

Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

JANUARY 2021
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D. Thyagarajan and Nitya Ramanan



Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

December began with nightly lighting of the flame on the hilltop underway, many of which were not visible owing to cloud cover during this year's abundant Northeast monsoon (see p. 9).

A very challenging 2020 ends in blessing with Sri Bhagavan's 141st Jayanti celebrations and participation from devotees around the world (see Global Online Jayanti on p. 10-11). Vaccine rollouts are presently underway and it is hoped that global deployment can make the pandemic more manageable.

This issue of Saranagati takes a look at the life of a rather unknown devotee who, as a single woman, practised Bhagavan's meditation while living in caves on the Mountain (p. 3).

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

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

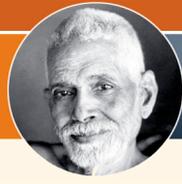
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Calendar of Events Celebrated at Home

1st January (Fri) Sw. Ramanananda Day
14th January (Fri) Sankranti Pongal
15th January (Sat) Mattu Pongal
27th January (Weds) Punarvasu
28th January (Thurs) Full Moon/Chinnaswami Day
2nd February (Tues) Sundaram Iyer Day
24th February (Weds) Punarvasu

26th February (Fri) Full Moon
11th March (Thurs) Mahasivaratri
19th March (Fri) Sri Vidya Homa
13th April (Tues) Telugu New Year
14th April (Weds) Tamil New Year
14th April (Weds) Nirvana Room Day
21st April (Weds) Sri Rama Navami





IN PROFILE

Thérèse Rigos

[The present In Profile is unusual in many respects in that we normally feature devotees who had Bhagavan's darshan. This devotee, however, only came to Bhagavan in the early 1970s, some twenty years after Bhagavan's Mahanirvana. It is also unusual in that this devotee is not widely known among Ramana devotees, having never appeared in the Mountain Path or the Asbram literature, or for that matter, even in public. Additionally, rather than practicing formal devotion as is typical of Bhagavan's devotees, this devotee made it her life's work to practice meditation in the style of Bhagavan. She was hidden from view during her long years in Tiruvannamalai and except for her husband, avoided the company of others for the benefit of her spiritual practice. The fact that hardly a

single photo of her (excepting a passport photo) can be located, speaks to this. During her thirty years in Tiruvannamalai, she spent many of them alone in the caves on the Hill. But those who met her could see the determination in her brightly shining eyes and were greatly impressed by her uncompromising dedication to meditation. The following account, pieced together from various sources, is an effort at telling her life story, though it surely fails to convey the dominant feature of it, namely, her interiority and adherence to silence and solitude.]

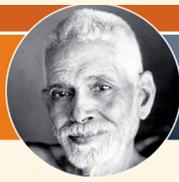
Born January 10, 1934 to the family Houdeletk in Vitré, Ille-et-Vilaine department of Brittany in north-western France, Thérèse Houdeletk grew up in calamitous times. In June of 1940 at the age of six, France fell to the invading German army. Her father and elder brother joined the Resistance and participated in the activities of the “Buckmaster” Resistance Network. As it was customary to have Resistance members summarily shot for acts of sabotage or even merely disrespecting the new German order in the Vichy regime, the longevity of Thérèse’s nearest family members was ever in question throughout the war. As a schoolgirl, she used to hide whenever she saw a German soldier in the street. Both her brother and father survived the war¹, but the pain of occupation and the constant threat to her family helped forge the fire of spiritual inquiry that would come to occupy her. As a young adult after the war, her spiritual life formally commenced when she attended meetings of the Rosicrucians.

After her schooling, Thérèse followed her older brother to the south of France for higher studies—he for a doctorate in medicine and neurophysiology and she in dentistry. She took up studies near Marseille in the Faculté d’odontologie at Montpellier University. It was here that she befriended Richard Rigos, a senior dentistry student from Poros, the Greek island in the southwest of the Saronic Gulf opposite the Peloponnese.

After graduation, the two married and spent their honeymoon pouring over the many spiritual books

¹ For their service in the Resistance, both received the *Croix du combattant volontaire de la Résistance* and her brother was later knighted: *Chevalier de l’Ordre National du Mérite*.





Richard had accumulated during his years in France. They opened a dental clinic in Montpellier and another smaller clinic in a nearby village. When not treating patients, they pursued their strong spiritual inclinations and in time, both became vegetarians and practiced meditation.

In their thirties, they decided to rouse their spiritual longings and relocate to India. They abandoned their careers and closed their clinics. They sold their property and dispensed with personal belongings, except their dental equipment which they shipped to India to make use of as a way of supporting themselves while living on the subcontinent. They settled in Pondicherry, taking up residence in Sri Aurobindo Ashram. By then Sri Aurobindo had left the body. They thus devoted themselves to the Ashram's founder, Mirra Alfassa, known as 'The Mother', the respected associate of Sri Aurobindo who Aurobindo considered of equal spiritual stature to himself. They became the Mother's personal dentists and got to know her quite well, regarding her as a living *jivanmukta*. During this time, Thérèse witnessed many miracles and observed the Mother's formidable psychic abilities. But in time Thérèse's fervour diminished as she began to have experiences of Sri Ramana Maharshi. She felt the pull to Arunachala but initially resisted it, owing to a sense of loyalty to her benefactress. In the end, however, her heart won out and she secretly laid plans to slip away and make the 100 km journey westward to Arunachala. She concealed her intentions from everyone, including Richard, hoping to simply disappear. She knew how difficult this would be, not least of all because the Mother, owing to her psychic gifts, was keenly aware when one of her flock left the 5 km radius of the Pondicherry Ashram. Thérèse knew that the Mother had sent people to Sri Ramana in former years, but she also knew that the Mother would not let her go easily.

Thérèse moved all her scheduled appointments to Richard's calendar, freeing up her own, not wanting to inconvenience patients. Meanwhile, Richard remarked at how busy he was becoming. Finally, one day in 1972 Thérèse simply left, taking only one change of clothes. She brought no money besides what she needed for the bus ticket. She arrived at Ramanasramam in a



Ramanasramam Illupai Tree

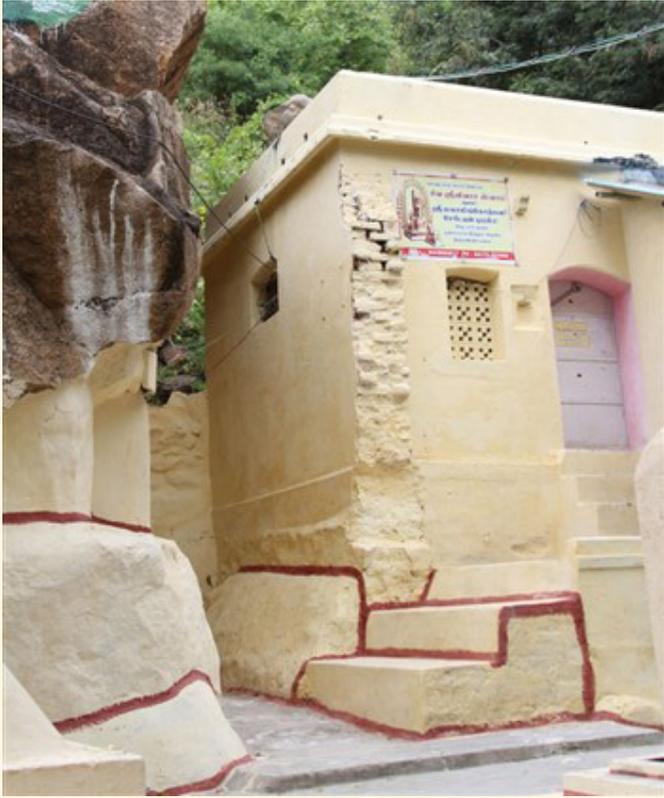
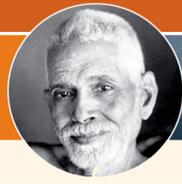
state of ecstasy and duly went to the office to ask for accommodation. When she was refused—perhaps because she had failed to write in advance to request a room—she was neither daunted nor afflicted with the slightest bit of antipathy but took it as Bhagavan's will. She went and sat down under a tree where she spent several hours quite happily. Eventually someone who knew her from Pondicherry wandered by. 'What are you doing?' asked the friend. 'Sitting under this tree,' Thérèse answered casually. 'Where will you sleep?' asked the friend. 'I don't know,' Thérèse answered. 'Maybe under this tree.'

Thérèse was in such bliss being at the Feet of Arunachala that nothing else mattered to her.

Eventually a vacant cave on the Mountain was located. It was situated next to Narikutti Swami's cave just north of Mulaipal Tirtham, the famed tirtham where Bhagavan retrieved water during the hot summer months (and which Narikutti, an architect by trade, renovated in 1984). Thérèse got permission from the Temple authorities to live there. The cave had not been lived in for a while and so it leaked considerably. This didn't bother Thérèse in the least. She would simply sit meditating, and when it rained, hold her tumbler up to the drip and collect the water as Arunachala's prasad.

She may not have known it at the time, but she was following in the steps of another great French national, the Benedictine monk Swami Abhishiktananda, who





Arutpal Guhai (left) and Lakshmi Devi Cave (right)

had a pivotal advaitic experience in the presence of the Maharshi in the darshan hall in 1949. Abhishiktananda came to settle on the Hill in the spring of 1950 in this very cave. Her cave was called Arutpal Guhai, “Cave of the Milk of Grace” and was written about by Abhishiktananda in his modern classic, *The Secret of Arunachala*. It was two-storeyed, with a meditation nook below and a small spring inside the cave behind the meditation/puja room. To boot, there was a small opening on the rear side that allowed just the right amount of light in the morning. The one on the right where Narikutti lived is called Lakshmi Devi Cave, named after the mouni woman sadhak from Mysore who lived there for long years and had taken a 12-year vow of silence. Lakshmi Devi was held in great respect by Abhishiktananda and others who lived on the mountain in the early 50s. In fact, she had a following and her devotees used to come up to the hermitage to see her.

Arutpal Tirtham lies about twenty vertical feet below these two caves and has water much of the year. In the summer months when the tirtham was dry, one could walk about 100 metres to retrieve water from Mulaipal Tirtham which had a perennial spring.

Thérèse used to wander about on the Hill, as Bhagavan had done, and sometimes took up sweeping caves as a service to the sadhus living there. A small sum of money given her by a friend afforded her the luxury of purchasing white rice on which she lived exclusively for many months.

Eventually her husband found her, much the way Bhagavan’s mother had found Bhagavan in his youth. As in Bhagavan’s case, people who knew Thérèse had inevitably mentioned it back in Pondicherry that she was living up on the Hill in Tiruvannamalai. Hearing the news, Richard came to see her. He reported back to the Mother telling her that Thérèse had refused to return and she sent him back to Tiruvannamalai with explicit instructions to bring her back. This initiative backfired as Richard himself began to feel drawn to the holy atmosphere of Sri Bhagavan and Arunachala. Finally, it was Mrs. Osborne who convinced Thérèse to return to Pondy and settle her affairs with the Mother so that she could take leave of the Ashram in a proper manner. Thérèse went back and stayed for six months. She then left a second time, this time for good, after having reached a *rapprochement* with the Mother.

Subsequently Richard told the Mother that he too would be moving to Tiruvannamalai. The Mother gave her blessing and insisted that he take his dental equipment along with him in order to practice dentistry, which he did. But soon enough he found he would not be needing it: the life he and his wife were embarking upon was something altogether different. He thus sold it all and with the money from the sale, supported himself and Thérèse for the duration of their stay in Tiruvannamalai.

Not being drawn to life in a cave, Richard found accommodation in Bose Compound just opposite Sri Ramanasramam. One of the first things he did was to patch the leaks in Thérèse’s cave. Later, the Mango Tree kitchen room became vacant and Richard acquired the use of it not only for food preparation but as a second accommodation and a place where he and Thérèse could sit together since Arutpal Guhai was very cramped.

Their roles had now reversed. Richard had initiated Thérèse into spirituality, but Thérèse now took the





lead. Already the two felt that celibacy would improve their spiritual quest, so they agreed upon it and remained thus for the rest of their lives. Since Richard was not initially drawn to a solitary life of meditation, Thérèse suggested that he practice general health care for the local poor. In addition to his allopathic background, he became versed in Siddha medicine so that he could treat the poor without charge. He began to hold free clinics once or twice a week.

During these years, Richard visited Thérèse on the Hill each day to bring her food. Later she would return the favour when Richard would stay for shorter periods in the cave on the Hill and she would tend to matters below in Bose compound. At such times she would take provisions up to him.

Thérèse became deeply devoted to Arunachala and during the years in her cave, she experienced a deep connection with Lord Arunachala, who had now become her Guru and who would remain so until the end of her life. Thérèse informally took sannyas and donned the ochre cloth, accepting whatever was offered her, seeking nothing. Years later when Richard insisted she accept the money he wanted to leave her in his will, Thérèse dutifully returned to wearing ordinary *sahwar kameez* of a heavy cotton cloth², her ‘armour,’ she called it, as she was very often living alone on the Hill.

In time, there were three Westerners living on the Hill, a young pilgrim from New York City, Nadhia Sutara; an

² The reason for the change is thought by some to have been Mother Krishnabai of Anandashram, who suggested Thérèse go back to normal dress, perhaps as a humility practice.



Guhai Namasivaya Temple

Australian sadhu, Narikutti, who had been a disciple of Yogaswami in Sri Lanka; and then Thérèse.

Nadhia moved into Guhai Namasivaya mantapam, but not long after that, she fell ill. Word got out and one day Thérèse appeared in the compound. She took one look at Nadhia and said in her typically joyous voice, ‘Oh! You have jaundice!’, spoken in the same tone as one might use when saying, ‘Merry Christmas!’ She then approached the patient, introduced herself and forbade her to leave the compound until all the yellow had gone from her eyes and skin. To counteract the bile and keep her from having to leave the sickbed to go shop for food, Thérèse brought her fresh fruit—oranges, sweet limes, etc. And knowing the healing effect of tender coconuts for jaundice, Thérèse brought her several each day even though she did not have much money. Thérèse also delivered spiritual books to keep Nadhia company during the protracted convalescence. After two months Thérèse declared the

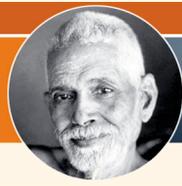
From the Collected Works

What is the meaning of dwelling in solitude (ekantavasa)?

If a man is free from all the pairs of opposites and always lives in solitude, established in himself alone, he gains perfect wisdom even while in the present body and shines forth with great effulgence ... As the Self is all-pervasive it has no particular place for solitude. The state of being free from mental concepts is called ‘dwelling in solitude’.

— Devikalottara §79, *Spiritual Instructions* §19, in *Collected Works*, pp.184 and 62.





patient cured and returned to her solitary way of living.

Thérèse used to go for giri pradakshina once a week. She left her cave at 2 or 3 am so that she could walk in the early morning quiet before residents of Adi Annamalai and the rest of the town woke up. Richard sometimes joined her. They prepared food at home and could sometimes be found sitting and having breakfast on the pradakshina path.

Thérèse insisted that at the time of a death, it was incumbent on all who knew the deceased to attend the funeral. Thus, following the death of Subramaniam, the Mango Tree swami, she insisted that all go for the funeral conducted by Maniswami, the caretaker of Virupaksha Cave. Nadhia writes of the ceremony and the conversation they shared afterwards:

At the funeral, we sang bhajans and everybody contributed whatever positive thing they could say about the departed Swami. Thérèse, who had nursed him in his last days, described how, despite dying of TB and gasping for breath, he refused to go to the hospital where he could have been given oxygen to ease his suffering. But he wanted to be sure that he died on his beloved Arunachala. So, for the next 3 days, with every breath he would gasp, 'Arunachala! Arunachala!' until, at last, he expired.

After the body was taken to the funeral grounds, Thérèse invited Narikutti and me into the kitchen room next door for tea. First, she made clear to us that she was not a social person so that we should not take liberties in visiting her. Richard, she said, was her only friend and she wanted no other. During the tea, we all remarked at how well Subramaniam Swami had died. Then we discussed how we would like to die. Therese said that she wanted to die in meditation; Narikutti said that he wanted to die sitting up, that is, consciously; and I said that I wanted to die with the Name of God on my lips. Then we discussed what we would like done with our bodies. Thérèse said that she had heard that cremation was painful, and stated that she wanted to be buried. She mentioned that in addition to her Hindu leanings, she was also deeply attuned to Christianity. She had been named after the French saint, Thérèse of Lisieux, (born in Alençon, not far from Thérèse's native town), whom she regarded as a great bhakta, and of whom she often had visions, along with other beings (Christian and otherwise, especially Sri Bhagavan) while strolling on the Mountain. She was indeed quite psychic. She mentioned how, upon the death of her father, who had no religious or spiritual leanings whatsoever, he had come to her and complained that nobody he had visited after his demise had understood that he was there. Only Thérèse did, and they spent a few days talking so that he could move on in peace and harmony.

Thérèse practiced for long hours each day. Whether in her cave, in the kitchen room at Mango Tree Cave or when visiting Richard in Bose Compound, she spent most of her time in meditation. On her weekly visits to Richard, one could see her sitting quietly in Bhagavan's samadhi hall for hours on end.

The Ashram management tells the story how when the then Mrs. President, T.N. Venkataraman's wife Nagalakshmi passed away in 1984, Thérèse was living on the Hill and saw a shooting star. She intuited that it meant that Nagu had passed away even though she hadn't known Nagu had been unwell. Thérèse came down the Hill immediately to attend the wake.

Taking Leave

In 1990 there was a sudden and dramatic shift for the residents on the Hill. A general amnesty for hardened criminals was granted when the new Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu was elected, and the Mountain became unsafe. One by one residents left. Thérèse went to join Richard who was by then having heart problems and the two continued to live in their room in Bose Compound. They found another cave quite secluded, distant from the town, and when Richard's health permitted, they would go there. However, one day some villagers came and wanted to occupy the place, threatening the couple with knives. They made the decision to give up the place.

In the summer of 1999, Richard felt dizzy during a walk in the city underneath the hot midday sun. In the months that followed, he continued to sense that his body and nervous system were overworked and could no longer tolerate the South Indian climate.

In early 2000 Richard returned to Greece and settled in an apartment of his brother in the village of Askeli on the island of Poros.

In 2002, Thérèse decided to move to Greece and take care of her husband. She had once commented that marriage was a sacred bond and that the phrasing, 'the two become one flesh' had an important spiritual meaning. When truly married, a couple's energy fields become conjoined so that they do indeed become one entity. Therefore, breaking that bond, whether through infidelity or neglect, was harming the partner and therefore, a violation of spiritual law. Thus, she





made up her mind to spend the rest of her life with Richard on the island of Poros.

After Richard died of a heart attack in 2008 at the age of 79, Thérèse moved to a quieter apartment and continued to live in Askeli, practicing her sadhana with a strict program from early morning until night each day. On occasion people she had known in India would come to visit her, each one very impressed with the radiance and deep inner peace she emanated in her later years. She never forgot Arunachala and although living a very simple life on very little money, she continued her financial assistance to two poor families in Tiruvannamalai.

At the end of October 2020, Thérèse decided to move to a nursing home in the city of Navplio. After

a few days, she began to refuse food and the staff heard her say one day, “It’s time to leave”. Thérèse had a heart attack on December 7th 2020 and died shortly afterwards, just a month before her 87th birthday. Her funeral took place on the 8th of December in the cemetery of the small village of Aria near the city of Navplio. —

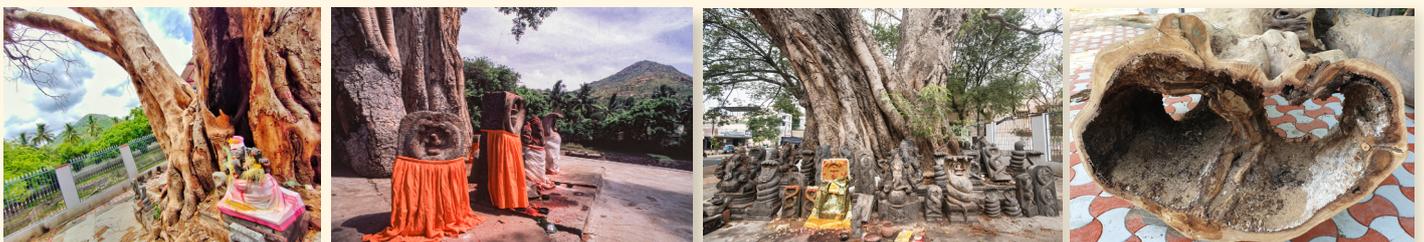


Therese, Richard and Dipti Agarwal in front of the Ashram office, mid-90s

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Pali Tirtham Bodhi Tree



Devotees were heartbroken when, in early December, the Pali Tirtham Bodhi tree at the southern bank of Pali tirtham had to be removed by woodcutters. “Was there no way it could have been saved?”, some cried. The answer to this question lies in the remains of the tree itself (photo below right) which reveal that the tree had been hollowed out by white ants and would have fallen soon enough anyway. The difficult decision had to be taken to bring down the giant that had served for long decades in performing obsequies for the departed. At 9:45-10 am on the morning of Wednesday 30th December, with the local MLA & former Minister Sri Pichandi present along with Ashram devotees and management, a sapling was planted in its place. This followed extensive renovations to the tree platform and the surroundings by Sri Ramanasramam. The bodhi (pipal) tree platform was inaugurated by Chettians in 1880 and the Ganesa statue was installed in 1930. The age of the departed tree is not known with certainty but was probably 120-140 years old.—



Pali Tirtham Bodhi Tree in better days





Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Bhagavan's 141st Jayanti Celebrations

On Thurs day, 31th December, devotees gathered at Bhagavan's Shrine to initiate a world-wide online celebration of Bhagavan's 141st Jayanti. The morning began at 4.15 am with Marghazhi puja. The live streaming began at 6 am (see the following two pages) with a Jayathi Tamil parayana programme followed by milk offering. Kalasa abhishekam and Jayanti puja took place around 10am. Programming has been uploaded for later viewing. Go to <<https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>>, <<https://youtu.be/M08EgQiqxwA>> and <<http://www.youtube.com/c/ArunachalaAshrama>>. —

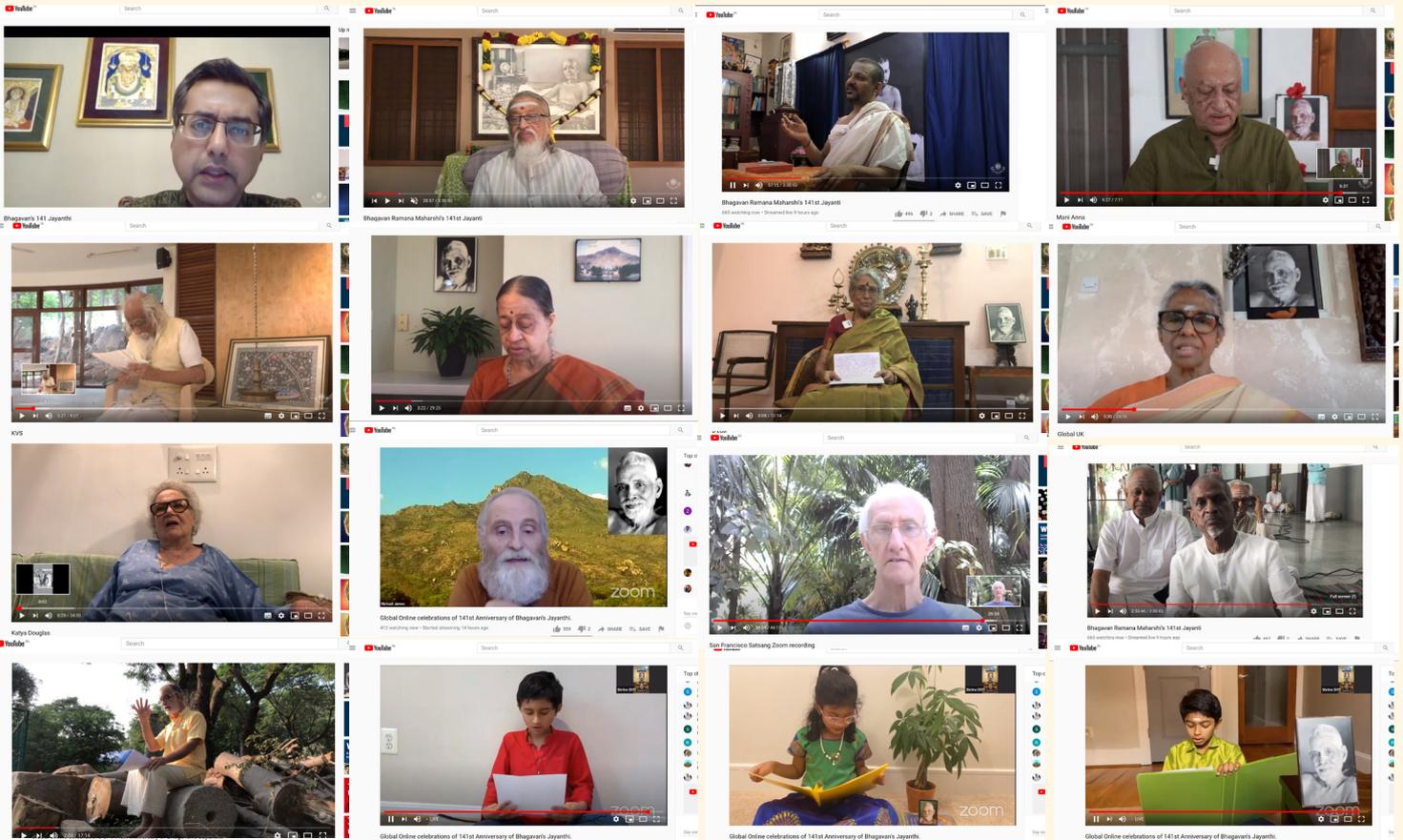


Events in Tiruvannamalai: Monsoon Rains and the Samudram



This year's Northeast monsoon brought Pali tirtham to overflowing and for the first time since 2018, the Samudram now has an appreciable amount of water. From 1st October till mid-December, Tamil Nadu got rainfall 5% above the norm for this season due to two principal cyclones, Nivar (27 November) and Burevi (2nd December). The lake is now filled above half capacity. Even if the rainy season seems to have ended now, what a boon for farmers in the region and a glorious sight for locals, following a lengthy period without water. —



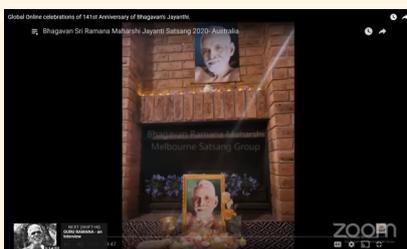


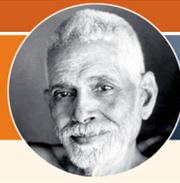
Sri Bhagavan's Global Online Jayanti Celebrations

What a blessing that in a global pandemic when devotees all over the world are suffering the same crisis, we can come together and centre our attention on Bhagavan all at the same time, and even share our mutual celebrations with one another.

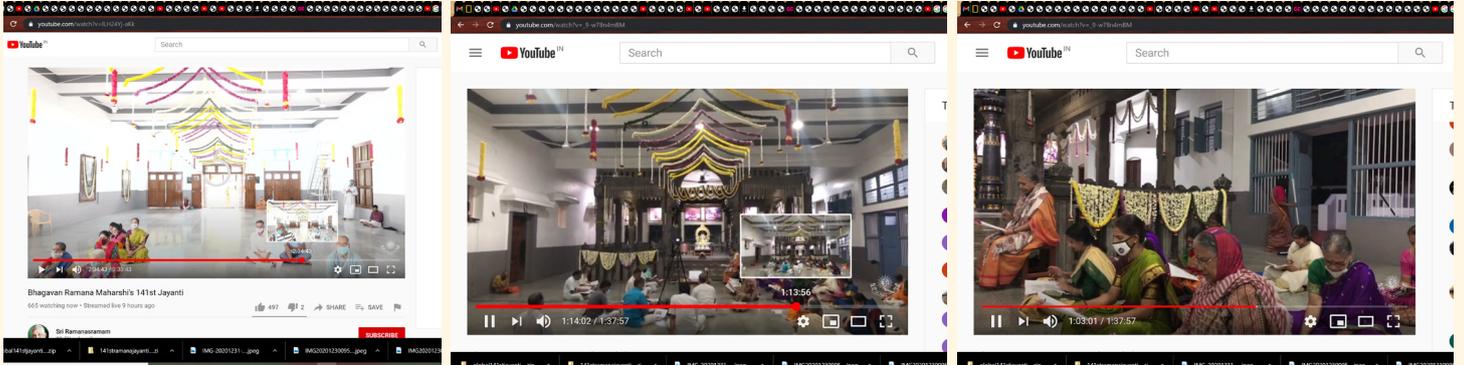
The capping event of a tumultuous year was a very favourable one. Indeed, Thursday, 31st December marked a new era in Ashram history, the day when devotees at Sri Ramanasramam and Ramana kendras and Ramana centres from around India, the US, the

UK, Australia, Kenya, Canada, Singapore, Malaysia and elsewhere celebrated Bhagavan's 141st Jayanti in an all-day and overnight livestream. The multilingual programme included talks by Nochur Sri Venkataraman, Sri V. Ganesan, Sri V. S. Mani, Sri K.V. Subramonyan, Smt. Mangalam, Dr Santa Ramachandran, Smt. Aparna Krishnamoorthy, Kitty Osborne, Dr Ambika Kameshwar, Dr Sarada Natarajan, Swami Sarvapriyananada, Sri S. Rammohan, Michael James, Dr Parimala Moodley, David Godman and others. Replete with bhajans, chants, Carnatic singing, skits and children's programmes including programmes from children with special needs, the livestreaming began at 6 am IST on the 31st December from Sri Ramanasramam followed by





Events around the World: Sri Bhagavan's Global Online Jayanti Celebrations



Australia at 10:15, Singapore, at 11.45, Malaysia at 12.15 and so on, making its way around the globe. The 30-hour continuous programme ended on New Year's Day, 1st January at 10 am with a live broadcast of a talk by Sri Ramanasramam President, Dr Venkat S. Ramanan who marvelled over the success of the programme, thanking the 20 or so tech-savvy devotees around the world who set up, monitored and maintained live coverage continuously for the duration. The President remarked how devotees of various countries, nationalities and ages, the youngest being 3 yrs. old and the eldest close to 90, took part in the programme. He also reflected on Bhagavan's teaching and paid tribute to the former three Ashram Presidents, promising in the years ahead to support devotees in establishing new Ramana satsangs in cities around the world. The final moments of the world-wide broadcast

took place with arati at Ramanasramam at 10.15am. —

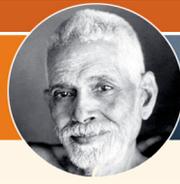
[For downloaded clips of the event, go to the Ashram YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>, <https://youtu.be/M08EgQiqxwA>, <http://www.youtube.com/c/ArunachalaAshrama>. Additional links include <https://youtu.be/BZkoy1oT8BI> for V. Ganesan's talk (36 min); <https://youtu.be/l-qGzEP0eL0> for Nochur (24 min); <https://youtu.be/As676BP1TT8> for VS Mani (7 min); <https://youtu.be/DaSvenSKy1c> for Smt Mangalam on Swami Niranjanananda (19 min); <https://youtu.be/m1upVwGvLas> for Dr Parimala; <https://youtu.be/3tSgFNc9Caw> for S. Rammohan (15 min); <https://youtu.be/gevEHDcTQc8> for David Godman; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJwXlsKjuqE&feature=youtu.be> for JJ; <https://youtu.be/sRpfmWrZWkk> for KVS (7 min); <https://youtu.be/0X1RlYxoVj8> for Smt. Aparna Krishnamoorthy; <https://youtu.be/Q4K5LzjK-k> for Katya Douglas; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wk1Gw9ME_w for the final talk by Dr Venkat S. Ramanan followed by final puja.]

Nochur Sri Venkataraman 2021 Discourses

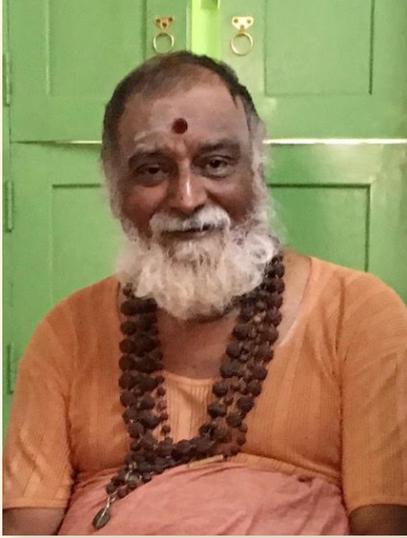


In spite of the COVID pandemic, Nochur Sri Venkataraman is giving his annual *Aksaramanamalai* discourses in English, though this year, without a live audience. The discourses are being video recorded each day and uploaded onto the Ashram's YouTube channel starting the day after Jayanti, 1st January. Please visit the Ashram's YouTube channel for free downloading at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>





Obituary: Swami Ramananada Saraswati



Born in Rangoon, Burma, in 1938, Swami Ramanananda was named Seshadri. He had one elder brother and two younger sisters. He came to India from Burma in 1942 during the War years as a refugee and did his schooling at the Besant Theosophical High School in Chennai. He excelled in athletics, painting, and, above all, music. In school, he was fortunate to have good teachers such as Rukmini Devi Arundale and the Carnatic maestro Tiger Varadachariar as well as classmates like M.D. Ramanathan. This helped him develop his singing skills, and he once had the chance to sing a song on *All India Radio*.

After his examinations, he joined the family in Calcutta, and served as a draftsman's apprentice in a British company that specialized in constructing bridges for the Indian Railways. While still in his teens, he came across Arthur Osborne's *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* which had a great effect on him. In the late 1950s, he met Ananda Mayi Ma at Ranchi who advised him to go to Ramanasramam. When he suffered an injury to his leg, he was forced to leave his job and came to

Tiruvannamalai as she had suggested. After a lengthy stay, he made up his mind to settle permanently at Arunachala. His gentle nature made him the favourite of older devotees like Muruganar, Swami Viswanathan and K. Natesan. In the early 1970s he served Muruganar during his last years when his health deteriorated. He also helped in the construction of Bhagavan's Samadhi mantapam and worked in the Ashram Dispensary preparing compounds. In 1973, he left the ashram to be more independent and stayed a year at Guhai Namasivya with Albert Frahm, a close friend who had been living there for some time.

In 1983, Seshadri got the blessing of the Paramacharya Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram to take sannyas when the latter was traveling nearby. In a ceremony at Bhagavan's Samadhi, Kunjuswami placed ochre robes on Bhagavan's Samadhi overnight and on the following day, Seshadri simply clad himself in them. He stood before Bhagavan's Samadhi and took the name Swami Ramanananda. After doing the traditional yatra to the mahakshetras of North India, he returned to Tiruvannamalai and stayed for some time at Skandasramam. Eventually Ramanananda built a hermitage named Ramana Padam on the hill-round road near the Varuna Lingam. This came about by the initiative of Moopanar Swami who organised a sannyasin to stay at each of the ashtalingams and their abutting temple land. He gave Swami Ramanananda the choice where he wanted to live since he had helped him renovate the eight lingams.

Ramanananda had agamic knowledge of samadhi construction and helped in conducting abhishikam and puja while interring the mortal remains of Muruganar, Ramaswami Pillai and others. In 1996, he became the principal organizer of the Adiannamalai Temple Maha Kumbhabhsiekam and with permission from the Ashram management, based his fundraising efforts out of Ramanasramam. His enthusiasm for the project got numerous devotees involved and all participated in the event with relish. He also helped the ARS in its early days. His kuti, Ramana Padam was home to snakes, squirrels and monkeys, but like Bhagavan, Ramanananda was quite at home with his many animal friends. When not practising sadhana, he occupied himself with water-colour painting. His innocent child-like temperament, charitable disposition and great sense of humour allowed him to converse with people of all ages. He was approached by a diverse range of visitors who felt inspired by his understanding of Bhagavan's teachings and never spoke ill of anyone. Following long months of poor health, on 10th December 2020 at the age of 82, Swami Ramanananda Saraswati attained the lotus feet of Arunachala. —



Watercolour by Sw. Ramanananda

