

# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

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Dev Gogoi



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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

This has been one of the hottest summers in recent memory but hopefully the worst is over as devotees pray for rain in the aftermath of a 20-month drought.

In this issue, we read about the life of Atmananda (Blanca Schlamm), an Austrian concert pianist who came to India in the mid-1930s and stayed for the next fifty years. During the time of her stay with Anandamayi Ma, she met Bhagavan Ramana and had powerful experiences in his presence. Noting down all she observed in a carefully kept journal over the decades, we have detailed recorded conversations with Bhagavan and other devotees during the months she spent at Ramanasramam.

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)

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The Editorial Team

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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

3rd July (Weds) Purnarvasu  
13th July (Sat) Cow Lakshmi Day  
16th July (Tues) Guru Purnima  
31st July (Weds) Purnarvasu  
14th August (Weds) Full Moon  
27th August (Tues) Purnarvasu

1st September (Sun) Bhagavan's Advent Day  
13th September (Fri) Full Moon  
23rd September (Mon) Purnarvasu  
29th September (Sun) Navaratri Festival commences  
7th October (Mon) Saraswati Puja  
8th October (Tues) Vijayadasami





Photo by Richard Lannoy

## Encounters with Sri Bhagavan: The Memoirs of Swamini Atmananda (part one)

*[The following series glimpses the life of Atmananda, an accomplished Austrian concert pianist who came to India in 1925 as a spiritual seeker and lived out her monastic vocation as a devotee of Sri Anandamayi Ma. In the course of her search in the years long before most Western seekers had found their way to India, she came into close contact with the spiritual luminaries of the day, including Sri Ramana Maharshi.*

*Atmananda's diaries reveal the trials and tribulations of an intimate search spanning forty years that reveal the cultural barriers facing a Western woman living in orthodox India. She records in detail her conversations with Bhagavan, a number of which have been included below.*

*Material for this series is taken primarily from the new, fully-revised edition of *Death Must Die: Shree Anandamayee Ma and The Guru/Disciple Relationship: A Devotee's Journey* by Ram Alexander, 2018; and from *Atmananda's own anonymously-published volume, As The Flower Sheds Its Fragrance: Diary Leaves of a Devotee* released in 1983, the year after Ma's earthly departure and just two years before Atmananda would make her own transition.]*

**B**orn into a wealthy Jewish family in 1904, Blanca Schlamm began her journey during the cultural and artistic flourishing of early 20th century Vienna where she trained in classical music. Like many, the cataclysm of the Great War (1914-1918) left her struggling to make sense of life and she embarked on a spiritual search that led her to J. Krishnamurthi and the Theosophical Society.

She came to India for the first time in 1925 at the age of twenty-one to attend the Theosophical Society's 50th anniversary. Following the Depression where her well-to-do father lost his fortune, anti-Semitism began to rear its ugly head. Blanca left her native Austria a second time, unaware of the danger her family would face, and came to India in 1935. She took a teaching position at the Krishnamurthi school in Rajghat and frequently performed on *All India Radio*. She later declined a job as director of European music in Delhi in favour of her true calling—a dedicated pursuit of the Divine—and thus was compelled to manage on her small teaching stipend.

In time, Blanca became disenchanted with J. Krishnamurthi's rejection of tradition and eschewing the great teachers of India. She redoubled her efforts and sought a true teacher, an exploration that eventually took her to Sri Ramanasramam.

Upon meeting the Maharshi in 1942, she was convinced that her search had come to an end. For the following six weeks, she imbibed Sri Ramana's non-dual teaching which, as it would turn out, proved groundbreaking for the spiritual explorations that lay ahead.

Her diary entry of 17th May, 1942 begins:

*"I left Benares on the 10th May. As the train approached Tiruvannamalai, I suddenly felt blissfully happy, thinking: Now all struggle is over, there will be only peace. The prodigal son has returned to his father's house.*





“After sometime this passed. Upon arriving, my first reaction was to run away. The ashramites and the prostrations and adoration of the Guru seem all mad to me. I wrote a letter to Ramana Maharshi asking him to straighten the twists in me. In his presence there is a deep peace, the same that I have felt ever since I decided to come here. I criticise others, considering myself far above them. I am terribly important. Isn’t that part of the twist? One thing seems sure, one can’t get things suddenly or quickly, but only through patience, through experimenting and daring to risk one’s happiness. Nobody can help one to attain Realisation otherwise.”

Blanca’s hesitations passed and the premonitions on insights and attainments got a gentle nudge as the following entry from 26th May describes:

“At about 12.30 a.m. I woke up and had a strange experience, which I cannot put into words. It was not imagination and seemed beyond the mind altogether, but I was wide awake. I realised a fiery being of terrific power without form of any kind and I understood what it is that one worships and why people prostrate in front of the Maharshi. It has nothing to do with him as I see him daily, but it seemed to be simultaneously him, God and also myself. What I usually call myself was ridiculous at that moment, so petty and insignificant. I could not imagine that I would ever be the same hereafter. This state was very real. I was wide awake for hours and it persisted for some time. The song: ‘Holy Lord, God Almighty... Casting down their golden crowns’—but I can’t remember the whole anymore—came into my mind and I was consumed in adoration. I felt like writing down what I had perceived ... I felt that now I shall understand. But I was too lazy. In the morning I could not recall or reproduce the experience. I only remembered what I had thought about it.”

Each new day brought fresh surprises, the cherished openness of a virtual beginner testing the boundaries of the unknown and struggling to let go of the familiar.

On the 30th May, she writes:

“Last night I walked round the hill of Arunachala in the full moon with a sadhu, Premanand Saraswati,

who I discovered had been an active Theosophist for 14 years. The hill has such a powerful magical presence. I’m told it has been worshipped as an emanation of the god Siva for thousands of years. The traditional form of receiving its blessing is to walk around it, which took us nearly four hours. What a wonderful experience!

“The day before this I had the darshan of a sadhu living near Annamalai Tank, where Parvati is supposed to have been immersed in penance for one thousand years. It seems to me that I must put myself wholeheartedly into this atmosphere while I am here. So far I have mostly resisted and compared. I am all the time frightened to go away from J.K. and get caught here. But it is so silly. Whenever I read only a little of his talks I get upset.”

Blanca began to discover that a great opportunity for guidance awaited her in the darshan hall and she mustered the courage to pose some of her many questions face to face with the Maharshi. On 3rd June, she recorded the following exchange:

“I do not know to whom to surrender. How do I know the Supreme? I may deceive myself.”  
 The Maharshi: *It is the mind that deceives itself. At least you must admit that you exist. Either you accept the Supreme or at least you inquire as to the true nature of your Self. Who are you? Knowing or not knowing belongs to the mind and therefore all your so-called ‘knowledge’ is really ignorance. You identify yourself with the mind and that is the cause of the confusion. Enquire more deeply into the true nature of your individuality. If you perceive that in fact the mind does not exist at all, then it will vanish along with the confusion, and what truly IS will stand revealed. When you look at your reflection in the water and believe it to be an accurate representation of yourself, then you are troubled when the movement of the water disturbs the reflection. But when you realise that this has no reality to it, then your worries cease. You cannot get rid of your shadow, but you need not believe that it is who you really are.*

Blanca: I feel as if I were two and not one.

The Maharshi: *No, there is only the Self, there cannot be two. But if you focus only on the form of the bangle, you may forget that it is made of gold. Yet the form of the bangle is dependent on the gold. It cannot exist without it and ceases to exist when the gold is melted down; but the gold itself remains constant. By deluding yourself into identifying solely with the mind, you*





*deny your true Self. This is worse than suicide, because there you only kill the body; but here you are murdering the Self. Seek the Self and the ego will vanish. By solving one mind-created problem you only create new ones.*

Atmananda remains uncertain about her relationship with J. Krishnamurthi, who she had once thought might be her guru. She writes, “Not understanding [J.K.] and having thrown away everything else, I have made him into my God and my chains. Bhagavan helps me to understand J.K. but [J.K.’s] way cannot satisfy me. Shall I ignore my dilemma by simply looking the other way? No, face the devil and he [will be unable to] bear your gaze. For me there is only one thing: love [and] perhaps gazing at the Self.”

A few days later, she writes with greater clarity under Ramana’s influence. The entry for 6th June reads:

“Faith is not beyond reason. If I reason it out, the only thing I know for sure is that ‘I’ am alive, I exist, and this ‘I’ is something that is ultimately beyond the limitations of the body, mind, time and space. That is faith. If I am truly alive, then everything else must be also. We forget this all the time. One must remind oneself of it constantly. That is surrender. Let the mind dwell on this fact and it will get enlightened and lose its pride. My life is only love. But romantic entanglements, no matter how well-intentioned, invariably degenerate into self-love—identification with body and mind. Forgetting that ‘I’ am truly alive, and being centered



in the mind and body only, keeps me in a state of separation and ignorance. The moment I realise the cause of the confusion and drop what prevents me from truly loving, i.e. this false identification, then the mind created separation will go and with it the problem. This is what I have to thrash out here through and through and then I shall know how to live. This was the purpose of my journey to Arunachala.” —

*(to be continued)*

## Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai: Desika Padigam §5

போகமே துறந்த புனித மாதவர்க்குப்  
புலப்பட யோசு செய் நாளில்  
வேகமே மிகுந்த வெங்கணை துறந்த  
வேடனை விழித்தார் காம  
வேகமே இல்லாய்க்கு உடுத்த கோவணமும்  
மிகையாத் மிகையெனின் மிகையோ  
தேகமே மிகையாய் தேர்ந்தெலாம் துறந்த  
தேசிக ரமண மா தேவே

**G**uru Ramana, Siva, to those who reach  
Your Feet  
And long to taste the bliss,  
Free from the unbearable birth and  
Death,  
You straight vouchsafe  
The mind desireless and  
the vision flawless,  
Bringing near the once so distant goal. —





## Bhagavan's Favourite Stories: Miracle by Kabirdas

*[Bhagavan narrated the following episode in the life of the great 15th-century mystic, poet-saint Kabirdas to illustrate that occult powers should not be given importance. Maharshi's Gospel, 13th edition, pp. 59-60]*

**K**abirdas was brought up in Varanasi, by a family of Muslim weavers who were simultaneously followers of the Shaiva Yogi school of Hinduism. He was a practitioner of yoga and a great devotee of Lord Rama, and had long been refused initiation by the Hindu saint Ramananda. According to

legend, Kabir hid himself on the steps of the Ganga and when Ramananda came for a holy dip before dawn, he accidentally touched him with his foot and habitually cried "Rama, Rama!" This became Kabir's "guru-mantra" and was enough for the orthodox Ramananda to accept him as his disciple.

Later endowed with occult powers, Kabir refrained from exhibiting them and led a simple life weaving cloth on his loom. His devotion and faith were such that he put all his trust in Rama and would pray, "Oh! Rama, please grant me two measures of flour and a small bowl of ghee each day and ensure that all those who come to my house can be fed to their heart's content."

His devotion was complete surrender and he believed that the Lord was responsible for all the actions of His devotees. He would say, "Everyone knows that there are water drops in the ocean. But how many know that there is ocean in each water drop?"

One day, Kabir was at his work as usual, when he heard a commotion in the street outside. Kabir asked about the scene outside and was told that there was a master of occult powers visiting the neighborhood, full of miracles: "He can make a long wooden pole hang in the air without any support."

Determined to expose the charlatan, Kabir rose and went out into the street. Carrying a ball of string in his hand, he found his way into the middle of the crowd, close to where the magician was displaying his skills. The enthralled crowd stood watching the pole as it hung in the air.

Shouting aloud his favorite mantra, *Jai Sri Ram*, Kabir flung the ball of string into the air. It rose into the sky unfurling all the way. Kabir let go of the end of the string that he was holding. The string stood in the air completely motionless.

The crowd now turned their attention to this new miracle. Amazed by Kabir's skill, they clapped and applauded rapturously. The 'miracle maker' was greatly embarrassed by this feat that outclassed him. Recognizing the Rama bhakta's greatness, he prostrated at Kabir's feet. —





## Your Best Shot: Flight



White peacock flying up to the tree-top beside the guest-room for gentlemen

Every evening, as dusk darkens into night and the chants of Tamil Parayana ebb and flow in Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall, the peacocks begin to choose their perches for the night, launching into their last flight of the day, usually heading for the treetops or *gopurams*. It is a wondrous sight for those visitors who are outdoors and alert to their presence.

On another note, it took more than half a century for the albino gene to reassert itself, after the first white peacock was presented to Sri Ramana Maharshi in the 1940s by the Maharani of Baroda, immortalized visually by master photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson. The peacock population which was in noticeable decline in the 1990s, has since revived, thanks to yeoman efforts by ashramites, and their habitat has now spread

much farther afield, into Ramana Nagar, westwards around Nirudhi Lingam, and even beyond the Samudram Eri.

Interestingly, in the 1990s, before the white peacocks reappeared, a devotee from Mumbai who was revisiting the Ashram with his son, came to me with a compelling question. "I told my son about the white peacock that I saw here last time I visited, and he's pestering me now to show it to him. Where is it?" I replied slowly, "Please remember to believe the direct evidence of your own senses. You have witnessed a miracle. You can ask anybody here and now. There hasn't been a white peacock here since Bhagavan's time."

To paraphrase the Maharshi, when he and Chadwick beheld the vision of a vast city at the feet of Arunachala: What is real? Who will believe? — *Dev Gogoi*

### 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>





## Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Uma Sahasram Parayana



On Sunday June 9, 2019, devotees from Sri Arunachala Ramana Ganapathi Ashramam, Kaluvarai, Andhra Pradesh joined devotees from Sri Ramanasramam in reciting the complete *Uma Sahasram*, the epic stotra composed by Kavyakanta

Ganapathi Muni as an offering to Divine Mother. Organized by Smt. Ramana Puthri and Sri. Parasara M.Narasimham, President, Ramana Maharshi Heritage and Vasista Ganapathi Muni Memorial Trust, with collaboration and guidance of Sri Ramanasramam, Uma Sahasram parayanam started at 10am in the New Hall., presided over by Sri Ramanasramam President, Sri. V.S. Ramanan and Smt. Susheela Ramanan with the great-grand-daughters of Nayana in attendance. —

## Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Nochur Sri Venkataraman



From the 27th June through 3rd July, Nochur Sri Venkataraman has been continuing his series on *Ulladu Narpadu Anabandam*. At the time of publishing, he had completed verse 28. —

## Obituary: Sri Pingali Surya Sundaram



Born in Chennai on Oct 17, 1930, Sri Sundaram served in the Central Government before retiring as the Deputy Accountant General in Hyderabad in 1988. When a neighbour gave him a picture of Ramana Maharshi, Sri Sundaram got it framed, and thus started his association with Bhagavan. He sought out the Ramana Kendram in Hyderabad to further his knowledge of Bhagavan's teachings and made the acquaintance of Prof. K. Subrahmanian. Rapidly, this association led to his translation of several books on Bhagavan, variously into Telugu and English. Among them were *Sri Bhagavan Visishtatha*, *Uniqueness of Sri Bhagavan*, *Be As You Are*, *Ribhu Geetha Saram*, Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni's *Chatvarimsat*, *Atma Sakshatkaram* and *Sri Ramana Leela*. Sri Sundaram merged in Arunachala on 25th May 2019 in Hyderabad. He is survived by his devoted wife, Prabhata Kumari, and two children. —

