atmavidya Song*. Endowed with mellifluous voices, fine musical acumen and deep devotion, a bright future awaits these sisters from Chennai.

