

Śri Râmânuja

Life & Philosophy

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by

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&

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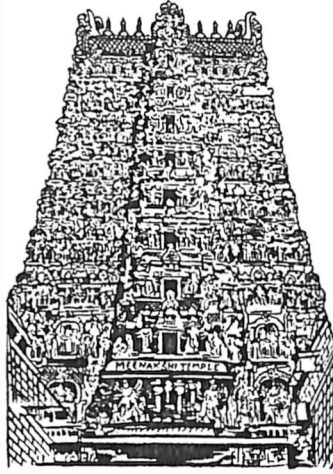
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Sri
Srimate Ramanujaya Namah

PREFACE

Nearly nine hundred and ninety years ago the Earth was graced by the brightest star in the philosophical firmament of India. This was none other than Acharya Ramanuja: preceptor par excellence, compassion incarnate, and foremost among social reformers. He was a perfect example of an Acharya who spared no effort to lift up the spiritually downtrodden masses who had no hopes of spiritual redemption.

Foremost among the Acharya-s of the Srinivaishnava Acharya lineage and the personification of matchless compassion, Acharya Ramanuja was able to understand and address the serious suffering of the spiritually downtrodden masses who were not capable of serious spiritual pursuits and practices like Meditation or penance. His heart literally bled for the philosophically weak and for those born in the under-privileged classes. His predecessors belonging to other philosophical disciplines like Non-Dualism and Dualism-cum-Non-Dualism had denied the privilege of spiritual redemption for those who did not belong to the class of Brahmins. They strongly advocated that one can attain spiritual emancipation only after being born as a Brahmin. Acharya Ramanuja was

the first to declare that everyone in this world is entitled to attain spiritual redemption irrespective of the (class) caste or creed in which he is born.

Not only was Ramanuja bold enough to declare this, but he also implemented this idea practically in his life. When he was seeking to learn the secret esoteric teachings of Vedanta from his preceptor Gosthipurna, Acharya Ramanuja had to make 18 trips to Gosthipurna's place of residence at Tirukkottiyur, a place far away from Srirangam, where Ramanuja was dwelling. Eventually though, after examining Ramanuja in rigorous ways and warning him of severe consequences if he revealed the secrets he would learn to undeserving disciples, Gosthipurna did divulge this secret esoteric teaching. But after learning this secret, what did Ramanuja do? As an embodiment of compassion, Ramanuja could not bear the sufferings of the frail human beings who were caught in the severe net of the cycle of birth and death of this trans-migratory world.

Hence, as soon as he gained knowledge of this spiritual elixir which could immediately deliver suffering souls from this transmigratory world and offer spiritual redemption, he climbed to the top of the temple of Tirukkottiyur and invited all the people seeking this knowledge, irrespective of caste or creed, to share the valuable teachings he inherited from Gosthipurna which would grant them salvation. The qualification to receive these spiritual secrets he prescribed was that one should have a burning desire to receive these

secrets, an intense longing for spiritual union with the supreme and a strong desire to offer totally selfless service to the Lord Srimannarayana. When this clarion call was given, thousands of people assembled and received the secret teachings of the Vedanta and obtained spiritual redemption.

When his preceptor Gosthipurna first realised that he was divulging the teachings, he could not contain his anger. He thought Ramanuja was too liberal to share the secret teachings with so many people who had a desire to learn but had not been seriously tried or examined to assess whether they were worthy of receiving such valuable esoteric teachings. When he confronted Ramanuja, he burst forth with the words:

“How dare you divulge such valuable teachings to ordinary people without seriously examining them? Do you know the consequences of transgressing the vows that you had undertaken, not to divulge these secrets to undeserving people?”

Ramanuja answered, “I am sure to be condemned to go to hell, since I have transgressed the vow that I had given to my Acharya, but I could not resist the temptation to divulge this to those people when I saw the sufferings of the frail human beings who were caught in the net of transmigration. Since these suffering human beings, who have received these teachings, are sure to get liberation, I am prepared even to go to hell. Should not one sacrifice his spiritual benefits for the spiritual well being of hundreds of people?”

When Gosthipurna heard these words, at once, his eyes were opened. He was overwhelmed by the catholicity and compassion of Ramanuja. He hugged Ramanuja, overpowered by emotion and conferred upon him the title 'Embrumanaar' (my master). Keeping this in mind, our predecessors call Ramanuja: Kripa-matra-prasanna-acharya, meaning a preceptor who is driven to guide his disciples by compassion alone.

From the 8th century onwards many Acharyas like Shankara, Udayana and others waged severe philosophical war against the Buddhists who had propagated their philosophy of Nihilism and Transience. Shankara and Udayana are said to be great Acharyas who could redeem the soul of India strongly advocating the existence of consciousness. Shankara's theory of pure consciousness was a sincere effort to wean away the masses from the nihilistic philosophy of the Buddhists. By the 12th century the time was ripe for Ramanuja to continue from where Shankara had left off and further explain the Supreme consciousness advocated by Shankara, with greater elaboration of its innumerable virtues and divine forms, taking his cue from the Upanisads and the teachings of the Acharyas of his spiritual lineage. Hence, Ramanuja depicted the Supreme Brahman as most compassionate and waiting to shower his unlimited grace on those who were ready to receive it.

Another greatness of Ramanuja's lies in his adopting the mystic literature of the Alvars written in the local language

(Tamil) into temple worship. Being an ardent devotee of the foremost Mystic poet Saint Nammalwar, he canonized the secular literature of the Alvars and gave prime place for their recital in the temples. This was a revolutionary act of Ramanuja, particularly in the 12th century when canons written in no other language than Sanskrit were accepted as sacred. Thus Ramanuja was capable of bringing even the philosophically under-privileged into the fold of spirituality.

As a social reformer Ramanuja was the first among the Acharyas to admit the Harijans (in those days condemned as outcastes) into the fold of spiritual service to the Lord. Even today this can be witnessed in Melkote otherwise known as Tirunarayanapuram, where a Harijan leads the temple processions by blowing a trumpet. In fact Ramanuja named them as “Tirukkulattar” i.e. born in the “sacred lineage” or born in the family of goddess Lakshmi. Such social reforms are unheard of in the last several centuries except in the spiritual lineage of Ramanuja.

Who are we and where are we to write the biography of Ramanuja and his successors? We are convinced of our inability, lack of competence and understanding. Still, our awe and reverence for the greatness of Ramanuja urge us to write at least something about Ramanuja. The present work is a result of such strong desire. When emotion overpowers a person he forgets about his inabilities and inadequacies and speaks spontaneously. This is our “Vacika Kainkaryam” (service in the form of words) to Ramanuja,

trying to extol his greatness, however weak we may be in our expressions and so on. We hope seekers of spirituality will appreciate us for the small efforts we have made to ruminate the valuable incidents in the life of Ramanuja and his successors to some extent. If this small and inadequate effort is able to stir the feelings of seekers of spirituality, we would be blessed indeed. We beg pardon of the great devotees of Ramanuja for any deficiencies that might have crept into the body of this text due to our own inadvertency and shortcomings. We request the motivated readers to accept this small offering at the feet of Ramanuja and bless us to have more spiritual enlightenment. We are sure to make the necessary amendments, if any are suggested by the devotees of the Acharya, in succeeding editions.

– Prof. M.A.Lakshmithathachar

Sri
Srimate Ramanujaya Namah

INTRODUCTION

Aims of this book

When I first embarked upon writing a life history of the divine personality of Ramanuja, I knew that there were already quite a number of books on this topic, written by great stalwarts in the field. So I asked myself the question: 'Should I really write a separate book on this topic? Might another book not be redundant?' I was familiar with three other works in particular. The first was the one by Sri Alkondavilli Govindacharya published in the 1920s and republished recently. The second one was published by the Ramakrishna Order, written by one of its members Sri Ramakrishnananda, originally from Bengal. Another text was by a Sri Naimisharanya Das belonging to the ISKCON tradition. Each book, I felt, had its own uniqueness, but I felt that none of them provided the general overview of Ramanuja's life and philosophy which I felt was missing. The aims of this new book were to give a totally authentic account of the life of Ramanuja in simple and lucid English language while also illustrating some of the unique aspects of the distinctive system of philosophy he propagated. In many places in this text, details about how Ramanuja practiced and demonstrated the philosophy he himself preached have been

recounted. How far I have succeeded in these aims is for the readers and critics to judge.

Sri Ramanuja propounded a unique system of Philosophy that hitherto has remained not very well known either to scholars or the masses. Though there are several treatises in Sanskrit, TamiI and Mani-pravala languages written by succeeding Acarya-s which focus on Ramanuja's philosophy, there are not many books in English that depict both his life and philosophy in an authentic manner. Noticing this void, this attempt is being made. Ramanuja's life history forms the main focus of the text, but episodes in his life have also been developed to explain some important aspects of his Philosophy as well as certain problems that arise while trying to precisely understand his philosophy.

Ramanuja's philosophy: Meaning of the term 'Viśiṣṭadwaita'

It is well known that Ramanuja is the principle exponent of the philosophy of Viśiṣṭadwaita. However, many people, including scholars of other systems of Vedānta as well as Indian philosophy, often wonder what Viśiṣṭadwaita really means. We are able to understand 'Advaita' and its philosophy which specifically and clearly states that both the Jivatma (individual soul) and Paramatma (Supreme Soul) are identical i.e. one and the same and that there is no difference between them whatsoever. We are also able to understand 'Dvaita' and its philosophy which specifically and clearly states that

the jivatma (individual soul) and Paramatma (Supreme Soul) are totally different and can never become one and the same. However, what does the philosophy of Visistadwaita say? It is generally understood that this philosophy accepts that the jivatma (individual soul) and Paramatma (Supreme Soul) are different, yet also identical. Obviously, this can prompt many questions, not least: 'How can two objects be different yet identical?' For example, if there are two objects, say a pen and a book, the two objects are clearly different. Moreover, a pen and a book can never become one and there is no question of their ever being identical. However, there is also the example of the clay and the pot. Clay and pot are two different objects, but we can also say, "this pot is nothing but clay". Also, in the shaped form of a pot, we can also say that "this clay is nothing but a pot." Of course, a lump of clay and a pot are different, but at the same time it is irrefutable that the pot is clay, and shaped clay and a pot can be identical. This rather crude analogy illustrates the key point that two different things can be different, yet identical: it just depends at which stage or state one considers them. In Visistadwaita, the same is said of the jivatma (individual soul) and Paramatma (Supreme Soul). In terms of the individual soul and Supreme Soul, this can only be understood experientially, but in terms of a general analogy, the 'clay and pot' example shows how Visistadvaita views jivatman and paramatman. It is this seemingly plural viewpoint which makes Ramanuja's philosophy so distinctive, for some so appealing, and certainly so thought-provoking.

Questions about Visisdatvaita

Of course, such a philosophy is bound to provoke questions. In the Vedartha Samgraha, which was the first of Ramanuja's nine works, after providing a thorough explanation and analysis of all the prevailing theories of Vedanta, Ramanuja asks himself the following question:

तथा च भेदो वा अभेदो वा द्वात्मकता वा, वेदान्तवेद्यः कोयमर्थः
समर्थितो भवति?

(After all this, which is the reality that is understood to be substantiated by the Upanishads: is it Dualism, Non-Dualism or a combination of both?)

So after raising all these questions, what conclusion does Ramanuja arrive at? Is it 'Bheda' (Dualism) or 'Abheda' (Non-Dualism), or is it 'Dvyatmakata' (a combination of Non-Dualism or Dualism)? Which is the reality? It should be noted here that no other Acharya like Sankara or Madhva or any of their followers even dared to raise such a bold question in any of their works. Only Ramanuja has dared to ask such a question.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that Ramanuja does not recognise the validity of only one position. Indeed he states clearly:

सर्वस्यापि वेदवेद्यत्वात्सर्वं समर्थितम्

(Since all these three aspects are described in the Vedas, all three are to be upheld as correct.)

He then goes on to give specific instances where each aspect is specifically mentioned in the Upanishads and substantiates each of them separately. As Ramanuja did not give an answer which confines his philosophy to one view, the following questions might arise:

Is it right on the part of Ramanuja not to give a specific and precise reply after raising such a complicated question in a critical manner?

If he did not want to give a specific answer, why did he raise such a question in the first place?

Among scholars today, it is widely believed that Ramanuja is a votary of 'Bheda' between the Paramatma and Jivatma. If this is the case, then why did he not give an answer to that effect?

We read in the story of Ramanuja that he had a doubt as to whether the Paramatma and Jivatma were identical or different. In order to help him find out, he requested one of his preceptors, Kanchipurna to ask none other than Lord Varadaraja Himself and so resolve his doubt. We further read that Lord Varadaraja communicated through Kanchipurna that there indeed existed difference between the Paramatma and Jivatma. Even then why did Ramanuja not say: 'Bheda eva'?

There are several sutras in the Brahma Sutras like भेदव्यपदेशात् (१-१-१८) भेदव्यपदेशाच्चन्यः (१-१-२२)(श्रीभाष्यम्) that specifically state that difference does

indeed exist between the Paramatma and Jivatma. Did Ramanuja not take these Sutras into account? There are other Brahma Sutras like तदनन्यत्वम् आरम्भणशब्दादिभ्यः (२-२-१५), अविभागेन दृष्टत्वात् (४-४-४) (श्रीभाष्यम्) that also specifically mention the identity (oneness) of the two. In that case, did Ramanuja not take these Sutras into account? The fact is that Ramanuja's view encompasses all these Upanishadic teachings.

Finally, the question arises as to whether Sri Ramanuja should be considered as a 'Bheda-vadi' or 'Abheda-vadi' (votary of Non-Dualism or Dualism)?

Further, the school of Bhaskara advocates the theory of Bheda-abheda (both Dualism and Non-Dualism). Since it seems that Ramanuja accepts both, should his philosophy thus be classified along with the Bhaskara school as its sister school? No, this would not be correct since Ramanuja states specifically in the 'Vedārtha Sangraha' that:

ब्रह्मज्ञानपक्षादपि पापीयानयं भेदाभेदपक्षः

These are some of the questions and doubts that often come up when people consider Ramanuja's teachings and try to understand his philosophy in depth. Clearly it is difficult to resolve these questions. However, recalling the 'clay and pot' example, we can also understand how Ramanuja can accept 'Bheda' (Dualism), 'Abheda' (Non-Dualism) and 'Dvyatmakata' (a combination of Non-Dualism and Dualism): the same truth can look different from different perspectives

and the same matter can change form many times while still maintaining its essential nature.

Another important related issue that needs to be addressed and resolved by scholars today is the status of the world (referred to as 'jagat' in Sanskrit) according to Ramanuja. It is generally understood and well known that Ramanuja does not accept the Advaitic viewpoint that this Universe is totally illusory and hence false (mithya). In the Janmadyadhikarana, Ramanuja states specifically:

सत्यपदं निरुपाधिकसत्तायोगि ब्रह्माह । तेन विकारास्पदम्
अचेतनम्, तत्संसृष्टश्चेतनश्च व्यावृत्तः। (श्रीभाष्यम् – १-१-२)

(The word 'Satya' refers to the Supreme Brahman that is devoid of all 'vikara-s'. This is stated to show its difference from the 'cit', the sentient jivatma, and 'acit', non-sentient beings or matter)

This sutra refers to the well-known concept that the universe consists of two principle entities viz. cit and acit: sentient and insentient beings. When the word 'Satya' is explained as that which is different from the cit and acit, it suffices to say that cit and acit are not 'Satya' or real. If this is the case, does it not amount to accepting 'jagat' as 'Mithya' which is the theory of Advaitins that is refuted time and again? Here again we find a problem that is difficult to resolve.

As we can see then, several basic questions that are not specifically raised or answered by scholars of Visistadwaita remain to be resolved in a correct and thorough manner

that leaves no room for any doubt or ambiguity. Only when these issues are resolved will one be able to really understand the view of Ramanuja with regard to these very important matters that form the bedrock of his philosophy.

Several other such issues remain unanswered not only with regard to the philosophical aspects, but also with regard to the incidents of the life of Ramanuja.

To answer these questions, one has to struggle very hard to critically examine the statements of our predecessor preceptors and be blessed to receive the grace of Ramanujacharya himself. Further, to be such a recipient of his grace, one has to struggle hard and constantly meditate upon his divine form.

Possible solutions to certain of the problematic philosophical issues mentioned above are as follows:

Reconciliation of the issue of Non-Dualism and Dualism

Here, there are two issues: firstly the resolution of the conflict between the Non-Dualistic passages and Dualistic passages in the Upanishads; and secondly the resolution of Non-Dualism and Dualism itself.

Regarding the reconciliation of the Upanishadic passages that propound Non-Dualism and Dualism, it is well-known that Ramanuja cited certain passages of the Upanishads that mention the body-soul relationship between the Paramatma

and jivatmas: the Ghatak a-Shruti-s or reconciliatory passages. Since this aspect has been relatively well-established in the Vedartha sangraha and other texts, I will not dwell upon it in detail here.

As for the resolution of the issue of Non-Dualism and Dualism itself, there are so many aspects that have to be taken into consideration. This topic has been debated over the ages without any final conclusions being arrived at. It would require at least an elaborate thesis to deal with this question in an appropriate manner, and I would certainly not be so bold as to try to resolve it here.

The Shwetashwatara Upanishad is one Upanishad that aims at resolving all the apparent contradictions that exist within the Upanishadic passages. That is why it was held in great esteem by Sri Ramanuja. He quotes extensively from this Upanishad, though he does not consider it on par with the other ten principal Upanishads. This Upanishad, while describing the Paramatma (Supreme Soul) and Jivatma (individual soul) together, says “क्षीरे सर्पिरिवार्षितम्” “Ksheere sarpirivarpitam” which means that the Paramatma (Supreme Soul) exists within the Jivatma (individual soul) just as ghee exists within milk. This is another tangible example to illustrate these challenging philosophical points like that of the clay and the pot. The key point to consider is whether the ghee that exists within the milk is different from it. Since ghee is an integral part of milk and can never be separately identified, one has to say that the milk and ghee are the same. At the

same time, when one transforms the milk into curds and churns the curds, we see that butter emerges and further when the butter is heated, ghee is obtained. At this stage, the milk is totally different from the ghee. But from where did the ghee emerge? From milk only and not from anything else. This clear, everyday example does a good job of illustrating the complicated relationship between the Paramatma (Supreme Soul) and Jivatma (individual soul), a relationship which has provoked so many types of speculation and rhetoric.

Another important point to be noted is that the question as to whether the Paramatma (Supreme Soul) and Jivatma (individual soul) are different or not arises only due to our ignorance of the nature of both of them. No one asks the question whether a horse is different from a donkey since one knows both these objects very well. As has been mentioned, real understanding of the Paramatma and Jivatma can only come experientially. This question will not be there for one who has experienced both states.

One key point to remember when answering the enquiry as to the question whether the Parmatma (Supreme Soul) and Jivatma are identical or different is that we need to ask ourselves: 'When?'

The Upanishads describe how cit and acit existed in a non-descript form at dissolution, before creation. They were not different at the time of creation: but were part of one entity, Brahman. With creation, they were manifested in the

forms of cit: manifestation as jivatman; and as acit: manifestation as non-sentient beings. The Chandogya Upanishad says: “Sadeva soumya idam agre aseet”. सदेव सौम्येदमग्र आसीत्.

Here the word ‘agre’ meaning ‘long ago’ is important. Before the process of creation, there was only one entity that was known by the term ‘Sat’. At that time, there was no difference between the Paramatma and Jivatma or between the Paramatma and matter (acit). Another Upanishadic passage mentions this aspect as follows:

तद्धेदं तर्ह्यव्याकृतासीत् । तन्नामरूपाभ्यां व्याक्रियत् ।

(At that time this was in an un-manifest state. Then it was made manifest by bestowing a name and form).

This is further explained by Ramanuja in Sribhashyam – Prakrtyadhikaranam:

स्वशरीरतयापि पृथक्प्रतिपत्त्यनर्ह – सूक्ष्मदशापन्नम् ।

(The un-manifest state of the Brahman is so subtle that even the Brahman itself is unable to know that the Jivatma and Acit are different from itself)

These passages make it clear that before the process of creation, there was only one single entity, namely ‘sat’, in such a state that even the Brahman could not separately identify the ‘cit’ and ‘acit’ aspects within itself. Thus before the process of creation, the Brahman was one single entity without any other entity that could be distinguished from

the Brahman. Therefore at this stage it is pure 'abheda' (Non-Dualism) that existed. Of course, this can then prompt questions like 'was the Brahman attribute-less or did it possess attributes at that stage?' However, these issues are to be taken up in another context as they require a separate article to be dealt with properly.

Coming back to the meaning of the 'term' Vishishtadwaita, it is to be understood in the following manner; there are two parts: 'Visista' and the other 'Dwaita'. The term 'Vishista' means possessing 'Vishesha' or attributes, which is referred to as 'Sa-Vishesha' in Sanskrit. What are these 'Vishesha-s'? The Vishesha-s are Guna-s, Vighraha and Vibhuti. Guna-s mean the auspicious qualities that exist within the Brahman. This allows one to praise the Supreme Brahman. Unless one possesses some good or auspicious qualities, he cannot be praised. The second aspect is 'Vighraha' or a personal form. This gives scope for the devotee to meditate upon Brahman. Unless an entity has a form, it cannot be meditated upon. For example, no person can meditate upon space or ether which does not have a specific form. Therefore it is clear that the Brahman can be or become an object of meditation only if it has a form. The third aspect is the 'Vibhuti' it possesses; this means that the world that we are born and live in is the manifestation of the Brahman itself and is therefore not totally illusory as the Advaitins claim. Thus the meaning of Visishtadwaita is that the Brahman is a single unique entity that possesses three principle Vishesha-s as mentioned

above. This is actually a development of the 'Nirvishesha-Advaita' propounded by Shankaracharya and his followers. The main drawback in this theory of 'Nirvishesha-Advaita' is that Brahman is said to be devoid of qualities, form and manifestations. Without qualities, the Brahman cannot be praised or described; without a form, it cannot be meditated upon; without manifestations, it cannot be perceived in any manner and this world will have to be considered totally illusory, which is totally contrary to the experience of one and all. This will result in the situation that there is no relationship whatsoever between us the Jiva-s and the Paramatma or Supreme Brahman that exists within and without of all objects including our own selves. Therefore, noticing the drawbacks in this theory, Ramanuja suitably modified this theory and called it 'Savishesha-Advaita' or 'Visistadwaita'. This is the principle meaning of this term. However, there are a few other explanations that are given while interpreting this term, which are relatively well-known and hence will not be dealt with in this context.

* * * * *

All these technical aspects mentioned above are ones that I have gleaned from the words of my revered Acharya and Guru. None of it belongs to me as such. I hope I have done justice to the topic that I have dealt with here and presented it in the right perspective without hurting the sentiments of anybody whatsoever. I also request one and all to excuse me for any shortcoming that might have occurred in this

introduction or in the body of the text. I also solicit blessings of all elders and preceptors in leading a rewarding academic and spiritual life.

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Vidwan Sri U Ve. Prof. M.A.Lakshmithathacharya

First of all, I offer my humble pranams to my revered father and Acharya, Vidwan Sri U Ve. Prof. M.A.Lakshmithathacharya, who is also the co-author of this book. When I had completed certain portions of this book, I was facing certain difficulties which were hampering the progress of this work, due to my inexperience and ignorance. He was kind enough to lead me by the hand and help me reach logical conclusions. Vidwan Sri U Ve. Prof. M.A.Lakshmithathacharya, right from my childhood, has been the guiding force in my life. He had an exact vision as to how I should be moulded, the fields of knowledge that I should acquire expertise in, the precise way in which my career should be shaped and so on. I fall short of words to further elaborate on this. With his innate kindness and 'vatsalyam', he has been guiding me throughout my life, on all fronts including my personal life, career and all other facets that I can think of. Every bit of what I am today, I owe it all to this great personality and his vision. What else can I do other than offer my most sincere and heartfelt pranams to him, and also pray that he continue to guide me in all walks of life for many many years to come.

Mahamahopadhyaya Panditaratnam Vidwan Sri U. Ve. K.S.Varadacharya

I offer my humble pranams to my revered Guru Mahamahopadhyaya Panditaratnam Vidwan Sri U. Ve. K.S.Varadacharya, who has his own unique, comprehensive and holistic vision of the greatness of Ramanuja and his contribution to this world in various fields like philosophy, spirituality, social reform, temple reform et al and has established direct communion with Sri Ramanuja Himself in a transcendental state. It would not be out of place to mention here that he has devoted a major portion of his entire life to knowing the precise and exact view of Ramanuja by not only going through Ramanuja's works innumerable times and examining them in the finest detail, but also by scrutinizing many hitherto rather neglected passages that Sri Ramanuja has authored, but which previously have seldom been noted or seriously thought about by any worthy scholar with any amount of seriousness in assessing the exact intention of Ramanuja that made him author those particular passages. However, these aspects have not been specifically dealt with in this book since they require a very high level of scholarship, language skill and other associated expertise in properly presenting them in the right manner that does full justice to the issues being expounded. Further, another reason for not mentioning these aspects is that they are of too serious nature to be written in the form of a book. They are to be known only by a person who is totally dedicated, discerning and has an honest and sincere quest to know this

particular subject from the great Guru himself directly. However, a small attempt is made here to present the problems that arise or have been raised with regard to the Visistadwaita system of philosophy. How far this attempt is successful, the readers themselves have to judge.

Manoram Chaitanya Dasa

The authors and publishers are beholden to Sri Manoram Chaitanya Das, an ardent devotee of the Lord and philanthropist, who first initiated, through us, the task of writing this book on Sri Ramanuja. In fact, he intends to bring out the authentic life histories of all the Acharyas so that they may inspire the people of the world at large including the younger generations to come. He also intends to make facilities to publish other books such as 'Vidura-neeti' that speak about different values of life one has to adopt and imbibe. I wish Sri Manoram Chaitanya Das and also Sri Sachi Pran Das (Shankar) who introduced us to him, a long and prosperous life that is also spiritually rewarding.

Vidwan Dr. Sri U.Ve. Venkatakrishnan Swami

Vidwan Dr. Sri U.Ve. Venkatakrishnan Swami is one of the most versatile scholars of Srivaishnavism today, and the famous founder-editor of the Tamil religious monthly 'Geetacharyan' that has now been quenching knowledge-seekers' thirst for knowledge of different aspects of Srivaishnavism for more than 25 years. Sri MA Venkatakrishnan Swami is an authority on the life histories

of the Acharya-s who have adorned the Srivaishnava lineage. At present he is working as a Professor in the Department of Vaishnavism, University of Madras, Chennai. He is rendering yeoman service to the cause of Srivaishnavism by encouraging many people, young and old, ladies and gentlemen irrespective of their various affiliations, to study Srivaishnavism. He is also the author and publisher of many unique works on Srivaishnavism in Tamil, that include a magnum opus called 'Vaazhvum, Vaakkum' that gives an authentic, exhaustive account of the different incidents of the lives of our predecessor Acharya-s. He has taken great pains to go through the text in minute detail and has given invaluable suggestions for its improvement. He has also checked the authenticity of each and every aspect mentioned in the book based on the accepted authorities on the life of Ramanuja like the Guru-Parampara-Prabhavam of Pinbalagiya-Perumaljiyar and other allied texts. We are extremely grateful to this great scholar for taking great pains in this regard, despite the numerous demands on his time. We also request him to continue to give us valuable advice in our future endeavors that are similar to the present one.

Sri T.S. Krishnamachar is a person who is not very visible in public, but has been striving honestly and sincerely to support the present type of activity to spread the knowledge of our great forefathers through a Trust of which he is a trustee. The entire financial cost for the printing of this book

has been donated by him **in memory of Smt. & Sri Kalkunte Srirangachar.** We are greatly indebted to Sri Krishnamachar for his kind and appreciative gesture and pray to the Supreme Lord to grant him a long and prosperous life.

Sri MAN Prasad is a scholar and connoisseur in his own right. After successfully serving in industry for many decades in Mumbai, he has now settled in Bangalore, supporting and initiating many cultural and philanthropic causes. He has also founded the 'Kala-premi Foundation' that is promoting the cause of religion and fine arts among the masses. He has given many valuable suggestions in the preparation of this publication after going through the entire text in detail. We express our sincere thanks to him and request him to continue to guide us in all possible ways.

James Boag is a budding scholar of Indian philosophy and Sanskrit and a proficient scholar in English. As a student of Prof M.A.Lakshmithathachar, he has sincerely obeyed his preceptor by going through the text in detail from the point of view of English language and has greatly contributed to make the publication what it is today. We wish him all the best in his life and hope that he continues to serve such noble causes.

Prof MA Narasimhan, whom I see as my mentor in many aspects of my life, is a scholar whose vast knowledge in various fields has deeply inspired me. Right from my childhood, he has been a friend, philosopher and guide to

me. Being a person who has devoted a major portion of his life for spiritual pursuits, and a 'Yogi' in a true sense of the term, he is a role model for the youth of this generation as well as future generations. He has accomplished many enviable tasks in bridging the gulf between the oriental and occidental, ancient and modern systems of thought, without being noticed and is most appropriately known as 'Mauni' which I interpret as 'the silent accomplisher', a title which I consider entirely deserved. I pay him my respectful regards for his feedback after reading the text of this book and request his gracious self to continue to guide me in all my educative endeavors in future.

I also convey my respectful regards to my mother **Smt. M.A.Goda** for her blessings and my wife **Smt. Vidya** for her unstinted support in all my endeavours.

Many other persons have contributed in their own ways to help bring out this publication. They include **Mr. K. Lokesh**, an artist and graphic designer par excellence who is an expert in designing attractive cover pages. I am thankful to him for designing a beautiful cover page for this publication as well. I am also thankful to **Miss Anna Tosato** from Italy for her suggestions in improving the presentation, the **Trustees of the Samskriti Foundation**, Mysore, for publishing this book under their auspices, the proprietors of **M/s Tech Prints** for printing this book in an attractive manner, and all others who have helped in bringing out this publication.

Suggestions for improvement are solicited from one and all and will be incorporated in succeeding editions.

I dedicate this book to the Lotus feet of Bhavagan Sri Ramanuja.

– Dr. M. A. Alwar

One might wonder how of all the commentators, Sri Ramanuja alone was able to go through the entire gamut of the 'Srutis' and synthesise the various seemingly conflicting texts, the "Abesha Srutis", suggestive of the existence of no more than one single entity (viz) 'Brahman' and the 'Bheda Srutis' highlighting the difference between 'Brahman', the Supreme Lord, on the one hand, and the sentient beings and non-sentient matter on the other. It is indeed unique, the aura of judgment with which he has wound up each one of his commentaries on the Vedanta Sutras, declaring 'ithi sarvam saman jasan', that is, "Everything has been reconciled".

- Alkondavalili Govindacharya

Sri Râmânûja



Sri Ramanuja

Many philosophers have come and gone in this world, but the advent of a mystic philosopher is the rarest of rare events indeed. Mysticism is purely emotional and philosophy is purely logical. Yet Sri Ramanuja was able to bridge the gulf between the head and the heart and arrive at a universal philosophy. His compositions show a happy blending of a scholarly mind and a poetic heart.

The social reforms that he attempted to bring about show his great concern for the downtrodden. Knowing that all that is and all that is to come is only the manifestation of the Lord Himself, he lived without fear. For him, liberation and happiness were a single continuum which encompassed the physical, social, cultural, mental and spiritual spheres of human life. He made others see the Divine in man and the man in the Divine.

Background to the incarnation of Sri Ramanuja

*"Ananthah prathamam rupam lakshmanastu tatah param.
Balabhadrah trtiyastu kalau kashcit bhavishyati"*

Adishesha, the primordial serpent is engaged eternally in the service of the Almighty, Lord Narayana, in his eternal and exalted abode, the Vaikuntha. In the Treta Yuga (the period in history known as the Silver Age), when the Lord incarnated as Sri Rama, Adishesha accompanied Him, by being born as Lakshmana, just to serve Him. Similarly, in the Dwapara Yuga, (the Bronze Age) when the Lord incarnated as Sri Krishna, Adishesha again accompanied Him, being born as Balarama. The main purpose of the incarnation of the Lord is to destroy the forces of Adharma and to re-establish the reign of Dharma. In this Kali Yuga (Iron Age), Adishesha took incarnation, unaccompanied by Lord Narayana, as Ramanuja.

The reason for this is said to be that the previous incarnations of the Lord were not as successful as the Lord Himself had envisaged or would have wanted them to be. Even though Krishna proclaims himself (quite rightly) as almighty in the Bhagavad Gita:

“...adhyaji, mam namskuru; mameva eshyasi”

(“Worship Me alone. Prostrate to Me alone; Surrender unto Me, You will reach Me alone”).

He also makes it clear that in this world, if a person proclaims that He Himself is the Almighty, people do not generally value such statements, even if they are true.

“Ava-jananti mam mudhamanushim tanum ashritam”

(Even though I am verily the Almighty, generally people are

indifferent towards me thinking that I am an ordinary person, since I have taken a human form”).



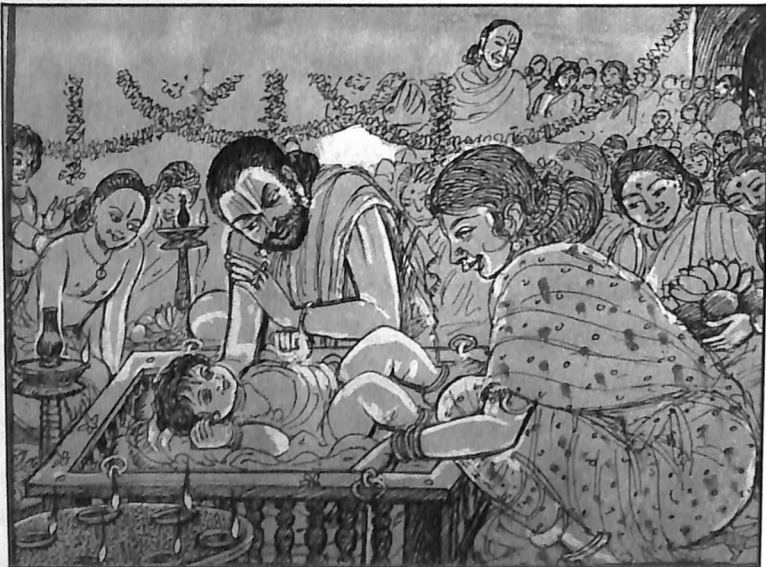
Sri Ramanuja, the incarnation of Adishesha

Knowing that the incarnations he had taken had not been as successful as envisaged, the Lord persuaded His own divine servants to take birth in the world, and continue the tasks He had initiated in this world. Their words were more valued than the Lord's, because they never said anything like "I am the Almighty Lord; Worship ME for fulfillment." Instead, the servants of the Lord who appeared on this earth always said: "He is verily the Almighty Lord; Please worship Him in order to attain liberation." This seemed to be more appealing to the people. Thus, the incarnations of the Lord's divine

servants have been more successful in terms of achieving the objectives of their incarnations. The life of Adishesha, the most beloved of the servants of the Lord Sriman Narayana, as Ramanuja, was one such incarnation.

Ramanuja appears in this world

At the time when Adishesha (the Primordial Serpent) took incarnation as Sri Ramanuja, due to the influence of Kali Yuga (The Iron Age), the authenticity of the Vedas had been questioned. Due to the advent of Buddhism, the Vedas could not command any respect and the subsidiary supportive texts of Vedic thought known as the Smritis and other allied works like the Itihasas and the Puranas were not in a position to influence the people at large, or help them lead virtuous



Sri Ramanuja appears amidst great rejoicing

lives. To rescue people from this hopeless situation, and to guide them towards the path of fulfillment, Sri Ramanuja appeared in this world in the “Pingala” Samvatsara (circa 1017), in the month of Chaitra, in the moonlit fortnight (Shukla Paksha), on the fifth day of the fortnight, Thursday, in the constellation of Aridra.

Sri Perumbudur – Sri Ramanuja’s birthplace

Sri Perumbudur is a quiet temple town near Chennai in South India. A pious Brahmin named Sri Aasoori Keshava Perumal dwelt here and was engaged in performing the Vedic rites.

At the time of Sri Ramanuja’s birth, Sri Yamunacharya was the leader of the Srivaishnava tradition. One of Yamunacharya’s premier disciples was Srishailapurna. Srishailapurna had dedicated his heart and soul to the service of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumalai. He had two sisters, Sri Devi (Kanthimathi) and Bhooma Devi (Dyuthimathi). The elder of Srishailapurna’s sisters, Sri Devi, was given away in marriage to Aasoori Keshava Perumal. Since Aasoori Keshava Perumal was engaged in the conducting of different Vedic yagnas (sacrifices), he was adorned with the honourific title “Somayaji”. In due course, he came to be known as “Keshava Somayaji”.

Ramanuja undergoes the sacramental samskaras

In due course, Keshava Somayaji performed the birth-ceremonies for his newly-born son, adhering with great

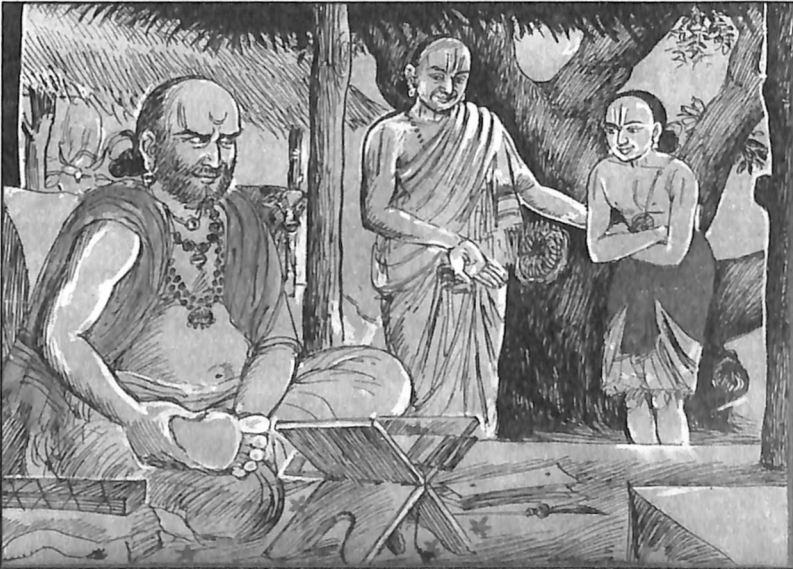
devotion to the shastraic injunctions. Having come to know of the birth of his nephew, Srishailapurna arrived at Sriperumbudur, on this auspicious occasion. He immediately noticed the extra-ordinary brilliance of the newborn boy and told Keshava Somayaji: "Your child is endowed with all the traits of a genius. He will master all the Shastras. In the Ramayana, we see that Lakshmana was so named because he could render all services to Rama, just like the Primordial Serpent does to the Lord. Similarly, your baby has the potential and privilege to serve the Lord to His heart's content. As such, it is in the fitness of things to name him Ramanuja (meaning "the younger brother of Sri Rama" - another name of Lakshmana)." Accordingly, Keshava



Sri Ramanuja entering the life of a householder

Somayaji named the newborn child “Ramanuja” in the “Namakarana” (naming ceremony), on the twelfth day after he was born, as ordained in the Shastras.

Soon after, at the appropriate times, the other ceremonies, like *Aksharabhyasa*, *Choula* and *Upanayana*, were performed for Ramanuja by his father. After *Upanayana*, Ramanuja began study of the Vedas, Angas and Upangas (subsidiary aspects of the Vedas), and very quickly gained mastery over these subjects. By the time he turned sixteen, he had mastered all the Shastras and become well versed in their exposition. In accord with the custom prevailing in those days, he was married to Rakshamba, a beautiful bride endowed with all good qualities.



Sri Ramanuja approaches Yadava Prakasha

Ramanuja and Yadava Prakasha

Soon after, in order to further his studies, Ramanuja was sent to Yadava Prakasha, a sanyasin-scholar who belonged to the Advaita tradition at a place called Tirupputkudi, situated near Kancheepuram. He was accompanied by his close cousin, Sri Govinda Bhattar.

Ramanuja was a brilliant student and instantly earned the admiration and goodwill of Yadava Prakasha. However, Ramanuja, whose intellect was always guided by his divine wisdom, would often see inadequacies and inconsistencies in Yadava Prakasha's explanations of the Scriptures.

Once, while Ramanuja was, as usual, giving oil massage to his teacher Yadava Prakasha, the teacher was explaining a passage from the Upanishads that described the beauty of the divine eyes of the Almighty as

“ tasya yatha kapyasam pundarikam evam aksini ”

Yadava Prakasha explained: “The word ‘kap’ means a monkey. The word ‘asa’ means ‘rump’. So ‘kapyasa’ means ‘the rump of a monkey’. ~~S~~ , this Vedic passage says that the divine eyes of The Almighty resemble the red rump of a monkey.” Highly sensitive Ramanuja was so hurt by this bad explanation and overwhelmed by grief. Instantly tears trickled down from his eyes and fell on the body of the preceptor.

Feeling the hot tears, Yadava Prakasha turned to Ramanuja in astonishment and asked: “What happened? Why are you in tears?” Ramanuja replied in a voice choked with emotion,

"O sire, Please forgive me. To compare the divine eyes of the Almighty, who is the very embodiment of all that is beautiful in this world, to the ... seat ..." Ramanuja faltered; so sensitive was he that he could not even utter the word 'rump', and continued: "...the seat of a monkey is totally incongruous. How can the scriptures, the very breath of the Lord, mean such a thing?"

Yadava Prakasha responded with irritation: "Ramanuja, what other meaning could there be? This has been the interpretation given by our masters. If you are so intelligent as to find fault with my interpretation, let me hear your interpretation."

Ramanuja, with all the humility at his command and with folded hands explained: "O revered one, how could a novice like me dare to interpret an Upanishadic passage? But in all sincerity, I feel that the meaning of this passage could be - the word 'Kapi' means the Sun and the word 'asa' means that which depends on or which is caused to bloom by the Sun - naturally meaning a lotus. So the meaning of the passage would be 'the divine eyes of the Almighty resemble a lotus.'"

Hearing this beautiful exposition of the scriptural passage, Yadava Prakasha was awe-struck. But he was also irritated. It had never occurred to him that this passage could be interpreted in such a beautiful manner. However, he could not tolerate the fact that his own student was able to interpret the Vedic passage better than him, and in such a beautiful manner that appealed to both head and heart.



Sri Ramanuja explains the meaning of the passage

The Plot to execute Ramanuja

Ramanuja continued offering new interpretations of Vedic passages for many days thereafter. Before long, Yadava Prakasha grew unable to tolerate this. He assembled his close disciples and told them: "All of you have accepted my exposition of the Vedic passages, only Ramanuja is opposing it. If he continues to do so, our school of thought is sure to suffer, and it will never get propagated. Hence, we have to find some permanent solution to this problem. That would be to, somehow, finish off Ramanuja." In response, the disciples suggested some possible solutions. However, Yadava Prakasha turned down these suggestions, saying that they would result in unnecessary complications and would be

sinful. But he did agree with their suggestion that all of them go to Kashi, and there in the bathing ghat known as Manikarnika, they would push him into the water and drown him.

Having this plan in his mind, Yadava Prakasha soon organized a tour to Kashi. Ramanuja, unaware of the wicked plan, innocently accompanied Yadava Prakasha to Kashi. Govinda Bhattar, his cousin, was also among the touring party. Since the other disciples knew that Govinda Bhattar was aware of the wicked plan, they took care not to allow him to be alone with Ramanuja. During the course of the journey, they happened to pass by the Vindhya mountain range. Seizing an opportune moment, Govinda Bhattar gestured to Ramanuja to accompany him to an isolated place. There he disclosed the plan of Yadava Prakasha and his other disciples to Ramanuja and urged him to leave immediately. Ramanuja, perturbed by the conspiracy, left the group and wandered off into the forest. Govinda Bhattar continued his journey with Yadava Prakasha and his disciples.

Having traveled a long distance in an unknown land, he soon became tired and sat under a tree in the dense forest. He was all alone and was anxious about the course he had to take, not knowing in which direction to proceed.

Ramanuja's escape

Just then, the Almighty Lord wanted to shower His divine grace on His dear devotee. Disguising Himself as a hunter,

along with His consort, He arrived in front of Ramanuja. Ramanuja was delighted to see them and asked, "From where have you come, and where are you heading to?" The couple replied, "We have come from the Siddha Ashrama in North India; we are heading towards Kancheepuram in the south." Ramanuja immediately told them "It would be my pleasure to accompany you to Kancheepuram," to which the Divine couple readily agreed. Ramanuja accompanied them and they travelled for a long time.

Soon twilight descended, and Ramanuja was tired. Ramanuja performed his evening ablutions, and continued to follow



The hunter couple leading Sri Ramanuja to Kanchi

them. Soon, it became pitch dark and as they could no longer proceed, they decided to stay under a large tree for the night. The huntress was feeling extremely thirsty, and the hunter suggested that he would search around and get her some water. Ramanuja offered to bring water himself, but was unable to do so in the pitch dark night, being in the midst of the dense forest. He felt depressed that he could not help quench the thirst of the couple who had been so helpful to him. Soon he fell asleep even as the hunter-couple were watching.

When Ramanuja woke up, the hunter-couple were nowhere to be seen. He wandered around to see if they could be found somewhere nearby. After a short while, he saw a few Brahmins. He approached them and asked: "O Sirs, which place is this"? The Brahmins were surprised at this question and replied "O Sir! How is that you are not familiar with this place, which is popularly known as Kancheepuram?" Ramanuja was awe-struck. He had been instantly transported all the way from the Vindhya to his own place, Kancheepuram. He now realized it was none other than the primordial couple Lord Narayana and His consort Lakshmi who had appeared before him the previous day and who had brought him back to his own place.

Arrival at Kancheepuram

Ramanuja marveled at the divine mercy the Lord had showered on him, even though he had not asked for it. He

then went on to have the divine darshan of Lord Varadaraja, the presiding deity of Kancheepuram. Situated in the present State of Tamil Nadu in South India, a historic city of numerous temples and the ancient capital of the noble dynasty of Pallava kings, Kanchi is one of the famous centres of the Srivaishnava religion. Ramanuja let the Lord of Kanchi know of his gratefulness for having helped him reach safely from the dense and dangerous forest of the Vindhya to his own place, Kancheepuram. As a token of his gratitude, he started serving Lord Varadaraja, by fetching the holy water for the "Tirumanjanam" (ritual bath) of the Lord everyday. This continued for some time.

Yadava Prakasha came back to Kanchi with his entourage. He was surprised and happy to see Ramanuja at Kanchi. He embraced Ramanuja and said, "O Ramanuja, how happy I am to see you! I was extremely worried about your safety when I found that you had gone missing from the touring party. I am relieved to see you hale and healthy." Ramanuja replied, "O Sir! I somehow got isolated from your entourage in the Vindhya forests. However, by the grace of the Lord, I was able to come back safely." Yadava then realized that Ramanuja was not an ordinary person. He felt that there was something extraordinary in this young prodigy. He instructed Ramanuja to continue to attend his classes. Ramanuja readily agreed and continued his studies under Yadava Prakasha.

Sri Yamuna arrives at Kanchi

At this time, a few Srivaishnavas who were engaged in the service of Lord Varadaraja, happened to visit Srirangam. They also visited Sri Yamunacharya to pay their respects. Yamunacharya was a great Acharya and devotee of Lord Vishnu. He was a peerless scholar and a pioneering exponent of the Visishtadwaita philosophy. He had authored many important works that were instrumental in re-establishing the Vedic Dharma and its subsidiary aspects. He had a burning desire to write a commentary on the Brahma Sutras that would bring out their true meaning in accord with the Scriptures. Yamunacharya was also the grandson of Sri Nathamuni. Nathamuni was a great Yogi, who had achieved God-realization, and was instrumental in the rediscovery of the Divya Prabandhams, the spontaneous, devotional outpourings of the Alvars - the Srivaishnava saints - in the form of hymns. These divine experiences of the Alvars eventually turned out to provide the guiding light for Ramanuja when he authored his magnum opus "Sri Bhashya" – an elaborate commentary on the Brahma Sutras.

The Srivaishnavas from Kanchi spoke to Yamunacharya about Ramanuja; describing his great personality that was blooming even as he was still a young man. They also mentioned that Ramanuja was studying under Yadava Prakasha. They told him about the debates that Ramanuja used to have with Yadava in the course of his lectures, including the debate about the Vedic passage "Kapyasam..." and Ramanuja's beautiful new

explanation. Yamunacharya was greatly impressed by Ramanuja's budding genius. He could immediately realize that Ramanuja was no ordinary person, but the incarnation of a divine being who had appeared in this world to re-establish the Vedic Dharma and guide people to follow the right path to attain fulfillment. He wanted to see Ramanuja in person. He immediately proceeded to Lord Ranganatha, the presiding deity of Srirangam, and prayed for permission to visit Kanchi. Having obtained this, he started for Kanchi accompanied by the Srivaishnavas who had come there. On the way, they visited the Divya desam of Tirukkovilur, one of the 108 chosen sites of the Lord. It was the place exalted by the meeting of the three early Alvars long ago. They worshipped the deity at that place and proceeded to Kanchi.

Yamunacharya blesses Ramanuja

The city of Kanchi is a place which commands great reverence. According to Indian lore, it is one of the seven cities in India which unfailingly confers liberation to its citizens. It is also one of the four most important holy places for Srivaishnavas. Yamuna directly proceeded to the temple of Lord Varadaraja. He was welcomed by Sri Kanchipurna, one of his many disciples. Even though Kanchipurna was born in the Vaishya caste, he was such a great devotee of the Lord that the Lord used to converse with him. Kanchipurna was engaged in the daily service of Lord Varadaraja. He prostrated before Yamuna and welcomed him. Kanchipurna, then led Yamuna to the sanctum sanctorum of Lord Varadaraja and



Sri Yamuna showering his grace on Sri Ramanuja

arranged for the darshan. Yamuna, after having the darshan of the Lord and partaking of the teertham and prasadam, then visited the other shrines around the main temple.

Precisely at that time, Yadava and his students happened to pass by the temple premises. Yamuna immediately noticed them and asked Kanchipurna: "Which one of the students is Ramanuja?" Kanchipurna pointed towards Ramanuja who was in the middle of the group, and said: "There he is; the one who is tall, well built, with beautiful eyes, and with a divine radiance. Verily he is Ramanuja." Yamuna was delighted to see Ramanuja. He could immediately gauge the young man's inner worth. He showered his blessings on Ramanuja and said, "He verily is the person, for whose arrival we have all been waiting. He is the one who will restore the Vedic Dharma to its original glory." Having said this, he immersed

himself in meditation of the Lord Varadaraja and requested the Lord to shower His Divine Grace on Ramanuja, to enable him to accomplish the tasks for which he had appeared in this world. He then addressed Kanchipurna and asked him to take good care of Ramanuja.

Ramanuja cures the Princess of Kanchi

At that time, the King of Kanchi was under distress. His daughter was possessed by an evil spirit and he was looking for a person who could rid her of this affliction. When the King came to know about Yadava Prakasha, he sent for him through his guards. Yadava Prakasha went to the palace with his students, accompanied by Ramanuja. Yadava Prakasha approached the princess who was possessed and started chanting mantras to drive away the evil spirit. However, the



Sri Ramanuja curing the princess

evil spirit refused to budge. The evil spirit talked to Yadava Prakasha and explained the details of the previous birth of Yadava Prakasha as well as the reasons for its taking possession of the princess. Yadava Prakasha then asked the evil spirit about the remedial measures to be followed. The spirit replied, "If Ramanuja, one of your students, who is the incarnation of a divine being, commands me to leave, I will leave the princess." Yadava Prakasha requested Ramanuja to do so. As per the instructions of Yadava Prakasha, Ramanuja commanded the evil spirit to leave the princess. The spirit immediately prostrated at the feet of Ramanuja and left the princess. Yadava Prakasha marveled at the greatness of his disciple Ramanuja.

Yamuna's thoughts

Soon after, Yamunacharya returned to Srirangam. Since he himself was getting old, he felt that he should appoint a successor to take on the mantle of heading the noble Srivaishnava Sampradayam (tradition). While he was thinking about this, thoughts of Ramanuja would frequently come to him. He felt that Ramanuja was the right person to succeed him. He also felt that Ramanuja should be weaned away from Yadava Prakasha and further educated under a proper guide. He then prayed to Lord Varadaraja that Ramanuja would move away from Yadava Prakasha, become his disciple and then succeed him by taking up the mantle of propagating the Srivaishnava tradition after his departure.

Ramanuja renounces Yadava Prakasha

Shortly thereafter, when Yadava Prakasha was conducting his classes, he quoted certain Vedic passages and interpreted them in such a way that it implied that the Jivatma (individual soul) and Paramatma (Universal soul) were totally one and the same and there existed no difference between them whatsoever. Ramanuja openly contested this point of view, and proved that the views expressed by Yadava Prakasha were untenable. At this, Yadava Prakasha became very angry. He told Ramanuja not to attend his class any more, and that he should find an appropriate guru who could answer his queries in a better manner. Ramanuja then decided to give up Yadava Prakasha's classes.

Ramanuja and Sri Kanchipurna

Ramanuja returned home and informed his mother about what had occurred between him and Yadava Prakasha. Ramanuja's mother then instructed him to meet Kanchipurna who was one of the greatest devotees of Lord Varadaraja. Ramanuja immediately went to meet Kanchipurna and was instantly impressed on observing the manner in which Kanchipurna conducted himself. Ramanuja asked Kanchipurna to guide him regarding the future course he should take. Kanchipurna instructed Ramanuja to continue bringing the holy water for the ritual bath of Lord Varadaraja, everyday. Ramanuja immediately accepted the orders of Kanchipurna and would bring the holy water from a nearby

well designated for that purpose with great devotion and dedication, and offer it to the Lord.

This continued for sometime. About that time, Yamunacharya fell seriously ill. Yamuna had five important, dedicated disciples. They fell at the feet of Yamuna and asked him to give them commandments that they should follow in the future. Yamuna gave each of them commandments that they had to follow. He then directed them to bring Ramanuja to Srirangam immediately so that he could see him and give him the necessary guidance.

Mahapurna, one of Yamuna's premier disciples (also known as Periya Nambi) immediately started for Kanchi. He arrived



Sri Yamuna in his final hour

at Kanchi and met Ramanuja near the well, where Ramanuja was collecting the holy water to offer to Lord Varadaraja as usual. When he found Ramanuja, Periya Nambi recited a sloka from Stotra Ratna composed by Yamuna. On hearing the sloka Ramanuja was instantly attracted and asked who was its author. Periya Nambi told him it was his Acharya Yamuna's. Ramanuja wanted to see Yamuna immediately and fell at Mahapurna's feet. Mahapurna told Ramanuja that Yamunacharya wanted to meet him urgently too and hence they had to proceed to Srirangam without delay. Ramanuja started for Srirangam immediately. He left without informing either his wife or mother feeling that the call from the Acharya was most sacred and had to be responded to immediately.

Ramanuja at Srirangam

After a long and arduous journey, Ramanuja and Mahapurna reached Srirangam and went straight to the residence of Yamuna. But alas! By the time they were able to reach the place, Yamunacharya had already passed away. Ramanuja was shocked and unable to contain his grief. It was his cherished desire of many, many years to meet and worship Yamunacharya, about whom he had heard so much. He collapsed and swooned at the feet of the mortal remains of Yamuna. The other disciples of Yamuna sprinkled water on Ramanuja and helped him regain consciousness. As he regained his awareness, Ramanuja noticed that three fingers of Yamunacharya's right hand were folded. He asked the

disciples about this and was told: "O Sire, Yāmunācharya was very eager to meet you. He was very hopeful of meeting and instructing you. But alas! That was not to be. The three folded fingers represent the three important tasks that Yāmuna wanted you to accomplish:

1. Author a commentary on the Brahma Sutras in accordance with the views of the previous Acharyas, expounding the Visistadwaita viewpoint
2. Author a commentary on the Tiruvaymoli of Nammalwar, and
3. Popularize the names of Parashara Maharishi and Vyasa Maharishi to express his gratitude to them."

Ramanuja took a vow then and there: "If I am the recipient of the grace of Sri Yāmuna, if I am hale and healthy, and if the Almighty wishes it to be so, I will accomplish these tasks, to the satisfaction of this great preceptor." As soon as Ramanuja uttered those words, to the amazement of all the devotees, Yāmuna's three folded fingers straightened. Yāmuna's other disciples blessed Ramanuja and said: "O Sir, you are verily the recipient of the grace of this Acharya. May God bless you in carrying out your vow of accomplishing these tasks to the satisfaction of Yāmunācharya. You will be the successor to carry on the divine task of protecting and propagating this divine Srivaishnava Sampradayam of ours. May God bless you!" Ramanuja then prostrated to Mahapurna and Yāmuna's other senior disciples before starting back for Kanchi.

Ramanuja and Sri Kanchipurna

Ramanuja then returned to Kanchi and immediately went to meet Kanchipurna. Sri Kanchipurna was depressed to know that Yamuna had left for his divine abode. Ramanuja then narrated the events that had taken place at Sriragam. Kanchipurna then blessed Ramanuja and assured him that by the grace of Lord Varadaraja, Ramanuja would be able to complete the tasks that he had vowed to accomplish at Srirangam. Ramanuja continued to offer the holy water to Lord Varadaraja for the sacred bath everyday.

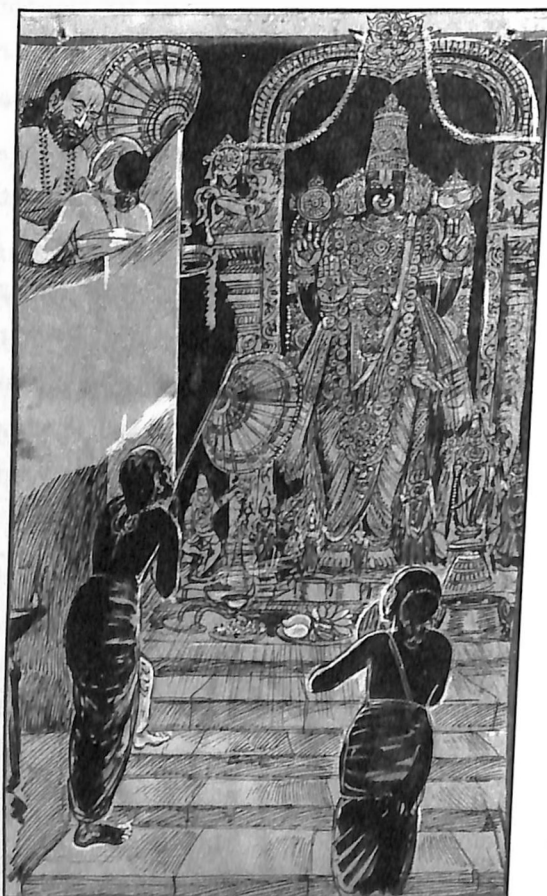
In due course, the relationship between Kanchipurna and Ramanuja blossomed. Ramanuja realized that Kanchipurna was a great devotee, and also a realized soul. He also came to know that Kanchipurna was so close to the Lord that he could verily converse with him. One day, he approached Kanchipurna and asked him to accept him as his disciple and initiate him into the path of divinity. Despite repeated requests by Ramanuja, Kanchipurna declined to do so, saying that he was born of a lower caste, and would not like to go against the prevailing custom. Ramanuja had no other option but to accept Kanchipurna's diktat.

The next day, Ramanuja invited Kanchipurna to dine at his residence. Ramanuja then gave necessary instructions to his wife to prepare some delicious dishes that would please the Lord residing within the hearts of His devotees. After due preparations, Ramanuja went out to fetch Kanchipurna in order to bring him to his home. In the meantime, Kanchipurna

arrived at Ramanuja's residence by another route. Since he was in a hurry to go to the temple to serve the Lord, he had his lunch and left Ramanuja's residence quite quickly. After Kanchipurna had left, Ramanuja's wife cleaned the place where he had eaten his lunch, and deeming the arrival of Kanchipurna a pollution, bathed afresh. Meanwhile, Ramanuja, not finding Kanchipurna at his residence, returned home disappointed. He was surprised to see that his wife had bathed afresh. Ramanuja's wife, ignorant of her husband's intentions said: "Since Kanchipurna, a person of a lower caste, had lunch here, I cleaned the place with cow-dung. I also gave away the remnants to the servant and as atonement for feeding a person of lower caste, I have bathed." Ramanuja was upset at his wife's attitude. He felt, 'Kanchipurna is a realized soul and a great devotee of the Lord; it was to partake his *prasadam* (the food made sacred by his partaking of it) that I had invited him for lunch. But alas! That was not to be!' Still, he did not say anything. Instead, he went straight out again, in search of Kanchipurna. After finding and offering his prostration to Kanchipurna, Ramanuja said, "O revered one, I am a troubled soul. I am in need of proper guidance. My heart and head are torn asunder. I need a guru who can be my spiritual guide. People say that the Lord Varadaraja Himself converses with you. Can you be kind enough to ask the Lord on my behalf about my doubts and about whom I should turn to for guidance and solace." Ramanuja then told Kanchipurna about the doubts he had had for a long time.

That night, Kanchipurna approached Lord Varadaraja and while he was alone with the Lord, asked Him the questions put forth by Ramanuja. The Lord was happy to answer Ramanuja's questions and directed Kanchipurna to convey to Ramanuja that:

I. I am the Ultimate Reality



Sri Kanchipurna clears Sri Ramanuja's doubts

2. There exists difference between the individual soul and the supreme soul.
3. Total Surrender unto the Lord is the right path for liberation
4. Remembrance of the Almighty at the time of death is not imperative for a Prapanna (a person who has surrendered unto Me)
5. Liberation is attained only after the soul leaves the body
6. You may approach Mahapurna for initiation into the Spiritual path.

Kanchipurna conveyed these six answers that were directly told to him by the Lord Himself. Ramanuja was delighted to listen to these words that cleared his doubts. He had obtained answers to the questions that had been disturbing him for a long time, from the Lord Himself. He gratefully fell at Kanchipurna's feet.

Sri Mahapurna initiates Ramanuja into the Spiritual Path
Meanwhile, in Srirangam, soon after the last rites of Yamunacharya had been performed, the Srivaishnava leaders approached Mahapurna and asked him about appointing a worthy successor to Yamuna. Mahapurna reminded them of Yamuna's words and also about the events that had occurred after Yamuna's passing. He pointed out that Yamuna himself had clearly willed that Ramanuja should take up the mantle of succeeding him. The Srivaishnava leaders agreed with Mahapurna and urged him to proceed to Kanchi to fetch

Ramanuja and establish his seat at Srirangam. Mahapurna started for Kanchi immediately.

Having known from the Lord Himself that it was Mahapurna whom he should approach for initiation, Ramanuja too started for Srirangam without delay. It so happened that Mahapurna and Ramanuja met on the way at a place called 'Madhurantakam'. Ramanuja was overwhelmed to meet Mahapurna; he was delighted that his preceptor himself had come all the way to bless him. Mahapurna was equally elated to meet Ramanuja. He embraced Ramanuja. Ramanuja then requested Mahapurna to initiate him then and there. Mahapurna suggested that they go to Kanchi and do the initiation there. Ramanuja replied "O Sire! Due to a delay of a few moments, I was deprived of the privilege of meeting Yamuna. This life is as temporary as a flash of lightning; hence I beg that you may be so gracious as to initiate me into the spiritual path here and now." So saying he fell at Mahapurna's feet. Mahapurna appreciated Ramanuja's sense of urgency about entering the spiritual path and raised him from his feet. They then proceeded to the temple of Sri Rama in Madhurantakam. Under a tree in the temple grounds, Mahapurna initiated Ramanuja into the five-fold Samskara. As part of this, he also taught the three most important mantras to Ramanuja. He said, "I am performing this purely as the representative of Yamunacharya. Hence it is Yamuna who is your real Acharya. I am only an instrument in his hands."



Sri Mahapurna initiates Sri Ramanuja

With the initiation complete, Mahapurna and Ramanuja proceeded to Kanchi. Mahapurna accepted Ramanuja's request to stay at his own residence and teach him spiritual matters and other related issues that were embedded in the Divya Prabandhas of the Alvars. Mahapurna then stayed with Ramanuja and taught him all that was to be taught in the short span of six months. In this time, Ramanuja was able to attain complete and in-depth knowledge of the Divya Prabandhas as well as the other Sastras.

Ramanuja's discord with his wife

Once, a poor Srivaishnava arrived at the residence of Ramanuja, early in the morning. Famished, the visitor begged

Ramanuja for some leftover food. Ramanuja asked his wife to see whether there was any food left over from the previous day. Rakshamba replied that not even a small morsel of food was left. Ramanuja doubted the truth of her words and proceeded to the kitchen to see for himself. As he entered the kitchen, he saw that there was quite a lot of food left over from the previous day. His wife's attitude upset him. He expressed his concern seriously, and let her know that it was improper on her part to have refused food to a hungry person.

Sri Mahapurna leaves Kanchi

The classes of Mahapurna were going on as usual and were nearing completion. One day, Ramanuja was immersed in



Sri Mahapurna leaves Kanchi

his daily ablutions as usual. Soon after performing the daily rituals, he proceeded to the place where Mahapurna was residing. However, to his surprise, Mahapurna was not to be found there. On enquiry, he learnt that Mahapurna had suddenly left for Srirangam with his wife. Ramanuja was greatly worried as Mahapurna had abruptly left his house, without even informing him. After further enquiries he was informed by a member of the household: "O Sir, Your wife had a quarrel with the wife of Mahapurna, near the well. It seems that when both of them were drawing water from the well, some water happened to fall from the pitcher of Mahapurna's wife to your wife's pitcher. Your wife objected to it saying that the water she was drawing was thus polluted. Then there was an argument, and after that Mahapurna left for Srirangam immediately, without informing you." Ramanuja was greatly overcome with indignation at the behavior of his wife.

Ramanuja renounces his wife

Ramanuja was greatly perturbed that, of all people, it was his wife who was a thorn in his flesh, obstructing his spiritual pursuits. The Sastras ordain that a wife should fully cooperate in the spiritual evolution of her husband. In his case however, Ramanuja felt that the reverse was true and his wife was obstructing his progress. He deemed that she had committed three grave mistakes.

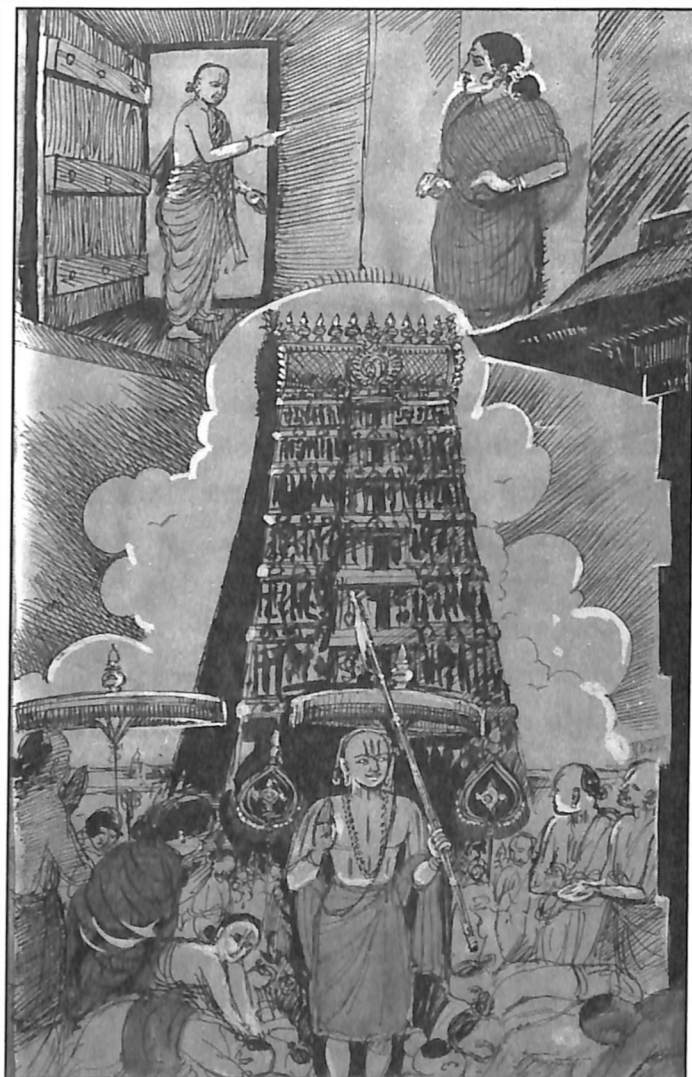
Firstly, she had behaved in an improper manner in the case of Kanchipurna, which was a case of 'Bhagavata-Apacharam' (Offending a true devotee of the Lord). The Sastras say that the Lord generally forgives those who have offended Him, but that he never forgives those who offend his true devotees. Hence offending the true devotees of the Lord is a graver sin than offending the Lord Himself.

Secondly, she had refused food to a hungry guest (*atithi*). According to the scriptures, an *atithi* is to be treated as the Lord Himself, and should be entertained even at the cost of one's own discomfort. However, Rakshamba, flouting these norms, declined food to a needy person, despite food being readily available. This was the second inexcusable mistake on her part.

The third offence proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. Rakshamba's quarrelsome nature had resulted in Ramanuja's own Acharya deserting him without warning.

These three mistakes were all 'Bhagavata-Apacharams' for which it is said there is no proper atonement. Just as the husband takes credit for the good conduct of his wife, he also has to partake of any discredit that occurs due to her bad conduct. As such, Ramanuja would also be held equally responsible for his wife's sinful acts, and would have to undergo punishment for them.

Considering the three grave mistakes committed by his wife, Ramanuja now deemed it proper to separate from his wife.



**Sri Ramanuja undertakes Sanyasa
after renouncing his wife**

Not only was she not cooperating in his spiritual progress, she was actually hindering it. He then made up his mind to renounce the worldly way of life as a householder and undertake Sanyasa.

He informed his wife of his intentions, returned all the precious materials that belonged to her, and after making necessary arrangements for her future sustenance, urged her to return to her parents' house.

Ramanuja takes Sanyasa

Ramanuja then entered the temple complex of the Lord Varadaraja at Kanchi. At the entrance is a famous holy pond called 'Anantha Saras'. He plunged into the pond, bathed there and purified himself. He then proceeded to the sanctum sanctorum of Lord Varadaraja. In his own mysterious way, it was the Lord himself who urged Ramanuja to take up Sanyasa granting him the holy saffron robes and the Tri-danda (a combination of three sticks tied together, signifying that the holder has achieved total control over the three facets of human behaviour: mind, body and speech) the distinct symbols of a Sanyasin. Ramanuja gratefully accepted these. He was thus initiated into Sanyasa by none other than Lord Varadaraja Himself. He had renounced everything that was worldly, and had achieved complete control over all his senses. He had also overcome the six enemies that exist within every human being: Kama (lust), Krodha (anger), Lobha (greed), Moha (illusion), Mada (pride) and Matsarya

(jealousy). He had also developed his many noble qualities, foremost of which was his compassion and infinite mercy for the downtrodden. Recognizing these divine qualities in Ramanuja, Lord Varadaraja Himself conferred the title “Yati Raja” (the king among Sanyasins) on Ramanuja and also named him “Ramanuja Muni”.

Lord Varadaraja was overjoyed to have granted Sanyasa to Sri Ramanuja. The Lord knew that henceforth Ramanuja would be able to achieve the mission for which he had appeared on this earth, the mission of the Lord Himself. The Lord felt content since the foundation had been laid for the renaissance and the resurgence of the Vedic Dharma.

The Lord then instructed Kanchipurna to establish a suitable place for Ramanuja to stay. In accord with the Lord’s wishes, Kanchipurna found a suitable location for Ramanuja’s residence in Kanchi.

Sri Ramanuja acquires the assistance of disciples

After undertaking the institution of Sanyasa, Ramanuja started strictly following the regulations governing the way of life of one seeking spiritual emancipation. He gratefully remembered the blessings of Yamunacharya, and mentally offered his obeisance to him. He then started to think about carrying out the tasks that he had vowed to undertake. He realized that he should have the assistance of good scholars who were also good devotees of the Lord. Such persons’ assistance would be vital in establishing the philosophy of

Visistadwaita. His thoughts went to Govinda Bhattar, his cousin and erstwhile classmate. At that time, Govinda Bhattar was living in a place called Kalahasti, worshipping in a temple of Lord Shiva. Sri Ramanuja sent a messenger to Srisailapura, his own maternal uncle, asking him to bring Govinda Bhattar back into the Srivaishnava fold.

Two prominent persons came to know about Ramanuja taking Sanyasa and becoming 'Yati Raja'. They were Kuresha and Mudali Andan. They arrived at Kanchi and immediately approached Ramanuja and fell at his feet. They humbly requested Ramanuja to accept them as his disciples and initiate them into the five sacramental samskaras. Ramanuja acceded to their request and imparted the five sacramental samskaras



**Sri Ramanuja with Sri Kuresha and
Sri Mudali Andan**

to them. Kuresha and Mudali Andan were so devoted and dedicated to Ramanuja that they were with him all the time and would assist him in all his tasks. Both of them had achieved mastery over the Vedas, Vedangas, Itihasas, Puranas and all the Sastras.

Yadava Prakasha becomes Ramanuja's disciple

Once, Yadava Prakasha's mother visited the temple of Lord Varadaraja. After worshipping the Lord, she happened to see Ramanuja, who was now a Sanyasin. She was instantly impressed at the radiance emanating from Ramanuja. She approached him and spoke to him. Ramanuja, recognizing her, asked about the well being of Yadava Prakasha. After a brief discussion, she went home.

Soon after, she met Yadava Prakasha and told him about Ramanuja's evolution into a great personality. She urged Yadava Prakasha to meet Ramanuja personally. Yadava Prakasha was happy to hear this. He then remembered the greatness of Ramanuja, which had been well proven in many instances in which he too had had a part to play. He remembered the words of the evil spirit which had possessed the princess of Kanchi, where Ramanuja was described as the incarnation of a divine being. He also remembered that the Lord Himself had guided Ramanuja from the Vindhyas back to Kanchi, when Yadava Prakasha himself had plotted to kill him. He also remembered how in the classes Ramanuja used to attend, he would always show a remarkable

combination of great genius coupled with unparalleled modesty. He now felt that he should atone for the wrongs he had done to Ramanuja.

Up until this time, Yadava Prakasha had been a sanyasin who had given up the Shikha Yagnopavitam, holding a single danda (staff) instead of three dandas. Now he realized that giving up the Shikha Yagnopavitamas part of taking up Sanyasa was against the Vedic principles. Hence he wanted to take Sanyasa according to the right procedure. He also came to know that it was the will of Lord Varadaraja to do so.

He immediately sought Ramanuja. He fell at the feet of Ramanuja, who welcomed him with respect. Ramanuja recognized Yadava Prakasha's honest intentions. He then convinced Yadava Prakasha about the meanings of the ambiguous Vedic passages that had been bones of contention between them in previous years. Yadava Prakasha realized and accepted his mistakes. Ramanuja then performed the necessary rituals and initiated him into the right way of Sanyasa afresh, gave him the five sacramental samḍaras, and named him "Govinda Jeeyar". Later, following Ramanuja's instructions, Yadava Prakasha authored a work called "Yati Dharma Samucchayah", which sets out the code of conduct for Sanyasins. Ramanuja read the work full and was greatly impressed by Yadava Prakasha's erudition. In due course Yadava Prakasha passed away, meditating on the feet of Ramanuja, and attained liberation.

Ramanuja leaves for Srirangam

At this time Srirangam was already the epicenter of Srivaishnava activity. When the Srivaishnavas of Srirangam came to know about the greatness of Ramanuja, they discussed among themselves and decided to request the Lord Ranganatha to bring Ramanuja to Srirangam. Lord Ranganatha conveyed His acceptance and a request was sent to Lord Varadaraja to part with Ramanuja and send him to Srirangam. While Lord Varadaraja was reluctant to part with the company of Ramanuja, after some intense persuasion by some great Srivaishnavas, Lord Varadaraja finally agreed. This was conveyed to Ramanuja who then went to the sanctum sanctorum of Lord Varadaraja, and took his consent to leave for Srirangam.

On an auspicious day, accompanied by his disciples, Ramanuja left Kanchi for Srirangam. As soon as Ramanuja and his party arrived at Srirangam, there was tremendous rejoicing and he was received with the honour befitting for such a great person, as had been decreed by Lord Ranganatha. Later, Lord Ranganatha bestowed the title of “Udaiyavar” (‘Owner of the two regions’) to Ramanuja, as a mark of honour and respect and proclaimed that: “Henceforth, by my decree Ramanuja can command anything he wishes in this physical world (Lila vibhuti) as well as in the eternal divine world, the world beyond (Nitya vibhuti), at any time.”

In due course, having established his headquarters at Srirangam, Ramanuja started implementing the divine tasks assigned to him by the Lord.

Ramanuja and Goshthipurna

Ramanuja is known to have had five preceptors (Acharyas). One among them was Goshthipurna. He used to stay at the exalted Divya Desam (chosen site of the Lord) known as Tirukkottiyur, about a hundred miles from Ramanuja's headquarters at Srirangam. Mahapurna, the first and foremost among the preceptors of Ramanuja, directed Ramanuja to go to Goshthipurna to learn the inner, hidden meanings of the three esoteric Vyapaka mantras, the chanting of which is said to be one of the most basic practices a Srivaishnava is supposed to undertake as part of his daily routine.

The three principal Vyapaka mantras are named as follows:

1. Tiru Mantra (also known as the "Mula Mantra") : This mantra is known as the Mantra Raja, or the king of all mantras.
2. Dvaya mantra : This mantra is known as the Mantra Ratna, or the gem among all mantras.
3. Charama Shloka: There are three types of Charama Shloka:
 - i. Varaha Charama Shloka
 - ii. Sri Rama Charama Shloka
 - iii. Sri Krishna Charama Shloka. This last one is the one that is given most commonly.

Even though Mahapurna had already preached these mantras to Ramanuja while initiating him unto the Srivaishnava faith, he wanted Ramanuja to become familiar with the esoteric

meanings of these mantras from Goshtipurna, who was an expert in the field.

Goshtipurna also had a reputation for being a hard taskmaster who would treat his disciples purely on merit. Ramanuja, as per the directions of his primary preceptor Mahapurna, started for Tirukkottiyur and after a long and arduous journey, reached Tirukkottiyur. He went straight to the residence of Sri Goshtipurna, and knocked on the door. Goshtipurna did not immediately open the door, but instead inquired from within, "Who is it?" Ramanuja humbly replied, "It is I, Ramanuja". Goshtipurna immediately responded in an abrupt and brusque tone, "Come after I have died!" Unable to understand Goshtipurna's words, Ramanuja was perturbed and had no option but to return to Srirangam.

Once he was back in Srirangam he narrated what had happened to his principal preceptor Mahapurna. Mahapurna simply smiled and said, "Please continue the effort to meet Goshtipurna and try to know the esoteric meaning of the mantras. He is the best person to impart the knowledge to you." Ramanuja agreed. Thus, Ramanuja repeated the long and arduous journey to Tirukkottiyur to meet Goshtipurna; and he repeated the journey several times. On each occasion, when he reached Goshtipurna's dwelling, he was confronted with the same question. However, Ramanuja saw no other option but to reply as he had done the first time, with his truthful answer: 'It is I, Ramanuja.' But each time,

Goshtipurna replied in the same vein: 'Come after I have died!' Then, not even having managed to get to see Goshtipurna, Ramanuja would trudge back to his master, crestfallen. This continued until Ramanuja had made the journey seventeen times. On the eighteenth occasion, Ramanuja was determined to break the deadlock. Once again he trod the lengthy path to Tirukkottiyur, but this time he was hopeful that he would be able to meet Goshtipurna. On reaching the master's residence, he knocked at the door as before, and as usual he encountered the same question. This time however, instead of replying with "I", Ramanuja said: "This is Adiyen (humble servant)." Goshtipurna was delighted at this answer, and immediately opened the door and welcomed Ramanuja.

What is the significance of the reply Ramanuja had given this time around? Each time, when Ramanuja went to Goshtipurna's house and knocked on the door, Goshtipurna would ask: "Who is it?" And Ramanuja would reply, "It is I, Ramanuja" upon which Goshtipurna immediately used to respond in an abrupt and brusque tone: "Come after I have died!" Ramanuja had pondered over the riddle of what Goshtipurna had said: 'What does he exactly mean? How can I go to him and meet him after he is dead?' Finally, it dawned upon Ramanuja that, Goshtipurna wanted Ramanuja to come to him only after the 'I' – the ego (Aham-kaara) within Ramanuja had disappeared. It is only when a person overcomes the two important negative traits of

'Ahamkara' and 'Mama kaara' (the feelings of 'I' and 'mine'), that he will be ready to make real strides on the spiritual path. This is one of the very basic pre-requisites in this regard. Thus, Ramanuja, after understanding this secret, and after becoming totally free of ego within himself, went to the house of Goshthipurna, and his reply at that 18th visit, indicated that he had understood the secret import of the question and had overcome his ego*.

So Goshthipurna then welcomed Ramanuja and engaged him in a hearty conversation. He already knew the purpose of Ramanuja's visit and immediately started an introduction with regard to the esoteric meanings of the mantras that Ramanuja had come to learn from him. However, as he began teaching, he also extracted a promise from Ramanuja. He told Ramanuja: "The esoteric meanings that I am going to disclose to you are of a very subtle and sensitive nature. They are capable of instantly emancipating the person who possesses their knowledge. Hence they are to rest with you and you alone. They are not to be disclosed to anyone at any time, come what may. In case out of arrogance, you disclose these esoteric meanings, you will attain nothing short of the most dreadful portals of *Naraka* (hell). So, first, please promise

* (According to some versions, the present story is found in connection with another Acharya, namely Engalalwan and not Ramanuja. However, other versions suggest that this incident took place with regard to Ramanuja only. Keeping the spirit of the story in mind, it is given here.)

me that you will not disclose these meanings to anyone.” Ramanuja, having been told thus, immediately vowed that he would never disclose the esoteric meanings that he would learn from Goshthipurna to anyone under any circumstances. Soon after, in an isolated place, Goshthipurna initiated Ramanuja into the esoteric meanings of the three important secret mantras (known as the Rahasya traya). Ramanuja was thrilled at having been the recipient of such divine knowledge and was overwhelmed. He prostrated before Goshthipurna and expressed his gratitude before taking his leave from Goshthipurna.

But Ramanuja did not head straight back to Srirangam. Instead, he immediately climbed on to the Gopuram of the temple that was adjacent to Goshthipurna’s house. After reaching the summit of the Gopuram he called to all the people in the vicinity: “O great people! I crave your indulgence in something I have to reveal to all of you, which will instantly qualify you for emancipation. Please come! Please listen to me for a moment, for I am now going to tell you the secret of all secrets. Please come at once.” Upon hearing this, hundreds of people who were in the vicinity assembled and looked up to Ramanuja, intent on listening to his words. Naturally, they were thrilled that they would learn the secret spiritual knowledge, and at their unexpected good fortune, which was like a windfall of riches coming to a beggar. Ramanuja, without any hesitation or delay, conveyed to them the esoteric meanings of the secret mantras that he had just

learnt from Goshthipurna. The joy of the people, who were recipients of this divine knowledge, knew no bounds. Ramanuja then climbed down from the Gopuram, content that he had done his bit for society.

Goshthipurna however, was furious at what Ramanuja had done, especially after solemnly promising not to reveal the esoteric meanings to anybody. A disturbed Goshthipurna confronted Ramanuja as soon as he came down from the Gopuram: "You have betrayed me! You have acted totally contrary to the solemn promise you gave me. Do you know



Sri Ramanuja instructing people from the 'Gopuram'

the consequences of what you have done? You will have to experience the worst of the worst narakas." Ramanuja replied in a very modest tone, "O Sir! You were kind enough to impart the secret esoteric meaning to me that will instantly make one eligible for emancipation. You also told me that if I disclosed it to anyone, I would go to hell. I thought if so many people can attain liberation by knowing what you have mentioned, then a single ordinary individual like me going to hell does not matter. I would rather go to hell, if so many people could attain liberation through what I have told them. Kindly excuse me if I am wrong. I sincerely apologize for what I have done."

Goshthipurna was overwhelmed. He had never thought that Ramanuja would give such an answer. He felt awe at the great compassion Ramanuja had shown for the people, and the great concern he had for their emancipation. He could also see clearly how Ramanuja was genuinely interested in relieving the people of their sorrows, even at the cost of his own happiness and wellbeing. He also realized that even though generally, sacred knowledge should only be imparted to the discerning, lest it may fall into wrong hands and be misused, there are also times when the grace of the Lord – in this case in the form of the knowledge imparted by Ramanuja – comes through in torrents for one and all to partake. Those who are capable of garnering it and utilizing it for their own spiritual welfare will be able to do so, while the ignorant and arrogant will not be able to do so. However,

they will not be able to complain that they have been denied access to spiritual knowledge by the privileged. In wonder and full of gratitude at all these realizations, Goshtipurna embraced Ramanuja as the words: “Neere Emberumanar” (“*you are verily my Lord*”) emanated from his lips.

Ramanuja and the boys performing Puja

Once Ramanuja was passing by the river Kaveri in Srirangam, the holy temple town situated in South India. At that time, a few children were playing on the sands on the bank of the river.

The game was not any mundane game like those that are commonly played these days. For their game, the boys had sculpted an idol of Lord Ranganatha from the river sand. They had also used the sand to make the vessels and all other items required for ritual worship, similar to the ones used in a real temple, including the different dishes that were to be offered to the Lord. As for the *tulasi*, the sacred basil offered to the Lord, again they used the abundantly available sand. The children were totally immersed in their performance of ‘Tiru Aradhanam’, the ritual worship. One boy was acting as the main priest, performing the ritual. Another boy ably assisted him, just as the priest would be assisted in the real temple. The other children were also performing the duties of worship, just as their fathers would do in the main temple of Lord Ranganatha in Srirangam.

All the children were so immersed in their play worship that they did not even notice Ramanuja watching them with rapt attention. They were unaware of their surroundings, and performed everything as their fathers would do. Ramanuja, was amazed to see these young children performing the ritual worship in this manner. He approached the place where the youngsters were performing the worship and, with utmost sincerity, humbly prostrated before the idol of the Lord the boys had prepared. In this way, he too took part in the worship the boys were performing. When the boy performing the duties of the head priest enacted the distribution of the *teertham* (sacred water offered to the Lord) which was in the form of sand, he once again humbly prostrated before the boy, and accepted it with total devotion and faith. Then the boy distributing the *prasadam* (eatables offered to the Lord) approached Ramanuja and gave him the same. Ramanuja accepted that too with sincerity. In the temple at the conclusion of Puja Sri Ramanuja would be called forward to receive *Prasadam*. In the same way the children enacting the puja also called "Jiyo". Ramanuja immediately went forwards, prostrated and received the sand *prasadam* in his upper garment as he would do in the main temple, considering the puja of the children as valid and real.

This incident is one of the most important ones that highlight the greatness of Ramanuja.

Among Indian philosophers, there are some schools that believe that, since the whole world is unreal and illusory,

worship of God too is also unreal. They also deem that the Almighty does not possess any qualities or attributes, and believe He is devoid of any form. They use the word “Nirvishesha” to convey this idea.

However, Ramanuja clearly refuted this concept, ably explaining that the Lord is not “Nirvishesha”, but “Savishesha”: that is, He has “Visheshas”, which are known as “Gunas”, “Vigraha” and “Vibhuti”. His “Gunas” are his qualities owing to which we can glorify and eulogize Him. “Vigraha” is the Lord’s divine form that helps us meditate upon Him. “Vibhuti” is His power, which has manifested this entire world as an aspect of His divine prosperity. Hence the Lord is “Savishesha” as He possesses these “Visheshas”.

As Ramanuja made clear, if we accept that the Lord has no qualities or attributes, then we cannot sing his glories or praise Him. One can only extol and glorify a person who has qualities. It can be easily understood that no one can extol or describe an object that is totally devoid of any attributes or characteristics. Similarly, if the Lord is said to be devoid of any form, how can one meditate upon him? Can anyone constantly meditate on a formless object? And if the world that is there for us to see and experience is deemed to be illusory and therefore totally unreal, then what is the means of contact between us, the bonded souls and the Almighty Lord? There would be absolutely no connection or relation between the individual souls and Him, the Universal soul. Hence, one has to accept that the Lord

possesses qualities, due to which we can glorify and eulogize Him. The Lord also possesses divine forms that help us meditate upon Him, and also that this whole world is the manifestation of His divine prosperity. According to Ramanuja, this basic acceptance is the first step the individual soul has to take, if he is to progress on the spiritual path and ultimately attain liberation.

As far as the process of progressing in the spiritual path is concerned, there are basically two routes, one known as the Jnana Marga (the path of Jnana, or Knowledge) and the other known as the Bhakti Marga (the path of Bhakti, or devotion unto the Lord). As Lord Krishna mentions in the Bhagavad Gita, the former is a very difficult path, while the latter, relatively speaking, is an easier path. In the path of Bhakti, all levels of devotion and all levels of devotees are to be given equal respect and prominence. The devotion may be shown by small boys playing the game of God in the sand, or by the greatest saints, from whose mouths there is a spontaneous outflow of eulogistic hymns and mystic verses resulting from the Divine vision of the Lord in all his glory. Ramanuja's greatness lay in the fact that he could recognize this and communicate it.

Ramanuja learns Tiruvaymoli

While he was in Srirangam, Ramanuja also received orders from his trusted preceptor Thiurmai Andan to seek knowledge of the inner secret teachings of Tiruvayamoli

from Srivaranga. Ramanuja approached Srivaranga and requested that he accept him as his pupil. Everyday he used to apply oil and massage his body to put an end to his body-ache. The body-ache was due to his dancing before the Lord while singing Tiruvaymoli to propitiate Lord Ranganatha. After sometime, pleased with the devotion and dedication of Ramanuja, Srivaranga told him, "Blessed one, I am pleased with your perseverance and zeal for learning the inner secrets of Tiruvaymoli. Today I will teach the secret of the final goal a man has to aspire for. This secret is not known any other person except Nammalwar. There is no other person superior to your Acharya who has taught you Brahmaildya. For a good disciple, there is no refuge other than his own Acharya, who has taught him Brahmaildya. Acharya alone is the means to spiritual emancipation, as he has taught you Brahmaildya. In fact a good disciple should accept Acharya as god himself." In this way Srivaranga taught the greatest secret on this earth, which leads finally to the emancipation of the soul.

In this way, the five close disciples of Yamunacharya, viz. Mahapurna, Goshthipurna, Maladhara, Srivaranga and Srishailapurna, in whom all the great secrets of Srivaishnavism were kept alive, taught Ramanuja the various secrets of Srivaishnavism. After gaining knowledge of all the secret tenets of Visistadvaitha Philosophy, Ramanuja began to shine forth like Yamunacharya, the ultimate model of Srivaishnavism.

Efforts to poison Sri Ramanuja

During the time Ramanuja was at Srirangam, the religious leaders entrusted him with the responsibility of the administration of the great temple of Srirangam. Ramanuja examined every minute detail concerning temple administration and ritual and suggested ways and means to improve them, in keeping with the spirit of Vedanta that would lead all the devotees to spiritual emancipation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the priests of the temple became annoyed with the changes that Ramanuja was introducing. These priests, who had neither the vision nor intuition to understand the changes Ramanuja introduced, resisted them, their concern only being always the bark and not the sap of the tree, as it were. They were of the opinion that there was no need for any change, and took shelter under the stand that these were original and time-honoured practices and no one was expected to change them. However, other devotees of Ramanuja, who had absolute faith in his spiritual visions, strongly supported him. The Priests could not tolerate the growing support for reform in the administration of the temple. Provoked by this situation, the chief priest of the temple hatched a conspiracy to finish off Ramanuja by secretly poisoning him.

As a sanyasin, Ramanuja had to beg for alms, as is ordained in the scriptures. Knowing this, the chief priest saw an opportunity. He ordered one of his trusted associates to mix poison with the alms offered to Ramanuja, when he

came begging the next day. The person who was assigned the job of poisoning Ramanuja then ordered his wife to do the job. She refused; but her husband exerted considerable pressure on her and eventually made her fall in line and agree to execute the wicked plan to do away with Ramanuja. The next day, when Ramanuja came begging for alms, the woman, quite against her conscience, offered him the alms mixed with poison. But, being a kind-hearted woman, she somehow wanted to indicate to Ramanuja that he should not consume the food she had just offered. Being very resourceful, she prostrated before the Acharya after offering the alms. It is enjoined in the Shastras that a Sanyasin should not consume the alms if the person offering alms prostrates before the receiver after offering it. Ramanuja could immediately sense that something was wrong. Not wanting to partake of the food, he threw away the food in the river Kaveri and decided to fast for the day.

This was repeated for three days. In due course, this information reached Goshthipurna, who left for Srirangam immediately to find out what was going on in Srirangam. When he was walking on the shores of the Kaveri, Ramanuja appeared before him and prostrated. It was the middle of the day and the sands on the bank of the river were scorching hot due to the blazing sun.

In the scriptures, it is ordained that a true disciple, prostrating before his own Acharya (preceptor), should not get up unless the Acharya asks him to do so. Strangely Gosthipurna did

not ask Ramanuja to get up, even though he was lying down on the scorching sands of the bank of the Kaveri. Kidambi Acchan, an ardent disciple of Ramanuja, who could barely stand to keep his feet on this burning sand for a second, took exception to the behaviour of his Acharya and told him, "Sir! How cruel can you be? Are you not aware of the tender and delicate nature of Ramanuja's body? He has been lying on the hot sand for such a long time. Why don't you ask him to get up?" And even as he said this, Kidambi Acchan fell to the sand and pulled Ramanuja over his body. Gosthipurna replied: "I know this very well, my boy. I did this intentionally, as I was looking for a person who is genuinely concerned with the wellbeing of the tender body of Ramanuja. Now I have that person and it is none other than yourself!" Thus saying he asked Ramanuja and Kidambi Acchan to get up and entrusted the responsibility for preparing Ramanuja's food to Kidambi Acchan, thereafter. He forbade Sri Ramanuja from begging for alms, lest someone should try to poison him again. Thus, Kidambi Acchan took charge of Ramanuja's kitchen. He would prepare food and serve it to Ramanuja with unswerving devotion. Kidambi Acchan was also a very great scholar. In his works, he writes that the philosophy and tradition initiated by Ramanuja for everyone to learn actually emerged from the kitchen of Ramanuja. He proclaims "Maanyam Yateeshwara-mahanasa-Sampradaya" ('I adore the spiritual tradition, which has emerged from the Kitchen of Sri Ramanuja'.)

Frustrated in his efforts to get rid of Ramanuja, the head priest of the Srirangam temple desperately wanted to murder him. One day, Ramanuja went to the temple to have the Darshan of Lord Ranganatha alone. The priest thought that this was the right opportunity to implement his scheme. He mixed poison with the holy water of the Lord that he gave to Ramanuja. Somehow, Ramanuja knew quite well about the plot of the head priest. Nevertheless, since the sacred water offered to him was also imbibed with the grace of Lord Ranganatha, Ramanuja consumed it without any hesitation. He had absolute faith that Lord Ranganatha would protect him, just like the Lord protected Prahlada when he drank poison. And lo! Nothing actually happened to Ramanuja. Moved by the grace of the Lord, Ramanuja began to dance with joy. When he saw this, the head priest thought that his plan was working. He was under the impression that the influence of poison has made Ramanuja dance like this. He felt certain that the poison he had administered would show its result by the following day and he imagined attending Ramanuja's funeral the next day. With high expectations, as he went to Ramanuja's Ashram the next day, he saw from a distance that hundreds of devotees had gathered near the Ashram and were singing the bhajan: 'Bhaja Yatirajam.... Bhava Bhiro.' The priest was feeling thrilled thinking that his plot had worked and Ramanuja was no more. However, when he went closer, he could see Ramanuja seated on a couch enjoying the Bhajans. Suddenly it dawned on him that it was the divine intervention of Lord Ranganatha

that had protected Ramanuja and that was the reason why all his schemes to kill Ramanuja had not worked. He realized his folly and fell at Ramanuja's feet, saying, "Sir, excuse me for all the sins I have committed; without realizing that you are such a great recipient of Lord Ranganatha's grace, I have tried to poison thee. Would you shower your grace on this sinner and pardon him?" The repentance of the priest moved Ramanuja. He raised him and caressing him said, "O' son! Do not worry; the ways of the Lord are inscrutable; who can kill whom? Everything is in the hands of God; nothing is permanent in this world. Try to love every fellow being, as everyone is the creation of God." Immediately, there was a transformation in the head priest. Overwhelmed by Ramanuja's compassion, he became his ardent devotee. Later, this devotee composed 108 stanzas in praise of Ramanuja, which is popularly known as the "Prapanna Gayatri Mantra", for those who have taken refuge in the feet of their Acharya. The mellifluous stanzas in this poetic treatise depict Ramanuja as the personification of compassion and expound his greatness in some detail.

Yajnamurthi Vanquished

Yajnamurthi was a great scholar, who had vanquished most of the scholars of Benares, in scholarly debates. In those days, Benares was famous as a center of higher learning. After hearing the fame and fame of Ramanuja, he arrived at Srirangam to challenge Ramanuja. He arrived at Ramanuja's Ashram on a palanquin that was carried by great scholars

who he had bested in debate. A bullock cart, laden with books including his own works, followed him. When he met Ramanuja, he said with conceit, "Oh Ramanuja, I wish to have a scholarly debate with you." Ramanuja replied, "If you are defeated, what will you do?" Yajnamurthi replied, "If I am defeated, I will embrace Srivaishnavism and become a Srivaishnava recluse, holding the 'Tri-idandam'. On the other hand if you are defeated what will you do? Ramanuja replied, "I will give all my books to you."

Both of them were outstanding scholars. The debate went on for eighteen days. Just as in the case of two great lions fighting it out relentlessly, there was no sign of victory or defeat on either side. On the final day, the great Advaitin Yajnamurthi put forth certain deceptive arguments, which could not be easily set aside by judicious logical refutation. Ramanuja was seriously depressed. In the evening after circumambulating his personal deity Lord Varadaraja, he prostrated before the Lord and said, "Oh Lord! The great system of Visishtadvaita propounded by Nammalwar, Nathamuni, Yamunacharya and others has never been defeated; but since their time, this system has slowly become weaker; tomorrow probably I may not be in a position to defend this system in the presence of such a terrifying scholar. It is true that the Upanishads known as the Vedanta enlist the innumerable auspicious qualities of You, the Supreme Lord. Nevertheless, Yajnamurthi with his pseudologic is trying to establish that you are devoid of all qualities. Now victory

or defeat of the Vedantic system that You Yourself have revealed is in Your own hands. I pray to thee to do whatever You deem fit." Thus praying to God, Ramanuja went to sleep, fasting.

Soon after, Lord Varadaraja appeared in his dream and said "O Ramanuja ! Do not be disappointed; none can refute the tenets of Srivaishnavism and Visishtadvaita as they are all-time realities. Please consult the book authored by Yamunacharya that refutes the Mayavada. Go forth! Use the rhetorical arguments proposed in that in the debate with Yajnamurthi and defeat him." So doing, Ramanuja gracefully vanquished Yajnamurthi's challenge.

Ramanuja and Anandalwan

Ramanuja was an ardent devotee of Nammalwar, the greatest among the Alvars of South India. Ramanuja regularly taught the Tiruvaymoli, one of Nammalwar's great compositions, to his disciples. Once when he was teaching the section titled "Ozhivil Kalamellam", he became visibly moved. In this cluster of poems Nammalwar expresses his burning desire to offer his best service to Lord Venkateswara of the Seven Hills, now popularly known as Tirupati. Ramanuja explained: "Nammalwar could not physically move out of his native place of Alwar Tirunagari. Hence, he could not fulfill his deep desire of serving Lord Venkateswara. Among the four important most holy Srivaishnava shrines, Tirumala, the holy shrine of Lord Venkateswara is considered to be the 'Pushpa

Mantapa' – the abode of flowers, where Lord Venkateswara alone should be bedecked with flowers. Tradition holds that no other human being should adorn himself or herself with flowers in this holy place." So saying Ramanuja went on to inquire: "Is there a person among my disciples who can go and stay in that region and offer "Pushpa-Kainkaryam" (perform the service of offering flower garlands) to the Lord Srinivasa as prescribed in the Shastras and as desired by Nammalwar, so fulfilling his desire?" In those days, Tirumala was a place that was infested with dangerous wild animals and did not have any basic amenities. The weather too was extremely chill and hostile. All the devotees were afraid of straying, even accidentally, into the hills of Tirumala. Ramanuja's request was met with silence by almost all the innumerable disciples assembled. Only Ananthacharya or Anandalwan as he was popularly known, immediately stood up and volunteered to go to Tirumala and offer the service to Lord Srinivasa. Ramanuja was extremely pleased with Anandalwan and said, "Oh! Anantha, since you have dared go to Tirumala in spite of the hostile atmosphere prevailing there, you are the only "he-man" in this gathering ("anpillai"). Congratulations to you! Do proceed immediately to Tirumala and offer this service unto the Lord!" From then onwards, Ananthacharya was known as "Anand-An-Pillai" ("the he-man" among the devotees of Ramanuja).

As soon as he arrived at Tirumala, Anandalwan dedicated himself totally unto the service of Lord Venkateswara. He

and his wife personally created a lake called 'Sri Ramanuja Lake' to water the flower garden they were to raise in Tirumala. Remains of this lake and of the flower garden can be seen even today, after more than 800 years have elapsed. Anandalwan's primary concern was to offer services to the Lord as ordained by his great preceptor Ramanuja. He considered his Acharya himself as his Lord and benefactor. In the Srivaishnava tradition, respect unto one's own Acharya as the Supreme and even above God is called "Charamaparva Nishtha" and is seen as the best means to attain liberation. Though this means of attaining salvation may appear to be very simple, it requires a lot of courage and unswerving devotion unto the Acharya. The Supreme Lord is also accepted as a benefactor, because He Himself is responsible for bestowing such a great Acharya upon the disciple. Thus Anandalwan continued to serve the Lord to his heart's content, obeying the command of his beloved Acharya.

Once, Ramanuja was on a sojourn to Tirumala. After starting from Srirangam he visited many holy shrines of the Lord on the way. He visited the holy shrine of Trivikrama (Ulamalandalan) near Kanchipuram and offered his services to the Lord. Later he arrived at Chitalootam (now popularly known as Chidambaram) which was full of Shaivites. He felt that the atmosphere at Chitalootam was not conducive for the Shrivaishnavas. Hence, he decided to proceed further and stay at a village called Ashtasahasra. Two disciples of Ramanuja used to live there. One of them, called

Yajnesha, was a wealthy person. The other was Varadacharya, who was a poor person, but in no way inferior to Yajnesha in terms of devotion or dedication unto his preceptor.

Yajnesha jumped on hearing the information that his great preceptor was visiting his village. At once he ordered all his servants to organize everything required to provide a grand reception for Ramanuja. All arrangements were made to receive Sri Ramanuja in a befitting manner. However, Yajnesha, being fully involved in the preparations, did not care to receive Ramanuja's disciples who had arrived to inform the local devotees about their master's pending visit. After their journey though, the disciples were exhausted. When Ramanuja was informed about this, he decided not to accept Yajnesha's hospitality. Instead, he accepted the humble hospitality of his other disciple, Varadacharya. On arriving at the Varadacharya's house, the main door was locked from inside. Varadacharya had gone to the village to beg for alms, just so he would be able to host Ramanuja. His wife was wearing some tattered clothing, as she had washed her only saree and hung it out to dry, ahead of Ramanuja's visit. When Ramanuja knocked at the door, she clapped her hands since she was not in a position to come out and receive Ramanuja, as her saree was not yet dry. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Ramanuja threw his upper garment inside the house. Later, wearing the garment that Ramanuja had offered, she came out and prostrated at Ramanuja's feet with immense pleasure. After washing the feet of Ramanuja and

his disciples, she offered them seats and enquired about their wellbeing. Then she requested the preceptor and his followers to perform their daily religious rituals, by which time she would arrange for their hospitality. When she entered her kitchen, to her utter consternation, every container was empty. There was not even a grain with which she could prepare the food and offer it to the guests. She felt completely dejected at her utter poverty, which prevented her from offering hospitality to the great guests. Suddenly an idea flashed upon her. She remembered the businessman in that village who was quite enamored of her bewitching beauty. He had tried to entice her several times with the lure of money; but being a faithful wife totally devoted to her husband, she had never yielded. Whenever the businessman tried to lure her, she had reprimanded him and tried to discipline him. Now, she thought that she should sacrifice her body for the sake of offering hospitality to the great Acharya and his disciples. She thought, 'this physical frame will fall off one day or the other; let me sacrifice this for the sake of my Guru'. Thus thinking, she approached the businessman and said, "I have decided to fulfill your desire but, on one condition: you should give all groceries and other required material such as vegetables and fruits which are required to feed my great guru and his disciples." The businessman immediately responded and sent all the required material to her house, cherishing the reward that awaited him.

Varadacharya's wife then prepared the most delicious dishes and offered them to the guests, all the while chanting the names of the lineage of preceptors.

Transformation in the attitude of the Businessman

When Varadacharya returned home, he was pleasantly surprised to have the Darshan of his beloved Acharya and his disciples. He prostrated before him and after enquiries about their health, entered into the kitchen. He was astonished to see the varieties of food that had been cooked to treat the guests. He asked his wife about how she had managed to get all the ingredients to prepare the food. Then the wife Lakshmi told him without any hesitation about the agreement she had made with the businessman. To her surprise, her husband, instead of being angry, praised her action and told her, "I am blessed indeed to have a wife like you; you have taught me a great lesson in devotion unto one's own Guru. The Acharya himself is the Supreme Lord Narayana; you are able to offer the best service to such a preceptor sacrificing this filthy body made out of flesh, blood and bones. I really consider myself fortunate." After partaking the sacred food offered by the devout couple, Ramanuja offered the remaining food as 'prasadam' to the couple. After consuming a portion of this food Lakshmi promptly proceeded to the house of the businessman to fulfill her promise. With her, she also took a portion of the 'prasadam' given by Ramanujacharya, and gave it to the businessman. The businessman was very much pleased as he thought that

his long-standing desire would finally be fulfilled that day. He was also very pleased to receive the prasadam and accepted it with great devotion. However, when he consumed it, a sudden transformation occurred in him. He began to address Lakshmi as a mother and said, "Oh! Mother, please excuse me for the wicked deed I had planned to commit and the wicked and lusty intentions I had for you. You are a great mother, as you have opened my eyes. I assure you that hereafter; I will never cast my wicked eyes on any other woman." Saying this, he honourably sent her back home. When she conveyed the entire episode to her husband, Varadacharya was elated and felt that it was all the effect of the 'prasadam' of the Acharya that had brought about the transformation in the attitude of the businessman. Later, the businessman was brought to the presence of the Acharya. He fell at Ramanuja's feet and became his disciple.

Correcting Yajnesha

While all this took place, the other disciple Yajnesha was waiting, thinking that Ramanuja would grace his house to receive his hospitality. However, it did not happen. Yajnesha sent his followers to find out what was happening. After ascertaining the details from some people, his followers returned and informed Yajnesha that Ramanuja probably would not be visiting his house. Yajnesha was hugely disappointed. He hurried to the place where Ramanuja was staying and fell at his feet with remorse.

Raising him up Ramanuja said, "It is one thing to be initiated into Srivaishnavism by undergoing the fivefold Samskaras like....

1. **Taapah:** Branding the front portions of the right and left shoulders with the signs of the disc and conch of the Lord respectively.
2. **Pundrah:** Applying the sacred *naamam* (divine insignia of the Lord) on the forehead and eleven other places as prescribed in the Shastras,
3. **Naama :** Giving the newly initiated disciple a new name that signifies his status as a dedicated servant of the Lord.
4. **Mantrah :**Initiating the disciples into three sacred and secret mantras that signify his being able to establish direct communion with the Lord Sriman Narayana. It is said that the deities have a form that is verily that of the Mantra that is dedicated to them. Thus the devotee by chanting the mantra as per the procedure can establish contact between his own inner self and the Lord.
5. **Yaagah:**Teaching the disciple the procedure of offering worship to the Lord.

(These five sacramental Samskaras are involved in the initiation of a person into the fold of Srivaishnavism.)

“...but Srivaishnavism will not be complete merely by these things. If one wants to uplift one’s own self, the most important thing is to worship the devotees of the Lord and offer them all sorts of services. When one receives the devotees of the Lord who are physically exhausted, he should welcome them, receive them properly by washing their feet, offer them seats, converse with them saying soothing words, offer food and decorate them with flowers and sandal paste. If one desists from doing so, then such a person is not considered to be a Srivaishnava. But, Oh! Yajnesha, you are showy and offer charities just to show that you are a wealthy man. Since you have not cultivated the real virtues of a true Srivaishnava, we did not receive your hospitality. Unless you give up your ostentation and offer sattvic food, with humility, we cannot partake of the meals offered by you. We Srivaishnavas take only sattvic food after offering it to the Lord.”

Thus guided by Ramanuja, Yajnesha realised his folly. He begged Ramanuja to excuse him. Ramanuja said “Hereafter, please involve yourself in the absolute worship of Srivaishnavas. This is the greatest service you can offer in this world.” Having thus advised Yajnesha, Ramanuja left for Kanchi. On his way he had the Darshan of the deity “Sri Vijaya Raghavan” of Tiruvallur, before he came to the precincts of Kanchipurna. There he spent three days with his preceptor Lord Varadaraja.

At Tirumala

Ramanuja then proceeded to Tirumala, the heavenly abode of Lord Venkateswara. Even as he was about to climb the hills of Tirumala, he performed his daily ablutions at Alvar Tirtham, a celestial waterfall found at the foot of the Tirumala hills. Ramanuja then prostrated before the holy hills of Tirumala before beginning to climb the hill. However, knowing that Ramanuja was visiting Tirumala, Srishailapurna had come to wait for him at the foot of the hills with the 'Tirtham', holy water, and other honours brought from the Tirumala temple. After honouring him with the 'Prasadam' brought from the temple, Srishailapurna welcomed him to Tirumala. When Ramanuja saw Srishailapurna he prostrated at his feet and said, "Sir, you yourself have bought 'Teertham' and 'Prasadam' all the way from Tirumala. You could have sent all these through some ordinary people. I am an ordinary person; for my sake, a person of your great stature should not have taken this trouble. You could have sent any ordinary person for this purpose." Sri'shailapurna replied, "I searched and searched for an ordinary person, a person inferior in stature than me. To my utter consternation, I could not find any person who is inferior to me. Then I had no other alternative except to bring all these things myself." Such was the humility of Srishailapurna, an outstanding scholar and authority on Ramayana.

Enjoying the celestial beauty of the hills, Ramanuja stayed in Tirumala for a few days. The king of that region, Vithaladeva

by name, came to know about the greatness of Ramanuja. He approached him and requested him to accept himself and his followers as disciples. Ramanuja initiated him to Srivaishnavism. At his feet, the king offered a place called Ilayamandayam as Gurudakshina. Ramanuja gave away this gift to his three disciples, including Anandalwan, who was staying there as per his own directions. Later Sri Anandalwan and others approached Ramanuja and requested him to visit the holy shrine Tirumala and worship the Lord, to which Ramanuja readily agreed.

Then Sri Ramanuja entered the temple. On the way, he picked up a pot and started towards Swami Pushkarini (the holy pond situated beside the temple) to fetch water for the worship of Lord Venkateswara. It is said that the sacred waters of all the holy rivers and lakes will be present in this holy pond, on the 12th day of the moonlit fortnight of the 'Dhanurmasa' (the Tamil month of 'Margazhi', occurring during December-January). Having collected a pot of holy water Ramanuja entered the temple accompanied by hundreds of disciples and prostrated to the Yajna-shala (a place dedicated to giving offerings into the holy fire, as part of the ritual worship of the Lord). He then proceeded to Sri Mani-Mantap and then to the sanctum of Viswakshena, the commander-in-chief of the Lord. After witnessing the Ananda-nilaya (the Vimanam - the coronal mount constructed atop the sanctum sanctorum - of the Lord), he entered into the sanctum sanctorum of Lord Venkateswara. Amazed and

overwhelmed by the captivating beauty of the Lord, he meditated upon him for a long time, received the holy 'Tirtham', 'Prasadam' and 'Shathakopa' (a conical crown of gold carrying the divine feet of the Lord on its top which is touched to the devotee's head). After a while, he began to think that this abode of Lord Venkateswara was Vaikuntha, the celestial abode of the Lord and one should not stay too long. Thus thinking he began to climb down the hills. Then, his other preceptor, Srishailapurna came to meet Ramanuja. He approached Ramanuja and said, "O Ramanuja! A person who visits this holy place should stay here for at least three days." Obeying Srishailapurna's order, Ramanuja stayed there for three days without taking any food. Throughout, he chanted the hymns authored by Nammalwar about Lord Venkateswara. The Lord of the seven hills was immensely pleased with Sri Ramanuja's devotion. On the third day, the Lord sent the holy 'Tirtham', 'Shathakopa' and 'Prasadam' through his main priest and proclaimed, "O Ramanuja ! I am pleased with your devotion. In reciprocation for your devotion and dedication, I give you Lordship over my two possessions, namely, this physical world and the celestial world." Overjoyed to hear these celestial words of Lord Venkateswara, Ramanuja worshipped the Lord. Later he climbed down the hills and arrived at Tirupati. After arriving at Tirupati he had some food in the house of his Acharya Srishailapurna and stayed there for one year learning the secret teachings of Ramayana from him.

Govinda Bhattar's compassion

Govinda Bhattar, Srishailapurna's nephew, was also his disciple. Everyday, after spreading the bed of his Acharya, he used to lay down on the bed and roll himself on it for a while. Somehow Ramanuja did not like this, as sleeping in the bed of one's own Acharya is said to be a great sin. One day he discussed this matter with Srishailapurna. Sri'shailapurna immediately summoned his disciple and asked him, "Is it right on your part to lie down and roll in the bed of your own preceptor? Is it not a great sin? Do you know the consequences of this immoral act?" The disciple replied, "Yes Sir, I know quite well that my sin will lead me to the netherworlds known as 'Naraka' (hell). I do this knowing full well the consequences just to make sure that my Acharya will have a sound sleep on this bed without being disturbed by anything pressing or pricking him. For the sake of my Acharya's sound sleep, I am prepared even to go to hell." When Sri Ramanuja heard this, he was pleased by the extraordinary devotion of Govinda Bhattar unto his preceptor.

One day Sri Ramanuja and his preceptor Srishailapurna were walking in a forest nearby. Suddenly, they came across Govinda and saw he was inserting his fingers into the mouth of a poisonous cobra. Later, after bathing as usual, he entered his Acharya's house and began his routine services for his Acharya. When asked what he had been doing with the Cobra he replied: "Sir! I was removing a thorn which had

become stuck in the Cobra's tongue." Ramanuja was deeply impressed by Govinda's extraordinary compassion.

While staying in Tirupati, Ramanuja made the pilgrimage to the temple of Lord Vishnu atop one of the hills. While climbing up – there were no steps in those days – he used his knees as he felt that he should not place his footsteps on the mountain since the hill itself is said to be the body of the Lord of the seven hills. At that time many recluses and saints living nearby met Ramanuja and honoured him. Ramanuja arrived at Tirumala after passing through several resting places along with these Srivaishnavas. He took a holy dip in the Swami Pushkarini and began to circumambulate the temple of Lord Venkateswara, witnessing the ponds, resting places and beautiful flower gardens. Then, after carrying out the requisite pilgrimages and having learnt 18 different interpretations of secret teachings from the Ramayana, Ramanuja begged his master's permission to leave for Srirangam. He also requested his Acharya to gift his disciple Govinda Bhattar to him and Srishailapurna granted his request.

Before they had got far into their journey however, Govinda, who was accompanying Ramanuja at the behest of Srishailapurna, began to suffer. His limbs became emaciated on account of the pangs of separation from his Guru. Seeing his pitiable condition, Ramanuja said, "If you cannot withstand the separation from your Guru why don't you go back, have a Darshan and then come back?" Overjoyed at this offer,

Govinda rushed back to Tirupati and went to Srishailapurna's residence. When Sri Srishailapurna heard from his disciples that Govinda had come back, he declared with great anger and indignation: "Tell him to go back." On hearing this, Srishailapurna's wife suggested, "At least before sending him back why don't you give him 'Tirtham', 'Tulasi' and 'Shathakopam' of the Lord? Srishailapurna's reply came without hesitation. "No one feeds grass to a cow which is already sold." Hearing these words of the Acharya, Govinda, quite disappointed, returned to Ramanuja.

Then, on the way back, Ramanuja passed through the village of Ashtasahara, accepted the hospitality of Yajnesha and arrived at Srirangam. His disciples at Srirangam accorded him a grand reception, pleased with his arrival. Then Ramanuja went to the temple and had the Darshan of Lord Ranganatha. After the usual entreaties, the priests of the temple offered all the appropriate honours to him. Then Sri Ramanuja entered his mutt to rest.

Govinda becomes a Sanyasi

Govinda was of the opinion that any services rendered to one's own Acharya were far better than services rendered to the Lord. With this view, he gave all services to Ramanuja, waiting upon him day and night, thinking that Ramanuja was Srishailapurna himself. The disciples of Ramanuja at Srirangam were amazed at the extraordinary devotion of Govinda to his Acharya. They were deeply impressed with his method

rendering services and began to praise him. When Govinda heard their eulogies, he responded saying: "Sure! I welcome all your eulogies." Ramanuja, who just wanted to reveal the way Govinda thought, said: "Oh! Govinda, is it right on your part to respond like this? Should you not have stated: 'I am a very humble man, I don't deserve any of these compliments' and so on." Govinda replied, "Sir! This individual soul will be taking different births here and there, among the eighty-four lakh (8400000) species of beings. It is only as a result of past good deeds, and the grace of God, that one is born as a human being. Even after being born as a human, an ordinary person strays away from the assigned path and gets lost in the cycle of birth and death. Consider my case: I was last in Kalahasti, growing a beard and smearing ash on myself. I had become a devotee of some minor deity. My identity was like milk mixed with water. No one can separate milk from water. I was messed up and had totally forgotten my original identity. It is only because of your matchless grace and compassion, that I have been able to find my way back to Vaishnavism. Today, I am indeed blessed to call myself a 'Vaishnava' and offer all services to you. All this is only because of your unprecedented grace and compassion. If I am not praiseworthy even after being a recipient of your grace and compassion, what is the benefit of your grace? That is why, when they praise me, I simply accept the compliments showered on me. Ultimately, all these compliments go to you only." Ramanuja was greatly moved when he heard this and hugged him.

One day, some of the disciples witnessed the movements of Govinda near the house of a prostitute and promptly reported this to Ramanuja. Immediately Ramanuja summoned him and asked whether it was true. Govinda replied "Sir! It is true; Sri Rangagayak of Srirangam often visits her house and when he is there, he sings eulogies of your good self. When he does this, I have a chance to listen to your praise and I don't want to lose that opportunity." Ramanuja was pleased with this reply. Govinda was always absorbed in the services of Ramanuja physically, mentally and verbally.

Once, Govinda's mother came to the mutt and said "O! Govinda your wife has reached puberty and now it is your duty to spend some time with her." Govinda replied, "Mother, kindly excuse me. Since I am totally involved in the services of my Acharya I do not find any time to come and stay at my home." When this was reported to Ramanuja, he told him, "It is laid down in the Sastras that one has to strictly follow the principles of each Ashrama. Now it is your duty to return to your house and spend the night with your wife. Forced by his Acharya, Govinda went to his house and spent the whole night with his wife teaching her the greatness of knowledge and renunciation. Next morning, the daughter-in-law reported all this to his mother. Then she called Govinda and chided him, "Being a knowledgeable person, is it right on your part to disappoint her like this? Should you not realize your responsibilities?" Govinda replied, "Mother!

What you want me to do is a deed to be performed in the dark. However, there was not even a speck of darkness when I approached her, due to the glowing effulgence of my inner self. Due to the grace of my Acharya, I am no longer a receptacle of desire, anger or such." Dyutimati, as the mother was known, was disappointed. She reported all this to Ramanuja. When Sri Ramanuja asked him about his behavior, Govinda said: "As a householder, I have to perform my duty in the darkness of the night. When the Lord who is my inner soul was shining forth there was no darkness at all. Hence I was not able to approach my wife in that immaculate light" Ramanuja replied, "It is the duty of every human being to follow the principles of each Ashrama laid down in the shastras. Being a householder, you have to perform the duties attached to that Ashrama. If you are unable to follow the principles of a householder, it is better to become a recluse"

Soon after, Sri Govinda decided to renounce the Ashrama of a householder and performed the necessary rites, as prescribed in the Sastras. After witnessing Govinda's renunciation, Ramanuja admitted him to the 'Sanyasa Ashrama' (institution of Sansyasa) and gave him his own name 'Emberumanar'. Then Govinda said, "Sir! Kindly excuse me. I am not fit to be a recipient of this title. In fact, you are the only person in this world fit to be adorned by this name. The disciple and the preceptor should not have the same name." Appreciating the perspective expressed by Govinda,

Ramanujacalled him 'Embar', after which Govinda was well known only as 'Embar'.

Authoring the Sri Bhashyam

One day while Ramanuja was resting at his mutt, he was suddenly reminded of the vows he had taken in the presence of the body of Yamunacharya, when his obsequies were being performed. He felt that he should soon fulfill the promise he had made to his Acharya. He decided to fulfill his first promise of writing an elaborate commentary on the Brahmasutras based on the gloss written by Maharishi Bodhayana, well known as 'Bodhayana Vrtti'. For this purpose, he had to study the gloss of Bodhayana, which was available only in 'Sharada Pitha', the exalted location of Goddess Saraswati of Kashmir. He started his journey towards Kashmir along with his disciple Kuresha and reached the place after a few months. When he arrived at the 'Sharada Pitha' he had to encounter several scholars in debates. He ultimately defeated all of them in the scholarly debates. Staying in the 'Sharada Pitha', Ramanuja performed severe penance for many days seeking the grace of Goddess Saraswati in order to obtain the 'Bodhayana Vrtti'. Pleased with Ramanuja's meditation, Goddess Sharada handed over the 'Bodhayana Vrtti' to him and said, "O Ramanuja! Please leave this place immediately, as it is very dangerous here." Ramanuja left the place. The pundits of Kashmir were in search of this 'Bodhayana Vrtti' and naturally they could not find it. When they came to know that Ramanuja

had taken it with him, the angered pundits sent a few people in search of Ramanuja. After a few days, they tracked him down and forcibly took back the valuable book and returned to their place. Ramanuja was disappointed by this turn of events. However, Kuresha soon consoled him, saying: "Sir! You need not worry about the non-availability of this work. In the last few days, I have mastered every letter of this work, by heart. I can repeat any portion of this text, whenever you need it."

This assurance from his disciple pacified Ramanuja. After returning to Srirangam Ramanuja mentally prepared himself for writing the Sri Bhashyam. He requested Kuresha to assist him in writing this commentary stating, "O Kuresha! I have decided to author Sri Bhashyam, to address the misconceived views of Kevala Advaitins, who have wrongly interpreted the Upanishadic statements like "Tatvamasī" and 'Aham Brahmasmi", relying only on the principles of non-dualism. From now onwards, I want to dictate the work." Kuresha readily agreed. But Ramanuja said, "There is a condition; while taking down the text, make sure that you are totally convinced about what I am dictating. If you are not convinced about anything I dictate, you must stop writing immediately, and seek clarification." Kuresha readily agreed and the writing of Sri Bhashyam began.

One day while Ramanuja was explaining the nature of the individual self (jivatma), what he dictated did not convince Kuresha who immediately laid down his pen thinking:

'Somehow this definition of the individual soul given by Ramanujacharya is not complete'.

However, Ramanuja forced him to write what he had dictated. When Kuresha refused to obey, with great indignation he said, "If you feel what I am dictating is wrong then you may write your own commentary. Here afterwards I will not continue my dictation." At this point, Ramanuja's other disciples intervened saying: "Sir! If you do not complete this great work what will happen to us? Please contemplate once again about the precise nature of the individual self (Jivatma) and continue. When Ramanuja contemplated repeatedly on the nature of the individual self, then it dawned on him that the individual self could not merely be the knower; his innate nature is associated with subservience to the Supreme Self (Paramatma) along with knowledge. Then Sri Ramanuja retraced his steps and defined the individual self as one which is not only the knower but is essentially subservient to the Supreme Being. Then, convinced with the modification in the definition of the Jivatma, Kuresha continued to take down the text of Sri Bhashyam as dictated by Ramanuja.

Along with Sri Bhashyam, Sri Ramanuja authored several other major works viz.

Gita Bhashya

Vedanthasangraha

Vedanta-Dipa

Vedanta Sara

Gadya Traya and Nitya Grantha.

Since Gadyatraya consists of three works called Saranagati gadyam, Sriranga Gadyam, and Srivaikuntha gadyam, it is acknowledged that altogether Ramanuja wrote nine works which are considered to be nine gems.

Among the above, the 'Gadyatraya' literally means three compositions in the form of lyrical prose. These three sequential compositions emphasize the importance of surrender to the Lord and extol the splendour of Vaikuntha: the eternal abode of the Supreme Lord Narayana where He resides with His consorts.

Saranagati Gadya

Saranagati Gadya is a devotional lyric par excellence. It is in the form of a dialogue between Lord Sri Ranganatha and Sri Ramanuja. Here, Ramanuja expresses his unconditional love and surrenders to the Lord. He then requests the Lord to help him lead a virtuous life. It is the outpouring of the soul, overwhelmed by the grace and compassion of the divine and yearning to become a part of it. In return, the Lord assures that He - the source, course and goal of all creation - is always there as the indweller, looking after the wellbeing of the soul. This text shows the dialogue between two great souls as it happened, which helps us to understand the ways of the great. It also tells us that Saranagati, which means total surrender, is most essential if the soul is to attain happiness

and liberation, which is in the form of exalted and unlimited bliss.

Sriranga Gadya

Sriranga Gadya is in a way a continuation of the previous Gadya. Here, Ramanuja expresses his devotional fervour to Lord Sriranganatha, the Lord of Srirangam. Srirangam is praised as the Vaikuntham on earth, where the Lord resides in splendour equal to that of His eternal abode. It is the most important shrine for all Srivaishnavas. Though Sriranga Gadya is very short, it contains the essence of Saranagati or total surrender unto the Lord.

Srivaikuntha Gadya

The Srivaikuntha Gadya is a rapturous outpouring on the beauty and bliss of Vaikuntha. Here, He is served by various devotees in many ways and these devotees have taken divine forms just to serve the Lord. In Vaikuntha Gadya, Ramanuja gives a picturesque and vivid description of all aspects of Vaikuntha. The language is beautiful and the style is soothing. Ramanuja authored it when he was in a mood of divine ecstasy.

Thus the three gadyas (prose compositions) of the Gadyatraya are the spontaneous outpouring of Ramanuja's divine experience when in trance. They expound the true essence of the Dvayamantra through which one surrenders unto the feet of the Lord.

In the Nityagrantha, Ramanuja delineates the procedure for performing daily worship of the Lord in an elaborate manner. Thus, Ramanuja propagated the philosophy of Visistadvaita, explaining its practical application which leads to its intuitive experience.

Teaching Mantra ratnam to the Lord of Kuranga nagari

With Srirangam as his headquarters, Ramanuja was thus spreading the message of Srivaishnavism. Nine great works known as nine gems were enough to refute the improper tenets of other systems of philosophy and establish the basic tenets of Visistadvaita Philosophy on a firm foundation. Many scholars, after hearing the name and fame of Ramanuja, and venturing to have Shastric debates with him, were vanquished by his outstanding scholarship. Thus, he was able to propagate his philosophy without hindrance.

One day some of his disciples approached him and said, "You are rendering a great service to our Srivaishnavism, by writing books, offering services to Lord Ranganatha and also spreading the messages of our great seers and saints from Srirangam. Now it is time for you, Sir, to spread this message through the length and breadth of the country. Ramanuja was convinced by the view of his disciples. He sought Lord Ranganatha's permission to start a journey all over India, along with his disciples and well-wishers. After obtaining the Lord's permission, he visited all the holy shrines of the 'Pandya' region. In all those shrines, he prayed for the

wellbeing of the presiding deities and had Tirtham, Prasadam and Shathakopams. Incidentally, he also had debates with the scholars of the various regions he visited and convinced them all about his philosophy by demolishing their theories. Many of them became his disciples. Finally, he entered into the temple of Sri Shathakopa in Alwar Tirnagari, also known as Kurukapuri. When he entered the temple, the priests received him with befitting honours and took him near the sanctum sanctorum. After praying for the wellbeing of Sri Shathakopa (Nammalwar), the foremost among the Srivaishnava Alvars, Ramanuja composed a Sanskrit verse in his praise.

वकुळधवळमालावक्षसं वेदबाह्य-
 प्रबलसमयवादच्छेदनं पूजनीयम् ।
 विपुलकुरुकनाथं कारिसूनुं कवीशं
 शरणमुपगतोऽहं चक्रहस्तेभचक्रम् ॥

(I surrender unto Shathakopa, who is the incarnation of Visvaksena, the Chieftain of the Lord. He is the foremost among the poets and also the son of Kari, the Lord of Kurukapuri, worthy of worship, a person who has put to rest all the heterodox systems of philosophy. His chest region is shining forth by the effulgence of the 'Bakula' garland he is wearing.)

Later, after taking leave of Sri Shathakopa, he left for Kuranganagari, now known as Tirukkurungudi. There he had the darshan of the presiding deity Sri Namb-Narayana. At that time, the Srivaishnavas assembled there began to

mention the greatness of Ramanuja and his spectacular services to Srivaishnavism. Deeply impressed by the achievements of Ramanuja, the Lord said, "O Ramanuja! I have taken many human incarnations; but I was never able to convince people and make them my disciples. Most of the time, people who see me in human form think that I am an ordinary human being. Kindly teach me how to convince the people and make them spiritual." Then, Ramanuja said "O Lord! If you approach me as a disciple in the proper way, I can teach you. You are the Supreme Being and you are also exhibiting that supremacy. How can I teach you?" At this Sri Nambi-Narayana got down from his seat, prostrated before Ramanuja, sat near his feet and requested him to teach the secrets of Srivaishnavism. Pleased with his disposition, Ramanuja initiated him to the greatest secret Mantra called gem among the mantras. After accepting the Lord of Kurangangari as his disciple, Ramanuja named him as 'Vaishnava-Nambi'. The Lord paid him great tributes. Then Ramanuja, prostrating at the feet of Mahapurna his own Guru, and Sri Nambi-Narayana, requested them to pardon him for all his wrongdoings that might have happened because of his oversight. Later he proceeded towards Kerala, with all his disciples.

Sri Ramanuja receives the title "Sribhashya-kara" from Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning.

In Kerala, Ramanuja visited several holy shrines of Vishnu. Wherever he went, he had a warm reception and was

showered with many honours. After receiving 'Tirtham' and 'Prasadam' he used to have debates in the Shastras with the pundits he came into contact with. All of them accepted his teachings and became his disciples. Ramanuja then proceeded north, after touring the length and breadth of Kerala. On his way, he visited the holy shrines of Dwaraka, Mathura, Ayodhya, Sri Salagrama Kshetra (Mukthinath) Badrinath, Naimisharanyam, Pushkar, Brindavan and so many others. Finally he reached the Sri Sharada Pitha in Kashmir. Goddess Sharada Devi, the presiding deity of learning, was overwhelmed by the presence of this great Acharya. She appeared in a human form and received him. She expressed her desire to hear the interpretation of the Upanishadic passage "Kapyasam Pundarika..." from him directly. Pleased with the disposition of Saraswati, Ramanuja explained the passage thus: "Kam pibati iti kapih - i.e that which drinks water is the sun. It is well known that, the sun drinks the water through his rays. Kapyasam means the lotus which blossoms because of the rays of the sun. The eyes of the Lord are so enchanting just like the lotus, which blossoms by the rays of the sun; this is the correct meaning of this passage." Delighted by this interpretation, Saraswati congratulated Ramanuja and said, "Of course, this is the correct interpretation of this Upanishadic passage. I am really very proud of you." Thus saying, she adorned his head with the work Sri Bhashyam and came forward to hand over that work to Ramanuja. Ramanuja stretched his hand and received the same with joy. Holding the hands of Sri



**Goddess Saraswathi Gifting the
'Bodhayana Vritti' to Sri Ramanuja**

Ramanuja, Goddess Saraswati said, "O Ramanuja! I confer upon thee, the title of Sri Bhashyakara, as yours is the only commentary which correctly interprets the Vedic passages, in accordance with the spirit of the Brahmasutras. Thus saying she presented him with the icon of 'Hayagriva' (presiding deity of learning) and Ramanuja was immensely pleased.

When the scholars of Kashmir heard that Ramanuja had been able to please the Goddess Saraswati herself with his interpretation of the Vedic passage 'Kapyasa...', they became jealous; they had encounters with Ramanuja and tried to destabilize him in shastraic debates. However, no one could stand before this extraordinary genius; ultimately they left the place, disappointed.

Soon after, the king of that place came to know that Ramanuja had vanquished all the outstanding scholars of that region in spiritual debates. He approached Ramanuja, fell at his feet and embraced Srivaishnavism after Ramanuja initiated him. Many of the adversaries of Ramanuja in that region, who could not withstand the honours received by Ramanuja, resorted to witchcraft to try to put an end to him. However, none of their malign efforts affected Ramanuja, as he was the incarnation of the primordial serpent of the Supreme Lord Sriman Narayana, Adishesha himself. On the other hand, the perpetrators of this witchcraft were themselves affected by them, and ended up as lunatics. Seeing their pitiable condition, Ramanuja prayed to the Lord saying, "Kindly excuse them; please restore their mental health." Thus, with

his immense compassion, Ramanuja not only excused all of them, but also saw to it that their health was restored. All the pundits became his disciples.

Thus Ramanuja emerged victorious in all respects after visiting Kashmir. After visiting the celestial Ganges with all his followers, including the King and his entourage, Ramanuja set off to return to his headquarters at Srirangam.

Sri Ramanuja Showers his grace on Dhanurdasa.

After completing his trip to propagate Srivaishnavism around India, Sri Ramanuja was actively engaged in the service of Lord Ranganatha at Srirangam. The number of disciples who beseeched Ramanuja was steadily increasing. Many special as well as ordinary human beings were spiritually guided by Ramanuja and attained fulfillment, by becoming fit for both a meaningful life in this world as well as in the eternal abode of the Lord.

At that time, in a place called Nichulapuri, there was a great wrestler known as Dhanurdasa, who was famous for his physical prowess. He had defeated many famous wrestlers, and his valour was comparable to the wrestlers of yore like Chanura and Mushtika. Dhanurdasa was completely in love with a beautiful damsel called Hemamba (also known as Ponnacchi). He was particularly captivated by Hemamba's beautiful eyes, which resembled lotuses in full bloom.

The annual festival of Lord Ranganatha falls in the month of April – May, when devotees from far and near assemble in

the holy city of Srirangam. Once, Hemamba expressed her wish to participate in this annual festival. Since Dhanurdasa was greatly attracted towards Hemamba, he too followed her to Srirangam. It was the height of summer and the heat was almost unbearable. To prevent the tender eyes of Hemamba being affected by the sweltering heat of the sun, Dhanurdasa held an umbrella to cover her face, and walked backwards, deeply absorbed in admiring and enjoying the beauty of her eyes. When the people saw the great wrestler Dhanurdasa, holding an umbrella for a woman, walking backwards, they were greatly amused and annoyed. A small crowd gathered, and started mocking him. Exactly at this time, Sri Ramanuja was returning from the River Kaveri after performing the mid-day rituals. Sri Ramanuja too happened to see this strange scene. He then told his disciples "See this person, who is influenced by the maya of the Lord! He is so lost in sensual pleasures that he does not even care for the insults of the people and shamelessly serves this woman in this unusual manner. Nevertheless, we will make this person, who is lustful and is immersed in a sea of desire, attracted towards the Lord Sri Ranganatha" Some of Ramanuja's disciples seemed doubtful about whether such a man, apparently so in thrall to worldly attractions, could become a devotee of the Lord. However, such was Ramanuja's greatness that he was able to immediately recognise the man's divine nature and potential, even in this apparent weakness. Noticing his disciples' doubts, Ramanuja continued: "See how he is so absorbed in what he is drawn to? Someone

who feels such strong attraction towards worldly beauty will be even more powerfully attracted to divine beauty!"

Having said this, Sri Ramanuja sent a few of his trusted disciples to Dhanurdasa and had him brought to his Ashram. When Dhanurdasa came to Ramanuja's Ashram, Ramanuja observed him from head to foot, and then asked Dhanurdasa where he came from. Dhanurdasa answered, "O Lord! I stay in Nichulapuri. My name is Dhanurdasa, and I am a wrestler by profession. At present I am very famous for my art of wrestling, due to which all the wrestlers of the land accept my superiority. I have come here to see the great festival of the Lord with my beloved Hemamba." Ramanuja then told Dhanurdasa, "I have a question for you. Please do not misunderstand me. Is it honourable for a person of your stature to serve a woman by holding an umbrella and walking backwards, that too in the presence of thousands of people? Generally, lusty people accept the servitude of their beloved in privacy. However, this is the first time I have seen a person of your stature behaving like a slave in the presence of thousands of people! I would like to know the reason for this." Dhanurdasa replied with quiet humility, his hands folded in modesty, "Sir, the bewitching beauty of her eyes captivates me and when I am looking at it, I am not aware of anything else in this world. Hence, I am totally engrossed in preserving the beauty of these unusually delightful eyes. Today, since the weather was unusually hot, I held an umbrella to protect these captivating eyes of hers." Listening to these modest,

humble and truthful words of Dhanurdasa, Ramanuja smiled. He recognized Dhanurdasa's honesty and sincerity. Yearning to make Dhanurdasa an ardent devotee of the Lord, he asked him, "O my boy! What will you say if I show you another pair of eyes that are much more beautiful than the eyes of your beloved?" Dhanurdasa retorted, "I could never imagine that eyes more beautiful than hers exist. However, if they really exist, I will love them more than I love hers." Ramanuja said, "Come with me," and immediately led him to the sanctum sanctorum of the Lord Sri Ranganatha who was lying down on the primordial serpent Adishesha. Ramanuja took him very close to the Lord and made him see the enchanting eyes of the Lord. In the presence of Ramanuja,



**Sri Ramanuja showing the lotus eyes of the
Lord to Dhanurdasa**

Lord Sri Ranganatha bestowed a divine vision on the eyes of Dhanurdasa. Dhanurdasa was enthralled and captivated by those divinely beautiful lotus eyes of the Lord that were beyond any possible comparison with anything in this world. He also had the divine vision of the beautiful, tender cheeks of the Lord, the celestial smile on his divine lips and the charming divine persona of the Lord in all His glory. Having shown this celestial, divine ocean of beauty of the Lord to Dhanurdasa, Ramanuja said, "This is verily the Lord Sri Ranganatha, who is the master of the whole world." Dhanurdasa was overcome with unlimited bliss, having experienced the divine beauty of the Lord, especially his eyes. His mind was totally focused on that divine beauty, and immediately, his cravings for the attractions of the world vanished. He instantly became a devotee par excellence and was able to immediately overcome the six internal enemies of all humans: desire, anger, lust, greed, pride and hate. He was also able to overcome the mundane human cravings like hunger and thirst.

Soon after, Sri Ramanuja took Dhanurdasa to his Ashram and gave him the Teertham and Prasadam of the Lord. He then initiated Dhanurdasa into the realm of Srivaishnavism by imparting the five sacramental Samskaras. After becoming the disciple of Ramanuja, Dhanurdasa served his master with utmost dedication and devotion. In due course, Dhanurdasa requested Ramanuja to impart the five sacramental Samskaras to Hemamba too, and help her enter into the

realm of Srivaishnavism. Ramanuja granted his request and imparted the five sacramental Samskaras to Hemamba. Soon the devout couple began to serve the Lord with total dedication and became two of Ramanuja's closest disciples.

The Great Devotion of the Dhanurdasa couple towards Srivaishnavas

Every year, the Brahmotsavam (annual festival) of Lord Ranganatha is held with great religious fervour. On the final day of the festival, a ritual bath is taken in the waters of the river Kaveri by all devotees assembled for the festival. Later, the holy water offered to the Lord is distributed among the devotees. At this time, on his way to the river, Ramanuja went resting his hands on the shoulders of Mudali Andan, one of his closest disciples. While returning after taking bath in the river, Ramanuja came back with his entourage of disciples, resting his hands on Dhanurdasa's shoulders.

This kindled the envy of some of the Brahmin devotees and disciples of Ramanuja. They were curious to know the reason for Ramanuja's fondness and affection towards Dhanurdasa, who belonged to a lower caste. One day, some of the disciples summoned their courage and directly confronted Ramanuja about his behaviour with regard to Dhanurdasa. Ramanuja replied: "The Sastras mention three types of egos: ego arising out of education, out of prosperity and because of one's lineage. A person desiring fulfillment has to overcome these three egos. Dhanurdasa has

overcome them and is a humble and modest devotee. Therefore I rest my arms on his shoulders and shower my affection on him." Hearing these words, to which there was no retort, the disciples decided to be silent for the time being, but they were not happy.

After a few days, the jealous disciples decided on a different tactic and started a covert propaganda campaign intimating that Dhanurdasa was an immoral, unsacred person, born of a lower caste. At the same time they also said that they themselves were the most desirable ones, being learned and born in the highest caste. They also questioned as to how Dhanurdasa could become their equal, let alone become superior to them. They started making false allegations against him in the presence of Ramanuja. Due to their ill-conceived notions, they failed to recognize the sincerity and devotion of Dhanurdasa. In due course, due to their biased views, they started openly ridiculing Dhanurdasa.

Before long, the undesirable events happening in the Ashram reached the ears of Ramanuja. He tried to resolve the issue by thinking of a plan that would highlight the honesty and sincerity of Dhanurdasa, as well as expose the envy and resentment of the other disciples of the Ashram. He called one of his trustworthy disciples and instructed him: "The dhotis of the Sastraic scholars as well as other disciples have been put up for drying in one of the halls of the Ashram. Without any of those people observing you, please tear the dhotis in a few places. Please take care that this is done

without their knowledge." The trustworthy disciple did as he had been bade.

As soon as the Sastraic scholars and disciples found out that some of their clothes had been torn, they suspected each other of being the culprits. They immediately started abusing each other in a loud and rude manner. Ramanuja, who was a witness to all this, smiled within himself at their conduct. Addressing them he said, "This is a great surprise; all of you are great scholars, born in a superior caste, yet you are making such a fuss about this minor issue. In this Ashram, all wear dhotis and someone might have needed a loincloth. Hence he might have torn off pieces of cloth from your dhotis. Is this the way to conduct yourselves? You are actually sinning towards true devotees of the Lord." Having said this, he assured them of procuring them new dhotis and resolved the dispute.

After a few days, Ramanuja called those disciples whose dhotis had been torn a few days back. He told them, "Tonight, I will retain Dhanurdasa to serve me here in the Ashram; a few of you may go to the residence of Dhanurdasa and steal the jewellery and ornaments from his sleeping wife. However, Dhanurdasa should not have even an irking of this. You have to accomplish this skillfully. Many important results are expected from this, which you will be able to know later."

According to the directions of Ramanuja, the disciples reached the house of Dhanurdasa. They silently and

cautiously approached Hemamba, who was apparently in a deep sleep, laying on her left side. Immediately they took away the valuable ornaments that they could remove from her right side. Unbeknown to the thieves, Hemamba was awake and she realized that the thieves were none other than those from the Ashram, as they were wearing the 'tilak' (Tiruman) and beads of the sacred basil 'Tulasi' and lotus. This being the case, she was quite happy to part with the ornaments she was wearing, since they were being taken by Srivaishnavas. She thought that the ornaments would probably be used for the service of the Lord and therefore felt that she should make it easy for them to take away the ornaments she was wearing on the other side too. Hence, she turned to the other side. However, the disciples, thinking that she had woken up and that there could be a commotion, fled the scene.

Soon after, the thieves went to Ramanuja and reported what had happened at Dhanurdasa's residence. They told him, "We were able to remove the ornaments she was wearing on one side. However, when we tried to remove the ornaments from the other side, she woke up so we immediately fled." Ramanuja said, "Good! You have followed my instructions. Now please wait in the next room, for further instructions. I will get back to you soon."

Ramanuja then approached Dhanurdasa who was engaged in his service and told him, "It is already late in the night. You may go home now and take rest." Dhanurdasa immediately

left for his residence. Ramanuja then called the disciples and told them: "Follow Dhanurdasa and secretly watch what transpires between the couple. Please report the same to me."

Even as Hemamba came to know that Dhanurdasa was coming home, she hurried to the entrance to welcome him. Dhanurdasa happened to notice that Hemamba was wearing ornaments on only one side of her body. The ornaments of the other side of the body were completely missing. He then asked her the reason. Hemamba replied, "O Lord! Some Srivaishnavas, who were probably very poor, came here. I was lying down, meditating upon the Lord, and expecting your arrival. They mistook me to be in deep sleep and stole all the ornaments I was wearing on the right side. When I turned, to make it easy for them to take away the ornaments of the other side, they mistook that I had woken up, and fled away." Hearing this, Dhanurdasa was greatly distressed. He said, "By turning to the other side, you have committed a great sin. The nature of a jivatma (individual soul) is that it is totally subservient to the Lord and its devotees. You should have laid down like an inanimate object. You thought, 'This is my body; these ornaments are mine; I will donate these ornaments.' Your mind was contaminated by these egoistic thoughts. If you had not moved, they would have taken away the ornaments of the other side too. If you want to progress in the spiritual path, you have to totally do away with thoughts that are associated with 'I', 'my beauty', 'my ornaments' and

such. Now, the ornaments that are left on your body are a waste, whereas the ornaments that the Srivaishnavas have taken away will be used for a good cause.” Having said this, Dhanurdasa retired to bed.

The disciples of Ramanuja had heard every word of the conversation of the devout Dhanurdasa couple. They came back and reported everything to Ramanuja.

The next day, all the senior disciples, scholars and students assembled for the class conducted by Ramanuja. Ramanuja addressed them and said: “O learned ones! O great men born of higher castes! You created such a great commotion, when just a small piece of cloth was torn off from your dhotis. You abused each other in the choicest foul words. But now you know the conduct of Dhanurdasa when he came to know that golden ornaments of immense value had been stolen from his wife. Please notice the difference between your conduct and the conduct of the Dhanurdasa couple. Please tell me now whose conduct befits a Srivaishnava. Good conduct alone is the main cause for attaining emancipation, and not birth in a higher caste.” Ramanuja then delineated the tenets of a true devotee of the Lord, and the method of imbibing the same in oneself, in great detail. The disciples were greatly embarrassed at their own conduct and repented their earlier misdeeds. Thereafter, they were able to appreciate the sincerity and integrity of Dhanurdasa and the envy and resentment they had had for Dhanurdasa vanished.

The next day, Ramanuja called Dhanurdasa to the Ashram and narrated the events that had occurred in the previous couple of days. He then returned all the ornaments to Dhanurdasa.

It was only because of the great reverence that Dhanurdasa had towards Ramanuja that Ramanuja would rest his hands on Dhanurdasa's shoulders after bathing in the River Kaveri.

Caste is no barrier for a Srivaishnava devotee

Marnernambi was born of a lower caste, but he was one of the great devotees of Yiamuna. When Marnernambi passed away, Mahapurna performed his last rites according to the procedure of 'Brahma-medha Vidhi'. (The procedure performed for the last rites of great Brahmins, who are acknowledged to be great scholars and true practitioners of the spiritual path.) All the conservative Brahmins despised Mahapurna for this act. They believed that by performing the last rites of a Harijan according to the procedure laid down for a Brahmin, Mahapurna had transgressed the stringent rules of the Varna-system prevalent in those days and become a great sinner and so they ostracized him.

Having heard about the entire episode, Ramanuja hastened to visit Mahapurna. Ramanuja prostrated before Mahapurna and humbly said, "By your command, all of us are here to serve you. Would you be kind enough to let us know why you performed the last rites of Marnernambi, transgressing the rules laid down in the Sastras?" Mahapurna, emphasizing

that the rules of conduct governing Bhagavatas (true devotees of the Lord) were more important than the rules of the Varna-system said: "Lord Sri Rama, who was born in the great Ikshvaku dynasty, performed the last rites of Jatayu, the vulture, according to the procedure of 'Brahma-Medha'. Similarly, Yudhisthira, the eldest of Pandavas performed the last rites of Vidura, born of a lower caste, according to the procedure of 'Brahma-Medha'. Is Marnernambi, a great devotee, inferior to Jatayu, a non-human? Or am I superior to the great Rama and Yudhishtira, kshatriyas, who were satya vadin throughout their lives? O Ramanuja, if a person is a true devotee of the Lord, he is a true 'Bhagavata', whatever caste he might be born in. As it has been proclaimed:

श्रपाकमिव वीक्षेत लोके विप्रमवैष्णवम् ।
वैष्णवो वर्णबाह्योऽपि पुनाति भुवनत्रयम् ॥

"O king, if a person is a true devotee of Lord Vishnu, then even if he is a 'chandala', he is to be considered superior to a Brahmin who is devoid of devotion towards Lord Vishnu. Conversely, even a Brahmin, if he is not a true devotee of Lord Vishnu, then he is to be considered as equal to a 'chandala'.

Thus, performing the last rites of Marnernambi according to the Brahma-Medha is completely justified," Mahapurna finished. Ramanuja greatly appreciated the subtle nuances of Dharma propounded by his Acharya. He then convinced all

the people that what Mahapurna had done was totally correct; and that in fact it would have been a grave mistake had he not acted in this way. The Srivaishnavas were then convinced; they apologized to Mahapurna and sought his blessings.

Grace of the Acharya is the sole means of Emancipation and is accessible to all

Ramanuja was a great Acharya, who was the personification of compassion. Whenever he saw any being in distress, he would immediately run to lend a helping hand. Once, Ramanuja took hold of the hands of a dumb person, who was working in his kitchen and took him to a separate room. There Ramanuja placed his lotus feet on the dumb person's head and initiated him into the spiritual path. He then gestured to him and convinced him that total devotion and dedication unto one's own Acharya is the foremost means of emancipation. The dumb person was amazed with delight. He had never even imagined that he would be the recipient of the Divine Grace of such a great Acharya.

Unbeknown to Ramanuja, Sri Kuresha was a silent witness to this incident. When Kuresha saw what Ramanuja had done, he felt sorry not to have been born as a dumb person. He thought, "Had I too been born as a poor, dumb person, then Ramanuja would probably have been kind enough to place his divine lotus feet on my head and he himself would have personally imparted the means of emancipation to me

too. Alas! How unlucky I am to have been born in this good lineage, so I am unable to be the recipient of the unsolicited, but all-surpassing grace of Ramanuja!" Experiencing a feeling of remorse, Kuresha fainted.

It might seem strange that Kuresha felt like this when he had so much access to his Acarya. However, the path of the spiritual aspirant is beset with obstacles. It is not at all unusual that many times, he will be beset with doubts, which, if left unclarified, could prevent his spiritual progress. Many of Ramanuja's disciples had such doubts, but by the grace of the Acarya, these doubts can be cleared. One example of how Ramanuja would clear his disciples' doubts is illustrated by a journey he undertook with his disciples, including Kuresha, to Tirukkottiyur to meet Goshthipurna. As soon as he reached Goshthipurna's residence, he saw that Goshthipurna had locked himself up in a room, and was sitting with his eyes closed, immersed in deep meditation. After some time, Goshthipurna came out of the room. Ramanuja and his followers immediately fell at his feet. Then Ramanuja asked "O Acharya, kindly let us know, which mantra you were meditating upon until now." Goshthipurna replied, "I was meditating upon the back side of Mudugu (of Yamunacharya) while he was taking a bath in the River Kaveri which appeared like a tortoise. The Sastras ordain that there is none superior to one's own Acharya. He is to be given greater respect than the Lord Himself. Blind, deaf, dumb as well as physically handicapped persons or others disabled in

any manner, can attain liberation by being the recipient of the grace of one's own Acharya. The object of meditation should be the form of the Acharya, the mantra to be recited is the name of the Acharya, and the means of liberation is the divine grace of the Acharya." As soon as the disciples heard these words, their doubts vanished completely. Kuresha realized for example, that his Acharya Ramanuja had already blessed him, just as he had blessed the dumbman.

Background of the birth of 'Krimikantha Chola'

Just as a worthy son is given all the responsibilities of the father, which allows the father to retire after a certain period, similarly, Lord Sri Ranganatha too had given away the responsibility of running his two primary kingdoms: the 'Nitya Vibhuti', meaning the eternal abode - the Vaikuntha, and the Leela Vibhuti, meaning the playground of the Lord - this world; to Ramanuja and was relaxing. Ramanuja was actively engaged in catering to the needs of the Mother Divine - Goddess Lakshmi too. It is always the wish of the mother that her children should always be with her. Ramanuja was ensuring that the Jivatmas (individual souls), who are the children of the Mother Divine, would return back to their original home, the 'Vaikuntha', after having duly completed the duties assigned to them in this world. Ramanuja was doing this by imparting the eight-lettered mantra to them, as per the command of Lord Sriman Narayana. Ramanuja was also ensuring, by his own preaching and by his personal example, that the people, irrespective of caste, creed, age or sex, were

not only chanting the mantra according to the procedure, but also conducting themselves in a befitting manner. Apart from this, Ramanuja had trained seventy-four of his best disciples, to become eminent scholars, devotees and blessed them with divine knowledge, so that they could practically and objectively guide the people.

Day and night, Ramanuja and his primary seventy-four disciples were thus engaged in the service of the people. Thus an atmosphere of total dedication and devotion had evolved, by Ramanuja's unstinting efforts. The Vedic path, founded and established by the Lord Srīman Narayana Himself, was reestablished and the whole land was guided by the principles of this path. The devotees, who were thus influenced, were all engaged in the service of the Lord, without craving for any worldly pleasures. For them, service of the Lord and his devotees was an end in itself. It has been stated that Nammalwar, the pre-eminent Acharya and Alwar, and the progenitor of the family of those who have surrendered to God, had foreseen such a situation, when an Acharya would incarnate in this world and see to it that evil effects of the Kali Yuga (Iron Age) would not be felt, by singing the stanza 'Poliga, Poliga' in his divine poetry, the 'Tiruvaymoli'. The purport of that stanza is:

"Hail! Hail! There will be a time, when a great person will incarnate in this world, due to whose untiring efforts, the effects of 'Kali' will not be felt at all, and devotion unto the Lord will flow in torrents."

The elderly, scholarly people of those times realized that it was this period of Ramanuja that Nammalwar had been referring to.

However, Ramanuja's work did not go on unopposed forever.

The Birth of the Chola King and the Departure of Sri Ramanuja

During the time of Ramanuja, a King was born in the Chola dynasty that ruled over the Tamil region of South India. He was very powerful and fostered sectarian fanaticism; he hated Lord Srīman Nārāyaṇa and His devotees. The king forced people to follow him and this included accepting the path of Saivism. He encouraged those who censured Lord Nārāyaṇa as well as His devotees. He would also send his trusted envoys to neighboring places and have them bring Vedic scholars of repute from far and wide. He would then ask them to endorse the supremacy of Saivism and the inferiority of Srīvaishnavism, declare that Siva alone is the supreme Lord and apply their signatures to this declaration, so that he could punish them in case they retracted. He then declared by a decree that all those that practiced the Srīvaishnava religion would be treated as inferior subjects, and in some cases, they would be punished.

In this atmosphere of rancour and blind fanaticism, eventually, one Srīvaishṇava known as 'Naaluran' who was also a disciple of Kuresha, but whose allegiance was to the Chola King, told the King: "Your majesty, Ramanuja is the leader of

Srivaishnavas; he stays at Srirangam. It is only if Ramanuja signs this document that it will have authority. Otherwise there is no worthiness whether others sign it or not.”

The King instantly swung into action and sent two of his henchmen to Srirangam to bring Ramanuja to his court immediately. The news of the impending disaster reached Ramanuja's Ashram. Ramanuja prepared himself to accompany the assistants. However, Kuresha opposed Ramanuja's going to the court of the Chola King. Even as Ramanuja was about to put on his saffron robes, Kuresha took them away by force and draped himself in those robes. Ramanuja said, “a ‘grhastha’ (householder) does not become a Sanyasi just by wearing saffron robes.” Kuresha immediately offered white robes to Ramanuja and said, “Neither does a Sanyasi become a ‘grhastha’ just by wearing a white robe.” Kuresha insisted that Ramanuja wear the white robes, saying, “The Chola king is a tyrant. He will go to any extreme to harm Srivaishnavas. You are the only saviour we have; hence you have to be protected at any cost. I beseech you to kindly leave this place at once and proceed north. I will wear your saffron robes and go to the court of the Chola King as Ramanuja.”

The dedication and devotion of Kuresha was in line with what is prescribed for a model disciple:

शरीरं वसु विज्ञानं वासः कर्म गुणानसून् ।

गुर्वर्थं धारयेद्यस्तु स शिष्यो नेतरस्मृतः ॥

“One who holds his own body, his riches, his knowledge, his clothes, his acts, his qualities, as well as his own life, purely for the sake of his own Guru, is verily the model disciple.”

Ramanuja, heeding the request of his disciples and wearing white robes, proceeded north towards today's Karnataka, with some select disciples, after obtaining the permission of Lord Sri Ranganatha. After a continuous, arduous journey in inclement weather for six days and nights, they reached a place which looked like a small village. The tribal people, who were living there, were perturbed to see them suffering with hunger and thirst and from the effects of the severe cold weather. They gestured to Ramanuja and his followers to sit near a bonfire they had put up. The tribal people then gave Ramanuja and his followers some clean new clothing. With modesty, they asked Ramanuja and his followers about where they came from. The followers of Sri Ramanuja told them that they belonged to Srirangam, and that they had come here due to some unforeseen circumstances. As soon as they heard the name of Srirangam, the tribal people were delighted. They asked: “Is Lord Sri Ramanuja doing well at Srirangam?” The disciples of Ramanuja were surprised at this question. They looked at Ramanuja and then asked the people:

“How do you know about Ramanuja?”

“We have seen many people who have been initiated into Sri vaishnavism by Sri Ramanuja. We have observed that they have the symbols of the conch and discus on their shoulders

and tilaks on their foreheads. Our Acharya, well known as Sri Nallan, has told us during his discourses that Ramanuja alone is our Acharya. And that his lotus feet alone are our raft for crossing over this ocean of 'Samsara'. Since then we know about Ramanuja."

Delighted to hear these words of the tribals, the disciples of Ramanuja informed them that the Acharya who was in their midst was Sri Ramanuja himself.

Just as the tribal people headed by Guha felt elated when they met Sri Rama, so these people were delighted at the great, unexpected opportunity of meeting their own Acharya Sri Ramanuja. They immediately fell at his feet and with great devotion, offered all variety of fresh fruits and honey to Ramanuja. Ramanuja remarked, "The cloud called Nallan has showered even in this dense forest," conveying the meaning that his disciple Nallan had instilled devotion for the Lord even among these people who were dwelling in the forest. Later, after offering the same to the Lord, Ramanuja partook of the devotional offerings that the tribal disciples had offered,

But at the same time, Ramanuja was very eager to know about the developments in Srirangam. He was particularly anxious about the well being of Kuresha and Mahapurna. He asked one of the tribal disciples to proceed to Srirangam and return with a report of the happenings there. The tribal disciple proceeded to Srirangam.

Later, Ramanuja moved further and reached another village. He came to know from the locals there that they had crossed the border of the Chola Kingdom. He and his disciples were happy to know that there was no further threat from the Chola King.

The Story of Chanchalamba

When Sri Ramanuja reached the next village, he was heartily welcomed by a devout Srivaishnava woman called Chanchalamba. She prostrated before the party and offered a high seat to Ramanuja, and greeted them with great fervor and faith. After offering them water to drink, she said: "It is my true privilege that great devotees like you have come to my house and sanctified it. I will now prepare 'prasadam' that consists of all the six 'rasas' (tastes). Kindly take rest until then, so that you can recover from your fatigue due to your continuous traveling over recent days." The Srivaishnavas replied, "O generous one, we are delighted to listen to your affectionate words. Why should you take the trouble to cook for so many of us?" Chanchalamba replied, "Please do not have any doubt regarding me. I too am a disciple of Ramanuja, as I have obtained the relationship of his lotus feet. I will narrate how I have come to have the grace of the lotus feet of Ramanuja. Please listen to me." And so she began her story.

"Once, there was a severe drought in this place for twelve years. The people were greatly distressed and started to

migrate to other places. I went to Srirangam with my husband. There at Srirangam, I was standing on the street, when I had the privilege of having the 'darshan' of Sri Ramanuja for the first time. He was going on his rounds, begging for alms. At that time, Sri Ramanuja used to beg alms from seven houses, which he would consume later. Many kings, scholars and devotees used to beseech him at that time and I was very curious to know why. I stopped Ramanuja who was on his way and asked him, "O Sire! You lead your life by begging for alms. Being a 'sanyasin', you have no belongings. Even so, many great kings, outstanding scholars and brilliant people from various walks of life come to you and take refuge in you, just as they beseech Lord Ranganatha Himself. May I know the reason for their coming to you, a recluse with no belongings whatsoever?" Sri Ramanuja replied, "O devout woman, I deem all the people as devotees of the Lord. I have initiated them into the divine 'Mantra-Ratna' (also known as the 'Dvaya Mantra', which is said to be the gem of all mantras). Hence, they come to me to know more about the nuances of the path of devotion that leads to emancipation." Then I said, "If it is so, then kindly initiate me to into that divine mantra." Ramanuja readily granted my request, and, with his great compassion, initiated me into the path of Srivaishnavism. Since then, I continuously chant the mantra. I also meditate on his divine lotus feet. I have been meticulously following the tenets that he has been kind enough to teach.

When the rains came and the drought went away, my husband and I returned back to this place, and have been living here ever since. Before our departure from Srirangam, I went to Ramanuja once again and had the opportunity to know some more subtle aspects of the path to liberation. I then requested Ramanuja to give me a pair of his divine sandals. Ramanuja agreed to my request and showered his grace on me by giving a pair of his divine sandals.

I had the 'darshan' of Ramanuja at that time. Now, I am most eager to have his 'darshan' once again. I do not know when I will have that privilege." Saying thus, she started to weep.

Having heard this episode, Ramanuja was delighted, and directed Chanchalamba to prepare food for his entourage. He then asked his disciples to observe the method in which Chanchalamba would prepare the food. The disciples agreed and started to observe. Chanchalamba first bathed afresh. Then, wearing new, clean, sacred clothes, she first prostrated at the divine sandals of Ramanuja, and chanting the *Dvaya* mantra, she also chanted propitiatory verses of the lineage of the Acharyas. She then started to prepare food, with total devotion and dedication. Soon after, she brought out the divine sandals and said, "These are the divine sandals of my Acharya." She then worshipped the feet of each of the Srivaishnavas who had come there with Ramanuja. When she was about to worship the feet of Ramanuja, a sudden awareness dawned on her and she noticed that these were the very feet that she had worshipped at Srirangam. She

exclaimed, "These are the divine feet that I worshipped at Srirangam. I am sure that this is none other than my Acharya himself. However I am puzzled to see that he is without the 'Tridandam' and is not wearing saffron robes." Ramanuja then replied, "O devout lady, I verily am your Acharya. Due to some circumstances, I am now wearing white robes, and am without the 'Tridandam'. I am delighted to receive your devotion." Chanchalamba was greatly excited when she listened to these words. With tears of joy rolling down her cheeks, she said, "How lucky I am to have my Acharya come to this house and shower his grace on me. I am the most privileged person."

Ramanuja then told his disciples, "See how this devout and pious woman reveres her Acharya. Just like Vidura, who was a devout devotee of Sri Krishna, this woman too is a sincere devotee of the Lord. It is very much in the fitness of things that we consume the food that she has prepared for our sake with such dedication. Please go ahead and partake of the same." The disciples then took the food that was most tasty and delicious. Chanchalamba then gathered the morsels of food that the Srivaishnavas had left over on their plates, and served them to her husband so that he would attain knowledge of the Divine. However, she lay down to sleep on the floor without consuming anything. Her husband was surprised at her act of fasting, and asked her for her reason. She replied: "When my Acharya Ramanuja is fasting, how can I have food? Ramanuja has fasted due to the fact that he

is not in a position to have food, being in the house of person who has not been initiated into the Srivaishnava faith. Chanchalamba's husband then asked: "Are you fasting for this simple reason. I feel it is too trivial a matter that does not warrant your fasting." Chanchalamba refused to relent and continued to fast. Finally her husband was convinced about the issue and repeatedly swore to get initiated. Chanchalamba was finally assured and partook of the 'prasadam'.

Early next morning, her husband stood before Ramanuja fervently requesting him to initiate him into the five-fold sacramental Samskara, which would, in due course, enable the devotee to proceed to the divine abode of the Lord. Ramanuja happily initiated him, and anointed him as 'Srirangadasa'. Srirangadasa then honoured Ramanuja and his entire group of disciples.

Ramanuja then stayed there for a few days with his disciples.

After staying for a few days with the Srirangadasa couple, Ramanuja started towards the west. He reached a place known as "Vahni Pushkarini" (literally 'pond of fire') and stayed on the banks of the pond for three days. From there he proceeded to a place known as 'Sdigrama', which was situated in the precincts of modern day Mysore. Many Brahmins used to stay there, but most of them were of the illusion that Jnana alone was the path to liberation, and that Bhakti had no chance of securing a person emancipation. They were also totally unaware of the tenets

Srivaishnavism. Naturally they were reluctant to speak to or entertain Ramanuja, who, according to them, belonged to a new school of thought, with a hitherto unseen countenance. They were also under the continuous influence of Maya-Vada, and firmly believed that the whole world is an illusion. Ramanuja saw that this was severely stunting their spiritual growth. He directed his cousin and close disciple Mudali Andan, who then convinced them about the fact that the path of 'Bhakti' (devotion unto the Lord) was the easier and best path to attain liberation, and that the Lord to be devoted to was none other than Sriman Narayana, as ordained in all the Vedic and subsidiary texts. Mudali Andan ably answered all the queries that were put to him by the scholarly folk of the town. He skillfully proved to them that the philosophy of Visistadwaita alone could guide the spiritual aspirant to his goal, by propounding the realities of life in such a manner that there are no inherent contradictions. Soon after, the people of Saligrama requested Ramanuja to come to a sacred pond from which all the people of the town used to procure drinking water. In the Vedic tradition, it is firmly believed that the Lord showers His grace on those who worship His true devotees, rather than those who worship the Lord Himself. To invoke the grace of the Lord, Ramanuja asked Mudali Andan to dip his feet in the pond and then Ramanuja, at the request of the people, dipped his lotus feet in the pond. Then all the people partook the water, so that they would gain the grace of the Lord Sriman Narayana. In due course, all the people of the town became disciples of Ramanuja, who

initiated them into the Srivaishnava faith, by imparting to them the five sacramental 'Samskaras'.

During this time, the King of the region known as 'Bittideva', was under severe distress. His daughter was believed to be possessed by an evil spirit. The princess would always act in a crazy manner, and at times would behave in such an awkward manner that it would cause embarrassment for the royal couple. The King tried all the remedies that were at his disposal, but none of them brought any success. Many experts of black magic and others tried to cure her, but all failed.

Once, Thondanurnambi, another Srivaishnava Acharya, happened to visit the royal palace. The Queen then raised the topic of her daughter's illness in the presence of the King. The royal couple fervently requested Thondanurnambi to suggest a proper remedy. Thondanurnambi then told the queen about the arrival of his own Acharya, Ramanuja. He mentioned Ramanuja's greatness and the fact that he was the greatest among the great devotees of the Lord, a scholar par excellence in all the Sastras, as well as a great visionary. The King then said, "If Ramanuja is able to cure my daughter of her disease, I will become his disciple and offer my whole kingdom to him. Kindly bring him to my palace."

The King then went to Ramanuja and with folded hands, requested him, "O Sire! Kindly visit my palace and show er your grace on us." Ramanuja acceded to the King's request. The King was delighted at Ramanuja accepting his request.

He arranged a great reception for Ramanuja with the royal elephant, royal steed, soldiers, courtiers and so on, awaiting Ramanuja's arrival. When Ramanuja arrived at the royal palace, he was given a great reception befitting his status as a premier Acharya and was seated on a golden throne. The King and his family members worshipped the lotus feet of Ramanuja, according to the prescribed procedure. After washing his feet, they adorned them with holy flowers. Then they partook of the holy water – the water that had washed Ramanuja's holy feet. The same reverence was also given to all his followers and the holy water was sprinkled all over the royal palace. Soon after, the princess who was possessed by the evil spirit was brought before Ramanuja. She was overwhelmed at the sight of Ramanuja. Without anyone instructing her, she fell at his feet and sought his blessings. Ramanuja gave her the holy water of the Lord and the water with which his lotus feet had been washed. He also gave her the holy turmeric that had been offered to Goddess Lakshmi. Immediately, the evil spirit that had been possessing her left her. Having got rid of the evil spirit, she became a normal human being once again. She then went to her room. After adorning herself with the attire befitting her status, the princess returned to the court and prostrated before Ramanuja. The King and his family members were relieved and delighted at their daughter's cure. They too prostrated before Ramanuja and honoured him. Soon after, the King and his followers requested Ramanuja to initiate them into

the Srivaishnava faith. Ramanuja anointed him as 'Vishnuvardhana'.

When the earlier preceptors of the King, who belonged to the Jaina school of philosophy, came to know about this incident, they were greatly agitated and furious. Together with thousands of their followers, they immediately went to the palace and confronted Ramanuja, saying: "You have inappropriately converted the King of this province to your religion. If you feel you are right, you have to convince us too! We challenge you to a scholarly debate, wherein you have to defend your philosophy, by substantiating the tenets that your philosophy propounds. Otherwise, we will not spare you." Thus all of them simultaneously challenged Ramanuja. Ramanuja accepted their challenge. Meditating on the divine icon of his dear Lord Sri Ranganatha, he readied himself to confront them in a scholarly debate. The onlookers were worried as to how Ramanuja would manage to debate with one thousand Jaina scholars. However, in accord with the wishes of Lord Sri Ranganatha, Ramanuja asked his disciples to put up a screen between himself and the Jaina scholars. Behind the screen, he took the form of the thousand-hooded Adishesha, the primordial serpent. He thus engaged himself simultaneously, in a scholarly debate with all the thousand scholars individually through his thousand hoods, and in due course, convinced them about the nature of reality. The scholars were totally convinced by Ramanuja's divine words, and by the grace of the Lord

Himself, were able to realize the shortcomings and inconsistencies in their own schools of thought. Full of gratitude they paid their respects to Thondanurnambi, who had been instrumental in giving them the chance to meet Ramanuja and learn the greatness of the philosophy of Visistadwaita. All of them ultimately became Ramanuja's disciples. The disciples who had accompanied Ramanuja from Srirangam, were also astounded at the divine versatility of their Acharya and realized further the extent of his greatness. They once again prostrated before him and sought his blessings.

Acquiring Lord Sampathkumara

Soon after, Ramanuja reached the place called Thondanur, along with the King, his disciples and Thondanurnambi. He stayed there for a few days. At that time, the supply of holy white mud that he used to apply the 'tilak' on his forehead and on his person was about to be exhausted. When he was wondering about how he could procure the same, the Lord Tirunarayana appeared in his dream and said, "O Ramanuja, please come to the place called Yadavadri (now known as Melukote). I am entombed in an anthill there. I request you to release me from the anthill, re-install me in a new temple and consecrate it. The holy white mud which you are looking for is abundantly available in Yadavadri, in pristine purity."

Next morning, Ramanuja let his disciples know about his divine dream of the previous night. He wanted to leave for

Yadavadri immediatly, as instructed by the Lord Thondanurnambi, who knew the route to Yadavadri, directed Ramanuja to the place. King Vishnuvardhana ordered his soldiers to clear the way through the dense forest to Yadavadri. Guided by Thondanurnambi, Ramanuja soon reached Yadavadri. It was the month known as 'Pushya' (Jan Feb), in the year known as 'Bahudhanya', Ramanuja soon reached the holy pond known as 'Veda Pushkarini'.

'Veda Pushkarini' (literally meaning the pond associated with the Vedas) is an exalted place. It is on the banks of this pond that sage Dattatreya imparted the Vedas to his disciples in the Krita Yuga. Hence the place was also known as the "Vedadri" in the Krita Yuga. There is also another place known as the 'Paridhana Shila'* bordering this pond.

Having heard about this from Thondanurnambi, Ramanuja thought that this was the right place to give up the white

** When a person enters into the holy institution of 'sanyasa', he has to be initiated to it by another person who has already undertaken sanyasa. However, according to the prevailing practice, in this special place any one may voluntarily undertake sanyasa on their own, without the help of another sanyasin, by taking the saffron robe and other items, kept on this stone. Since one can undertake sanyasa on his own in this place, the stone that signifies this is known as the 'Paridhana Shila' (the stone that grants – as it grants sanyasa).*

robes he was wearing and re-adorn himself with the saffron robes as well as the Tiridandam, the insignia of a sanyasin. He placed the saffron robes and the Tiridandam in the designated place of the 'Paridhana Shila' and meditating on the Lord and the sages that had sanctified the place, re-adorned himself with them. Since Ramanuja did so in this place, 'Paridhana Shila' was still further sanctified, and is greatly revered to this day. Even now, sanyasins who arrive at Yadavadri make it a point to visit this 'Paridhana Shila', place their saffron robes and 'Tiridandam' at the designated place and have them sanctified.

In accordance with the Lord's wish, Ramanuja, with his disciples, set forth to Melukote, a town that had been in ruin for the previous few decades. He entered Melukote through the Southern Gate.

As Ramanuja entered the town which had gone to ruin, he was welcomed by a group of people who appeared to be of a lower caste. Ramanuj^a, the personification of compassion that he was, recognized the sincerity, simplicity and devotion in them and with no hesitation mingled with them, disregarding the mores and codes of interaction that was in vogue those days. Later, he would name these people "Tiruvuk" (those^a belonging to the lineage of the Lord Himself). Staying there for a few days, Ramanuja would perform his daily ablutions as well as the worship of his personal deity on the banks of the sacred pond of the place known as 'Kalyani'.

Later, following the instructions of the Lord, he set forth to search for the anthill in which the Lord was enshrined. He asked the locals about the location of the sacred anthill. It was the day of the star 'Punarvasu', in the month of 'Thai', in the Tamil calendar.

The locals led Ramanuja to the anthill and said, "O' revered one! We have been told by our elders that this anthill is God Himself. They have commanded us to look after it with care and veneration." The locals also knew that there was something special about this anthill because a certain cow would always circumambulate the anthill and every day, spontaneously sprinkle her milk on it. "Now we know the reason for that cow's behaviour," they said, "Of what service can we be to you?" Picturing the image of the Lord in his mind, Ramanuja worshipped the anthill and called upon the locals to bring pots of milk.

Then, Ramanuja and his disciples poured pots of milk over the anthill and lo! Behold, the enthralling beauty – Tiru Narayana – emerged out of the anthill. Thus Ramanuja rediscovered the divine idol of Lord Tiru Narayana, and presented it to the world. Later, he built a beautiful temple to Lord Tiru Narayana and consecrated it. He himself then performed the ritual worship of the Lord continuously for three days. Later, he assigned the sacred job to some of his disciples who had accompanied him from Srirangam. He also laid down the procedure for worship according to the 'Pandraratra Agama'. He then renovated the ruined town

around the temple and named it as 'Tiru Narayana Puram', meaning the town of Lord Tiru Narayana. Thus Ramanuja was instrumental in finding and consecrating the divine icon of the Lord as well as the renovation of this ancient town.

While in Melukote, Ramanuja also arranged for the pariahs whom he had named as 'Tirukkulathar' to enter the temple and offer their worship unto the Lord. They first bathed in the holy pond of 'Kalyani' and after putting the 'Tilak' on their foreheads according to the procedure, entered the temple and offered worship to the Lord. It was Ramanuja who was the first person to allow them entry into the temple. To perform such an act (which was unimaginable in those days), more than nine hundred years ago, speaks volumes about Ramanuja's far-sighted approach. In fact, he was the first saint-philosopher of this land to recognize the fact that all human beings have the inherent right to worship the Lord and offer Him their devotion. This highlights his visionary approach and commitment towards social reform and the wellbeing of all sections of society.

Soon after, Ramanuja, following the divine edict of his heart, ventured towards the northeastern portion of the town. There he saw the divine idol Lord Garuda that had been consecrated some time long previous. Just beside the place was a deep well filled with pure white mud. It was of an extremely high quality. Ramanuja saw the 'Tiruman', the holy white mud, and instructed all his disciples to apply it to their foreheads and on other parts of the body as prescribed in the Sastras.

As Ramanuja was staying at Tirunarayanapuram, his mind often dwelt on the Lord that he had consecrated. It dawned on him that one would not be able to enjoy the divine leel without an 'Utsavamurthi' (an icon used for ritualistic processions). The Lord appeared in his dream that night and let him know that the 'Utsavamurthi' was already there, but was kept in a Muslim ruler's mansion. The Lord directed Ramanuja to proceed to that place and bring back the 'Utsavamurthi'. When Ramanuja informed King Vishnuvardhana about his dream, the King offered a necessary assistance to Ramanuja to go all the way to the Muslim ruler's court to bring back the 'Utsavamurthi'. Ramanuja started on the journey, accompanied by his entourage consisting of hundreds of his disciples, all immersed in continuously chanting the divine names of the Lord.

After a long and arduous journey, they reached the Sultan's palace. Ramanuja immediately sought an audience with the ruler. The Sultan received him with great honour and after inquiring about his wellbeing, asked Ramanuja about the purpose of his visit. Ramanuja told the Sultan, "I have come to know from my Lord that the 'Utsavamurthi' Sri Ramapriya, is in your possession. Kindly hand him over to me, so that I can consecrate him in the temple in Tirunarayanapuram, in accord with the wishes of the Lord Himself." (Ramapriya is another well-known name of the Lord. This name, meaning loved by Rama, is due to the fact that the Lord was worshipped by Lord Sri Rama.)

The Sultan agreed and took Ramanuja inside his palace. He then showed Ramanuja a big hall where he had many icons of different deities, collected from various places. However, Ramanuja could not find his dear Lord Sampathkumara, whose form was firmly established in his mind, after he had had a divine vision of the Lord in his dream. He let the Sultan know about this. Then the Sultan took him to the quarters of his daughter. There, Ramanuja saw a most beautiful icon of the Lord Sampathkumara, adorned with a beautiful yellow silk robe, a tilak that was neatly applied using the sacred 'Kasturi', resplendent in every way. Ramanuja exclaimed, "This verily is my Lord Sampathkumara!" Ramanuja was surprised that the princess had taken a fancy to the icon of the Lord and had it among her prized possessions. However, at that moment she was not there. Ramanuja informed the Sultan that this was the very icon of the Lord he was looking for. The Sultan was reluctant to part with it, lest his daughter should be upset about her prized possession being given away. He therefore said, "O' Sir! If this is really your Lord, then please call Him. If He comes to you on His own, then you may take Him with you. Otherwise, I will not let you have Him." Ramanuja then meditated on the divine form of the Lord and called him. And lo! Behold! The idol of the Lord took the form of a young boy and approached Ramanuja and sat on his lap. The Sultan was amazed and astounded at witnessing this remarkable event. Ramanuja's disciples were too stunned to say anything. After this incident, the Lord was known as the foster son of Ramanuja himself and

Ramanuja was given the honourific title 'Father of Lord Sampathkumara'.

The Sultan marveled at this miraculous event. He could no longer deny the icon of the Lord to Ramanuja. He acceded to Ramanuja's request for the 'Utsavamurthi' of the Lord, handed it over and arranged for a golden palanquin with all due honours for the transportation of the idol.

Even as Ramanuja was on his way back to Tirunarayanapuram, the princess returned to the palace and was shocked to see her dearest icon missing. She immediately confronted her father the Sultan and took him to task for giving away her prized possession to a stranger. The Sultan pleaded helplessness and narrated the unbelievable sequence of events that had taken place. Though the princess believed everything narrated by her father, she could not bear the pangs of separation from her dear Lord, whom she loved more than her own self. She immediately set forth in pursuit of her Lord on horseback.

By that time Ramanuja had reached Tirunarayanapuram, and had made all arrangements for the re-consecrating of his beloved son, the Lord Sri Sampathkumara. As the consecration rituals were in progress, the princess who reached that place, hurried to the temple. But alas! It was too late. She came to know that the Lord had been consecrated by the temple priests and she could no longer have the deity for herself, as before. Unable to digest this

truth, she immediately fainted and soon after her devout soul merged with the feet of the Lord.

To mark this, a small icon of the princess was installed at the divine feet of the icons of both Lord Tirunarayana and Lord Sampathkumara, and this can be seen even today at Tirunarayanapuram.

Having established the Utsavamurthi in accord with the Lord's directions, Ramanuja arranged for many beautiful, invaluable ornaments for his dear deity-son Lord Sampathkumara. He also laid down the procedure for conducting many divine celebrations, with the Lord Himself



**Sri Ramanuja devotedly calling
Lord Sampathkumara**

as the focal point of those celebrations that would greatly enhance the devotion of the devotees unto the Lord, and show them the path to liberation.

Thus Ramanuja was primarily responsible for the overall renovation of the town of Tirunarayanapuram, the discovery of the icons of the presiding deities, for building the temple and constituting the procedures of ritual worship there.

Ramanuja stayed at Tirunarayanapuram for twelve years. This place is known as his 'Vijaya Sthana'. It is in this province that he overcame the challenge from the Jaina philosophers and established the philosophy of the Visistadwaita. It was also here that he accomplished many divine tasks that he could not do at Srirangam. Ramanuja thus became an integral part of the history of Tirunarayanapuram (Melukote, as it is known today).

Ramanuja also reiterated the greatness of this hallowed place to his disciples in no uncertain terms. He advised people to stay in the holy town for at least a few days so that all the sins that they had performed would be washed away by the divine grace of the Lord.

Sri Ramanuja and Mudali Andan

Ramanuja with his disciples was performing services unto Lord Tirunarayana, the presiding deity of Melukote, also known as Tirunarayanapuram. At that time after the completion of the ritual worship (Tiru Aradhanam), the hea

priest would distribute the sacred water (Tēertham) of the Lord to all the devotees assembled there. In Srivaishnava tradition, the teertham is to be given first to the most exalted devotee, then to the next best exalted one, and so forth, distributed to all the devotees assembled, irrespective of their caste, creed or sex. It was but natural that the teertham would first be given to Bhagavan Sri Ramanuja, he being the most exalted devotee, and then to all the other devotees.

Mudali Andan and Kuresha were the two premier most devotees of Ramanuja. They were said to be the 'Tri-idaṇḍa' and 'Pavithra' (his sacred renunciate's staff and his sacred darbha grass ring - two of the symbols of a sanyasin) of Ramanuja. Mudali Andan had accompanied Ramanuja to Melukote.

On a particular day, Mudali Andan was among the congregation of devotees (Goshthi). The head priest, after the conclusion of the worship of Lord Tirunarayana, started distributing the Teertham to the devotees. As was the practice, he first gave the teertham to Ramanuja, then to a few other devotees, and then to Mudali Andan. The teertham was later distributed to all assembled there, which included some labourers and people belonging to the lower classes.

Teertham is literally "that which helps us transcend worldliness (and attain the divine abode of the Lord)". It attains greater power when it is partaken first by the

acknowledged devotees of the Lord and is thereafter given to the other devotees. Hence, in olden days, it was first offered to persons of the stature of Ramanuja, who were realized souls and then distributed to other devotees, thus making it more sacred and effective.

Mudali Andan, was irked at having been given the teertham, after some other devotees. He felt that this was a breach of protocol. Mudali Andan thought that as he was the foremost disciple of Ramanuja among those present and a senior devotee, he should have been offered the teertham immediately after it had been offered to Ramanuja. He felt agitated that his seniority and devotion had not been given due recognition.

Later in the day, he instructed the temple officials: "Today, there has been a breach in the protocol to be followed in the temple. I should have been offered the teertham of the Lord immediately after it was offered to Acharya Ramanuja. But it was not so. After the teertham was offered to Ramanuja, it was offered to many other devotees before it was offered to me. This is an insult to my position and stature, as the foremost disciple of Ramanuja. Hence, from tomorrow onwards, see to it that I am offered the teertham immediately after it is given to Ramanuja."

Eventually, in the course of the day, Ramanuja came to know about the incident that had occurred earlier in the day, and the instructions given to the temple officials by Mudali Andan. He was amused, but chose to say nothing.

The following day, after the conclusion of the worship of the Lord, the head priest, as usual, came to offer the teertham, first to Ramanuja. But Ramanuja declined to accept the teertham and instead, directed the head priest to give the teertham to the other devotees assembled in the Sri Goshthi, on the other side to where Mudali Andan was standing. Thereafter, he directed the head priest to give the teertham to all the ladies and labourers assembled there. Finally, he asked the head priest to give the teertham to himself. The head priest obeyed Ramanuja and gave the teertham to him. Then Ramanuja asked the head priest to give the teertham to Mudali Andan. Ramanuja then sarcastically remarked: "Yesterday, Mudali Andan instructed the temple officials to give him teertham immediately after it was given to me. I have seen to it that this has been followed. I hope Mudali Andan is happy, since his wish has been fulfilled."

In this way, Ramanuja made Mudali Andan realize that when a person claims that he himself is a great devotee, he then loses his value, because a really great devotee will never claim that he is a great devotee of the Lord. He will always feel and acknowledge that all the other devotees are far greater than him in all aspects and respect them. The first thing a devotee ought to know is that, in an assembly of devotees, all are equal in front of God (just as it is said, "All are equal in the eyes of the law"). It was for this reason that, on the second day, Ramanuja accepted the teertham only after it

was distributed to all the other devotees. Mudali Andan realized that Ramanuja himself would not claim any privilege place among the assembly of devotees and also that it would be more appropriate to receive the teertham only after it had been offered to each and every devotee present in the assembly.

After this episode, Mudali Andan was embarrassed and overcome by remorse. He realized his folly, caused by his ego. He then thought "I have been taught a nice lesson by my beloved, divine master," and he stopped insisting on being given any preference in the assembly of devotees, happily accepting the teertham as and when it was offered to him.

Sri Ramanuja and Somayaji Andan

Ramanuja was camping at Melkote. At the same time, a great devotee, Somayaji Andan was also staying at Melkote performing the kainkaryams (services to the Lord or his devotees) of Lord Tirunarayana. Somayaji Andan was such a great devotee of the Lord, that not only could he engage the Lord in a conversation, but the Lord would also literally dance in front of Somayaji Andan, following the tune of the

* There is no documented evidence about this story. It is based on an ancient 'Aithyam' (traditional anecdotes handed from Guru to Shishya). It is to be kept in mind that this story is not intended to belittle the greatness or virtuousness of Mudali Andan, one of the greatest Acaryas of our lineage. It is only to underline the spirit and values that Ramanuja upheld throughout his life that this incident has been narrated here.

songs Somayaji Andan would sing. Whenever Somayaji Andan would sing, the Lord would take a human form and dance before him. Ramanuja was delighted at the presence of such a great devotee in the exalted place of Melukote. He was very impressed at the mercy of the Lord towards His devotee, Somayaji Andan.

It is well known that just to have a divine vision of the Almighty Lord is most difficult. It is even more difficult to engage the Lord in a conversation. So if a person is able to make the Lord Sriman Narayana Himself dance, that too taking a human form, every time he sings, it is the most incredible and rare achievement, which even the most exalted devotee would not be able to even dream about. Ramanuja was overwhelmed at knowing of such a devotee, who could do such wonders with the Lord Himself. As Ramanuja was a being and devotee of the highest stature, he was able to view the divine instances of the Lord taking a human form and dancing, as the great devotee Somayaji Andan sung his heart out. Ramanuja considered himself most privileged to have been able to view such a divine event happening in this world. He prostrated to Somayaji Andan and paid his sincere respects.

In due course, Ramanuja came to know more about Somayaji Andan. Ramanuja, himself being a devotee par excellence, could visualize all that that was going on between the Lord and Somayaji Andan. Eventually he came to know that Somayaji Andan had not attained the wholeness required

for a model devotee, in order to attain the emancipation which results in the soul reaching Vaikuntha- the divine abode of the Almighty Lord - as soon as he leaves the mortal coil. Ramanuja was perturbed. He was in a dilemma as to whether he should let Somayaji Andan know that he had not attained the wholeness that would help him qualify for liberation. The matter was complicated as Somayaji Andan was older than him in age, a senior devotee, and a native of that place. He would likely be offended if Ramanuja pointed out this deficiency. Yet, it would also be incorrect on Ramanuja's part if, knowing of a person's spiritual deficiency, he did not mention it to that person.

In the field of spirituality, honesty, openness, frankness and so on, are the basic prerequisites. A person, even though he might himself be older and more experienced, has to listen to a fellow-devotee, irrespective of his age or credentials and accept, or at least consider, his suggestions. Seniority among the devotees is decided not on the basis of age or such other criteria, but purely on the basis of the amount of the grace of the Lord the devotee has gained. History is replete with stories of elderly people becoming the disciples of much younger people, because of the younger person's insight and grace.

Nonetheless, Ramanuja was in dilemma. While he was deep in thought about what course to take in this regard, the Lord ordered him to inform Somayaji Andan about the deficiency he had to overcome in order to attain wholeness as a

devotee and be eligible for liberation. Ramanuja then realized he had no choice but to bring the deficiency to the notice of Somayaji Andan. But this was easier said than done. How could he communicate this to Somayaji Andan? Ramanuja, the modest being that he was, summoned his courage derived from the divine will of the Almighty, and approached Somayaji Andan in all humility. After discussing certain other issues with Somayaji Andan, Ramanuja said, very modestly, in a soft tone: "Sir, you are a great devotee of the Almighty Lord. I understand that even as you sing the divine musical hymns, the Lord appears before you in a human form and dances. I have not come across a devotee who has such a close relationship with the Lord. However, I have a small doubt. Only the Lord can clarify it. Since you are so close to the Lord, I would request you to kindly enquire about this from the Lord and let me know the answer." Somayaji Andan felt proud listening to these words from Ramanuja. He happily replied: "Please let me know what it is about. I will readily ask the Lord and let you know." Ramanuja, in a tone even more modest said: "Please ask the Lord how one becomes eligible for final liberation and whether one can gain liberation by great devotion and kindly let me know." Somayaji Andan replied: "Definitely! Why not? I will let you know soon." Having accomplished his immediate task, Ramanuja left it at that.

It should be noted here that Ramanuja did not say: "Please ask the Lord if you are eligible for salvation." And of course,

he phrased his question purposefully. As Somayaji Andan had taken it for granted that he was eligible for liberation since he was so close to the Lord, he would undoubtedly have been offended if Sri Ramanuja had asked the question in that manner. An expert in gauging people's feelings, Ramanuja was very judicious in the way he dealt with such delicate issues. Hence he only asked Somayaji Andan: "Please ask the Lord how one becomes eligible for final liberation and whether one can gain liberation by great devotion and kindly let me know." However, Somayaji Andan misunderstood the question. He thought that Ramanuja was urging him to ask the Lord about whether Ramanuja himself was fit and eligible for liberation.

The next day, as usual, Somayaji Andan went to the temple, and sang the divine hymns, as was his wont. The Lord too appeared and performed the divine dances. Afterwards, Somayaji Andan asked the Lord: "O Lord, today, a devotee Ramanuja by name, asked me a question. He wanted to know from you if he was eligible to attain liberation. Do kindly let me know." The Lord replied: "Why did Ramanuja, one of my greatest devotees have such a doubt? It has been assured by me long back that, not only Ramanuja, but all those who chant his name with affection and dedication will automatically qualify for liberation. Please tell this to Ramanuja."

The next day, when Ramanuja went to meet him, Somayaji Andan exclaimed: "O Ramanuja, you are a very fortunate and blessed person. The Lord has told me that not only you

but all those who chant your name with dedication and sincerity will automatically be eligible for liberation. So you may be at ease. Henceforth you need not worry about this.” Ramanuja listened with rapt attention, but was disappointed that things had not worked out as he had hoped for. He then summoned his courage once again, and in a low tone asked Somayaji Andan: “Sir, I thank you for the answer obtained from the Lord. I have another small doubt. Please excuse me if my question is impertinent. I request you to kindly ask the Lord if you yourself are eligible to attain salvation.” Somayaji Andan frowned at this unexpected question and retorted: “When the Lord is so close to me that whenever I sing he takes a human form and dances to my tunes, how could it be possible that he would not grant me liberation and admit me to His divine abode? I am convinced that, given my proximity to the Lord, he will readily grant me emancipation. So there is no room for any doubt.” Ramanuja however humbly insisted: “Sir, since the Lord is so close to you, is it not better to get an assurance from Him to that effect? Why leave room for doubt when things can be easily clarified?” Even though Somayaji Andan initially refused, he finally agreed.

The following day, after the routine music-dance presentation, Somayaji Andan enquired of the Lord: “O Lord, is it not true that I am the most eligible person to attain liberation, and that I will, without any doubt, be admitted to your divine abode Vaikuntha, upon my death?” The Lord smilingly

replied: "No, definitely not, you are not eligible for salvation.' Somayaji Andan was shocked. He asked in a choked voice "How is it that you could deny salvation to me, your closest devotee. I am so close to you to that whenever I sing, you take a human form and dance. I haven't heard of any other devotee who has had such a close relationship with you. Is it right on your part to treat me like this?" The Lord replied: "Yes, you are my close devotee, but I am not inclined to grant you liberation. I fully compensate your devotion by dancing to your tunes whenever you sing and thus make you happy. Therefore I am not indebted to you in any way. Hence I am not bound to grant you liberation." Somayaji Andan further asked: "Then how is that you have granted salvation to Ramanuja and all his followers?" The Lord replied: "Oh! Ramanuja's case is totally different. He has nothing but pure devotion and the utmost love for me. His love for me is unconditional. He never expects anything in return from me. In fact he rejects all the offers I make to him, and yearns for nothing but my blessings and grace. Hence, I am not satisfied, even if I give myself to him." Somayaji Andan asked with humility: "Then what about my fate?" The Lord replied: "When the whole world is readily following Ramanuja, is it not appropriate for you too to approach him?" The reality now dawned on Somayaji Andan.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna mentions four types of devotees. The Lord, while concurring that a person who worships Him for the sake of worldly gains is also a devotee, emphasizes

that the devotee who is known as the 'Jnaani' is the best among all of them. A true Jnaani is one who does not expect anything in return from the Lord. Generally, the Lord tests His devotees, by luring them with boons of various natures. Many devotees fall prey to these things, and accept the boons given by the Lord, which result in name, fame and the fleeting prosperity of the material world. They then start basking in acquired glory and ultimately forget the very purpose of their approaching the Lord in the first place. A true devotee known as a Jnaani will never be lured by such temptations. He does not expect anything, neither from other people, nor from the Lord Himself. As a result, the Lord becomes a severe debtor to such devotees, and pleads His inability to repay the debt, even by giving His whole Self to them. The Lord, in this story, says that Ramanuja is one such devotee, to whom the Lord is totally indebted, and to whom He cannot repay the debt however much He tries. Thus, we can see that Ramanuja was the model devotee, who thus gained the gratitude of the Lord.

Somayaji Andan now realized that getting the Lord to dance to his tune was not an end in itself. Pure devotion unto the Lord without expecting anything in return is the final goal of every soul in this world. This is known as "Sadhya Bhakti" in philosophical parlance. This is the devotion (Bhakti) that is the means to attain the vision (sakshatkara) of the Lord as a mass of all-surpassing bliss. Once a devotee attains such a vision of the Lord, he is further attracted towards Him. In

this way, the devotee develops total dedication and devotion unto the Lord, which is known as "Sadhya Bhakti". Attaining this "Sadhya Bhakti" ought to be, verily, the ultimate aim of every soul. The devotion of Ramanuja belongs to such a category, by which the Lord is so pleased that he is not satisfied even if He gives His all to His devotee. Thus Ramanuja is indeed '*The Model*' for all devotees of this world to follow.

Somayaji Anda realized this, came to Ramanuja and surrendered himself at his feet.

This incident shows the essence of the greatness of the greatest devotee who happened to grace this divine land of Bharata (India).

The Argument in the court of the Chola King

Once, a devotee of Ramanuja started from Srirangam to Tirunarayanapuram, desirous of meeting Ramanuja. Ramanuja was very eager to know about the events that happened at Srirangam since he had departed from that place. He was eager to know about the fate of his own Acharya S Mahapurna as well as his dear devotee Kuresha, who had gone to the court of the Chola king, disguising himself as Ramanuja. The devotee replied, "O Sir, as soon as you graciously self departed from Srirangam, Mahapurna and Kuresha left for the court of the Chola King, escorted by the royal guards. Soon, they had an audience with the King.

himself. The King was in an angry mood. Addressing them in harsh language, he asked them to sign a statement that read "Sivat Parataram Nasti" (There is none superior to Lord Shiva). Kuresha meditated on the divine form of the Lord in his heart, and he set out to speak in a modest but firm manner. He spoke with great erudition and conviction in the scripture. His oratory was surpassing and he spoke verily as a seer. He cited scripture copiously, and he refuted others' false doctrines. His purport was that the Vedas, the Smritis, the Itihasas (the Ramayana and the Mahabharata) and Puranas ordain beyond doubt that Lord Srīman Narayana is 'The Supreme'. There is no other entity that is equal to Him, let alone one who is superior, whatsoever. He is the creator, sustainer and the destroyer of this Universe. He verily is The Supreme Being who, when worshipped, is capable of granting liberation to all souls. The Sun shines forth upon His command; the basic elements do their duties, as ordained by Him. Lord Brahma is the son of the Great Lord, and Shiva in turn, is the son of Lord Brahma. The sacred river Ganga is sanctified, since it happens to be the water that Brahma poured over the feet of the Lord Srīman Narayana, while he incarnated as Trivikrama. In conclusion, he quoted the text,

“वेदात् शास्त्रं परं नास्ति,
न दैवं केशवात् परम्”

meaning:

“There is no authority superior to Vedas
Nor is there a deity superior to Keshava.”

The King and his courtiers were spellbound by this superb display of oratory and convincing scholarship that was used to propound the truth. Nobody could counter Kuresha's statement.

Soon after, the king said, "Since you are a great scholar and have mastered the art of oratory, you have tried to prove that Sriman Narayana is the Supreme Being. However, scholarship and oratory are not of much use in my court. You may just give it to me in writing that there is none superior to Lord Shiva. That is all I want from you."

Thus forced by the king, Kuresha thought, 'It has been proved beyond doubt in all the Sastras that Sriman Narayana is the Supreme Being. All the other beings are subservient to Him and follow His orders. Therefore how can I endorse a false statement?' He further thought, 'The word 'Shiva' has many meanings. One of the meanings is a measuring vessel (used for measuring grains) known as 'Shiva' in Sanskrit. There is another measuring vessel known as 'Drona', that is bigger than this vessel called Shiva. Hence I will write below the statement: 'Sivat Parataram Nasti' (there is none superior to Lord Shiva), that 'Dronam Asti Tadah Param' (there is 'Drona' which is superior to 'Shiva') and then put my signature.' Having thought of this solution, he wrote it down, signed the document and handed it over to the King. The King was furious to see what Kuresha had written. Taking this as a grave insult he immediately ordered his guards to pluck out the eyes of Kuresha and Mahapurna. The guards

followed the King's command. While the guards forcibly plucked out Mahapurna's eyes, Kuresha took out his own eyes himself, voluntarily, saying: "I will never see my Acharya with these eyes, which have been sullied by seeing you."

Mahapurna could not bear the excruciating pain caused by the forcible and violent removal of his eyes and, as they were returning to Srirangam, he fell seriously ill. Placing his head on Kuresha's lap and his feet on the lap of his devout daughter Attulai, Mahapurna expressed his desire to give up his life then and there. Observing that it would be propitious if they could reach the sacred portals of Srirangam where Mahapurna could spend the last moments of his life, Kuresha



**Sri Mahapurna and Sri Kuresha at the
court of the Chola King**

told Mahapurna, "It would be good if you could kindly resolve to be alive until we reach Srirangam, instead of ending your life at this unknown place." Mahapurna feebly replied, "If I reach Srirangam alive just for the sake of ending my life in a pious place, it would create an impression in the minds of the people that I came to Srirangam just to end my life there. It would further imply that only those who pass away in Srirangam will be eligible for emancipation. However, that is not the case. Every true Srivaishnava, who has totally and unconditionally surrendered to the Supreme Lord, is eligible for liberation irrespective of where and when his life comes to an end." Having told this to Kuresha, Mahapurna started to meditate deeply on the lotus feet of his own dear Acharya Sri Yamuna and soon after, shed his mortal coil and reached the divine abode of the Supreme Lord.

Later, Mahapurna's son and other Srivaishnavas conducted the prescribed 'Brahma-Medha' rites for Mahapurna.

Ramanuja was very much agitated after hearing about these happenings from the Srivaishnavas who had come from Srirangam. He then arranged for the chanting of all the Vedas along with their subsidiaries like Vedangas, Itihasas and Puṛaṇas and the four thousand divine verses of the Alvars in the divine presence of Lord Tirunarayana, to commemorate Mahapurna's attaining the divine abode of Vāṭuntha. He then treated all the devotees present there to a sumptuous feast and honoured them with *Dakshina*.

Thus he performed the duties that are expected of a devout disciple unto his Acharya.

However, he still could not bear the thought of Kuresha's suffering, who had given up his eyes for his Acharya Ramanuja's sake. He sent a messenger to Kuresha expressing his sadness and concern over all the events that had happened in and around Srirangam during his absence.

Sri Kuresha retires to Sri Vrishabhachalam

Kuresha was also known as Sri-Vatsa-Chinha-Mishra (named after the Lord Sriman Narayana who sports the divine symbol known as 'Srivatsa' on his chest). After this incident when Kuresha went to the temple of Lord Sri Ranganatha and was about to enter the main entrance of the temple, the doorkeepers addressed him and said, "Oh! Kuresha, though you are a disciple of Ramanuja, you are a good personality; hence we will allow you to enter the temple." Kuresha was taken aback at these remarks of the doorkeepers. He asked, "Why are you, all of a sudden praising me?" One of the doorkeepers replied, "Sir, Ramanuja has left Srirangam and he has not returned for a long time. Ramanuja is considered to be the main enemy of our King, belonging to the Chola dynasty. Even though we are not against Ramanuja, as the servants of the King, we have been given strict instructions not to allow either Ramanuja or anyone who has any sort of relationship with him into the temple. Even the priests of the temple have agreed that neither Ramanuja nor his

followers should be allowed to enter the temple. Nevertheless, since you are a great personality and not a wicked person like Ramanuja, despite the orders of the king, we will allow you to enter the temple.” Kuresha was agitated listening to these words of the doorkeepers. He immediately said: “If not being related to Ramanuja is a condition for entering the temple then I would give up even the pleasure of having the darshan of Lord Sri Ranganatha. My relationship with Ramanuja is more precious than my having the darshan of the Lord. I would forego the darshan of the Lord, rather than declaring myself as unrelated to Ramanuja.” Having said this, he retreated from the temple entrance, and returned home with a heavy heart.

He immediately decided to quit Srirangam as it was no longer a fit place to live. He set forth to Sri Vrishabhachalam, where the presiding deity is popularly known as Sundara-Baahu (One with beautiful arms - Andal, Nammalvar, Periyalvar, and Tirumangai Alvar have all sung praises about this place of worship.) On his way to this place Kuresha composed ‘A Manusha Stava’ (propitiatory verses about the superhuman pastimes of the Lord Sriman Narayana), and ‘Sri Vaikuntha Stava’ (propitiatory verses of Lord Sriman Narayana, residing with all resplendence in Vaikuntha - His eternal abode). Once he arrived in Sri Vrishabhachalam, Kuresha stayed there immersed in a mood of devotion and total dedication to the Lord. As a result of his unswerving devotion, there was a spontaneous outflow of his heartfelt thoughts unto the Lord.

which resulted in the composition of a further four divine hymns in Sanskrit, known as 'Sri Sundara-Bahu-Stava' (propitiatory verses of Lord Sundara Baahu). Later, he composed the 'Varada Raja Stava', (propitiatory verses of Lord Varadaraja of Kanchi and 'Sri Stava' (propitiatory verses of Goddess Lakshmi).

By this time, the messengers sent by Ramanuja from Tirunarayanapuram reached Srirangam. They came to know that Kuresha had deserted that place. Hence, they travelled to Sundara Giri (another name of Sri Vrishabhachalam), the place where Kuresha was staying. They met Kuresha and prostrated before him. They then narrated all the events that had occurred at Tirunarayanapuram including the renovation of the temple and consecration of the Lord Tirunarayana, as well as the recovery of the Utsavamurti, Sri Sampathkumara. They also let Kuresha know about the concern that Ramanuja had expressed at Kuresha losing his eyes due to the wicked deed of the Chola King. They also conveyed Ramanuja's deep condolences for the passing away of Mahapurna, and informed Kuresha that Ramanuja was staying at Tirunarayanapuram, greatly distressed over Kuresha losing his eyes. Tears flowed from the damaged eyes of Kuresha when he heard about Ramanuja's great concern. He then said to Ramanuja's messengers that he was greatly privileged to be the recipient of Ramanuja's hearty concern. He prostrated before those messengers and attended to their needs as if they themselves were the personification of Sri Ramanuja.

Return of Sri Ramanuja to Srirangam

The anti-Srivaishnava stand of the Chola King had been intensifying day by day. Mahapurna and Kuresha lost their eyes as a result of his tyranny, which subsequently resulted in the death of Mahapurna. The King then ordered that all the temples of Vishnu, falling within the borders of his rule, be destroyed immediately. His followers started to implement his orders and demolished many temples belonging to Vishnu. His tyranny reached its zenith when he himself led an army to demolish the great temple of Srirangam, where Lord Sri Ranganatha presided in His resplendent glory. But even as he was making arrangements for the demolition, a boil appeared in his throat. It began to increase at a very fast pace, and soon it became infested with contagious worms. This disease proved fatal and he died on the way to the temple of Srirangam.

As soon as the news of the death of the tyrant Chola king reached the devout Srivaishnavas of Srirangam, they set forth on the long and arduous journey to Tirunarayanapuram. When they arrived, they informed Ramanuja that the Chola king had passed away. Ramanuja immediately proceeded to the temple of Lord Narasimha in Tirunarayanapuram and prostrated before Him. Ramanuja said "O Lord! Just as you killed the demon Hiranyakashipu to protect your devotee Prahlada, You have proved again that you are the true saviour of temples as well as your devotees." Lord Narasimha was happy to listen to these words of Ramanuja. He ordered

His priests to bestow the Teertham and Prasadam to Ramanuja and honoured him with great reverence. Ramanuja then returned from the hill-temple and prostrated before Lord Tirunarayana and his dear son, Lord Sampathkumara, and requested them to allow him to return to Srirangam.

When he was about to leave for Srirangam, he addressed his disciples and said, "It has been twelve long years since we came here from Srirangam. Now, Srirangam is rid of all evilforces. It is now necessary for me to leave for Srirangam to worship my dear Lord Sri Ranganatha. It has been a pleasure for me to have been associated with you all these years. Now, I would like to direct you to take very good care of Lord Tirunarayana and my own dear son Lord Sampathkumara and perform the necessary pujas with faith and religious fervor."

He continued, "Just as a mother is always worried about her young son, who is playing in the vicinity of an open unfenced well, and constantly keeps an eye on him, you have to take care of my beloved son, Lord Sampathkumara."

Listening to this, the disciples of Tirunarayanapuram were quite despondent, they did not want Ramanuja to leave and fell at his feet, weeping intensely. They said, "Just as a fish that is out of water is unable to survive even for a few moments, so also, we too would be unable to live, even for a moment without your presence. O Lord, kindly permit us to make a beautiful image of your gracious self." Sri Ramanuja replied, "I will permit you to do so. However, I appeal to

you to have the same affection and devotion to that icon of mine even after my departure. I also direct you to have total love and affection towards each other in the presence of my icon." After the beautiful icon was made, Sri Ramanuja bestowed all his divine powers to that icon. It is said that the devout disciples could get responses to their spiritual doubts from that divine, beautiful icon, whenever they wanted.

Thus, having departed from Tirunarayanapuram, Ramanuja returned to Srirangam with his disciples. Just as the citizens of Ayodhya were greatly excited and welcomed Lord Sri Rama when he returned from the forest after fourteen years, the devotees of Srirangam welcomed Sri Ramanuja, who returned to Srirangam after twelve long years, with all honours and devotional fervour. Govinda Bhattar (also known as Embar) attended to the services of Ramanuja. Vedic hymns were chanted by renowned Vedic scholars. Auspicious sounds from drums and other musical instruments emanated loudly. Thus, receiving a grand welcome, Ramanuja entered Srirangam.

Straight away, Ramanuja went to the temple of Lord Sri Ranganatha. Just as the poorest of the poor rejoices upon finding a treasure, Ramanuja was immensely delighted and celebrated his reunion with the Lord. The Lord addressed Sri Ramanuja, "O Ramanuja, You have gone through great hardship, roaming around dense and dangerous forests without food and water, due to the villainy of the Chola King." Ramanuja replied, "O ocean of compassion and mercy! O

Lord who destroys all the hardships of devotees! It is all due to the divine *Leela* of your gracious self." The Lord then directed his priests to honour Ramanuja in the prescribed way and then instructed Ramanuja to stay at Srirangam, where he would be able to carry out his work free from difficulties.

Ramanuja then circumambulated the temple and directly proceeded to Kuresha's residence. Kuresha was delighted to know that his beloved Acharya had come to his residence and he immediately fell at his feet. Ramanuja raised Kuresha and embraced him tightly, with the utmost love and affection. Tears rolled down both of their faces. Ramanuja was extremely sad and said, "You have been subjected to unbearable pain and misery by being made to lose your eyes. I am unable to understand why a great devotee like you has been made to undergo such misery." Kuresha replied, "O' Sir! Probably I might have made fun of the swerving 'tilak' on the forehead of some Srivaishnava sometime, which is why I have been subjected to this misery." Ramanuja said, "It is not so. You have been subjected to this misery on my account. It is because you are my friend and associate that the Chola King has acted against you in this wicked manner. Thus, the reason for your misery is not your sin, but your association with me." Having said this, Ramanuja took Kuresha to his Ashram.

The people of Srirangam rejoiced on hearing the news of Ramanuja's return. All of them came to have the darshan of

Ramanuja individually. They expressed their happiness and told him, "The Chola King's tyranny knew no bounds. As your gracious self knows very well, there is a temple of Lord Govindaraja within the temple of Nataraja, in the holy place of Chitrakootam (now popularly known as Chidambaram). The Chola King ordered that the Govindaraja idol of that shrine be thrown away into the sea nearby, so that the Nataraja temple would be rid of the presence of Lord Vishnu. However, some priests who were most devoted to the Lord have safely brought the 'Utsavamurti' (processional deity) to Tirupati. We request you to kindly re-consecrate the deity, at the divine shrine in Tirupati."

Ramanuja accepted their request and proceeded to Tirupati, and re-consecrated the icon of Lord Govindaraja. He then proceeded to Tirumala and worshipped Lord Venkatesha and returned to Srirangam with his entourage.

The granting of eyesight to Sri Kuresha by Lord Varadaraja

One day, Ramanuja sent for Kuresha. When Kuresha arrived, he told him that Lord Varadaraja of Kanchi was famous for fulfilling the desires of his devotees. He urged Kuresha to compose verses in praise of the Lord. Accordingly, Kuresha began composing what would become a great compendium of verses and would later be famously known as the 'Varadaraja Stava'. In one of these verses, Kuresha propitiated the Lord and requested Him to grant him the eyesight that

would enable him to have the divine vision of the Supreme Lord Sriman Narayana. Later that night, Lord Varadaraja appeared in Kuresha's dream and said, "I will give you divine eyesight," and vanished.

Next morning, Kuresha came to Ramanuja and read him his beautiful composition. Ramanuja was delighted to listen to Kuresha's beautiful composition: scholarly, yet full of emotion. Kuresha also told him about the dream he had the previous night, where the Lord had assured him of the divine eyesight that would enable him to have darshan of the Lord Himself in all His majesty and splendour. Ramanuja suggested that they immediately proceed to Kanchi and asked Kuresha to present his verses in the physical presence of Lord Varadaraja. Kuresha agreed and they set forth to Kanchi. They reached Kanchi and in the very presence of Lord Varadaraja, Kuresha presented his poetic compositions in praise of the Lord and even continued composing, in beautiful verse, right before the Lord. The Lord was delighted by Kuresha's humility, modesty and devotion. Taking this opportunity, Kuresha pleaded with the Lord; 'O Lord, accept this soul of mine and grant me the boon of taking me to your eternal abode, that exalted Vaikunta, where nothing but ultimate and eternal bliss alone exists! Kindly grant moksha to Nalooran* also because of whom all this happened." The Lord immediately granted Kuresha's request.

* Nalooran was the person, though being a Srivaishnava himself, who was serving in the court of the tyrant Chola King. In fact, it was he who

However, Ramanuja was perturbed that Kuresha never asked the Lord to give back his eyesight, which he had lost in the court of the Chola King. He told Kuresha, "What have you done? You have requested the Lord only for divine eyesight, which will be of no use to you in your daily activities in this world. It is unfortunate that you have done this, and you have also transgressed my order by not asking for ordinary human eyesight that will enable you to live independently in this world. You didn't ask for the right thing." Kuresha replied modestly, "O Sir! Of what use would this human eyesight be to me? I am already very old and ready to leave for the eternal abode. Hence, I am happy that I have asked for divine eyesight from the Lord. I don't regret it in the slightest." Ramanuja was satisfied by this reply; he appreciated Kuresha's detachment towards worldly life and objects as well as his desire for the otherworldly pursuits of the divine form of the Supreme Lord. He then returned from Kanchi and proceeded to Srirangam.

revealed to the Chola King that Kuresha, who was donning the saffron robes and was disguised as Ramanuja, was not Ramanuja, but his devoted disciple. This ultimately resulted in the king ordering that the eyes of Kuresha and Mahapurna be removed. Thus Nalooran committed a grave and heinous task in exposing Kuresha and Mahapurna. Fearing that Nalooran may, after his life goes to hell for this heinous task, Sri Kuresha who was most compassionate like Ramanuja himself, requested the Lord that Nalooran should also attain *salvati*. This incident highlights that the true Srivaishnava is interested in the well-being of even those who greatly harm him.

Completing the desire of Goda Devi

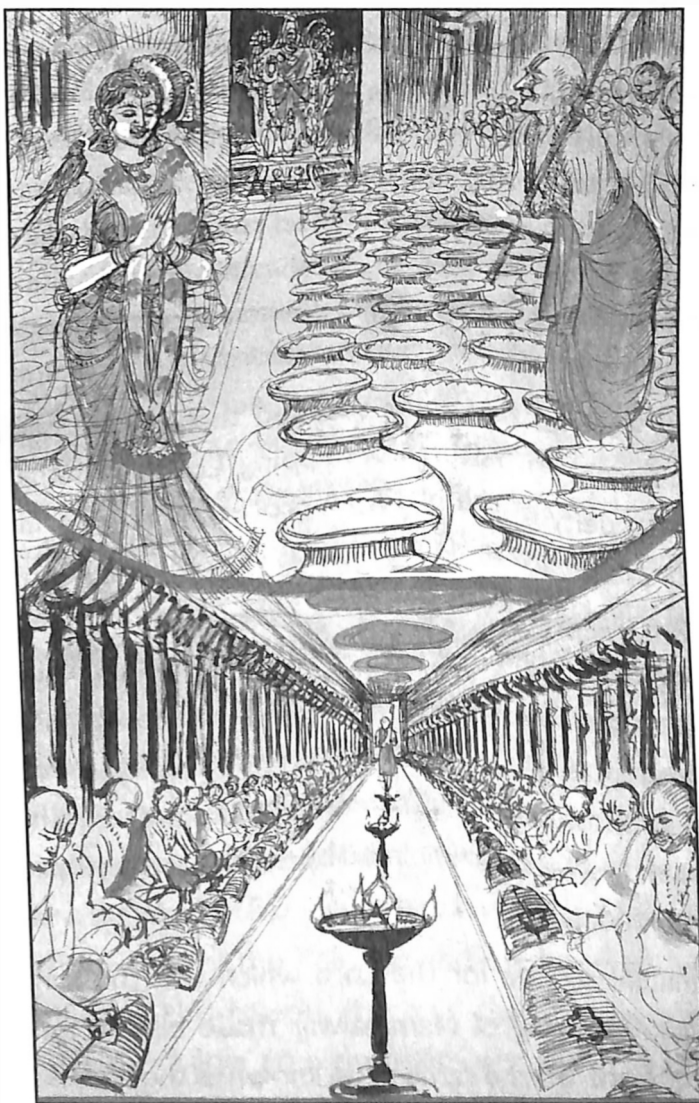
A few centuries before the period of Ramanuja, there lived many mystic saints who, overcome by divine experiences sung the glories of the Lord in the form of spontaneous outpourings. The saints who belonged to the Srivaishnava tradition were popularly known as the "Alwars". They are twelve in number including a woman-mystic known as 'Andal' or 'Kodai'. The compositions of these Alwars, numbering approximately four thousand verses known as the "Divya-Prabandham" (literally 'Divine compositions'), are very popular for their mystic content and the nature of divine enjoyment and bliss they speak about.

Andal is considered to be one of the greatest among these twelve mystics. She composed two works: 'Tiruppavai' and the 'Nacchiyar Tirumoli'. In the latter work, there are one hundred and forty-three poems. In one instance, Andal pleads with the Lord residing in the exalted Divya Desam (holy shrine) known as Tirumalirumsholai near Madurai, (in Tamil Nadu, South India) to accept her as His bride and then makes a pledge, "O Lord, if you were to accede to my request, I will offer you, 'Akkaravadishal' in one hundred vessels" ('Akkaravadishal' is a famous and extremely delicious sweet dish made of milk, sugar and rice.)

Ramanuja came across this poem even as he was devoutly chanting this hymn of Andal. He then thought, 'Andal was a young maid when she composed this poem with utmost devotion and love unto the Lord. She would not have been

able to fulfil this pledge, since she entered the lotus feet of the Lord soon after. Since she could not fulfil her cherished desire, how wonderful it would be if I could really offer this delicacy to the Lord as Andal has suggested.' He then proceeded to this chosen site of the Lord with his disciples and arranged for the delicious dish to be made with the very best ingredients. He then arranged for one hundred vessels to be brought and filled all of them with the 'Akkaravadishal' and placed them before the Lord Sri Sundara Bahu (The form of the Lord in this exalted temple). With great devotional fervour, amidst chanting of the Divya Prabandhams and Vedic hymns, Ramanuja offered the delicious dish to the Lord. It was an amazing sight, the like of which nobody had ever seen before. The Lord was only too happy to accept the dish offered with such devotion and love, as his consort Andal had imagined, and which was now offered by his devotee Ramanuja himself. After the offering was made, the curtains of the sanctum sanctorum were removed and all the disciples of Ramanuja and devotees were overwhelmed by witnessing such a great offering of the delicious dish in one hundred vessels. Then the abundant Prasadam was distributed to the devotees to their hearts' content. Thus Ramanuja fulfilled the vow of a fellow-devotee, many centuries later.

On the way back to Srirangam, Ramanuja visited Srivilliputtur, the birthplace of Andal, where she is present in the 'Archa' (icon) form. He prostrated before Andal and her divine spouse Lord Rangamannar, and humbly informed her about



Sri Ramanuja fulfilling the wishes of Andal

fulfilling her wish. Andal then told Ramanuja, "I am extremely pleased with your offering this divine service. Just as an elder brother fulfils the wishes of his younger sister, you too have fulfilled my wishes. Hence, you are verily my elder brother and you will be known as "Godagraja" (the elder brother of Goda, 'Goda' being another name of Andal) hereafter. Ramanuja then received the Tæertham and Prasadam and started for the holy town of Alwartirunagari where Sri Nammalwar, foremost of the Alwars, spent his whole life deeply immersed in the Supreme Lord.

In due course, Ramanuja reached the exalted place of Alwartirunagari. After worshipping Lord Adinatha, the presiding deity of the place, he proceeded to worship the icon of Nammalwar. Ramanuja was overwhelmed when he saw the divine icon of the great saint. When Nammalwar, known as 'Krishna Trishna Tattva' (the personification of intense thirst for Lord Krishna) had the vision of Lord Narayana, the Lord of Vaikuntha, in the heavens, with his divine spouses Sri devi, Bhu devi and Nila devi in his full epiphany, he was overwhelmed by the bewitching beauty of the divine form of the Lord.

The matchless love for the Lord which was the sum and substance of being of Nammalwar made him so intimate with the Lord that he came to be known as the Lord's Lotus Feet. To this day, Alwar is consecrated, in every shrine of Lord Sriman Narayana, in the form of the Lord's feet placed on a conical crown made of gold.

Since Ramanuja had the same magnitude of devotion as Nammalwar, he, in turn, is known as Nammalwar's Lotus Feet. Hence the lotus feet of Nammalwar are referred to as 'Sri Ramanuja' even to this day. Mudali Andan, the primary disciple of Ramanuja, also came to have the same magnitude of devotion towards his Acarya that Nammalwar had towards the Lord and so consequently he is regarded as 'the lotus feet of Sri Ramanuja'. Therefore, the lotus feet of Sri Ramanuja are referred to as 'Mudali Andan'. Even today, Sri Ramanuja and Mudali Andan are consecrated in every shrine of the Lord in the form of their lotus feet placed on conical crowns made of gold, that are placed on the heads of devotees who seek their grace. Thus, in the Srivaishnava tradition, when one visits the shrine of Sri Ramanuja in Tirumalai, he is supposed to request the officiating priest, "Kindly adore my head with Mudali Andan."

Thus Ramanuja, being the extraordinary recipient of the grace of Nammalwar, acquired all the spiritual powers and became the greatest among the spiritualists. It is also said that Nammalwar, several centuries prior to Sri Ramanuja, had foreseen the birth of Ramanuja who would be able to put an end to the evils of the Kali Age and establish the path of Dharma. For this reason, it is said that Ramanuja is the 'Bhavishyad Acharya' (the future preceptor).

And when Ramanuja did take birth, it was because of his ardent devotion to Nammalwar that he was able to progress fully along the spiritual path as Nammalwar's worthy disciple,

following the path he had laid down. As a spiritual leader par excellence, he was able to guide the ignorant masses on the path of liberation in an appropriate manner. Ramanuja demonstrated to the world that everyone in this world is entitled to attain liberation irrespective of caste, creed or sex. It is therefore said that Ramanuja erected a staircase to the celestial world.

The exceptional loyalty of Sri Andhrapurna

Sri Andhrapurna, another disciple of Ramanuja was a great scholar, well versed in all the Sastras. His sole aim in life was to serve Ramanuja. He recognized Ramanuja himself as his greatest deity and so realized the fact that the lotus feet of Ramanuja were his ultimate refuge.

Once Andhrapurna accompanied Ramanuja to the shrine of Lord Sri Ranganatha. While his master Ramanuja was immersed in the worship of the Lord, Andhrapurna did not even look at the Lord. Instead, his gaze was fixed on Ramanuja himself. Ramanuja, captivated by the bewitching beauty of the lotus eyes of the Lord remarked, "See! How beautiful are the lotus eyes of the Lord!" Andhrapurna replied, "For this servant of yours, there is no pair of lotus eyes that are more beautiful than yours." Such was the attraction Andhrapurna felt towards Ramanuja.

One day, Ramanuja, after having his food, respectfully gave the remaining food to Andhrapurna. After taking this food given to him by his master, Andhrapurna did not wash his

hands, as would have been normal. Instead he rubbed his hands, which contained the leftovers of the food, onto his head. He contended that the 'Prasadam' given by his Guru was so sacred that it deserved the utmost respect. (Traditionally great respect towards a particular object is conveyed by placing it on the head. If the leftovers of the Prasadam' are washed off with water, then it is considered to be an insult, as we generally wash our hands to get rid of the unwanted substances that cling to our hands.)

Another time, while he was engaged in the service of his Acharya, Ramanuja, Andhrapurna was heating milk to offer it to Ramanuja. At that time, the procession of Lord Ranganatha arrived near his residence. All the disciples, along with Ramanuja went out to have the 'Darshan' of the Lord. However, Andhrapurna, not bothered about the procession, stayed inside watching the milk that he was heating. After witnessing the procession Ramanuja returned and was surprised to see Andhrapurna still intently watching the boiling milk, showing no interest in the procession of the Lord. Ramanuja enquired, "O Andhrapurna, everybody else was so excited and rushed outside to have 'Darshan' of the Lord Sri Ranganatha and participate in the procession. However, here you are, immersed in boiling the milk, ignoring the arrival of the Lord himself. Is it not unbecoming of you, not to have worshipped the Lord when he has arrived at your doorstep?" Andhrapurna humbly replied, "If I had gone out to have the 'Darshan' of the Lord Sri Ranganatha, then who would have

taken care of this milk which is to be offered to My Lord? The milk would have spilt over and My Lord would have been deprived of his milk, which would have been a dereliction of my duty towards My Lord. Duty towards My Lord is more important for me than the worship of Sri Ranganatha." Ramanuja was astonished at this reply of Andhrapurna.

These examples demonstrate how Andhrapurna was totally dedicated to his Acharya, Ramanuja. Every day, before he would have anything to eat, he would take the holy water of the lotus feet of Ramanuja. He is also said to be the pioneer of the tradition that believes that total dedication and surrender unto one's own Acharya is the best path to emancipation.

Andhrapurna was also instrumental in the carving and consecration of the lotus feet of his Acharya in a sacred place called 'Saligramam' situated near Mysore in South India. This is worshipped with devotion even to this day.

Implicit obedience of Sri Anandalwan

Anandalwan, another of Ramanuja's foremost disciples, was engaged in the service of offering flowers to Lord Srinivas in the exalted shrine of Tirumala, as ordained by his Acharya Ramanuja. He had migrated there so he could offer the 'Pushpa Kankaryam' (Service of offering flower garlands) to the Lord of the Seven Hills. In order to help water the plants in his flower garden, Anandalwan was constructing a tank,

the water of which could be used to rear a flower garden. While he was digging the tank, the earth he had dug up had to be transported to some other place, and his wife helped him do this, even though she was in an advanced stage of pregnancy, carrying the excavated earth on her head and casting it at a distance. Suddenly, a young boy appeared before Anandalwan offering to help convey the excavated earth. Anandalwan was so possessive about offering these services that he was infuriated by the offer and threatened the boy with dire consequences if he asked to share in the service he was offering again. However, at his wife's advanced state of pregnancy, she needed rest. The young boy somehow convinced her to accept his help. Anandalwan, who was unaware of this, was surprised to find that his wife had suddenly picked up speed in conveying the load. He asked her, "O! How is it that you are returning so soon after casting away the mud at that far off place?" The wife replied, "O sir, a young boy has come here to assist me. Is it wrong on my part to take the assistance of this youngster who is voluntarily offering his help?" Anandalwan was furious with his wife and the young boy. He looked at the young boy and angrily said, "You impudent boy, how dare you transgress my words and try to snatch away a part of the service I am offering to the Lord, at the behest of my Acharya? I will teach you a lesson today." Saying this, he ran after the naughty boy. As the boy tried to run away, Anandalwan threw the crowbar that was in his hand at him and it hit the boy on the chin. The chase

continued but the boy ran inside the temple. Anandalvan also went inside temple in search of the boy. When he entered into the sanctum sanctorum, he was struck and pained to see that the Lord was hurt in the place where he had hurt the boy, by hurling the crowbar at him. Then it dawned on him that the boy was none other than the Lord Himself who had come to assist him and his wife while digging the lake. Anandalvan marveled at the divine turn of events and mentally thanked his Acharya Ramanuja, who had facilitated his coming into close association with the Lord.

Once, when Anandalvan was collecting flowers in his flower garden as usual, he was bitten by a poisonous serpent. However, Anandalvan did not even bother to treat the wound. He went on with his duties as usual, unperturbed by the bite of the poisonous serpent. Soon, the news reached the people who were around. They immediately rushed to Anandalvan and urged him to take some treatment. Anandalvan refused to heed their advice. He simply remarked, "If the bitten serpent (i.e. himself) is more powerful than the serpent that has caused the wound, then I thought I would bathe in 'Swamipushkarini' (the holy lake at Tirumala) and have the 'Darshan' of the Lord Venkateswara; on the other hand, if the serpent that has bitten me is more powerful, I thought after bathing in the river Viraja (the river between this and the celestial world), will have the 'Darshan' of the Lord at Vaikuntha" (i.e. he would die and go to the abode of the Lord). Receiving th

unusual reply the people assembled there were astounded by Anandalvan's unswerving faith. When they heard this remark they also thought it indicated that Anandalvan was an incarnation of the Primordial Serpent Adishesha.

Anandalvan and the definition of a true Srivaishnava

Once, a committed Srivaishnava wanted A Srivaishnava wanted to know about Srivaishnava Lakshanam. When he asked Parasara Bhattar, he was told to go to Anandalvan. When the devotee arrived at the place where Anandalvan was, he was welcomed and on the first day was invited to eat with Anandalvan. He told Anandalvan why he had been sent and Anandalvan acknowledged this, but said nothing. The next day however, he did not invite the devotee to have lunch with him and he was told that he would have to sit in the next room to take his food. On the third day the devotee was made to sit in the backyard of the house. The Srivaishnava devotee accepted all this without any word. Then finally Anandalvan spoke and said:

1. "Kokkaippol irukkum" (A Srivaishnava will be like a crane!)
2. "Kozhiaippol irukkum" (A Srivaishnava will be like a rooster!)
3. "Uppiap pol irukkum" (A Srivaishnava will be like salt!)
4. "Ummaip pol irukkum" (A Srivaishnava will be like you!)

This is what it means:

1. *We see that when a crane is near a water source, it stands still without even shaking a wee bit. It is concentration personified, looking to catch fish. Many small fishes pass under its gaze, but it does not bother to catch them. The biggest fish of the lot then enters, thinking that it is safe. The crane then swings into action and snatches that big fish in a flash. The conduct of a true Srivaishnava should be similar. In this world there are many things that are attractive, yet many of them have no worth whatsoever. Others have very little worth. Further, there are some objects that give us bliss and happiness, but they come with compensatory miseries attached to them. Further, there are some more objects that give us pleasure, but the pleasure they give us is temporary and limited. A true Srivaishnava should give up desires for all those objects of transitory or alloyed pleasure and strive for that greatest of great objects which brings him permanent and unlimited bliss and happiness: the Lord Sriman Narayana Himself. Just as the crane is not at all attracted by the small fish that pass by before it, a true Srivaishnava should not be attracted by worldly objects of pleasure and strive for that Lord Himself, who is the very personification of unsurpassed happiness and bliss.*

2. *In a heap of rubbish, a rooster is renowned for being able to find and pick out a gem (kuppai). Likewise, a true Srivaishnava will be able to take out the good even from the bad. In other words, a true Srivaishnava has the steadiness to retain his equanimity in difficult times and recognize the positive side of all experiences. Similarly, a Srivaishnava will see the good that lies beneath even that which may appear to be bad. Ramanuja provides so many examples of this. For instance, when he sees the great devotion inherent in Dhanurdasa while others see only a man making a fool of himself and caught up in worldly desire. So a Srivaishnava should be able to see the divinity which underlies even the mundane.*
3. *Salt is an integral part of our food. Salt-less food is despised by one and all. However, if one happens to eat or taste salt by itself, one is likely to feel uneasy and immediately ask for water. Thus salt is most enjoyable only when it is a subtle part of a delicious dish. The salt is essential to bring out the full taste of the dish, but by itself salt never makes us feel a great taste. Similarly a true Srivaishnava should never behave in such a way that he is independently taken note of. On the other hand, he should participate in the services to the devotees quite unnoticed.*

4. *One should be like you. I have been observing you right from the time you arrived at my place. Several times, you have been insulted by different people on some pretext or the other, when you were about to have lunch. I apologize for this. However, I noticed that not once were you annoyed, irritated or impatient, at being treated in this way. A true Srivaishnava should be like you. He should be most tolerant towards his fellow Srivaishnavas and must not be annoyed on being ill-treated by them. He should be so humble and modest, just like you. These are the main characteristics of a true Srivaishnava."*

Sri Anandalvan, the personification of total devotion and dedication to one's own Acharya, was delighted to see such exemplary behaviour from another Srivaishnava devotee.

The unswerving faith of Kuresha towards his Acharya

One day, Kuresha went to the shrine of Lord Sri Ranganatha to worship Him. He prostrated before the Lord and conveyed his unconditional devotion. The Lord, who had long been delighted by Kuresha's devotion and dedication told him "I am very happy with your conduct. You may ask for any boon and it is yours" Kuresha replied, "O Lord! You have fulfilled every wish of mine until now. As of now, I do not have a desire for anything else in this world. Hence, I do not require any boon." The Lord said "O Kuresha! You are

my dearest devotee. It is my command that you ask for a boon. I swear in the name of Sri Ramanuja that whatever you ask for will be yours. Do ask for a boon!" Kuresha was overwhelmed at these words of the Lord. He folded his hands in reverence and said, "O Lord, if that is your wish, then kindly help me leave this mortal coil and grant me a permanent place in Vaikuntha, your exalted abode, where I will be able to serve you to my heart's content eternally. Kindly fulfill this sole wish of mine." The Lord spoke in a voice choked with emotion, "O Kuresha, so be it. Not only have I granted you a place in my exalted abode Vaikuntha, but I also assure the same to anybody related to you directly or indirectly. Do not have the slightest doubt in this regard." Kuresha was delighted at these words of the Lord and returned to his residence in joy.

Soon after this, the news of the words of the Lord Sri Ranganatha reached Ramanuja. Ramanuja was overjoyed to hear the news that the Lord had promised liberation and a place in his eternal abode of Vaikuntha to all those who had some sort of relationship with Kuresha. Dancing with joy, Ramanuja swung his upper garment in the air with excitement and exclaimed, "The Lord has promised liberation and a place in his eternal abode of Vaikuntha to all those who have some sort of relationship with Kuresha. The relationship of a master and his disciple is also one of them and I am sure to have liberation and find a place in Vaikuntham. How lucky am I to be the Acharya of Kuresha! O! How lucky I am!"

Ramanuja then rushed to Kuresha's residence with his disciples. Kuresha was immersed in deep meditation. Soon Kuresha came to know of the arrival of his Acharya. He prostrated before Ramanuja who then said to him, "You have verily ensured my liberation. How great a disciple you are! I am beholden to you and feel privileged to have been related to you." Thus saying he embraced Kuresha. Then in a pensive mood, he asked Kuresha, "Was it right on your part to request the Lord to help you leave this body and so leave me here alone?" Kuresha replied, "O Sir, is it not in the fitness of things that I go to the abode of the Lord first so I will be ready there, to receive you when your good self arrives?" Ramanuja was choked with emotion. He once again embraced Kuresha and whispered the 'Dvayamantra' into his ears. Kuresha asked Ramanuja about the significance of his whispering the mantra into his ears at this time. Ramanuja replied, "Just as the tongue of a prince dries up when he is on a long, arduous journey without beverages to overcome the exhaustion, so also the tongue of a Srivaishnava dries up without the beverage in the form of 'Dvayamantra'." Kuresha was once again overcome with emotion. Suddenly he fell at the feet of Sri Ramanuja, washed his feet and partook the sacred water. He then composed a Sanskrit verse, filled with utmost devotion and respect to his preceptor.

*"Yo nityam achyuta padambuja yugma rukma
vyamohatah taditarani trnaya mene.
Asmad guroh bhagavatosya dayaika sindhoh
ramanujasya caranau saranam prapadye"*

[My Acharya Sri Ramanuja is eternally immersed in the divine experience of the lotus feet of the Lord Sriman Narayana, and considering it to be precious as gold, disregards everything else as worthless as a blade of grass. I surrender unto those lotus feet of my Acharya, who is verily an ocean of compassion.]

Soon after, Kuresha called his two children Parasarabhattachar and Vedavyasabhattachar. Kuresha, meditating upon the lotus feet of his Acharya then shed his mortal coil and left for the divine, eternal abode of the Lord.

The final six commandments of Sri Ramanuja

After living a long and successful spiritual life, Ramanuja expressed his desire to leave for his heavenly abode. All his disciples surrounded him and were extremely reluctant to let Sri Ramanuja leave, as they had had many divine experiences during the years they had spent with him. They insisted that they would end their lives if Ramanuja intended to leave them and depart for his heavenly abode. However, Ramanuja severely admonished them. After lengthy deliberations, they fell in line with Ramanuja, who made them agree to continue to live until their respective turn came. He made them swear in the name of Lord Sri Ranganatha that they would never give up their lives before the appropriate times. Ramanuja then addressed them, "Our material life in this world depends on our past deeds ('karma') and therefore we do not have control over it. Our spiritual life depends solely on the Almighty Lord Narayana and we do not have any control over that aspect of life either. Hence

our only task in this life is to aspire for the grace of the Lord. One should do all the duties that are prescribed in the scriptures, in accord with his own *Varna* and *Ashrama* as service to the Lord, without expecting anything in return. Lord Srīman Narayana alone is the bestower of all fruits of our deeds, past and present, both in this world and the world yonder. Hence, please perform everything you do as a service unto Him.” Ramanuja went on to advise them in many different ways and preached to them the subtle nuances of the spiritual path. The disciples considered themselves fortunate to receive Ramanuja’s blessings. They then told Ramanuja, “O revered Sir! What you have advised is verily the purport of the whole of the Vedas. However, we are ordinary beings and following the spiritual path according to your advice is easier said than done. Hence, we request you to kindly give us advice in very simple terms, that are easily understandable to us, the steps we have to take to progress in the path to fulfillment.”

Sri Ramanuja then replied, “Here are the simple steps I advise you to follow:

1. Read and preach the Sri Bhashya that I have authored; if you are unable to do so,
2. Immerse yourself in the divine outpourings of the Alvars, known as the Divya Prabandhams; if you are unable to do so,
3. Serve the Lord in the chosen hundred and eight sites in any way that is acceptable to you; if you are unable to do so,

4. Constantly chant the 'Dvayamantra' while going through its meanings in your mind; if you are unable to do so,
5. Become the host of a 'Bhagavata', a true devotee of the Lord and serve him to his heart's content;" if you are unable to do so,
6. Build at least a small hut in the exalted place of Tirunarayanapuram and live there.

These are the six directives that Ramanuja gave to the devotees who had assembled there. Each of these directives is very significant in terms of enabling the spiritual aspirant to gradually traverse the path to liberation. One can also understand that following Ramanuja's guidelines, the spiritual aspirant can start from the sixth directive and gradually move up in due course.

Sri Ramanuja the Administrator and Manager Par excellence

Ramanuja was a great visionary, who displayed a unique aptitude for organizing, administering and managing things. He took upon himself the task of propagating the principles of Vishistadwaita, for which he needed a large organization and built one. He believed that emancipation was not the prerogative of any caste or class and that every human being should have the opportunity to be emancipated.

Therefore, Ramanuja strove to build a new social order. In his order known as Ramanuja Koota, we could find not only brahmacharis but also many others. There were 700 Yatis

(renunciates), 74 centres, each headed by a Simhasanadhipathi (a spiritual leader appointed by Ramanuja), 12000 male devotees, 300 female devotees. Among them, there were many kings and their royal retinues, serving these people and the organization. This order included people wearing the sacred thread, and also people not wearing the sacred thread. Ramanujacharya made no kind of distinction and welcomed with open arms any one who was seeking liberation and was willing to adopt his philosophy.

Ramanuja gave the Divyaprabhandas a prime place in the puja system at all the temples. He realized that these Divyaprabhandas were able to convey to the laymen the essence of the Vedas in their own language, in a way that was easily understandable. He also saw to it that idols of Alwars were installed at all temples and proper puja was offered to them. He also instituted the Agama system of puja at the temples. He travelled all over the country and wherever he went, he introduced the same system. He worked out in detail the kind of festivals and pujas that should be celebrated and the frequency with which they should be celebrated. That is, he laid down the kind of puja or festival that should be held every day, every week, every fortnight, every month, every quarter and every year. This schedule is being followed even today at most temples. The Yathiraja Mutt he started is also active today.

It is a mind-boggling feat to have managed to gain such a huge following of so many devotees, to travel all over the

country, open up so many centres and install so many Simhasanadhipathis, institute such a detailed calendar of activities at each temple and establish the infrastructure for providing suitable administrative support to keep them going. If these have survived for centuries and are still being followed, the credit goes to the great organizing, administrative and managerial skills of Sri Ramanuja.

Sri Ramanuja the Yogi

In the Srivaishnava tradition, only five Acharyas have been designated as 'Muni', as they were great yogins. They are Parankusha Muni, Nathamuni, Yamunamuni, Ramanuja Muni and Manavala Mahamuni. They were great Acharyas, who could go into yogic trance in their Samadhi state. In that state of divine ecstasy, they could have the direct experience of the Supreme Lord, in His entire splendour, which would result in unlimited bliss. This direct experiencing of the Supreme Lord endowed them with many abilities and powers. We can see many such incidences in the lives of these Acharyas, which indicate their great yogic power.

Sri Ramanuja did many things in his life which were miraculous in nature. There are many instances which indicate that Ramanuja had a direct communion with the Almighty. It is said that Lord Sriranganatha of Srirangam bestowed the power of obtaining whatever he wanted in this world and the celestial world to Ramanuja. Lord Tirunarayana appeared to him in his dream and directed him to re-erect a temple

for him at Melukote and install Him there with due procedures. The Lord also told him in his dream about the presence of Utsavamurthi 'Ramapriya' being with the Moslem ruler in the North.

It was this yogic power of Ramanuja that helped him to understand all that his Acharya Yamunamuni wanted him to take up and complete, though he could not interact with his Acharya while he was alive. It was this yogic power that took him into a trance and made him pour forth a graphic description of the grandeur and splendour of Vaikuntha in Gadyatrayam.

It was this great yogic power and divine insight that helped Ramanuja to interpret the philosophical concepts and the tenets of Visishtadwaita in a simple and easy-to-understand manner. He said that Bhakti Marga is the easiest path to attain liberation and any one can follow it. His insight into matters and understanding of the people were so good that every one was greatly impressed by him. Tiruvaruttamudanar, in his work called "Ramanuja Noottandadi" – a collection of 100 stanzas on Ramanuja - says:

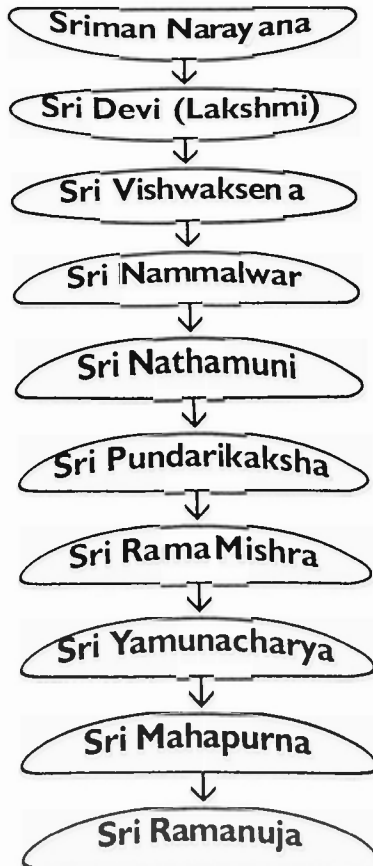
*Elders say that He lives in Vaikuntha,
Some others say that He lives in temples,
But His favourite place is Ramanuja's sacred heart,
So, if we worship Ramanuja with all devotion and seek his
refuge, We would be worshipping Lord Narayana Himself
and seeking His refuge.*



APPENDIX

SRIMATE RÂMÂNUJAYA NAMAHA

THE SRIVAIISHNAVA GURU PARAMPARA (Lineage of Preceptors)



Sriman Narayana & Sri Devi

The Supreme Lord Sriman Narayana is the creator, preserver and destroyer of this Universe. He is the first and foremost Acharya of the Srivaishnava pantheon. He first initiated His own consort, Goddess Lakshmi into the divine path of Srivaishnavism. These two are verily the primordial couple. Attaining the lotus feet of these two is the sole aim of the Srivaishnava faith.

Sri Vishwakshena

Sri Vishwakshena is the Lord of the hosts and the commander-in-chief of the army of Lord Sriman Narayana. He was initiated into this faith by none other than Mother Divine Goddess Lakshmi, and is hence known as 'Lakshmi Dasa'. He thus holds a prime place in the Srivaishnava lineage of Acharyas.

Sri Nammalwar

Tiru-k-kurukoor or Tiru-nagari, is a quiet community-town to the south of river Tamra-parai irrigating the deep 'Pandya' region of the Tamil-speaking part of the country. Kari, a profound devotee of Lord Sriman Narayana lived in this sacred site. Kari and his wife Udaiya-nangai paid a pilgrim-visit to the nearby *diya-dasa* of Tiru-k-kurun-kudi, and prayed to the presiding Deity, Lord Sundara-pari-poorna for progeny. The Lord, while blessing the couple said, "I will myself be born as your son."

Soon after, a child was born to the devout couple and, sure enough; the child had the striking looks of Vishvakshena, the

lord of celestial hosts, as he is described in the scriptures. The child, all the same, exhibited none of the functional reflexes of a normal human child such as crying or sneezing or feeding. This apparent inertness apart, the infant was not languishing. Understandably enough, the parents were alternately distracted and bewildered. The distressed parents held on to their faith in the Lord and named the boy Maran. They placed the child in a golden cradle which they tied up on the branch of a tamarind tree in the local temple of Tirunagari and stayed by watching over their precious child.

It is believed that a child in foetus receives divine intimations of immortality but gradually forgets them as he is born and counts his years on this earth. It is said that the amnesia which causes the fading of divine intimations is originally occasioned by a negative spirit called *Satha*. However, the *Satha* had no evil power over this child born of the Lord's grace, and was dismissed by his mere grunt. The child-Alwar thus retained his pre-natal knowledge of the divine, and hence came to be known as "*Satha-kopa*", that is, One who spurned *Satha*.

The child advanced in years to be sixteen, and all the while became more and more deeply immersed in God-consciousness. It was this perpetual state of holy immersion that made him the Alwar. Lord Nam-perumal, verily the Lord our own at Srirangam, showered His special grace on *Satha-kopa*. This Lord Our Own, Nam-perumal, adopted *Satha-kopa* as *Nammalwar*, that is to say, Alwar-Our Own. Since all of the nine other Alwar saints are held to be spiritually

integral to him, Satha-kopa is known by the unqualified appellation, Alwar.

At the behest of Lord Sriman Narayana, the Alwar was visited by Lord Vishvak-sena, the Lord of the hosts, who initiated him into the esoterics of *Para-tattvam*, the Ultimate Truth, and administered unto him the *Pancha-samskara*, the five-fold rite of SriVaishnava faith. Nammalwar drank deep of the fountain-spring of Krishna thoughts, and was enshrined under the humble tamarind tree as the very embodiment of Wisdom leading to *Brahmananda*, supreme bliss.

Meanwhile, Madhurakavi, a devout seeker who was roaming in North India in search of a preceptor, saw a large light-beam issuing from the south. After a long and arduous journey following the path of the light-beam, Madhura-kavi arrived at Alwar-tiru-nagari located in the south-east district of the Tamil region. The light-beam which he had pursued down from Ayodhya led him to Nammalwar, seated under the tamarind tree, with his eyes drawn closed in divine trance. Madhura-kavi approached the luminous personage rather timorously, but was instantly suffused with a feeling of transport and fulfilment.

Sensing the arrival of Madhura-kavi, Nammalwar stirred and looked at him. The benign glance yielded for Madhura-kavi a preceptor and God-in-preceptor all at once. Madhura quizzed the young hermetic in cryptic manner about the relationship of the Creator and his creation and Nammalwar responded appropriately, but likewise cryptically. Madhura-

kavi bowed and touched the feet of Nammalwar in reverence. Nammalwar accepted him completely as his disciple.

Nammalwar then initiated him into the Srivaishnava doctrine of the five states of the Lord's being, and the corollary esoterics of *artha-panchakam*, which would take the seeker to God-realisation. With surpassing graciousness, Nammalwar then imparted unto Madhura-kavi his own four books which were actually the Dravidian redactions of the four *Vedas*. Madhurakavi graciously recorded them all in manuscript form. Madhura-kavi sang the hymn of Kanni-nun-siru-t-tambu in adoration of nam-m-Alwar, as his offering of gratitude unto the precious preceptor.

When Nammalwar sang, it was always to adore Lord Narayana. Soon after, he had the vision of Lord Narayana, the Lord of Vaikuntha-in-the-heavens, appearing with his divine spouses Sri-devi, Bhu-devi and Nija-devi in full epiphany, which prompted the outpouring of his magnum opus **Tiruvay-moli**. Alwar was overwhelmed to see the surpassing divine form of the Creator. There was a grand assemblage of all the Deities of the 108 earthly shrines. This made for a pure mood of communication between the Creator in diverse manifestations and the soulful Creature who gratified the Deities by dedicating to them his psalms of passionate adoration. Nammalwar was the Seer of Truth, and he sang four psalm-books, *prabandham-s*, that contain the essence of the four *Vedas*.

It is because of the surpassing love for the Lord, which animated his entire being, that Nammalwar was so intimate with the Lord. This is why he came to be regarded as the Lord's Lotus Feet; and this is why, as has been mentioned, Alwar is still consecrated, in every shrine of Lord Srīman Narayana, in the form of the Lord's feet placed on a conical mount made of gold.

Sri Nathamuni

Sri Nathamuni was born in the village called Viranarayana-Puram (also known as Kattu-mannar-koil) near the holy place of Chitra-kutam (known as Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu, South India). His father was known as Isvaramuni.

Sri Nathamuni went on a long pilgrimage that took him to Divya Desams like Mathura, Vrindhavan, Bengal and Puri. After he returned to his home town, he spent his time in the service of the Lord Mannanar, the presiding deity of that place.

One day certain Sri'vaishnavas from Tirunarayanapuram near Mysore in South India happened to visit Nathamuni's place. When they worshipped the Lord there, they chanted ten stanzas of the Tiru-vay-moli of Sri Nammalwar, that is known as the decad 'Aravamude'. It is mentioned at the end of the final stanza that these stanzas are part of one thousand stanzas composed by Sri Nammalwar. Sri Nathamuni's inquisitiveness was raised when he heard this. He asked the

Srivaishnavas if they new the other nine hundred and ninety stanzas of the composition. The Srivaishnavas expressed their ignorance in this regard. The said, "These are the only stanzas that our elders have taught us." But the reference to the one thousand stanzas composed by Sri Nammalwar would just not let him keep quiet. He then decided to go Alwar Tirunagari, the place where Sri Nammalwar spent his time and make inquiries there. Soon he proceeded to that place. There he came to know from the elders that, if anyone was to come into transcendental contact with Sri Nammalwar himself, he was to chant the 'Kanni-nun-sitru-ttambu', a propitiatory composition of ten verses, composed by Sri Madhurakavi Alwar. This composition, in praise of Sri Nammalwar, was to be chanted twelve thousand times with utmost devotion and dedication unto Sri Nammalwar. Sri Nathamuni chanted this composition twelve thousand times, as prescribed, sitting under the Tamarind tree where Sri Nammalwar had spent his time. Soon, Sri Nammalwar appeared before Sri Nathamuni and revealed to him, not only his own compositions, but also all the compositions of the other Alvars as well, which amounted to four thousand stanzas in all. They came to be known as the 'Divya Prabandhams' (Divine compositions)

With the help of his two nephews, Melaiyagattalwar and Kilaiyagattalwar, Nathamuni set the stanzas to music and instructed Srivaishnavas in the method of chanting them in temples all over South India. From then onwards, these

hymns have been sung in the temples and are regarded as Tamil Veda.

Nathamuni is said to have authored three works viz., Nyaya-Tattva, Purusa-Nirnaya, Yoga-Rahasya, though none of these works are presently available.

Nathamuni was also a great exponent in Yoga and practiced the Yoga of eight accessories (Ashtanga Yoga).

Sri Pundarikaksha

Sri Pundarikaksha was born in the constellation of Chithra in the month of 'Karthikai'; He was born in a Brahmin family residing in Tiru-vellarai, near Srirangam in Tamil Nadu. It is believed that his parents had migrated from North India, and settled at Tiru-vellarai, worshipping Lord Sri Pundarikaksha (literally 'the lotus-eyed'), the presiding deity of that place. Pundarikaksha was trained in all aspects of Vedic philosophy at a very young age.

When Pundarikaksha was in his teens, he was sent to Sri Nathamuni for further instruction. At this time, Sri Nathamuni had two prominent students, Sri Pundarikaksha and Sri Kurukai Kavalappan. Sri Nathamuni had two important treasures with him, one the secret of the divine Yoga to attain liberation, the other, the four thousand Divya Prabandhas. Sri Nathamuni wanted to give each of these to his two prominent students. When he asked Sri Kavalappan which he would wish, he chose the divine path of yoga. Therefore, Nathamuni instructed him on that Yoga.

Nathamuni then instructed Sri Pundarikaksha in the Divya Prabhandham-s. It was this determination and kindness that resulted in the spread of Sri Vaishnavism all over India. He also gave the title 'Uyyakkondar' to Sri Pundarikaksha.

Sri Pundarikaksha had five prominent students, of whom Sri Rama-Mishra (also known as Manarkal Nimbi) was the foremost and most popular. After the death of Sri Pundarikaksha's wife, Sri Rama-Mishra took charge of the household chores at Sri Pundarikaksha's house. He also took care of Sri Pundarikaksha's young daughters. One day, when they were returning from their daily bath at a nearby pond, the girls had to walk past a muddy stream and were hesitant about crossing it. Sri Rama-Mishra, seeing their plight fell across the stream and asked the girls to use his back as a bridge. Seeing the foot marks on his back, after their return, Sri Pundarikaksha asked his girls what had happened. When he heard about the incident, Sri Pundarikaksha titled him as 'Manarkal Nambi' and renamed his birth place as 'Manarkal'.

It is said that Nathamuni, when receiving the 4000 Divya Prabhandham-s from Sri Nammalwar, also received an image of Sri Ramanuja, instructing him to hand over the image to his yet-to-be-born grandson. He immediately started work on creating an idol based on that image. When Nathamuni was about to depart for his heavenly abode, he passed on the idol to Sri Pundarikaksha after extracting a promise from him that he would keep the idol in a secure place until it was handed over to his grandson. However, Nathamuni's

grandson had not even been born at the time of Uyakondar's departure to Vaikuntam. He passed on the idol to Sri Rama-Mishra, extracting from him the same promise he had made to Sri Nathamuni. He also instructed Sri Rama-Mishra that he would take the responsibility of instructing Nathamuni's grandson, Sri Yamunacharya. It is believed that Sri Pundarikaksha lived for 105 years.

Sri Pundarikaksha did not compose any independent work. However, he did compose the 'taniyan' (preliminary verse) for Tiruppavai (the pastoral poem of Andal, which is recited every day at many temples and homes).

Sri Yamunacharya

Yamunacharya, also popularly known as Alavandar, was the son of Isvara Bhatta and grandson of the great acharya Nathamuni. He was born in 916 A.D at Viranarayanapuram (present day Kattu Mannargudi) in Tamil Nadu. He mastered several branches of learning in a very short period of time, under the guidance of Sri Maha Bhashya Bhatta. It is said that he defeated a conceited court poet by the name Akkialvan. In recognition of this victory, he was given the title 'Alavandar' (one who has come to rule) and was granted a gift of a territory by the king.

It was due to the tireless efforts of Sri Rama Mishra (also known as Manarkkal Nambi), the disciple of Pundarikaksha (also known as Uyyakkondar), that brought back Yamuna to the spiritual life. Sri Rama-Mishra initiated Sri Yamuna into

the ultimate truths and passed to him the spiritual treasures bequeathed to him by Sri Nathamuni. After the initiation, Yamuna became the leader of Srivaishnavas and settled at the holy place of Srirangam.

Alavandar's greatness was well known to other Sri Vaishnavas such as Sri Goshthipurna, Sri Mahapurna, Sri Maladhara, Sri Kanchipurna, Sri Srishailapurna, who were also his dedicated disciples.

Sri Yamunacharya composed eight works:

Agamapramanya. This is entirely devoted to vindicating the authoritativeness of the Pancharatra Agama.

Mahapurusha Nirnaya. In this work, Sri Yamuna shows that the ultimate reality is the Supreme Purusha, Sriman Narayana.

Atma Siddhi, Iswara Sidhhi and Samvit Siddhi.

Collectively, these three works are known as 'Siddhi-trayam'.

The three 'siddhi-s' establish the Visistadvaitic conception of individual soul, God and knowledge.

Gitarthasamgraha. This is a marvelous work, concisely describing the essence of the Bhagavad Gita, which later formed the basis of Sri Ramanuja's Gita Bhashya.

Chatussloki, This is in the form of four hymns, in praise of Goddess Lakshmi.

Stotra-Ratna. This is a poem in praise of Lord Narayana. This poem is also known as The Jewel of a Hymn.

Sri Mahapurna

Sri Mahapurna was the direct disciple of Sri Yamunacharya. He initiated Sri Ramanuja into the faith of Srivaishnavism. His life history is covered in the life of Sri Ramanuja.

Sri Ramanuja

Sri Ramanuja is the most important Acharya to adorn this lineage. His life and philosophy are covered in detail in this book.

These are the principal Acharyas who constitute the lineage of the Srivaishnavas.





Śrī Rāmānuja

Life & Philosophy

In this world, many philosophers have come and gone. But the advent of a mystic philosopher is the rarest of the rare occasions indeed. Mysticism is purely emotional and philosophy is purely logical. It was only Sri Ramanuja who could bridge the gulf between the head and the heart (emotion and logic) and arrive at a universal philosophy...

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