

# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

APRIL 2018  
VOL. 12, NO. 4



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## Saranagati



APRIL 2018  
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ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

On 6th March, the celebration day of Bhagavan's father, Sundaram Iyer, was observed in the Mother's Shrine. Sivaprakasham Pillai Day was celebrated in the New Hall on 12th.

This issue of *Saranagati* continues with the story of Ella Maillart sitting at the feet of Bhagavan Ramana in the darshan hall in the early 1940s and highlights the subtleties and nuances of Bhagavan's teachings as reflected in Ella's notes and journals (p. 3ff).

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

In Sri Bhagavan,  
The Editorial Team

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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

2nd April (Mon) Jagadish Swami Day  
14th April (Sat) Nirvana Room Aradhana/New Year  
17th April (Mon) Major Chadwick Day  
22nd April (Sun) Punarvasu Day  
29th April (Sun) Full Moon  
13th May (Sun) Bhagavan's 68th Aradhana

19th May (Sat) Punarvasu Day  
29th May (Tues) Full Moon Day  
7th June (Thurs) Mahapuja  
16th June (Sat) Punarvasu Day  
24th June (Sun) Cow Lakshmi Day  
27th June (Weds) Full Moon Day





## The Long Road to Bhagavan Tracing the Pilgrim Life of Ella Maillart (Part IV)

### In the Darshan Hall

Ella's days at the Ashram repeated a regular rhythm that centred on morning and evening darshan at the feet of the Maharshi. If in her earlier years she had savoured the changing horizons throughout her long journeys, new discoveries equally welcomed her on a daily basis at Sri Ramanasramam. Though she hadn't known it, this was the journey she had wanted to make all along. To voyage in foreign lands, as it turned out, was not the ultimate undertaking, but rather a preparation for the discovery of her own soul. To the outside observer, her life seemed routine. Yet in the presence of the Maharshi, universes were opening up and revealing exotic vistas beyond any she had ever witnessed or dreamed of before. She was driven now, not by idle curiosity or an itch for novelty, but by the perfect longing for the Self. Throughout this quest, she jotted down her experiences without any intention of publishing them, but rather that she might reflect on them in the years to come.

For the first time, Ella Maillart was writing for writing's sake. If she had previously expressed a dislike for writing, it had now become enjoyable and, more than that, it had become part and parcel of her pathway to self-understanding, had become for her a spiritual

practice. Her insights and observations were regular and often so numerous that she found she could not write fast enough. Like Ti-Puss, her cat-companion, writing became her interlocutor, a stand-in for the Maharshi when not interacting with him directly. And she made an effort to note down everything she witnessed:

*His skin was the shade of walnut wood. White head and naked face, huge black eyes, intensely benevolent, which see through us with one glance. Near him, a small revolving library and a brazier in which burn [loads] of herbs against mosquitoes. He reads newspapers and magazines, corrects proofs and the letters brought by the silent secretary. Above him a fan is fixed to the ceiling. The room is long and simple like a classroom. Twenty or thirty people are there permanently, learning lessons in silence, sitting cross-legged on the stone floor, dressed in their two pieces of white cotton.<sup>1</sup> ... One early morning I found [Ti-Puss] near me as I was leaving my sandals by the door before entering the hall. She must have crossed the road behind me, and passing among the tombs of holy men, followed me by the old tank with the many stone steps leading to the water-level. I let her do what she wanted. As I greeted the Maharshi by joining hands, my cock-sure Ti-Puss jumped on the couch where the Sage spends all his time. Particularly kind to animals, feeding the squirrels, peacocks and monkeys coming to him, as well as Lakshmi the oldest cow of the Ashram who was fond of bananas, the surprised Maharshi put his newspaper aside, smiled at the thin kitten and touched her head.<sup>2</sup>*

1 *Cette Realite Que J'ai Pourchassée*, ("This Reality That I Chased"), Editions Zoe, Paris, Payot, 2013, p. 190-191.

2 Ella Maillart, *Ti-Puss*, London, William Heinemann, 1951, p. 84-84.





### The Natural Teaching

Ella had been misinformed about sages and was surprised to see the Maharshi so human, earthy, humble and congenial. Deeply impressed by the absence of any haughty boasting of high attainments in Himalayan caves, she appreciated the practicality and accessibility of his teaching that could be brought home to life in this world:

*The Maharshi sometimes laughs, sometimes ignores everything, but always stands like a positive magnet... He doesn't believe that it is necessary to shut oneself away in silence to learn concentration as we have to live and learn to be with God in the middle of everyday life. The Absolute we long for unconsciously is not in a silent cave; for a specially trained mind, it is part of everything around us, and more easily, it is found in our innermost [heart]. The Sage does not want disciples, does not take in hand the life of many creatures.<sup>3</sup> Each has to find the way that suits him. He is here to be seen, attainable for all... Have I reached the harbour?<sup>4</sup>*

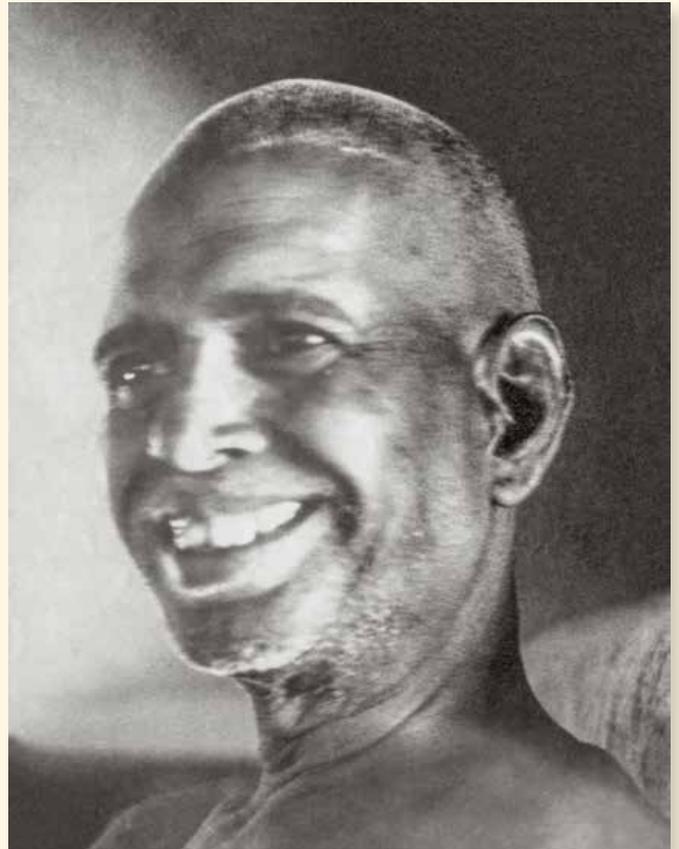
Ella began to understand that her arrival in Tiruvannamalai was no chance occurrence and that there was a deeper wisdom she should apprentice herself to which spoke to a longing that had been present, if indistinct, within her ever since her earliest days on the road:

*I wanted to live for a long period of time near a sage whose behaviour could help me understand that which my lack of intellectual preparation made incomprehensible to me.<sup>5</sup> I felt strongly at Tiruvannamalai that such great ones as the Maharshi are the salt of the earth. Something intangible emanates from these realised men; they sanctify the land through their presence. The Sage has attained a certitude which makes him free from restlessness, free from fear, desire and doubt. He can do things none of us can do, because he is egoless. Those who live near him have the conviction that he knew what he was talking about, who knew the 'why and how' of what had been harassing them. They stopped worrying continually about problems they were never meant to solve. He is a link between what we call the concrete world and the Unmanifest. He is a living symbol of that knowledge without which the humanity of today is but a pitiful joke. He implants a lasting peace in*

3 *Cette Realite Que J'ai Pourchassée*, ("This Reality That I Chased"), Editions Zoe, Paris, Payot, 2013, p. 187.

4 Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7111 B/2-6, Extraits de notes "Five Years in India".

5 *The Travel Narratives of Ella Maillart*, Sara Steinert Borella, New York, Peter Lang, 2006, p. 117.



Bhagavan in the Hall, early 1940s (photo is believed to be by Ella)

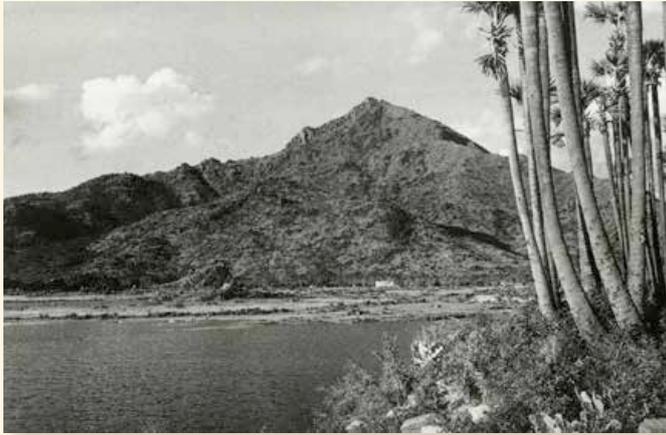
*the centre of every man's heart. What do we see in the West of today? Every moment adding to the despair of men lost in fruitless searches. Hopelessness gaining ground, each one being obliged to seek a solution along alleys most of which become blind. The Sage of the Vedanta symbolises a link between the unknowable ultimate and man. The Sage relies on actionless activity and carries on wordless teaching.<sup>6</sup>*

### Teaching by Silence

At first Ella had expected formal discourses, and visualised herself sitting with pen and paper copying word for word what the Sage said. Instead, she had to become accustomed to Bhagavan's teaching style which involved considerable periods of silence. Most of what he communicated, he did so without words and, paradoxically, this gave her even more to note down and reflect on. She thus had to understand what he more than once stated emphatically, that silence was the greatest of all languages. Summing up Bhagavan's position, she wrote:

6 "The Sage's Activity in Inactivity", Ella Maillart, *Golden Jubilee*, Sri Ramanasramam, 3rd edition, 1995, p. 264.





Arunachala Hill ca. 1941 (photo by Ella)

*Does preaching consist in mounting a platform and haranguing the people around? Preaching is simple communication of knowledge: it can really be done in silence only. What do you think of a man who listens to a sermon for an hour and goes away without having been impressed by it so as to change his life? Compare him with another who sits in a holy presence and goes away after some time with his outlook of life totally changed. Which is the better? To preach loudly without effect or to sit silently sending out Inner Force? Again, how does speech arise? There is abstract knowledge, whence arises the Ego, which in turn gives rise to thought, and the thoughts to words. So the word is the great-grandson of the original source. If the word can produce effect, judge for yourself how much more powerful must be preaching through Silence.<sup>7</sup>*

## Questions and Answers

Though naturally disposed to silence, Bhagavan was not attached to it, being unburdened in every way and making free use of language, and even humour, when the occasion called for it. Describing an encounter in the Hall between her American friend Guy Hague and the Maharshi concerning Arunachala, Ella was in a position to record Bhagavan's subtle insight about the mysterious mountain which had become her home:

*Siva lives in the Hill and Bhagavan is Siva. In the Puranas they say that the Vedas are chanted inside it. Bhagavan says that [on Arunachala] trees can speak to grass; stones speak to stones. Everything is similarly alive, [animated]. One day, Hague, a metallurgical engineer, said to Bhagavan, "I know the secret of your Hill. There is magnetic iron in the middle." "Yes," Bhagavan said, "and it drew you here all the way from America!"<sup>8</sup>*

7 Ella Maillart fonds – Ms. fr. 7107/2-8 Carnets.

8 *Ibid.*

On another day in the Hall, the sub-registrar Narayana Iyer asked why he was so lucky to be at Bhagavan's feet, having done nothing of all the religious practice recommended by the books. Bhagavan said: "Your past is so rich of lives that in some of them you did what was necessary to bring you here."<sup>9</sup>

In time, Ella mustered the courage to raise her own confusion, such as when Bhagavan had repeated his classical admonition in response to another questioner in the Hall: "Enquire what is the mind, who it is who has a thought, to whom the thought occurs, get to the root of it, eliminate all thoughts until you merge into It and realise that thoughts belong to the conditioned world of space, time, causality, and don't really matter. If you can't keep to the 'I'-thought, then use a mantra."<sup>10</sup>

Questioner: But it becomes automatic noise.

Bhagavan: Practice again and again. All [*sadhanas*] are nothing but a study in concentration. You must reduce your higher mind to silence by merging it into It. Some sadhaks are more advanced and can understand different things. A man might come and ask: "Where is God?" If I see that his soul is ripe enough, I say: "You are God." And that is enough to give him realisation.

Ella interrupts: It means Bhagavan can see how ripe we are?

Bhagavan: For me, every soul is ripe. You are in bliss; we are all in bliss. You think you are in this Ashram, in Tiruvannamalai. You think you are this body. [But] this is [delusion]. You are free all the [while].

Ella reflects on this exchange and comments:

*I had read such words; but to hear and see them pronounced by these true eyes, by these [grinning] lips, giving them such power that one lives their truth. Hence, the [conviction] that oral teaching is the necessary [means for transmitting wisdom].<sup>10</sup>*

The same teaching was relentless. On another day, Ella asks:

*Tell us, Bhagavan, now that you have reached self-realisation, how do you see the world and us? Bhagavan said: "All of the unrealised beings are like the shadows moving on the screen. The*

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*





*only reality is the screen. The more darkness there is, the more the moving shades appear real. For me, there is no darkness.”*<sup>11</sup>

### Diving Deeper

After gaining experience through her sadhana and the discussions in the Hall, Ella began her own inner inquiry as prompted by Bhagavan. She reflected on God as the deathless, the formless, that which *is-not* in respect of formal attributes. God is like space, she surmised, and the human form is strangely also like space. We say the human form, like all forms, occupies space, but might the human person just be space? In other words, instead of being a body in space, might I be space with a body in it? These were the kind of metaphysical ruminations that occupied her.

Thus in Bhagavan’s presence, she found the deathless. The body that had always been her identity turned out to be just one aspect of her being. She began to see that she was also non-being—space, the formless, that which does not die. She understood God as beyond any image we might hold of Him.

Her questioning thus intensified as she began to grasp the subtler dimensions of his teaching. She had as an ally Munagala Venkataramiah, the compiler and editor of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, a devotee who had trained in science, philosophy and Vedanta and who, to boot, was gifted with the knowledge of many languages.

Venkataramiah asked Bhagavan if the nature of the ‘I-thought’ is darkness or light, i.e. ego or the Self:

Bhagavan: Though it is a veiling of consciousness that the ‘I-thought’ exists, nonetheless its nature is Light, reflected light. Now that reflected light—and to be reflected, it has to meet a surface—forgets its origin, thinks itself autonomous and then thinks that the objects it illumines—and creates—are also autonomous. So the world of subject-object is created.

Ella: But where does that surface come from?

Bhagavan: Who is it who is there to ask?

Ella: [I get your point] but my question is what does the Sage mean by the word ‘surface’?

Bhagavan: When you reach the source of the ‘I-thought’, you come to that surface, and then only

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*



Arunachala temple from the Hill ca. 1941 (photo by Ella)

do you [see] that it doesn’t [actually] exist: all is light, there can be no more darkness in which a reflected light can appear.

Ella: Then that surface is like a witness but when [reached], it vanishes?

Bhagavan: Yes, look at yourself in a mirror without pause: when you come so near your image as to identify yourself with the image, there is no more mirror. Now, when there is only Light, there can be no more seeing. All is Being.

Ella comments on the exchange:

*Venkataramiah’s eyes were popping out [of his head], amazed by Bhagavan’s kindness. Bhagavan’s teaching exposed essence and [stood as a] perfect refutation of all other systems. Like a passenger in a steamer who thinks he is in [a single] place until he reaches the destination, Bhagavan’s presence is an immense help to look inward: “When you wake up do you bother about the pain of your dream companions? It would be foolish. You woke from the dream to see there is no dream but only Reality.”*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Compare with Cohen’s recording of the same dialogue in *Guru Ramana*, p. 62: “Professor M. Venkataramiah asked whether the light which gives the ‘I’-sense identity and knowledge (of the world) is ignorance or *chit* (Pure Consciousness). Sri Bhagavan replied: “It is only the reflected light of *chit* that makes the ‘I’ believe itself different from others and create the objects. For reflection there must be a surface on which the reflection takes place.” Ella Maillart asks Bhagavan: “What is that surface?” Bhagavan: “On realisation of the Self you will find that the reflection and the surface on which it takes place do not actually exist, but that both of them are one and the same *chit*. There is the world, which requires location for its existence and light to make it perceptible. Both rise simultaneously. Therefore, physical existence and perception depend upon the light





Cow Lakshmi with her new-born calf (photo by Ella)

She continues, acutely attentive to Bhagavan's response:

*I hear the next question: "Is this life to be considered an enjoyment or penance?" (That's an easy one!). "What is joy and penance? It is the same thing. There is joy in penance and penance in joy. Anyhow, what you mention is not real joy. You have it only in the Absolute."*<sup>13</sup>

### Internal Darshan

As Bhagavan's teaching came to life within her and she internalised his voice, Ella began to take up what could only be called an intimate internal dialogue, intuiting with astounding insight Bhagavan's likely answers to her continual questioning:

*What is yoga? "Even the effort towards yoga is yoga." It is foolish to say that Bhagavan concentrates (when correcting the proofs, for example) because he is never diffuse; he has attained 'one-pointedness' of the mind! Therefore, he is perpetually in the utmost, master of his faculties ..."*<sup>14</sup>

A phenomenon many devotees testified to, she found she need only think and the reply would arise:

*I hesitate to ask Bhagavan: You have freed yourself from causality. How is it you work [so many changes in] us, are still related to our conditioned world? The answer: The sun is [and works in the] places exposed to his rays. Though the*

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of the mind which is reflected from the Self. Just as cinematographic pictures can be made visible by a reflected light, and only in darkness, so also the world pictures are perceptible only by the light of the Self reflected in the darkness of *avidya* (ignorance). The world can be seen neither in the utter darkness of ignorance, as in deep sleep, nor in the utter light of the Self, as in Self-realisation or samadhi."

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*

*sun belongs to manifestation like us, Bhagavan is beyond... There are not two worlds. I am sobbing, have been shaken much by the glowing simplicity of [his] realisation.*<sup>15</sup>

Her silent reflections in the Hall doubled as prayers directed toward Sri Ramana who, it would seem, did not leave her petitions unanswered, but by the grace of his all-pervading silence, granted the requisite understanding, as the following entries demonstrate:

*I can only pray towards a Divine power which is searching for me... Bhagavan must give me the answer. Between "I dig, I dig until I meet the inner Sun which will consume my 'I'" [on the one hand,] and, [on the other,] "I surrender totally so that you can work in me", [there] is a big difference. The answer springing up in me nearly at once, is this: Surrender is necessary at first to make the inner earth light willing to be penetrated.*<sup>16</sup> *Abolish the outside world, look into the heart where the root of the 'I' is, this 'I' which is the residue (or*

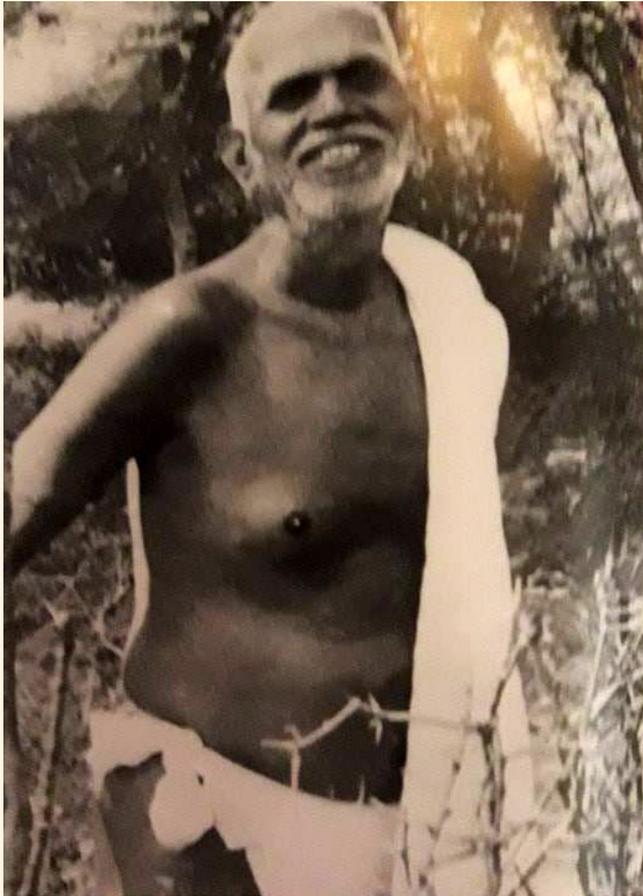
15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*



The temple elephant visiting Sri Ramanasramam (photo by Ella)





Bhagavan in Palakotthu, ca. 1941 (photo by Ella)

beginning) of all thoughts. The more one [looks] inside, the more thoughts will vanish. Somewhere hidden in me there is a light shining continually. It is [up to] me to reach it.<sup>17</sup> ... God is everywhere. Like the sun, we can see it or remain shut in; it is then our loss; the sun won't alter [his] ways. But if I get calm, I can realise [his] beauty and power; I can let [him] shine in me, enkindle my inner sun ...<sup>18</sup>

She concludes her narrative saying, "These clear ideas don't belong to me [but] come down from

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

above."<sup>19</sup> She closes with a petition that immediately receives Bhagavan's response:

*Make light in me, open the shutters, make not only the mind-consciousness broaden, but the soul's too. Send your rays [down] to me so that they [illuminate] me! Bhagavan [responds by indicating] that he [continually] sees in all of us the luminous Self. Thus, how could he [hope to] send rays to illuminate [us]? [We] just need to see in [ourselves] what he sees in us. How simple!<sup>20</sup>*

She follows up an inner exchange between them, assimilating and seeking to extract its full worth:

*Yesterday I 'told' Bhagavan that I could do no more, that I had come so far, as far as his presence, and all the rest seemed unwanted darkness. Alone I can do nothing; with you, God can do everything. No, how wrong. I must first disappear, surrender absolutely, then you can do everything through me, if you want.<sup>21</sup>*

In Bhagavan's presence, Ella quietly admonishes herself, putting the teaching into practice in real time:

*Make the surrender complete. Not to think that I do it to be free of worries—that is a selfish aim. I surrender because I don't exist, and I recognise [that]. There is something more real than this world and it is here with me all the time. I go to the 'Knower of the Field', the great one at the feet of whom all thought and action [is dispensed with]. As to the Knower of the Field, I have an appointment with him; and not with the mind [full of thoughts]; these shall be [discarded,] so that I [may] be alone with Him and drown in Him... What a silent teaching. The Self is without desire. Nothing else but this conquest of the Self matters.<sup>22</sup> —*

(to be continued)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## Announcements: Ashram YouTube Channel

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





## Sri Vidya Havan 2018

In March 1953, Major Chadwick helped initiate regular performance of the Sri Chakra Puja, the weekly Devi puja performed at the Mother's Shrine. One year later, an elaborate day-long fire-ceremony was performed to commemorate the event and to rededicate the inner

sanctum of the Mother's Shrine. Since then the Sri Vidya Havan has been an annual event. This year's Sri Vidya Havan was performed on Friday, 16th March, with various recitations including *Devi Mahatmyam*, *Lalita Sahasranamam* and *Trisathi* as homa flames glowed brightly. Divine Mother in young girls and sumangalis (married ladies) were worshiped. Poornahuti was performed at 3pm, followed by procession and abhishekam. —



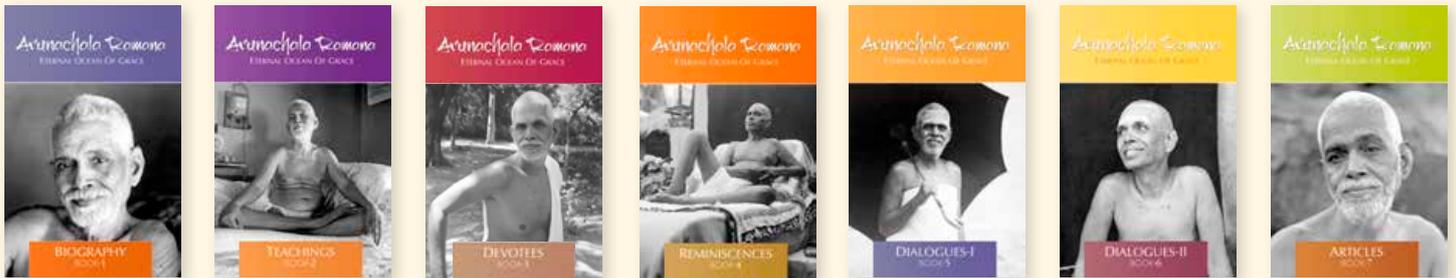


## Obituary: Rukmani, the Temple Elephant

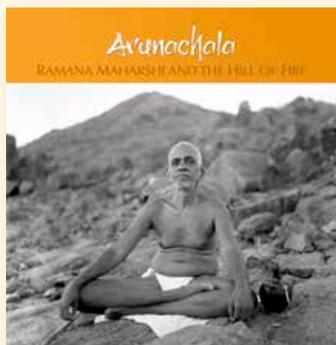


Arunachaleswarar Temple elephant Rukmani passed away in the early morning hour of 22nd March. All pujas in the temple that day were postponed in honour of the cow elephant who had served in the temple, blessing its many adherents each day for more than 27 years. Rukku, as she was affectionately called, sustained a head injury when out for her regular walk on Wednesday morning. Spooked by a barking dog, in her panicked flight, the elephant inadvertently collided with a barricade. Rukmani passed away just two weeks before her 30th birthday and was laid to rest in a large grave near Anjeneyar Temple just outside the Big Temple. —

## Announcements: New Ashram Publications



The eight-volume book *Arunachala's Ramana: Boundless Ocean of Grace* has been thoroughly revised and updated. It will be offered as a series of seven books entitled *Arunachala Ramana: Eternal Ocean of Grace*. The edition has been restructured under the subtitles: *Biography (Book 1)*; *Teachings (Book 2)*; *Devotees (Book 3)*; *Reminiscences (Book 4)*; *Dialogue I (Book 5)*; *Dialogue II (Book 6)* and *Articles (Book 7)*. The compendium is expected to be released on Maha Puja 7 June. —



The Ashram is pleased to release *Arunachala: Ramana Maharshi and the Hill of Fire*, a tribute to the Holy Hill. Devotees of Sri Bhagavan never tire of beholding images of the Hill and photos of Bhagavan, or for that matter, perusing the sayings of the saints, the scriptures and Bhagavan's poems in praise of Arunachala. A foray into the teaching, the present volume blends scenes of the Hill, the Big Temple, Sri Ramanasramam and portraits of Guru Ramana on the Hill with the testimonies written by Its beneficiaries over the centuries. —

