

# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

SEPTEMBER 2019  
VOL. 13, NO. 9



Chris James Dade



## Saranagati



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Dear Devotees,

We end the month of August with group recitation of selected works of Sri Muruganar (30th August-1st September) following Muruganar Day on 30th and the Satgurunatha Odhuvars on the 31st.

Recent light and moderate rains brought some improvement with greening of trees and plants, though Pali Theertham remains low. In light of improved weather conditions, the Ashram is inviting guests to the Ashram in September.

This issue concludes the life of Swamini Atmananda (Blanca Schlamm) who spent six weeks with Bhagavan in the summer of 1942 and wrote of her experiences. (see p. 3)

For videos, photos and further 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

1st September (Sun) Bhagavan's Advent Day

13th September (Fri) Full Moon

23rd September (Mon) Punarvasu

29th September (Sun) Navaratri Festival commences

7th October (Mon) Saraswati Puja

8th October (Tues) Vijayadasami

13th October (Sun) Full Moon

21st October (Mon) Punarvasu

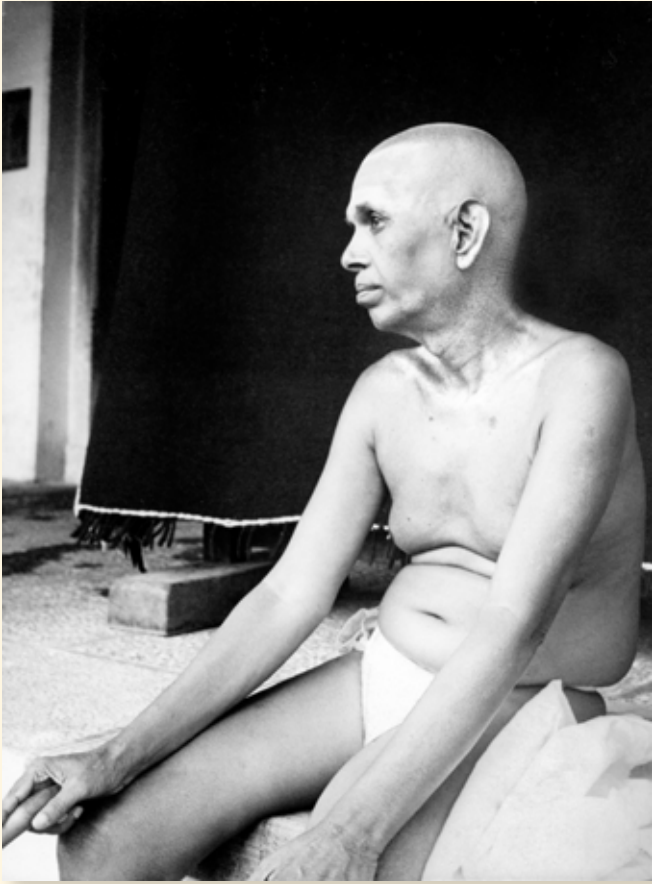
27th October (Sun) Deepavali

12th November (Tues) Full Moon

17th November (Sun) Punarvasu

1st December (Sun) Karthigai Festival commences





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

Blanca's longing to apprentice herself to a spiritual adept took shape during these weeks in Bhagavan's presence, and she was soon able to give herself over to the process, bringing her discontents and confusion to the darshan hall and raising them before the master. Her entry from the 25th of June reads:

*Yesterday my old agony of restlessness returned, and with it my fear of being caught here... I had backache, headache and tummy-ache and utter misery... But this morning I suddenly got back my peace after deciding to talk to Bhagavan and to ask him why I can't get rid of my egotistical resistance. As I asked him the question, tears came. The answer was: "Take the resistance into your heart and keep it there". I have to do everything from the heart. Let the heart see, hear,*

*think, speak, eat, sleep—everything. Though I do not know the Lord of my Heart, whoever He is, I must surrender to him and leave all else. It is very difficult to do in practice. I am still not clear about J.K. and until I am, I won't have any peace. I shall take him into my heart and will clear this problem by the time I leave.<sup>1</sup>*

She concludes the entry with a quote from the *Ashtavakra Gita*:

*When the mind is freed from such pairs of opposites as 'this is done' and 'this is not done', it becomes indifferent to religious merit, worldly prosperity, desire for sensual enjoyment and for liberation. The one who abhors sense-objects avoids them, and the one who covets them becomes attached to them. But he who does not accept or reject, is neither attached nor unattached. He who has an egoistic feeling towards liberation and considers the body as his own, is neither a jnani nor a yogi. He only suffers misery."<sup>2</sup>*

Hearing how King Janaka accepted Ashtavakra as his Guru, Blanca reflected on her relationship with Bhagavan:

*A sudden surrender to the Maharshi arose in me spontaneously and his outer form vanished. I feel more and more that Madras (which is so much closer to Ramana) will be better for me to live in than Delhi. The company of the Wise, whilst we are yet ignorant, is the most precious thing to seek.<sup>3</sup>*

Blanca sees herself entering a new world, inhabiting two worlds—the double-bind of *samsara*—the new, with all its promise for an alternative way of living, and the old that won't quite let go of us. Her reflections continue:

*I am always afraid to let go of the world and yet the beauty I seek is only an expression of the Supreme Reality that is not of this world. I play the piano, not for the sound in itself, which can even be ugly, [such as when playing] on a piano that is out of tune, but for the hidden something that I contact through it. Yet I cling to the world. Again, the confusion of the mind that will not give up its 'knowledge' which is actually ignorance: "The world is real, but not as we see it—like the rope mistaken for the snake, like dreams and like a mirage in a waste land. Mere theoretical knowledge can never dissolve this world of appearance; only the actual Experience of the Self can do so."<sup>4</sup>*

1 *Death Must Die*, 25th June 1942, p. 94.

2 *Ibid.*, 25th June 1942, p. 94.

3 *Ibid.*, 27th June 1942, p. 95.

4 *Ibid.*, 14th June 1942, p. 88, the concluding lines from *Maha Yoga*.





A couple of days later in the hall, Blanca is reminded of the war raging in her native Europe and reflects on its chief instigator:

*Who is Hitler? I hold Hitler in my heart and keep still. Hitler must not be killed. He must be turned around and made to see. Hitler is creative power turned downward. His God is Race. Why does he want to kill the Jews? Our whole civilisation is based on the fallacy of looking at the world from the wrong end—from the outside material standpoint and not from the spiritual centre. Hitler's function is to destroy this. He is the match that lights the funeral pyre and burns itself up in the process.<sup>5</sup>*

The next day, a devotee asked the Maharshi:

*Why are you unable to refuse when others prevail on you for this or that? Are you not free of karma and therefore able to do as you like?*

*Maharshi: There are three types of karma: Made by one's own actions and desires. Inevitable karma like government (world circumstances beyond your personal control). The karma of others taken on himself by the [one] who is free of his own karma.*

*Questioner: Is it like Christ, who suffers for the sins of others?*

*Maharshi: Yes. There is no freedom, it is merely a word. (i.e. even Christ or the Realised Saint, still must fulfil his destiny outwardly—although inwardly he is fully liberated).<sup>6</sup>*

Meanwhile, she observes the goings-on in the hall and those who came to see the Maharshi:

*A sadhu came today and sang hymns to Subramaniam. He is one of the oldest devotees of the Maharshi and famous for his*

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 16th June 1942, p. 89.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 17th June 1942, pp. 91-92.

*songs. He looks like the statues of Ganesh (the elephant-headed son of Siva), beard tied in a knot and tummy enormous. Most uncanny. He brought his whole family with babies to act as the chorus. It was like a fairy-tale, Arabian nights.<sup>7</sup>*

## Taking Leave of Bhagavan

At the end of June, the appointed time came for Blanca to leave and return to Benares to honour her obligations to the Rajghat School. Blanca had already set the intention to resign her job at the school and come to South India to be near Bhagavan:

*On the 28th, last day at Tiruvannamalai, I wanted to know how I should live after leaving there. The answer came in the form of an experience in which the Maharshi's head suddenly seemed to go inside me and he said: "You, ego, get out. I am [in-charge] here and whatever I tell you, you have to do. Not a breath without my order. I am your Self until you have realised It". To my own surprise I loved [having someone in-charge]. That is what I have always wanted. I am going to cling to him every moment and I shan't rest till he has absorbed the last atom of me.<sup>8</sup>*

But as she reached her destination, she had a premonition that her plans might be thwarted:

*In the train my thoughts stayed in Tiruvannamalai. When the train crossed the bridge, Mother Ganges [whispered] a secret: "You will not always be with the Maharshi."<sup>9</sup>*

## Travel Restrictions

Once in Rajghat, Blanca found things worse than expected: "The school is dead and utterly neglected.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 22nd June 1942, p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 3rd July 1942, p. 101.

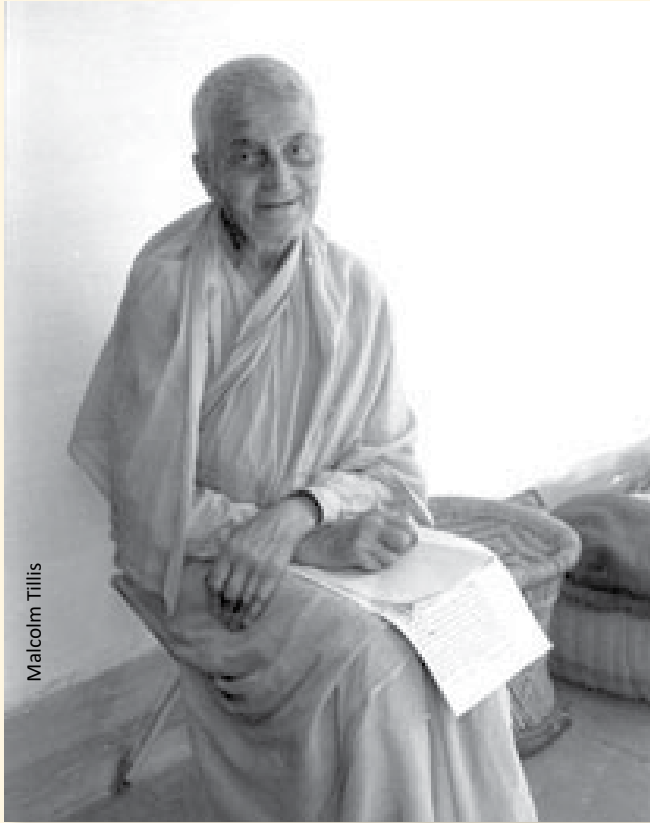
<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 3rd July 1942, p. 101.

## Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai: Desika Padigam §7

நோய்மையாம் பிறப்பை நோன்றிடற் கஞ்சி  
நோய்மையாது ஒன்றுமே சேரா  
வாய்மையாம் பரமே வாய்வதற் கெண்ணி  
வந்தடி வணங்கிடு வார்க்குத்  
தூய்மையாம் உள்ளத் துறவினை நல்கித்  
துகளறு காட்சியும் அளித்துச்  
சேய்மையாம் பொருளை அண்மையிற் சேர்ப்பாய்  
தேசிக ரமண மா தேவே.

**G**uru Ramana, Siva, to those who wish to be freed  
From the unbearable pain of birth and death,  
And surrender at Your Feet, longing to taste bliss  
(moksha),  
You straight vouchsafe  
A mind freed from desire, filled with renunciation,  
and the highest vision flawless,  
Bringing anear the once so distant goal. —





Malcolm Tillis

There is even less life than before”<sup>10</sup>. She began to inform friends of her decision to leave. But before the plan to move south could take shape, she ran up against an impenetrable barrier. She writes in her book, “Ever since the beginning of the war in 1939, my movements had been severely restricted. I had had to apply, giving valid reasons, every time I wanted to leave Varanasi even for a single day. Permits had often been granted, but by no means always.”<sup>11</sup>

This time around, there was no leniency. British authorities imposed strict travel restrictions on ‘enemy nationals’ which included Blanca, her native Austria being allied with Britain’s rival, Germany. Even if Blanca, being a Jew, was no friend of Hitler, she was forbidden to travel though she was at liberty to move about in a specified area freely and continue her work, unlike some of her countrymen who were placed in internment camps. She was thus compelled to content herself with continuing her work at the Rajghat school and wait till the war was over.<sup>12</sup>

10 Ibid., 4th July 1942, p. 102.

11 *As the Flower Sheds its Fragrance*, p. 33.

12 *Death Must Die*, p. 101.

### Directorship of European Music

If her plans had been turned upside down, fresh opportunities presented themselves. Having been a gifted pianist and musician since her earliest childhood and versed in the great masters of the Western classical tradition, Blanca was approached with the suggestion that she become Director of European Music in Delhi. A prestigious position, at first it seemed the ideal opportunity for her. But as she began to contemplate her original motivation for coming to India, namely, the spiritual search, she worried that taking the post would mean that a second barrier would now stand between her and the Maharshi.<sup>13</sup>

After her diary entry of November 1942, her diary record goes blank and entries only begin again three years later on 12th February 1945. The details of what went on in the interim are not known, nor is it known whether Blanca misplaced these diary notebooks or intentionally disposed of them. We are compelled to rely on testimonies elsewhere to fill in the gaps for these intervening years.

### First Meetings

Sometime following this, Blanca met Sørensen, or Shunya Baba as he was more commonly known, a Danish *sadhu* who lived in Almora but had originally come to India in 1922 at the invitation of the Nobel Prize winning poet, Rabindranath Tagore.<sup>14</sup> Somewhere in 1943 Shunya Baba encouraged Blanca to meet Sri Anandamayee Ma (née Nirmala Sundari Devi). But the encounter was awkward for Blanca. She felt out of place in her European dress amidst the crowded satsang hall and she was unable to interact with Ma directly.

Also, around this time, Blanca reencountered Lewis Thompson, the English poet-sannyasin who spent several years in Ramanasramam (including the year Blanca was there). He impressed Blanca not just with his lively penetrating verses in praise of the Divine but with the intensity of his spiritual quest. Blanca writes of him:

*It did not take me long to find out that [Lewis] was a quite unusually earnest seeker after Truth, in fact ruthlessly single-minded. He had come to Ceylon at the age of 23 and one year*

13 Ibid., 8th November 1942, p. 103.

14 Ibid., p. 100.





later proceeded to South India in quest of spiritual guidance. He had stayed in Sri Ramana Maharshi's Ashram for seven years ... To my question why he had come to North India when he had found so much in the South, he gave as one of his reasons that he had seen a photo of a Holy Mother who travelled in the North for whom he had immediately felt a strong attraction. He showed me the picture. "Oh," I exclaimed, "this is Sri Anandamayee Ma, I have had Her darshan."<sup>15</sup>

Blanca pointed out that Ma was in the area just then. When Thompson met Ma, he was so overwhelmed by the experience that he could not stop telling Blanca about her. Blanca comments:

*It must be made clear that Thompson had a very sharp, critical intellect and was extremely difficult to please. Only the very best, the highest interested him, and he coldly used to dismiss everything else... It naturally made a deep impression on me to hear someone whom I had found utterly unemotional, detached and one-pointed talk in this strain. I could hardly help wanting to know Mataji for myself and at closer quarters.<sup>16</sup>*

If Ma had more than once said, "There is a time for everything. No one can come to me until the time is ripe,"<sup>17</sup> then Blanca's time had finally come, even if it

<sup>15</sup> *As the Flower Sheds its Fragrance*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

seemed to have been delayed for two years.

Thompson left Rajghat on foot to go to Sarnath to meet Ma. When he didn't return, Blanca worried for the sadhu's health, given his regular bouts of debilitating weakness born of prolonged fasting. She went in search of him. Little did she know that the 5km cycle-rickshaw trip from Rajghat to Sarnath would turn out to be the capping sojourn of her life. When Blanca found Thompson, he was not only not infirm but was in a state of utter rapture, unable to stop speaking to Blanca about Anandamayee Ma and Blanca found herself moved to seek Ma's presence. This time the encounter was different:

*It was an informal and quiet gathering, no loud singing or dancing. This time I did not feel out of place. Everyone seemed friendly and congenial... I asked a question during the evening gathering and late at night had a long private talk with Mataji. What She said was so simple and so completely convincing, there was no room for doubt. "How strange that I had not been able to find this out for myself," I thought. In fact, it was not another talking to me, but my Self conversing with myself. This cannot be explained; it must be felt. It was an experience beyond words, but all the more real for that. What Mataji said was evidently only the outer expression of something that took place simultaneously on a much deeper level.<sup>18</sup>*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

## Wordwise: Yugapat Srshti

*Yugapat*: 'simultaneously', 'all at once', 'at the same time' + *srshti*: 'creation', 'formation', 'genesis' = 'spontaneous creation'.

**S**ri Bhagavan on *yugapat srshti*: "The Vedanta says that the cosmos springs into view simultaneously with the seer. There is no detailed process of creation. This is said to be *yugapat srshti* (instantaneous creation). It is similar to the creations in dream where the experiencer springs up simultaneously with the objects of experience. [Said like this], some people are not satisfied for they are so rooted in objective knowledge. They seek to find out how there can be sudden creation. They argue that an effect must be preceded by a cause. In short, they desire an explanation for the existence of the world which they see around them. Then the *Srutis* try to satisfy their curiosity by such theories of creation. This method of dealing with the subject of creation is called *krama srshti* (gradual creation). But the true seeker can be content with *yugapat srshti* — instantaneous creation." (*Talks* §651) —





From that point forward, Blanca's spiritual life began to take shape. What she had longed for since her youth suddenly became a reality.

In the ensuing years, under Ma's guidance and care, Blanca took up a strict discipline of daily meditation. If both Ma and Ramana had told her, "Only when the Self is known can one truly know God and vice versa",<sup>19</sup> she set about this noble path of self-discovery. She took up the Ashram dress though she carried on working at the Rajghat School. She continued her work, relying on its income to feed her, resistant to the thought of being a burden in any way to her new-found teacher. Adept at learning languages, Blanca began doing translation in the Ashram and frequently travelled with Ma. In the late 1940s, wanting to spend more time with Ma, she at long last left her teaching position in Rajghat School.

#### **Anandamayee Ma at Sri Ramanasramam**

In 1950, Blanca got the news of Sri Ramana's Mahanirvana. In Tiruvannamalai, work had begun on a samadhi for Bhagavan Ramana but progressed slowly owing to lack of funds. A simple bamboo structure with a palm-leaf matted roof was erected over the Samadhi but there was a felt need for a mantapam over the Samadhi, both for the prescribed daily Vedic worship as well as for devotees' meditation. Construction of the shrine, mantapam and eventually, the large Samadhi hall took place in successive stages.

In November 1952, when Sri Anandamayee Ma paid a visit to Sri Ramanasramam where she was called on to lay the foundation stones for the Samadhi complex, she remarked, "In Pitaji's lifetime, I could not come, though my devotees had his darshan".

The traditional *purna kumbha* was offered to her at the Ashram entrance but Ma graciously remarked: "Why all this? Do you do all these when a daughter comes to her father's house!" As she approached

<sup>19</sup> *Death Must Die*, p. 37.



Bhagavan's samadhi, she proclaimed: "Here is the Sun; we are all the stars in daytime."<sup>20</sup>

Those present in Ramanasramam that day saw the meticulous care with which Sri Anandamayee Ma handed over bricks, one by one, to lay the foundation of Bhagavan Sri Ramana's Samadhi Shrine.

#### **Taking Sannyas**

Meanwhile, Blanca remained in Rajghat. Early on in her association with Ma, Ma had given Blanca the name Rama Navami which soon became Ramananda. But later, Ma told her, "I must change your name; this name does not suit you. I will call you 'Atmananda'".<sup>21</sup>

Later in Hardwar for the March 1962 Kumbha Mela, when a number of Ma's devotees were taking sannyas and when one devotee was suggested by Ma to take sannyas, he declined. Atmananda piped up and said that she would take sannyas. Ma gave her an akala (robe) and instructed her to dye the cloth

<sup>20</sup> *Saranagati*, May 2013, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Video interview: <<https://youtu.be/zpyhD2Ts3OU>>

### **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>>





in ochre after which she should bathe in the Ganga (on the day that was special for taking sannyas). Since there is no provision for a European to take sannyas and since Ma followed the shastra strictly, there was no formal ceremony beyond her simple instructions. Atmananda did as directed and from that time on lived as a renunciant.<sup>22</sup>

In the decades that follow, Atmananda's diaries chronicle a gradual transformation under the guidance of her teacher, a life in service to the guru. She gained Ma's confidence and continued translating for visiting Westerners, and once she had learned Bengali, became editor of the English version of the Anandamayee Ma Ashram magazine while also translating and editing Ma's books in English.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> *New Lives: 54 Interviews with Westerners on Their Search for Spiritual Fulfilment in India*, ed. Malcolm Tillis < [http://www.newlives.freeola.net/interviews/8\\_bramachrini\\_atmananda.php](http://www.newlives.freeola.net/interviews/8_bramachrini_atmananda.php) >

### Epilogue

In August 1982 in Dehradun, Anandamayee Ma left the body. The following year, Atmananda anonymously published excerpts on Ma (which includes a brief account of her own life) called, *As the Flower Sheds Its Fragrance: Diary Leaves of a Devotee*. On the 24th September 1985, at the age of 81, Atmananda died of diphtheria in the meditation posture on her bed in a rest house near Ma's Kankal Ashram, Haridwar. She was given the honours reserved for a sannyasin—not typical for a Western woman in a Brahmin community—and her mortal remains were taken in procession through the ancient pilgrimage town and ceremonially submerged in the sacred waters of the Ganga. —

[For Atmananda's complete story, see the new edition of *Death Must Die: Shree Anandamayee Ma and the Guru/Disciple Relationship: A Devotee's Journey*. Ram Alexander, 2018 Revised Edition. Published by Lee (Ram) Alexander in conjunction with Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Archive Trust, ISBN: 978-81-927273-7-0.]

## Obituary: Sri Siva Deenanathan



Sri Siva Deenanathan was absorbed at the Lotus Feet of Bhagavan on 1st August 2019 at the ripe old age of 93. Sri Deenanathan took abode in the Thanjavur Ashram founded by Sri Janaky Matha in 1943 at the age of 17, just a year after Sadhu Om. Matha, having had spiritual enlightenment by the grace of her chosen Satguru, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, founded the Ashram in order to pave the way for devotees to practise sadhana in line with Bhagavan's teaching. A school teacher by profession, Deenanathan remained a bachelor throughout his life and impressed his students with his purity, punctuality and dedication to the spiritual life, consisting of regular puja, japa and meditation. While his students by and large took up the house-holder's life becoming doctors, engineers and managers, they maintained contact with him till the end for their spiritual benefit. By such association, they avoided being drowned in the tides of worldly life and under his care cultivated honesty, dedication, patriotism and regular sadhana. Soaked in Guru-Bhakti, Deenanathan's devotion to Bhagavan was beyond the pale and set an example for others. He authored several acclaimed books, among them, *Ramana Virundbu* and *A Concise Commentary on Kaivalya Navaneetham*. —

## Obituary: Sri Pitchu Mani

Sri Pitchu Mani was long associated with the family of Thygarajan Chettiar of Tiruaaruran Sugars, Ltd., Tiruvarur, and on their behalf, would bring puja items to the Ashram each year at the time of the celebration of the Sri Vidya Homa. In recent years, Pitchu made it the habit of offering on behalf of the Chettiars, one thousand fresh lotus flowers for that auspicious occasion. Sri Pitchu passed away earlier this year. —

