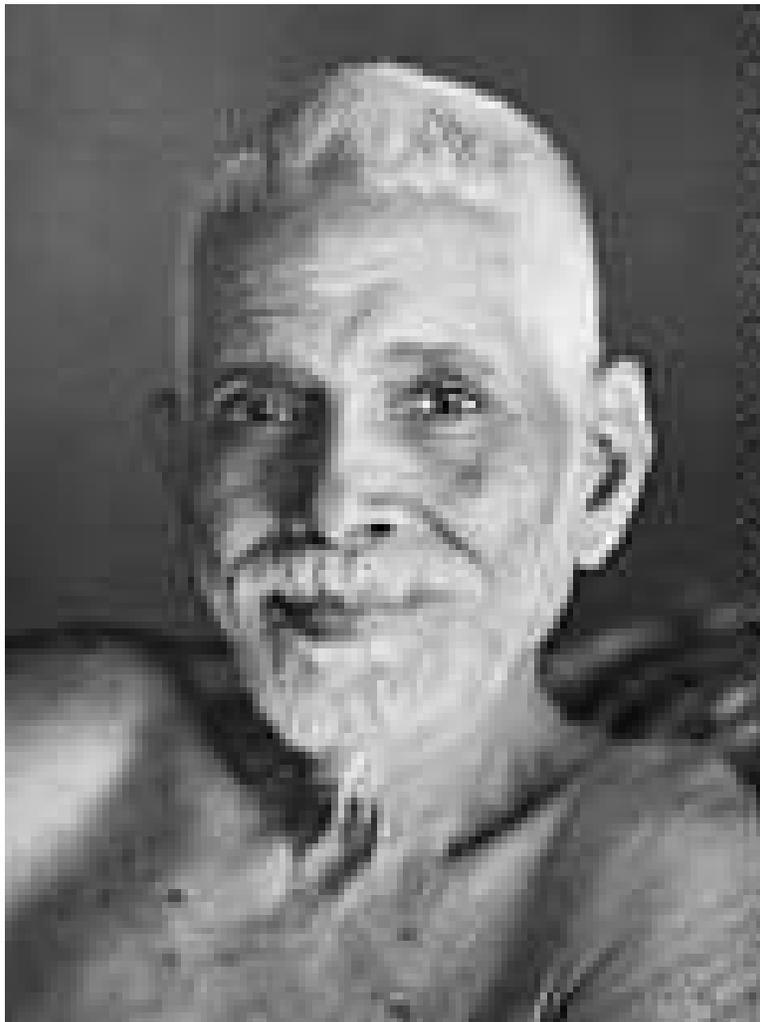


The Archival Films

1935 TO 1950

Research Booklet



Sri Ramana Maharshi

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Preface

During 1935 to 1950 a number of films were made of Sri Ramana Maharshi, recording some of the Sage's daily activities and the environs of Sri Ramanasramam. The films, taken by devotees, mostly show the Maharshi outdoors, since lighting techniques were much more limited than today. Also, in 1946 and 1950, the Indian Information Bureau produced two newsreels of Sri Ramanasramam that were shown in cinema houses around the country. Copies of all these films were collected and archived at Sri Ramanasramam.

Unfortunately, time and the extreme climatic conditions of South India took a heavy toll on these nitrate films. In February of 1990, the entire collection of archival reels was brought to New York for restoration, preservation and reprinting. John E. Allen, Inc., the major East Coast film restoration company, was engaged for the project.

The badly warped, shrunken and brittle reels were put through a patented 'Re-dimension' process, enabling them to pass through the sensitive transferring machines. As the work progressed and the 35mm, 16mm and 8mm films were closely scrutinized, certain new images surfaced, valuable rare footage was restored and other more familiar films were enhanced.

In December of 1991, the final compilation of restored films, in the form of a one hour 16mm reel, was delivered to Sri Ramanasramam. Since then, on a few special occasions observed in Sri Ramanasramam throughout the year, the film has been shown to gatherings in the large Samadhi Hall. The president of Sri Ramanasramam, Sri V.S.Ramanan, has now requested us to make these archival films, showing the beloved Sage of Arunachala, available for distribution in video format.

This booklet contains a description of the restored films. It is a compilation of articles that were serialized in the July 1991 to September 1993 issues of '*The Maharshi*', a bimonthly newsletter published by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center, Nova Scotia, Canada.

It should be noted that these articles were written under the assumption that the readers had no access to the films. Consequently, the articles not only provide a history of the films and identify the people and places in them, but describe scenes that may not necessarily require elucidation, since the film itself is now available. However, these descriptions are so interwoven with many other interesting details that we decided to leave the text as it first appeared. For easy reference, the chapter titles in this booklet conform to the titles found throughout the video, and time codes are provided.

As time passes, all the details of these films - when they were taken, who took them, the individuals and events presented, and most of all, the many scenes of the Maharshi himself - will assume greater interest and value. The restoration work ensures that centuries from now seekers will have the remarkable opportunity to view a fully-enlightened sage, who in the 20th Century lived like the ancient rishis of yore. This booklet is intended to serve as a supplement, emphasizing the highlights of the restored films. It is hoped that by reading it, and following the chronology of films described, a deeper interest in the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi will be cultivated.

Dennis J. Hartel
Nova Scotia, Canada
December, 1995

1935, November

The Maharshi with Swami Yogananda and Paul Brunton

0:01:54[1] The earliest surviving footage comes to us from the Self-Realization Fellowship, an organization founded by Paramahansa Yogananda, the well-known author of the "*Autobiography of a Yogi*". While he was collecting material for his book, he made a visit to the Maharshi, on November 29, 1935.

This visit is well documented in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*: "Swami Yogananda with four others arrived at 8:45 a.m. He looks big, but gentle and well groomed. He has dark flowing hair, hanging over his shoulders. The group had lunch in the Ashrama."

A very lucid conversation then ensued between Yogananda's secretary, Mr. C. R. Wright, and the Maharshi. "How shall I realize God?" Mr. Wright asks. He is told to realize the true nature of the Self. The Maharshi then explains what that Self is and the method to realize it. Mr. Wright asks several other sincere questions, to which he receives detailed and illuminating replies.

Paramahansa Yogananda asks how to effect the spiritual uplift of the people and *the reason God permits suffering* in the world. *Suitable replies are given* to him also.

Only forty-five seconds of 16 mm film are available from this visit, but since it was probably immediately taken out of the country for developing, printing and preserving, it is some of the best quality black and white footage of all the films we now have.

In this scene we see the Maharshi seated on a bench placed north of the Old Hall. He is facing south with his arms to his side and the palms of his hands flat on the bench. A crumpled towel is under his right palm. To his left is Paramahansa Yogananda, standing next to *Paul Brunton*, who was visiting the Ashrama. The Yogi glances at the Maharshi and exchanges a handshake with Mr. Brunton. Four of the Yogi's companions are kneeling or sitting to the right of the Maharshi. The film is very short and consequently, an earlier editor has frozen some of the scenes to prolong the episode. From Mr. Wright's absence we can infer that he was the cameraman.

The most striking observation that can be made of this film is related to the Maharshi. If you focused your attention solely on him

throughout the duration of this footage you would not know that you are watching a 'moving' picture; he is perfectly still, without even a blink of an eye.

1938 - Jayadevlal Dave Footage

0:02:51 From 1935 we move on to the latter part of 1938, where in the film we first see Bhagavan sprightly traversing his beloved Arunachala. In his left hand he carries a kamandalu, while his right hand lightly works a walking stick. His towel covers the front part of the body from his chest down to below his koupina. The towel is not tied but rather tucked under his armpits and held there by keeping the upper part of his arms close to his body. Although his back is not seen, we can assume it is not covered.

The former President of Sri Ramanasramam, Sri T. N. Venkataraman, remembers this film to be taken by Jayadevlal Dave in the year 1938. A clue to a more precise date of the filming can be construed by the presence of Guy Hague, an American mining engineer. In Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, talk number 594, dated December 15, 1938, there is mention of "...Mr. Hague, the American mining engineer who is here as a temporary resident for the last two months." Thus we can infer the filming was done in October, November or December of '38. Bhagavan was clean-shaven in the film, and it is well known that he was shaved every month on Purnima (full moon). In 1938 Purnima fell on October 9, November 7, and December 7. So, if the Talks statement ("...resident for the last two months") is correct, then the month of October can be disqualified. Let us take it that this film was shot in November or December 1938. With the help of Sri Ramanasramam's guest register we, in all likelihood, could pinpoint the date exactly.

In the film Bhagavan appears cheerful while walking on the hill northwest of the Ashrama. He is followed by T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, Guy Hague (in shorts, white shirt, sandals and cane, with a safari-like hat under his right arm), Krishnaswami (an attendant), someone from the

filming group (evident from the camera paraphernalia dangling from his arm), and Annamalai Swami, who later joins the group.

Annamalai Swami was a long-time resident of the Ashrama and labored hard constructing many of the present well-built Ashrama buildings. We find a number of references to him in Talks and other Ashrama books. Surprisingly, fifty-three years after this film was shot, the attendant Krishnaswami and Annamalai Swami are still residing at the foot of the Holy Hill, just west of the Ashrama in Palakottu[2]. The ideals and teachings imbibed from their long association with the Maharshi have remained intact and they both have been living an austere and simple life all these decades.

T. K. Sundaresa Iyer is seen walking directly behind Bhagavan, and at one point we see him leaning his torso to the right, gesturing with his hands and speaking to Bhagavan in a very humble, imploring manner. Bhagavan seems to be responding to him, although he never turns his head when replying.

Guy Hague is said to have stayed at Ramanasramam for two-and-a-half years. It seems he was called back to America with the onset of World War II. There is much speculation that he was the inspiration behind the leading character in Somerset Maugham's novel, *The Razor's Edge*. The similarities are many. Also, there are many similarities between Bhagavan and the Indian Yogi presented by the author in the same novel. Maugham visited the Maharshi and evidence reveals he was duly impressed.

There is a ruggedness about the Arunachala Hill. Boulders lie about as though scattered by a giant hand. If it can be said that Bhagavan displayed any attachment at all, it was to the Arunachala. He enjoyed walking on and around the Hill, remaining unperturbed in the intense heat or cold, walking barefoot at his regular pace.

Finally, the group, having made its way to the north entrance of the Ashrama, walks down the stairs and over to the front of the Old Hall, where a large, cushioned chair has been placed outside. Children are also seen in the background, following down the stairs. Children were an integral part of the life in Sri Ramanasramam. Bhagavan sits on the chair, wipes the perspiration from his brow with his towel, while Krishnaswami cleans his feet with another towel. He is given a cup of water to drink, which he does in typical South Indian style. Meanwhile,

Madhava Swami (another attendant) picks up a fan and begins fanning Bhagavan. Bhagavan lifts his feet up on the chair, turns to the camera and gives a broad, gracious smile. Right after that, Krishnaswami relieves Madhava of fanning, but Bhagavan soon comments, gestures with both hands, and gives a quick shake of the head. The message seems clear: stop fanning. Krishnaswami continues and the scene closes.

All of what has just been described comprises only one minute and fifteen seconds of film. Although brief, it is relevant footage, being one of only two short reels existing from the 1930s. The Maharshi was then nearing his fifty-ninth birthday.

0:04:43 The next three minute, twenty-five second segment is a continuation of the 1938 film taken by Jayadevlal Dave. It begins with a view of the newly built dining hall, shot from the hill, about 100 meters up. This combined dining hall and kitchen, built from local stone and high quality material, was Sri Ramanasramam's largest construction endeavor to that date - certainly, some skeptics believed unjustifiably large. But, in reality, it was a foresighted enterprise, towards which Jayadevlal Dave must have been importuned to aim his camera with impressive results.

From the dining hall the camera briefly pans to the west, taking in the gosala (cow shed) and other buildings, mostly hidden by overgrowth. Then on to the new office and bookstore, standing side by side with "SRI RAMANASRAMAM, OFFICE, NIRANJANANDA SWAMI, C.R. SARVADIKARI [spelling as given] written above the entrance. The office building still stands and is used for storing and packing book orders. It is just north of the Samadhi Hall. However, when the Samadhi Hall was built in 1970 the whole bookstore building was razed and the space incorporated into the large hall enshrining the Lingam over Bhagavan's grave.

Now on to the Old Hall where we briefly see Jayadevlal Dave and Krishnaswami. The camera quickly scans the holy hill then focuses on a whitewashed stone where we read "Skandasramam" in English and Tamil, and an arrow pointing the way. Even today this rock is whitewashed and painted with the same message.

At this juncture, the Maharshi enters the scene walking down his beloved hill, followed by his devoted attendant, Madhava Swami.

Before entering the Ashrama grounds, Mr. Dave, watching the camera, walks into view with joined hands to offer salutations to the Maharshi. The Maharshi lifts his cane as if to shoo him away and avoid the adoration. He then makes his way to the stairs that go up and then down into the Ashrama.

In the next scene we see Bhagavan, the attendant Krishnaswami, and Mr. Dave walking west of the Ashrama in Palakottu. The Maharshi seems unconcerned about the filming as he proceeds on his normal daily walk to this area - of course, not so with the other two. We see a thick forest in contrast to its present thinned condition. The group unceremoniously walks around the bank of the small tank in Palakottu and the film ends. This is the last of the films from the 1930s.

1945 - Ramachandra Reddi Footage

0:08:17 The next film, taken by Mr. Reddi of Hyderabad, takes us ahead seven years to 1945. On the opening scene the *front gate of Sri Ramanasramam* appears, just as we see it today. Then a few quick scenes appear: a detailed view of the *Mathrubhuteswara Temple* construction, the main entrance of the gosala, the Old Hall, and then Bhagavan appears in a delightful manner.

Walking out of the office Bhagavan turns left towards the Old Hall and is immediately met by a man holding a one-year-old babe. The Maharshi spontaneously lifts the point of his walking stick and playfully pokes the child in the tummy, then affectionately patting the child, moves on. This short little act of playful affection is one of the few scenes wherein we see the human tenderness and gracious spontaneity of the Bhagavan we have so often read about.

The Maharshi turns toward the camera, grasps the towel resting over his left shoulder and flips it under his left arm, being quite aware that the lens is focused on him. He walks almost directly toward the camera. The attendant Rangaswamy, along with T. N. Venkataraman's two sons, Sundaram and Ganesan, follow behind. During the next thirty seconds the cameraman takes five other shootings of Bhagavan walking towards him. In one we see the storekeeper, Kumaraswamy.

0:10:10 Then we see the Maharshi and attendant Rangaswami up the stairs leading to the Mountain, north of the Ashrama. Sri Bhagavan seems to struggle somewhat climbing the stairs. His ascent of the hill is also slow but steady. The cameraman must have been rushing to reposition himself, for we see Sri Bhagavan from at least five different angles slowly moving up the Hill.

Then the camera focuses on two women, Mrs. Talayarkhan and Framji's daughter, both in white saris. One of them bends over and clears some pebbles from the trail, over which they expect the Maharshi to be treading momentarily. Sri Bhagavan appears at a distance on the return swing of his walk; the women slip behind a large boulder beside the path; the Maharshi proceeds closer to where the women remain in hiding. Is this an ambush in the making? Well, we will never know, for next we see Sri Bhagavan stop and turn towards the camera, exactly where the Mountain top looms directly overhead: the classic Father Arunachala and son Ramana shot.

As this film ends, Sri Bhagavan, followed by his attendant and, yes, the two devoted women are seen nearing the back entrance of the Ashrama. Another brief scene of Bhagavan entering the bathroom and it is all over. These scenes, taken by Mr. Reddi, were shown in Sri Ramanasramam and have been referenced in '*Day by Day with Bhagavan*' (entry 11-12-1945). The film was projected onto a white sheet at the western end of the Old Hall. Everyone present enjoyed the pictures but Bhagavan who could not see them clearly. It was then a revelation to the devotees of his failing sight.

Golden Jubilee Celebrations September 1, 1946

0:12:04 This is the same year that the famous 'Welling Bust' photos of the Maharshi were taken. His features are charmingly softened by a short crop of white hair covering his face and head, his look is cool and penetrating and an inexplicable aura of freedom and joy seems to touch the heart of the onlooker.

Now we come to one of the more historically valuable films, one of two produced by the Indian Information Bureau. This first, short newsreel was shot on September 1st, 1946, the day commemorating

the fiftieth anniversary of the Maharshi's arrival at Arunachala. On this day the Golden Jubilee Celebration was observed in a grand manner. *Suri Nagamma* gives many wonderful details relating to the event in her *Letters From Sri Ramanasramam*. This newsreel, with a narration, was shown in cinema houses around the country and *G. V. Subbaramayya* reports seeing it, as described in his book, *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*. Bhagavan also comments about this movie in the same book.

The footage we have of this film is incomplete. The negative, apparently, was later stretched and stilled at several places in an attempt to fit the narration into the limited footage. The narration, too, has omissions. We believe there must be a complete version of this footage somewhere, but efforts so far to find one have not been successful.

The film begins by showing the archway entrance of Sri Ramanasramam. A large procession is then seen making its way through the entrance. The procession is again viewed passing the camera inside the Ashrama. Some prominent devotees seen are Swami Viswanathan, the former President of Sri Ramanasramam, T. N. Venkataraman and Appichi^[3], the late head priest. Swami Viswanathan first came to Bhagavan in Skandasramam in 1921 at the early age of seventeen. From 1923, he remained permanently with Bhagavan. He composed a hymn of *108 Names in praise of Sri Bhagavan*, which is recited before the Maharshi's grave every morning before breakfast.

At this point the narration starts, although the beginning of it has obviously been cut. The camera now shifts to the Maharshi majestically sitting cross-legged on a sofa under a pondal (thatched shed). There are many men and one child standing near him. Incense slowly wafts its fragrant smoke, swirling up before this holy scene. We can almost smell it. The Maharshi's eyes are open, but his look is lost in the unspeakable depths of everlasting awareness. The camera shifts and we view the sage from three different angles during a thirty second period. It is a powerful scene, a testimony to a lofty personality exuding a presence that has influenced the lives of so many during this century.

Throughout this darshan scene we hear the following narration in typical British accent:

"...Ashrama of Ramana at Arunachala drew crowds of devotees on September the First to mark the completion of fifty years when Ramana first set foot on the sacred soil of this historic mountain shrine. From far and near they flocked for the darshan of the holy Sage, who by the severest austerities and profound contemplation has attained spiritual wisdom and serenity unique in the country. Thousands draw comfort by his mere presence, for he neither preaches nor blames, setting all at ease who come to him by the essential goodness he radiates to all around - a good man in a troubled world."

The beginning of the narration has been cut off, perhaps lost, but what remains is sufficient to recreate what many thousands of viewers saw throughout India in local cinema houses.

0:12:56 At the end of this newsreel we see the most detailed frontal view of the Maharshi's face on film. He is wearing a short beard, exhibits a calm and distant look, and faces directly into the camera for twelve seconds. His head, which is slightly shaking, nearly fills the screen. The last few of these twelve seconds were stilled by an earlier film editor.

Then something interesting takes place. Suddenly we are looking at the Maharshi's back, while a small group of prominent devotees surround him. They also have their backs turned to the movie camera. This is quite unusual, though the reason is soon noticed. Bhagavan is facing a large crowd of devotees and in the front of this crowd, with tripod and camera, stands Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami focusing in on his favorite subject - the Maharshi. Filmed from behind and photographed from the front, Bhagavan displays a typically indifferent but gracious attitude.

We must mention here, that Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami was the ordained Ashrama photographer and is responsible for many of the hundreds of photos we have of the Maharshi today. As a young man he first came to Tiruvannamalai in 1930 with his new camera to take photos of the grand Arunachala Temple. While at the temple, someone mentioned that he should go a little distance down the road and take photos of the sage living there. He did. The Maharshi cordially consented, and Dr. T. N. K., as he is often referred to in books, became an ardent

lifelong devotee - a devotee with a camera (he died in 1975). The walls of his house in Madras, where his son now lives, are still lined with large framed photos of his Master.

1947 - K. K. Nambiar Footage

0:13:30 We now come to a three minute ten second 8mm color film taken by K.K.Nambiar. In his book, *The Guiding Presence of Sri Ramana*, he mentions the details relating to this film. In 1946, the State of Madras sent him abroad to learn certain engineering procedures. Before leaving New York he bought an 8mm color movie camera with the sole purpose of making a film at Sri Ramanasramam, which he did upon his return in February of 1947. After this, K.K. Nambiar filmed the Maharshi often and is responsible for more than half of all the films that we now have. He rose to the top of his profession and was able to assist the Ashrama in many capacities. As both an eminent and active devotee, we are deeply indebted to him. Mr. Nambiar readily gave over all his later films to the Ashrama, but he was reluctant to part with this first work. In fact, he never did. It was only after he passed away (in 1986) that his son give this film to the Ashrama in February of 1990.

A clue to why Mr. Nambiar withheld this particular reel is revealed from what his kind wife recently told us. She said that as he lay in bed during his final days, he would often reach over to the projector at his bedside, switch it on and view this film again and again.

While watching this film, and seeing the special indulgence granted to the Nambiars by Bhagavan, we can easily understand Mr. Nambiar's attachment to the film and the emotion it must have evoked in him.

It begins with several shots of the Maharshi walking through the ashram with his attendant, Sivanandaswami, following close behind.

With a walking stick in his right hand and a clean white towel hanging over his left shoulder, Bhagavan makes his way to the lavatory next to the goshala (cow shed). T. P. Ramachandra Iyer is standing near the lavatory door and stares at the camera.

0:13:47 Then appears Niranjanananda Swami, popularly known as Chinnaswami, looking tall and vigorous and walking straight toward the camera. Chinnaswami served as Sarvadhikari, the chief officer of

the ashrama from 1928, until his death in 1953. The scene suddenly cuts to where we see Bhagavan standing to the right of his beloved cow Lakshmi; Chinnaswami stands to her left and both are stroking her. There are children standing about. The camera pans to the right where Bhagavan's sister and Nambiar's wife and son are standing; the camera pans back and forth several times and each time new faces appear: T. N. Venkataraman, his sons, his wife holding an infant, and a dozen others.

All the while Bhagavan stands close to Lakshmi, petting her with affection. She, the centerpiece of the show, looks on with calm dignity. Then the whole group, about twenty in all, casually walks with Bhagavan toward the dining hall.

This whole episode has an air of a home movie. Although there are many relatives of Bhagavan in this sequence - perhaps half of the group - we sense an equality and intimacy of a single family unit, gathered under the sole shelter of their benign Father, the Maharshi. And the cow Lakshmi is no less a member, but rather an equal recipient of affection, loyalty and friendship.

This footage, one of two scenes in which the cow Lakshmi appears, is a fitting tribute to that rare soul who took the shape of a cow, surrendered to a Master in human form, and was forever merged in the formless Reality. Her remarkable story will live on as long as the memory of Sri Ramana Maharshi lasts.

A short scene of the flower garden is followed by that of the white peacock. K. K. Nambiar mentions in his writings that the Maharshi pointedly requested him to film this peacock.

0:15:32 Sri Bhagavan is then seen walking out of the dining room and toward the men's dormitory. There, Mr. Nambiar's memorable plan, now on film, begins to unfold: Mrs. Nambiar quickly approaches Bhagavan, stands in front of him with joined palms, immediately drops to her knees and touches the Maharshi's feet three times, returning her hands to her forehead after each touch. Bhagavan seems surprised, steps back slightly, rubs his thigh with apparent unease and looks on. It all happens so fast he has no time to react. But that is not the end. Mr. Nambiar must have immediately handed the camera to his wife, for in the next scene we see Mr. Nambiar on his knees with

his head firmly planted on Bhagavan's right foot. He then lifts his head up and turns to the camera to be sure everything was recorded. Uncertain, he repeats the act and then stands.

A glimpse at the Maharshi's face indicates that he is humored by this whole affair, though he wastes no time making his escape once Nambiar stands.

This film ends with a close-up of a consenting and cheerful *Major Allan Chadwick*; then one of a steady, stoic *Professor Syed*. It is important to mention the contribution of Major Chadwick, also known as Sadhu Arunachala, to the Ashrama activities. He was instrumental in initiating the regular performance of Sri Chakra Puja in the *Mathrubhuteswara Temple* and helped start a Veda Patasala in the Ashrama. He was the first European devotee to live permanently at the Ashrama. Dr. Syed was a Muslim Professor of Persian and Urdu in the University of Allahabad and used to frequently visit the Ashrama.

1948 - Aravind Bose Footage

0:16:49 In 1948, Aravind Bose, a Bengali devotee of long-standing, shot a series of 16mm color films which were collected together and have been frequently referred to as the 'Bose film'. This film came into the possession of Sri Ramanasramam only in the 1980s. The camera work done in these films displays a certain amount of professionalism that is absent in most of the other films taken by devotees. But the real value of the films lies in their content.

The film begins with a series of shots taken from up on the hill. We see the terrain surrounding Sri Ramanasramam as it was a half a century ago. And then from Skandashrama we look down on the great Arunachala Temple with a small community surrounding it. Those familiar with Tiruvannamalai will easily observe the sharp contrast to the bustling town of today.

0:18:03 *Swami Viswanathan* is then seen standing on the overlook at Skandashrama and pointing to places of interest. Mr. Bose's daughter, Maya, stands next to him. Apparently, Swami Viswanathan

served as a guide that day, for we see him again in various other shots.

What follows is a series of scenes that are mostly connected with the Maharshi's early life. From Skandashrama we go to *Pachaiamma Koil*. We then see various sites inside the Arunachala Temple, and scenes from *Pavalakkunru* and Virupaksha Cave. We also see, on two occasions, shots taken during the Karthigai Deepam festival. There are a great number of pilgrims walking on pradakshina near the Pali Tirtham (the large tank next to the Ashrama). The tank is full to the brim and many pilgrims are bathing and washing their clothes. We see a man being carried in a palanquin by four bearers and a *bhajan* party with drum and cymbals following. In another scene the images from the Arunachala and the Adiannamalai Temples are seen being carried on procession near the front gate of Sri Ramanasramam. There is one view of the wooded Palakothu where a bearded swami in a loin cloth (Annamalai Swami) walks out of the Ganesha Temple. A short close up shot of the famed white peacock and we come to the Maharshi.

0:23:15 Bhagavan steps out from the southern door of the dining hall, and begins cleaning his teeth while standing on the steps. The attendant Sivananda stands beside him.

Having a short crop of white hair on his face and head, a white towel over his left shoulder, and leaning lightly on his cane, Bhagavan quickly makes his way east between the dining hall and bathroom. A crowd of devotees follow him.

We soon see him walking again, flanked on both sides by devotees. Then Mr. Bose appears near the goshala (cow shed) and seems to be guiding Bhagavan to the Veda Patasala. The Maharshi stops and about ten priests and students come out and prostrate before him. One gets the impression that this was not a spontaneous occurrence, but rather an orchestrated act. After they all rise, Bhagavan resumes walking with all the priests and students reverently by his side.

Now we come to the part where Mr. Bose's camera is most effective in capturing the unique qualities of the Maharshi in a very natural manner.

We have all read of Sri Bhagavan's love for animals and how he would occasionally go to the goshala to visit those blessed cows whom he looked upon as ashramites, equal to any humans. This next scene

takes us there with him on one of his regular visits and we witness, as others did, his love and attention for these often mistreated animals.

0:24:40 Looking somewhat lean and cheerful he walks up to a black cow and begins to gently scratch her back. While doing so he gazes around, looking to see that everything is being done properly. He moves over to a young calf and rubs its back, gives instructions to a worker, turns to the left, takes one step and then a gracious smile adorns his face. The reason is soon apparent. His beloved cow Lakshmi walks straight to him and bends her head down low. He reaches out to her.

At this point, if you slow down the film speed and look at the Maharshi's smiling lips, you can distinctly see him say endearingly "Amma (Mother)," as he begins to talk to her.

He then raises his right hand and places it on the crown of Lakshmi's head, affectionately rubbing in the small hollow just behind the root of the horns. Anyone who has ever tended cows knows that scratching this particular spot, which is inaccessible to the cow, is a welcomed source of pleasure for the animal. Lakshmi meekly lowers her head out of the camera's view but obviously very near to the feet of her Master.

On June 18th 1948, Lakshmi left her body and attained liberation after Bhagavan placed his hand over her head and heart and caressed her. As per Bhagavan's instructions, a tomb was built over her grave with an epitaph which stated that Lakshmi had attained *Mukti*, liberation.

The camera shifts and we see the Maharshi is still in the cowshed petting and scratching other cows, all the while carefully scrutinizing their well-being.

0:25:30 Another blink of the camera and the Maharshi is on the move, surrounded by about a dozen devotees. Bhagavan leans heavily on his cane with his right hand and a white towel thrown over his left shoulder. The cameraman films the group from no less than eight different vantage points. Given this serene atmosphere, as the group slowly strolls with the Maharshi through the Ashrama grounds, it is hard to imagine the cameraman and his crew darting here and there, setting up and shooting in a frantic rush. The whole Ashrama must have been on high alert, although what we see filmed looks all

quite natural and normal, due, undoubtedly, to the Maharshi's tranquil presence.

In the group we see *Swami Viswanathan*, Appu Swami, *K. Natesan*, T. N. Venkataraman and others. The Maharshi seems indifferent to the camera focused on him as he quietly goes about his normal daily amble.

At one point, when walking west near the front of the Veda Patasala, Bhagavan seems to be saying something. Turning to Venkataraman's son, Ganesan (only a small boy then), who is shyly walking by his side, he puts his hand on the boy's right shoulder, turns to him and makes an amusing comment, then raises his hand and stretches it out to indicate something big and smiles broadly. Others smile too. Ganesan briefly smiles in the direction of Bhagavan, looks up at him, then quickly lowers his head, obviously embarrassed by all the attention.

But whatever it was that amused the Sage, however slight the humor, it continues to dance upon his benevolent face, filled with cheer, goodness and grace, as he walks on looking directly into the camera and then passing it. His cheerful charm shines brightly, contrasted by the stoic, sober looks of all his followers and the curious side-glances from the timid boy.

During several visits to Sri Ramanasramam in 1948, Aravind Bose brought with him a cameraman and shot what are now the best preserved color films of Sri Bhagavan. He took it upon himself to capture the Maharshi as he went about his daily routine. Bose's success in this was limited to the available lighting. For instance, we all know that the Maharshi spent the greater part of his day in the Old Hall on the sofa reading the newspaper, perusing letters, proof reading, answering questions and sitting silent, looking out into the vast nothingness. Dozens of aspirants would be sitting at his feet, either meditating or simply gazing on his holy form. This was the 'Durbar' of the 'Maha Rishi's' kingdom and in it the greatest of all miracles were being performed, secretly. It is here where the Sage entered the hearts of the sincere aspirants and kindled the light of the Self Supreme. But all this could not be filmed or, for that matter, even seen by the naked eye. Moreover, in the Old Hall the lighting was

inadequate for filming. Well, Mr. Bose had an idea, and it is in this next scene that it unfolds.

We have the devotees, we have the Sage, the throne, and the outside lighting, but where is the stage director to pull all these elements together? Mr. Bose amply rises to the occasion, as we now see him waving his arms, instructing devotees to sit here and there. Meanwhile, Bhagavan approaches his seat, strokes the top mat twice with the end of his cane (apparently to smooth out it out) and with an air of disinterest takes his seat. The camera pans slowly to the right where about fifteen men are seated in a row three deep. The panning continues to where the women are sitting. Prominent is the English woman, Miss Merston. Ammani Ammal is also there, sitting erect, looking straight ahead with downcast eyes. Her remote stillness seems to personify a determined aspiration. About a dozen women are sitting.

To the right of Bhagavan's seat is seen another dozen people, consisting of priest (Appichi and *Kittu* are present), attendants, and relatives of the Maharshi.

The attendant, Satchitananda Swami, enters the scene carrying a small, round stool, on top of which is placed a wicker tray filled with shelled peanuts. He sets the stool down in front of the Maharshi, picks up the tray and passes Bhagavan a small plate on which he drops a handful of nuts. Next we see the attendant moving from place to place doling out the nuts. Occasionally the scene reverts to Bhagavan who is engaged in selecting the peanuts from his plate and popping them in his mouth, one by one. Mr. Bose, now in a relaxed mood, stands behind Bhagavan eating nuts. The Sarvadhikari and his son, T. N. Venkataraman, are at his side.

Then everyone stands. Bhagavan, still sitting, is handed a tooth pick and *kamandalu* (water pot) and begins to clean his teeth and drink water. All are now in a jovial mood. Sundaram, the current president of Sri Ramanasramam, T. N. Venkataraman's oldest son, stands directly behind Bhagavan and smiles unabashedly, looking straight at the camera. We feel that we are watching a large family gathering, picnicking in a country park under a gentle summer sun. Bhagavan relaxes, waves his hand in jest, smiles broadly and then looks toward

the ground. There the white peacock has made his entrance. No doubt Bhagavan's smiles and jest were evoked by the bird's timing and subsequent filming. We can almost hear him say, "Oh, Look! He didn't want to miss this!"

All this looks so casual and unpretentious. Who would think that here sits a man whose mere glance has plunged wild and distraught minds into the eternal depths of unrivaled peace and joy.

After a few shots of the Maharshi around the dining hall, and one of him sitting in the verandah, the Arvind Bose film concludes with a brief view of the holy hill and the surrounding sky.

The Maharshi's 69th Birthday Celebration December 1948

Between the years 1947 and 1950, K. K. Nambiar of Madras visited Sri Ramanasramam regularly. As a highly-placed and respected engineer for the State of Madras, Mr. Nambiar had skills that were wisely utilized by the Ashrama authorities during construction projects. At this time he was very active in the construction of the Jubilee Hall, which is attached to the *Mathrubhuteswara Temple*. And it was during one of Mr. Nambiar's visits in December of 1948 that he brought along his 16 mm movie camera. This visit coincided with the sixty-ninth birthday celebration of the Maharshi.

0:29:53 In this film we first see the Sage surrounded by devotees and a number of police officers in beige uniforms. During those years the crowds of devotees and poor people that came for *biksha* (food offerings) during the celebrations were large and it was routine to have a number of uniformed policeman to control the crowds and to secure order, if necessary. Even now this practice is continued.

With his typical white towel thrown over his left shoulder, loin cloth and cane, the Maharshi walks, flanking a long line of enthusiastic Boy Scouts standing at attention - yes, Boy Scouts. This organization is of English origin and branches were established in India much earlier than in North America. As we will see later, the Scouts took an active role as volunteers during the day's festivities. One gets the impression that these Scouts, standing straight and proud in their neat uniforms,

look upon the Maharshi as a visiting dignitary inspecting an elite regiment of honor guards. Though Bhagavan never looks up at the boys, or even at the camera, he remains the central figure, like the Commander in Chief, so to speak.

Viewing the chronology of films, beginning in 1935, one can immediately see in this footage a new aspect of the Maharshi's appearance: his infirmity. We must remember that the same month that this film was shot, Dr. Shankar Rao first noticed a small nodule under the skin behind the Maharshi's left elbow. It was this nodule that developed into the fatal sarcoma cancer that eventually brought down the curtain on this unique life of purity and peace.

We see in this December 1948 film, how the Maharshi, stricken by many years of rheumatism, struggles with each step. His feeble knee joints gravitate inward so far that he must consciously swing one leg out and around the other before placing it down. By planting his left hand firmly on the back side of his hip and leaning heavily on his walking stick with his right hand, his head bent down and inclining to the right, he somehow manages to propel himself forward in a steady rhythm. His effort is painfully evident.

The Maharshi is then seen walking through different quarters of the Ashrama, surrounded, again, by devotees and relatives. When he arrives in front of the thatched building with the printed sign "Guest House for Gentlemen," he sends his attendant into the building to fetch something. The attendant immediately comes out scooping his hand into a small can and placing some grains on the ground in front of the white peacock. There is an almost imperceptible cut in the film, noticed only if you keep your eyes on the white peacock. It is now eating out of the can itself as Bhagavan stands directly in front of it and talks to it. Then Bhagavan moves away, everyone following.

Now we see vast numbers of local residents, many indigent, moving about the northern side of the Ashrama. Then rows of them are seen sitting, as eager Boy Scouts carry large thatched boxes of food, scooping out healthy portions for each person. The gruel is placed in towels, tied and then carried away by the recipients. In another place a large gathering is seen. Then rows of devotees are shown taking their meals under a thatched roof. Police and Boy Scouts are moving

about busily. It is *biksha* time and hundreds, perhaps thousands, are being fed.

Patala Linga Muhurtham Ceremony *May 4, 1949*

The Patala Linga is the underground cellar shrine where the Maharshi once lived when he first came and stayed in the Arunachala Temple. It was a neglected, dark, vault-like tomb. The young boy-sage resided there oblivious of the ants, vermin and mosquitoes that preyed upon his flesh until his thighs were covered with sores that ran blood and pus.

Because of the Patala Linga's association with the early life of the Maharshi, it is viewed as sacred by his devotees. In 1949, Mrs. Talayarkhan decided to have the shrine repaired and have a small gopuram built over it. She collected funds and hired a contractor. On May 4, 1949, the Governor General, C. Rajagopalachari, presided over the opening ceremony. Also in attendance were the Madras Governor and the Maharaja of Bhavnagar and his wife.

0:35:54 In this short film taken by Aravind Bose we see a procession walking in the direction of the Patala Linga. Leading the procession is Allamelu, the Maharshi's sister and Mrs. Talayarkhan, followed by officials and devotees.

Suri Nagamma wrote about this event in her book, *Letters From Sri Ramanasramam*. She mentioned that prior to the Governor General's arrival, roads were repaired and decorated with national flags, the Thousand-pillared Mandapam, where the Patala Linga is found, was cleaned and white-washed and spectators came from all places while the whole town was full of bustle and noise. Contrary to this description, the film shows a quiet, small gathering. It appears that the filming preceded the actual ceremony, and those seen mostly represent the Ashrama's circle of invitees. The Governor General and others must have arrived a little later.

Suri Nagamma also wrote: "Knowing that the Governor General, the Madras Governor, the Maharaja of Bhavnagar and his wife would also come for the occasion and would visit the Ashramam for having

darshan of Bhagavan, the Municipal authorities and the police made all the required arrangements at the Ashramam also.

"The Governor General went to the temple straight from the railway station at the appointed hour, performing the opening ceremony, spoke in terms of praise about Sri Bhagavan and went away, sending a message to Bhagavan that he could not visit the Ashramam owing to some urgent work. As soon as he left, all the people assembled at the temple came here. By 10:30 a.m., the Bhavnagar royal couple came into Bhagavan's presence, prostrated before him with great devotion, spoke to Bhagavan with great reverence, stayed for half an hour, received prasadam and went away."

May to November 1949

K. K. Nambiar Footage

In 1949, K. K. Nambiar was very active with his movie camera, as evidenced by the next twenty minutes of film. In these scenes, arranged chronologically, we witness a rapid deterioration in the health of the Sage. Toward the end of 1948 a small nodule appeared below the elbow of his left arm. It was surgically removed. It later reappeared and was diagnosed as a malignant tumor, which, inch by inch, ate up the flesh of his arm, poisoned his blood and, finally, rang down the curtain on a life of immaculate purity and grace.

0:37:13 These films begin with the Maharshi walking south near the storeroom, with the attendant Sivananda Swami following him. About forty seconds into this section we see the Sage being questioned by a devotee regarding some text in a manuscript. The Maharshi points out something in the manuscript and moves the same pointed finger up to his nose. It seems he was stopped for clarification of a proof edition of some book. The Maharshi then walks on and is seen strolling through the lanes of the ashram until he walks into the dining hall, followed by the attendant Satyananda Swami.

Some more shots of the ashram and Arunachala are followed by more of Bhagavan and his attendant walking. Then a crowd gathers around the Sage. We see T. N. Venkataraman and his children, Miss. Merston,

K. K. Nambiar, K. Netasan, T. P. Ramaehandra Iyer, *G. V. Subbaramayya*, Allamelu, and others. The Maharshi walks with apparent difficulty and appears to be the only person not watching the camera. In a later crowd and in another scene, walking behind two calves, *S. S. Cohen* is seen wearing a white kurta and pajamas. He is also briefly seen walking amidst other group shots.

After this series we see the newly-completed gopurams, built over the Mother's temple and the New Hall.

Then K. K. Nambiar and his wife slowly walk by the side of their Guru, just east of the kitchen. A crowd gathers. The same crowd stands while the film rolls. Chinnaswamy and his illustrious brother stand flanking K. K. Nambiar.

Another two minutes of similar footage and we come to one of the most captivating scenes of the whole film.

On June 1, 1949 a simple ceremony was performed at Sri Ramanasramam to commemorate the opening of the New Hall, attached to the *Mathrubhuteswara Temple*. The Maharshi was to shift his residence from the Jubilee Hall (an outside hall under a thatched roof) to the New Hall on this day. At 9:45 a.m., pujas were being performed in the temple, the bells were ringing and priests were waving *arati* (light) with burning camphor when Bhagavan walked into the New Hall, accompanied by Brahmins chanting the Vedas. He was requested to take his seat on the new Yogasana, which was aesthetically carved out of a single piece of rock and was highly polished and decorated. In his typically disinterested manner, Bhagavan acquiesced to all the requests.

The New Hall was made out of the same materials as the Temple, with granite walls, floor and pillars. It was a large, imposing structure, equal—everyone thought—to the grand spiritual personality for whom it was built. But, ironically, by the time it was completed and the Sage took up residence in it, his mortal vitality was ebbing and all the glory and satisfaction associated with its completion was overshadowed by concerns for his health.

In July of 1949, K. K. Nambiar brought his 16mm camera with him on one of his regular visits to the Ashrama. This time he somehow managed to arrange for sufficient lighting to take a rare film of the Sage sitting inside the New Hall.

0:48:37 The Maharshi is seen on the cushioned stone couch. His legs are stretched out with two pillows under his knees, while he sits upright holding a newspaper with both hands. There is one vertical pillow on each side of his back. During the fifty seconds of this scene he leisurely flips the pages of the newspaper, scanning the contents from top to bottom, never seeming to read any one news item completely.

By this time he had already undergone two minor surgeries on his left arm, just below the elbow. But, however close we scrutinize his arm, we see no apparent swelling, scar or bandage.

During a period in mid-July of 1949, the tumor ceased to ooze blood and the bandage was removed. The cancer seemed to be in remission. The film must have been shot at this time. The tumor was said to be still growing, yet it is not visible from the angle of the lens (the tumor was on the inner side of the left arm). Also, the Maharshi seems to be using this arm quite freely, turning the pages of the newspaper without apparent discomfort, which does not necessarily mean that there was no discomfort at all.

0:50:03 A profound scene ensues as he folds the newspaper, lays it on the table to his left, and assumes silence. He lifts his head, opens his eyes wide, and stares into the vast nothingness. The power of that peace which emanated from those unblinking eyes shattered the encrusted layers of many egos, soothed the despairing hearts of the suffering masses and attracted thousands from the world over.

What we now see is a one minute clip of the Maharshi assuming his natural poise. It seems the cameraman filmed him at four intervals, in which we later see his eyelids slightly closed, but never shut or blinking. In 1977, this film was brought to New York for restoration and re—editing. Since this was the only footage of the Maharshi sitting quietly in the hall, it was decided to repeat the scene several times, extending its length to five minutes. One of the one-minute sections was re-edited as a close-up, where we see the face of the Sage in detail. Viewers, especially devotees, will find themselves transported to the silent *sannidhi* (presence) of the Maharshi, as his sublime experience of Self-Awareness is easily imprinted on our hearts and minds.

0:54:44 Back outside, we see the Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency, O. P. R. Reddier, walking from his car with T. N. Venkataraman by his side. Then the Maharshi weakly steps down from the New Hall verandah while the attendants look on with concern. A cloth hangs ominously over his left shoulder and arm, covering bandages and a severely infected limb. Doraiswamy Iyer, a famous lawyer devotee, stands next to a pillar looking on. He was most instrumental in arranging for top medical professionals to attend to the Sage during the Maharshi's last year.

After a short walk the Maharshi is seen standing, leaning on his cane, while K. K. Nambiar's sister, Madhavi Ammal, salutes him. A small group gathers and then the bearded Yogi Ramiah walks up and stands between the Maharshi and O. P. R. Reddier. More scenes follow of Bhagavan walking with the attendants Satyananda and Venkataratnam.

Throughout the next five minutes there are two short scenes of the Maharshi sitting in the New Hall, which unfortunately is not lighted properly. Otherwise we see him during his slow and feeble walks back and forth from the bathroom.

Throughout his final year there appeared to be terrible suffering, but the Maharshi never complained. He seemed to be indifferent alike to the existence or non-existence of the body, being almost unaware of it. Devotees seeing his gradual weakening and ominous symptoms, expressed their agony at his impending departure. He simply told them that they attached too much importance to the body, indicating that his influence was not limited to the diseased body they saw before them.

It is unfortunate that the last months or years of many great historical figures are often compromised by physical debility. In the Maharshi's case, this physical decline in no way diminished his inner stature and spiritual luster. His rare example, emphasizing the ephemeral nature of the body while permanently abiding in the glory of the Supreme Self, will forever remain a source of hope for all seekers of Truth.

1:01:42 The last of K. K. Nambiar's films are more shots of the new gopurams in the ashram. Taken on the roof itself, the footage shows close-ups of the sculptured images adorning these structures. The last

shot is focused on the cow Lakshmi's tomb, where we see a stone carving of the cow and, above it, the inscription composed by the Maharshi.

Mahasamadhi *Indian Government Newsreel* **April 15, 1950**

1:03:00 In the concluding section of films we review a one minute segment which documents the Maharshi's Mahasamadhi. It comes to us with a narration, which is not only incomplete but defective. Some digital audio correction has been done to it; still, the quality of this soundtrack falls far short of the 1946 narration.

In the newsreel style typical of the times, the narrator declares: "...he [Bhagavan] prayed and meditated to realize himself, to know the meaning of life and work and sacrifice. Having obtained peace in the stillness of divine communion, he proclaimed and propagated the etemal truth - Know Thyself. For thousands of devotees this embodiment of inner peace is no more. The mortal life of Ramana Maharshi has come to an end...but his transcendental message lives for all time, beckoning humanity to seek, to strive, to stop not till the goal of emancipation from the bondage of life and death is obtained."

It is the day after the Maharshi's passing, and we first have a short glimpse of the Ashrama from the hill. We next see the entrance to Sri Ramanasramam. the gate to the Ashrama holding center screen, and a large crowd of people, both entering and exiting the compound. A quick scene change brings us directly in front of the Nirvana Hall and, again, shows a large number of people. It is apparent that some crowd control has taken place, as the multitude is cordoned off into different sections, making it easier to accommodate everyone. It is also readily apparent that a momentous event is taking place.

The camera pans a crowd of male devotees sitting. Swami Rajesjwarananda is sitting in a chair. D. S. Sastri, O. P. R. Reddier and many others are there also. A close-up view shows Sadhu Arunachala

(*Major Chadwick*) sitting with knee bent, speaking slow, deliberate words, perhaps of condolence, to the person next to him.

Mrs. Lucia Osborne, newspaper in hand, is seen gazing vacantly in Bhagavan's direction with the concerned expression that a daughter has for her father, as Bhagavan was father and more to everyone present. A young lady leans with her head on her hand, tears in her eyes.

The following scene is in front of the garlanded body of Sri Bhagavan the day after his Mahasamadhi. The camera angle is from the posterior left, so it is difficult to actually see Bhagavan's body. We do see a steady stream of devotees and pilgrims giving their sincere respect to, and having their final darshan of the body of the great Sage. The priests are present, officiating at this solemn moment, as thick clouds of incense bellow forth. We see people from all walks of life—sadhus, businessmen, mothers with children and other village folk—paying their last respects to the one who looked upon them all as equals, as manifestations of the Divine Self. A frontal view shows a well-organized queue filing past, and to the far right of the screen a policeman keeps watch. The camera picks up on Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Khanna and the bearded Swami Ramanagiri of royal Swedish descent, paying their last respects while passing before their Master. A young woman grieves, covering her face with the palms of her hands; an elderly woman sits on the ground, quietly wiping tears from her eyes. The concluding scene shows Bhagavan's garlanded body, seated upright in a palanquin, being carried out of the Nirvana Hall on the shoulders of his devotees. There is an immense crowd. Some wave sacred fans while others carry lighted torches in front of the procession. Many people are throwing flower petals onto the palanquin. The palanquin is covered by a large umbrella carried by one of the attendants. At this point the footage abruptly ends.

So concludes the archival film footage of the Sage of Arunachala. These priceless films have been retrieved, restored and catalogued for the benefit of future generations. They enable us to see a fully-enlightened Sage who, in the 20th Century, lived a simple, exalted life of peace and purity.

Appendix

Places of Interest

The Arunachala Hill: Though only 2,682 feet high it dominates the countryside of Tiruvannamalai. From the south, the side of Sri Ramanasramam, it is deceptively simple - just a symmetrical hill with two almost equal foothills, one on either side. To perfect the symmetry, Arunachala often wears a crown of white cloud or haze about its summit.

Mathrubhuteswara Temple: The Mathrubhuteswara Temple, the Temple of God Manifested as the Mother, is built over the grave of the Maharshi's mother. The construction took about ten years and was completed in 1949. Sri Bhagavan was deeply interested in the construction and he personally supervised the installation in the inner shrine. A significant aspect of the Kumbhabhishekam (dedication of the Temple) was that Sri Bhagavan placed his hands in blessing on the various objects that were to be enshrined. The interest he showed in Sri Chakra installed in the Temple prompted devotees to perform regular pujas for Sri Chakra, the symbol of Shakti, even to this day. The Temple, having been dedicated by a Jnani, must forever be a very sacred spot.

Pachaiamman Koil: Sri Bhagavan lived at least twice for prolonged periods in this shrine well outside Tiruvannamalai city limits. On one occasion his celebrated devotee, Sri Ganapati Sastri, stayed with him for three months in 1908.

Palakottu: Palakottu is a large garden of about ten acres on the western boundaries of Sri Ramanasramam. The trees of this garden are more than a century old, around which devotees of Bhagavan built their small huts. This evolved into a sadhus' colony.

Pavalakunru: *Pavalakunru* is one of the eastern spurs of Arunachala Hill where Bhagavan once resided during the early years of his arrival at Arunachala. It was here that Alagammal, the Maharshi's mother, saw her son for the first time after his arrival in Tiruvannamalai.

Virupaksha Cave: The Virupaksha cave was where the Maharshi lived from 1900 to 1915. During this period he left the cave only during the hot summer months when the nearby stream dried up. It is on the southeast slope of the hill and is shaped to resemble the sacred

monosyllable OM. It is said that the very sound OM can be heard within the cave.

Footnotes:

1. This is a VCR time code reference number. If the VCR time code is reset to 0:00:00 when the first title (Sri Ramana Maharshi - The Archival Films 1935 to 1950) first appears, all succeeding time code references will be accurate.

2. Krishnaswami is now living in the Ashrama. Annamalai Swami passed away on *November 9, 1995*.

3. Appichi (also known as Appuchi) passed away in 2007, see the *Jul/Aug issue`* of "The Maharshi" newsletter.

The Archival Films

1935 TO 1950

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