

# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

JANUARY 2020  
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Anne Petry



## Saranagati



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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

In this issue, we continue with the life of Thelma Rappold who spent two years in Bhagavan's presence in the late 1940s. Thelma took copious notes throughout her stay and compiled them into a large manuscript, segments of which are only now making it into print (see p. 3).

We also include photos of the colourful and lively celebration days of Karthigai Deepam, starting 1st December and culminating with the lighting of the Deepam flame atop Holy Arunachala on the 10th December (see p. 7).

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

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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

10th January (Fri) Full Moon  
11th January (Sat) Bhagavan's 140th Jayanti  
15th January (Wed) Pongal  
20 - 26th January Nochor Venkataraman Discourses  
7th February (Fri) Punarvasu  
8th February (Sat) Full Moon/Chinnaswamigal Aradhana

13th February (Thurs) Sundaram Iyer Day  
21st February (Fri) Mahasivaratri  
6th March (Fri) Punarvasu  
9th March (Mon) Full Moon  
20th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Homa  
25th March (Wed) Telugu New Year







## IN PROFILE

### Thelma Rappold: In Search of Bhagavan (part III)

As the weeks and months passed, Thelma was slowly introduced to the liturgical rhythms of South Indian orthodoxy. With its many grand festivals and celebrations punctuating ordinary time with the divine, hinting at the eternal even in the midst of conventional living, she revelled in the experience which proved unlike any in her life. She used her daily journal entries as a means of grounding her enthusiasm, making the effort to keep her observations casual and unadorned, and even took notice of very ordinary goings-on:

*This being full moon day Bhagavan got his monthly shearing which delayed lunch until 12 noon. Raja gave me some*

*buttermilk to tide me over until lunch. In our anticipation of going on the eight-mile pradakshina, we neglected to eat breakfast. Raja then took me to the Dispensary so I could lie down—a very welcome half-hour of relaxation. Much as the body revolted, I got up the next morning and went to 5 am parayana. The rest of the crowd slept in. Bhagavan seemed to get a kick out of my face this morning which looked like an over-ripe tomato [after the previous day's pradakshina]. This afternoon, a French sannyasin came for Bhagavan's darshan. He left France four months ago without a [single paisa]. He stowed away on a French ship for India. Barefoot and with nothing to call his own but the cloth on his back, he is making a pilgrimage through India in search of spirituality. Where there's a will there's a way.*

#### Mahapuja

Thelma's first major feast in the Ramanasramam cycle was Mahapuja on 1st June 1948:

*The Ashram has undergone many changes these days in preparation for Mahapuja. Bhagavan sat in a small enclosure in front of the temple. The coloured lights and hundreds of people moving about made the scene appear like a lively county fair. Ate dinner at the Ashram with hundreds of other devotees. Sat next to Mr. Sam Rappold. We compared notes on our trip to India. [The next day], thousands of people came to the Ashram to celebrate the Mahapuja of Bhagavan's Mother. At the time of her death, Bhagavan placed his hands on her forehead and heart to ensure that she reached the Ultimate. The women wore their best saris for the occasion only to be trampled on by the mob. The puja itself was very colourful. Krishnaswami sprinkled rose water over the crowd. At lunch time, we were jostled about to such an extent that my sari nearly went home on another body. Major Chadwick was the big front man making his way through the frenzied crowd that stampeded the barricade. Policemen were stationed at the entrances to push the people back when they got out of control. In addition to the poor feeding, lunch was served to approximately 3,000 persons. Bhagavan sat blissfully through the entire performance as though nothing [out of the ordinary] were going on. Poems, speeches, and songs were composed for the occasion. People were packed so tightly in the meditation hall it is a wonder someone didn't suffocate. Even the big elephant from the temple in town came to pay its respects to Bhagavan. He has been taught to go down on bended knee before Bhagavan in a bodily gesture of "namaste". He is always rewarded by several bunches of bananas, volumes of rice, coconuts and gallons of water.*





## Bhagavan in the Dining Hall

Thelma attends to Bhagavan's every move and makes note of what she sees:

*It is a symphony in motion to watch the graceful gestures of Bhagavan's long tapering fingers while eating. Not a grain of rice is left on his banana leaf plate. Rarely is a word spoken during mealtime.*

## Castor Oil Prasad

Thelma is invited to participate in the ritual life of the community which includes taking unexpected prasad:

*At parayana this morning, everyone got a dose of castor oil and bananas. Why? Ask Bhagavan. According to Raja, whenever Bhagavan takes a laxative, enough is prepared for everyone. What next?*

*Krishna and I went to see the little temple on the rock mound in town where Bhagavan had stayed for a while. We took some fruits to the sadhus who are doing tapas there, and then we climbed up on a prominent rock and sat "milking mangoes" while the evening sun set over Arunachala's left shoulder, a gorgeous sight.*

## Animal Devotees

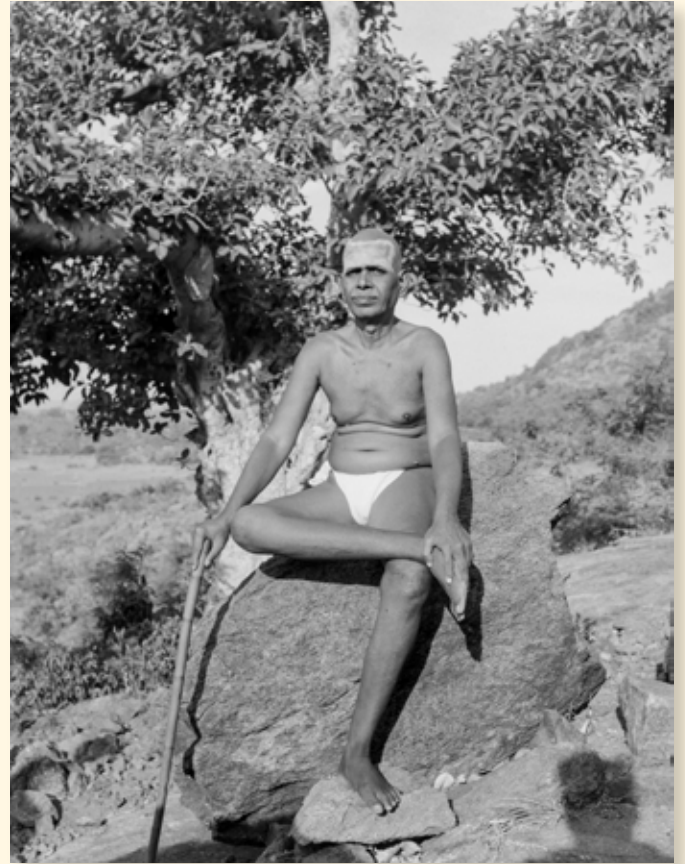
Thelma delights in Bhagavan's appreciation of the animal world and the grace he shows his non-human devotees:

*This afternoon two chipmunks played gleefully about on Bhagavan's couch. About the same time one of the monkeys made a quick dash into the hall, swiped a banana lying on the floor and made his getaway before the attendant saw him. Bhagavan's eyes really sparkle when he witnesses such scenes. Two different persons brought homemade delicacies for Bhagavan which were passed around to everyone. Meditation suffered considerably because of all the distractions...Never a day goes by without its major and minor problems. [But what a wonder how lifetimes pass] in just a fleeting moment with Bhagavan.*

## A Friend from Back Home

An old friend from back home, Mrs. Wally Groeger, arrived from Seattle via Colombo on 1st December. Thelma went to Madras on the 2nd to meet her:

*We spent four days there getting her equipped with Indian dress. Mrs. Groeger delivered a package [from home]. Coming back from Madras, Mrs. Groeger and I decided to try 3rd class on the train. That was my first experience riding 3rd class. Usually the cars in 3rd class are as packed as a New York subway at 5 pm. The coolies put our baggage on the train and to our surprise when we pulled out of the station, we were the only ones in the car.*



*Later we learned the reason. A notice had been posted outside the car to the effect that it had been reserved for 33 prisoners. Luckily the coolies couldn't read. No wonder when we stopped on the way people passed by and stared at us as though we were something strange. I think that was the first time in history two ladies had a 'private' 3rd class compartment. The prisoners got on the train where we got off at 2 am.*

## Karthigai Deepam

Not long after returning from Madras, the Karthigai Deepam festival commenced and day by day pilgrims from every quarter appeared in the town to participate in the celebration and worship the glory of Arunachala. On the 14th December 1948, the flame atop the Hill was lit, and for many subsequent days. Thelma looked to the goings-on in amazement:

*For the past 48 hours there has been a constant parade around the Hill at all hours of the day and night. At 4 am in the morning the place is already humming with excitement, the beating of drums, ringing of bells and the jingle jangle of anklet clad bare feet on pilgrimage around the Hill of the Holy Beacon. All this in the midst of a jungle setting is something that must be witnessed to appreciate, especially the colour, mystery and beauty. Most of the women wear several toe rings on each foot, several*







anklets on each ankle, nose studs as well as nose rings. Sometimes as many as six or eight rings on each ear. The gold earrings are so heavy the lobe of the ear hangs down so as to resemble an old-fashioned hoop. With their bright coloured saris and gaily coloured flowers in their hair they are really a picture.

## The Maharaja of Amarnagar

A few days after the lighting of the Deepam flame, Bhagavan's Jayanti took place on the 18th December. A few days before Christmas the Maharaja of Amarnagar State of Katheatar came to the Ashram. He invited Thelma and other devotees for afternoon tea:

*He brought with him 25 or 30 servants. Aside from stumbling over one another, I can't imagine what they could do for one single man. Europeans and Americans were invited to the Morvi Guest House which is otherwise reserved for royalty. We had a delightful time of course. While we were all having a festive time, the Maharaja got the idea that we should all have Christmas dinner together. Nobody refused and so we put on our best bib and tucker and went to the big dinner. There was a continual procession of servants passing before us to make sure we didn't run short of food. We had a large variety of dishes. Some of them were hot enough to start a forest fire and others quite delicious. The day before Christmas, various devotee-friends sent fruits and sweets to Wally and me.*

## Christmas Baking

Though in the heart of spiritual India, Thelma and her friend from home, Mrs. Groeger, made a small gesture at keeping the American Christmas tradition:

*We decided to get up at 5 am Christmas morning and do a bit of baking. A truly Herculean task in a place where an oven is an oddity for museums rather than to be used in kitchens.*

*To make our task more difficult, we had no recipes for cookies. Wally made some lovely pretzel-shaped cookies that were real works of art. When we peeked into our improvised oven—a frying pan with a lid—to our dismay, the pretzels had been turned to flapjacks—what a mess. We tried other varieties of cookies with very little success. We tried to make some candy which was also a fiasco. In short, we didn't draw one winner from all the things we made. We made up our little trays anyway and sent them to devotees who had been so nice to us. Reports came back that they were good, but Wally and I knew better. We had a lot of laughs anyway and nobody got a stomach-ache.*

*Shortly after the first of the year another Maharani came to the Ashram and invited us to dinner. We always welcome such invitations in that we don't have to cook on those days. The elegant saris worn on such occasions are breath-taking, some of them are several hundreds of years old and are worth fortunes.*

*Mr. Rappold, Mrs. Groeger and I have combined efforts on cooking which saves time and effort for everybody. Mrs. Groeger brought a nice one-burner kerosene stove with her and so we use that most of the time. In this way we can spend more time in the hall [with Bhagavan] which of course is what we all want.*

## Night in a Cave

Mrs. Groeger had become equally enamoured of Bhagavan and the Hill and the two made their best efforts at introductory renunciate life:

*Wally and I spent another night in a cave. Who knows, maybe in preparation for a future stay in the Himalayas. Anyway, it was very thrilling. That night there was just a crescent moon. On all these excursions, we have to get up on the Hill before dark as it is very dangerous climbing about after the sun goes down. The best thing to do is to stay where one is until daybreak if caught unawares. Anyway, in front of the cave were some nice big flat rocks, just as though they had been put there for a veranda. During the night one of those tropical downpours awakened us and we had to retreat inside the cave which was only two feet high and hardly long enough for the two of us. I don't mind saying I felt a wee bit creepy, not knowing exactly when some unwelcome animal, insect or snake might come crawling in wanting to share our small quarters. But no mishaps. It certainly was a novel experience and I wouldn't have missed it for anything.*

*Once a week now, usually on Wednesdays, I go into mounam. I shall try 24 hours in the beginning, which may be a challenge, not talking for that long. It's rather fun. The big challenge is to keep the mind from running all around the country, but it does have a soothing effect on the system. It also helps with meditation inasmuch as it cuts out all the unnecessary chatter.*





## Rain

Thelma sees Bhagavan's hand in everything around her:

*A very interesting phenomenon occurs whenever it rains. Many of the heavy downpours come in the late afternoons, but invariably at 7:30 when the men are scheduled to leave the Hall—the rain stops—perhaps only for a few minutes but long enough for the men to get home. Just a coincidence, some will say —perhaps!*

*Followed Bhagavan to the woodshed in the rain. A devotee came to the Ashram this morning wearing “glowing” raiment such as I had never seen before. An unforgettable picture framed by the gateway of the little temple shrine. The radiance of the moment dazzled even the attendant who approached the open doorway. We caught a glimpse of the “Rainbow Madonna” as we sat watching the mist-covered sun rise through the archway.*

## Bolt of Lightning

On another day, all were sitting quietly at the feet of Bhagavan listening to the raging wind and the roaring thunder, when suddenly, lightning struck within three feet of where Thelma was sitting:

*All the women in that section seemed to jump in unison, and miracle of miracles, the lightning struck the ground right there and not even a hair on anyone's head was harmed. Years ago, I was very much frightened of lightning, but strange as it may seem, the heart didn't even skip a beat that day. It must have been the presence of Bhagavan that protected everyone... Only by the Grace of Bhagavan could such calm reign in the midst of such fury.*



## True Home and Teacher

Thelma pauses from the outward adventure of life with Bhagavan to appreciate what is at work in her:

*At the Ashram I found my true home and teacher. It [is] as if I had lived several lifetimes in [this short time I have been] with him. The person who came to him in the beginning is not the same person [now]. I [begin to understand] how to open up the power locked within me... When I first met Sri Ramana, he told me, “You are what you are—accept it. When the time comes to give it up, do it with grace.” [I keep] trying to ‘open’ as much as possible. I recognize that we all choose our suffering because we do not open up and accept what life brings; we don't find out ‘who’ it is that is experiencing the suffering. I have never, at any previous time in my life, really let go and tried to just ‘be’. When we can do this, love just pours out. —*

*(to be continued)*

## Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai: Desika Padigam §11

தெருக்கடை அலைந்து திரியும் நாய் போலத்  
தேர்ந்ததே தேர்ந்ததே தேர்ந்து  
பெருக்குடை எல்லாப் பிறப்பினும் பிறந்து  
பெருந்துயர் இடும்பைகள் உழந்து  
கருக்கடை கதியாக் காத்து நிற்பேனைக்  
கடைக்கணித்து யான் எனதென்னும்  
செருக்கற ஒழித்துத் திருப்பதம் அளிப்பாய்  
தேசிக ரமண மா தேவே.

Like a dog loafing up and down the streets,  
Sniffing at the same stuff all the time,  
Much I have suffered in countless, ever-flourishing  
lives already,  
Condemn me not to birth again,  
Glance upon me with grace, save me.  
Sweep clean the pride of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ and give me  
Guru Ramana, Siva, Your heaven, your state Supreme. —







## Events in Ramanasramam: Karthigai Deepam Celebrations

On Tuesday, 10th December, devotees gathered before Bhagavan's Shrine to witness the lighting of the Karthigai Deepam flame atop the Holy Hill. Just before 6 pm, *Aksharamanamalai* was intoned and all joined in with a sonorous 'Annamalaiyanukku Harohara' as the beacon light began to blaze forth from the summit. —

[For live footage, please see the Ashram's YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>]







## Temple Karthigai Deepam 2019

More than ten lakhs of devotees from around South India made their way to Tiruvannamalai to participate in the ancient festival of lights called Karthigai Deepam. Tuesday, 10th December began with Bharani Deepam at the temple at 4 am and the climax came with the lighting of the flame atop Holy Arunachala at 6 pm. The five-foot copper cauldron (*kopparai*) filled with ghee and camphor blazed forth for all to behold, even for those at twenty or thirty kilometres distance. The ceremony was repeated each

night for a total of eleven days. It is thus necessary each morning to carry up the Hill replacement materials: 350 litres of ghee and 1,000-metres of thread cloth to serve as wick.

Prior to the lighting of the hilltop beacon was the 10-day *Brahmotsavam* which began with the flag-raising at Sri Arunachaleswarar Temple early on the morning of 1st December. Vinayakar followed by Subramanian, Arunachaleswarar, Unnamulaiamman and Chandikeswarar were taken twice daily in procession through the temple and around the Four Streets. On the seventh day, Saturday 7th December, the deities mounted the great chariot (*ther*) which was hand-pulled by tens of thousands of devotees and pilgrims.







Vedaparayana groups gathered at various locations in the temple and around the city to chant daily the four main Vedas while others recited *Thevarum* and other sacred Tamil recitations during the festival.

It is widely assumed that Karthigai Deepam falls on the full moon day, but this is often not the case, such as this year when the full moon fell on the following night. The muhurtha requirement is that Sun should be in Vrishika (the Tamil month of Karthigai, i.e. mid-November to mid-December), and Moon should be in Kritika, the constellation Karthigai or Pleiades. On Karthigai Deepam night, the full moon cannot be more than two days away.

According to legend, Kritika's six stars are the six

heavenly virgins, the sisters who are foster mothers found in Saravana tank (*poigai*) to six babies who were conjoined to become the six-faced Karthikeya, the second son of Lord Siva.

Ten thousand policemen and policewomen came to Tiruvannamalai to assist crowd flow, and the festival this year went off without a hitch. Annadhanam was arranged at various places around the Hill which assured that devotees in pradakshina would be sustained in their all-night efforts. Devotees were blessed to have a clear view of the Holy Mountain on most of the eleven nights. —

[For close-up video footage of the lighting of the Deepam flame, go to <https://youtu.be/tjUfAUwCRW0>. Also see transporting the refurbished cauldron at <https://youtu.be/ONpLs1ESZws>.]



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## Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Annamalaiyar Giri Pradakshina



On the morning of 12th December, Ashram devotees gathered at the Ashram's front gate to receive the Lord in procession around the Holy Hill. Lord Annamalaiyar goes on pradakshina twice per year, on this day two days after Karthigai Deepam and two days after Sankranthi Pongal in mid-January. The Ashram President V.S. Ramanan was present and was garlanded by temple priest as was his brother V. Ganesan, following the Deeparadhana of the Lord. —





Dev Gogoi

## IN PROFILE

### Marleen Boers: Coming to Bhagavan

Marleen Boers first learned of Bhagavan in her teen years during the 1940s from a book her mother had bought, Heinrich Zimmer's *The Way to the Self*. Though the language was beyond the grasp of a youngster, she was gripped by the photograph of Bhagavan. This together with a spiritual experience she had at the time paved the way for her to come to India and ultimately, to Tiruvannamalai. When she subsequently came across Arthur Osborne's books on Bhagavan, she knew Bhagavan was her guru. She made her first trip to the Ashram in November 1968. She came a second time in December 1970 while in the diplomatic corps of the Dutch Consulate in Karachi. The posting meant proximity to Tiruvannamalai which allowed her to solidify her tie to Bhagavan.

In 1972, with the help of Lucia Osborne, Marleen took steps to purchase a small piece of land near the Ashram. As India and Pakistan were at war, there was no postal service between the two. But in September, Marleen received a letter from Lucia Osborne regarding a piece of land for sale. The letter had come directly from Tiruvannamalai to Karachi, and there was even a stamp with a picture of Bhagavan on it. However,

when she went to the post office to send her reply, she was laughed at and told there was no mail service to and from India. When she showed Mrs. Osborne's letter which had a round stamp on the back of it mentioning 'Karachi 25.9.1972', they could hardly believe it, turning it over and over, saying it was impossible. She felt certain that this miracle showed that Bhagavan wanted her to come and live at the foot of Arunachala. She thus sent her assent for the purchase via a third country. When the sale was concluded and the plot of land registered, she learned that for more than a year, foreigners were not allowed to own immovable property in India. But at the Tiruvannamalai registry office, apparently no one was aware of the new law. Thus, Bhagavan's grace had again aided her in fulfilling her dream to settle near Sri Ramanasramam.

Marleen was transferred to the Dutch Consulate in Bombay in 1974, making her annual visits to Ramanasramam even easier. While there, she met another Ramana devotee, Maurice Frydman, who took her to see Nisargadatta Maharaj. Maharaj asked her, "Who is your guru?" She pointed to Bhagavan's picture hanging just behind him. Maharaj nodded approvingly. During her four years stationed in Mumbai, she also had the darshan of Ma Anandamayi and Mother Krishnabai.

Having saved her money in Karachi and Bombay, Marleen resigned her job in December 1978 and came to live permanently in Tiruvannamalai. Ten years later, she was diagnosed with cancer. A friend wrote on her behalf to Mother Krishnabai about Marleen's health. Mataji, who was always totally self-effacing and would refer everything to her Papa (Swami Ramdas), replied that she had prayed to Papa for Marleen's complete recovery. This was quite an unusual thing. Hearing of this, Marleen discontinued her radiation treatment and survived another thirty years under the care and guidance of Bhagavan.

Somewhere in the early 80's, she was bitten by a poisonous snake (*Russell viper*) while gardening, and almost died. She was rushed to the hospital in Pondy and was drifting in and out of consciousness as the lawyer tried to determine her wishes for a will, as she did not have one. But again Bhagavan brought her back. —

*[Liesbeth Marleentje Boers, born 10th October 1931, passed away peacefully in her cottage in Tiruvannamalai on 19th December. She was 88.]*







## Best Shot



D. Thiagarajan

Bhagavan composed a verse in Tamil to explain the significance of Karthigai Deepam:

*The true significance of seeing the Karthigai Deepam is realising the light of the Self that is one without a second, after discarding the notion 'I am this Body' and making the mind abide in the Heart.*

This photo of the Deepam flame atop the Holy Hill was taken at 6.30 pm on 13th December 2019 from the Ashram Gosala, home to over 150 cows which generously give milk twice daily for the benefit of Ashram inmates and guests. —

## Complete Umasahasram Audio CD Release



In 1907, Bhagavan Ramana was staying in Virupaksha Cave and Nayana, in Mango Tree Cave. A cold December night, Sunday the 15th, Nayana had been writing for ten days and had completed 700 out of 1000 verses of his masterpiece *Umasahasram*. His right thumb got a blister and he could not hold the pen anymore. But 300 verses still needed to be composed as they were to be sung the following day in the temple. At 8 pm, Bhagavan came to Nayana's place and sat there silently throughout. Nayana sat at the feet of Bhagavan, surrounded by five disciples with pens and paper. Nayana began dictating in quick succession in five different metres while they wrote. By midnight when the work was completed Bhagavan asked, "Nayana, have you taken down all that I have said?" With devotion and joy, Nayana touched the feet of Bhagavan and replied "Yes Bhagavan, all that you have said has been received."

The sound recording of the first 300 slokas of *Umasahasram* was released at Sri Ramanasramam on 7th October; another 400 on 26th November; and the balance of 300 slokas were released on Sunday, 15th December, the day and date Nayana started and finished, respectively, the composition of *Umasahasram* 112 years ago. To mark this event, there was a special recital on Sunday, 15th December 2019 following the release of the complete CD. —

## Events in Ramanasramam: Newborn Babes on Christmas Day



On Christmas Day, Wed., 25th December, three calves were born in the Ashram, adding to the population of 150. Devotees eagerly await Mattu Pongal Day, 16th January, when all get to hand-feed the Ashram cows following the Gosala puja. —

