



Makers of Indian Literature

Sri Ramanuja

M. Narasimhachary



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SRI RAMANUJA

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, 'mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.
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SAHITYA AKADEMI

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PREFACE

Sri Ramanuja (1017-1137) was a great saint, scholar, visionary and social reformer. His view of the universe as the body of the Lord of which He is the soul, summarizes his vision of life. Every living being, scholarly or unlettered, of a higher origin or a lower origin, is part of the divine scheme. Nobody is outside the purview of God's grace. His position in the world of Vedanta is unique. Though chronologically he came next to Sankara, the impression he left on the subsequent thinkers and writers is immense. Acharyas like Nimbarka, Vallabha, Ramananda and Swami Naryana drew their inspiration from the concepts of Bhakti and Prapatti popularized by Ramanuja. Even among the Advaitins, Madhusudana Saraswati must have been profoundly influenced by the Bhakti tradition since he was an ardent devotee of Sri Krishna.

Given in the following pages is a brief but exhaustive account of the life and work of this great teacher of Vedanta whom Swami Vivekananda acclaimed as a great benefactor of humanity. According to Sri Ramanuja, the Supreme Brahman is Lord Srīman Narayana or Srinivasa. Brahman is the 'soul' of which the universe of men and matter constitutes the 'body'. Bhakti (loving devotion) and whole-hearted or total surrender (*prapatti*) are the alternative means of liberation. He wrote nine works in Sanskrit highlighting these truths. To him goes the credit going through the *Bodhāyana Vritti* on the *Brahmasutra* during his visit to Kashmir on the basis of which he composed his celebrated commentary, the Śrībhāṣya.

Ramanuja, above all the achievements in the field of religion and philosophy, was a great social reformer. He allowed the so-called 'fifth community' to enter the temple of Lord Tirunarayana at Melkote (Karnataka). To him also goes the credit of explaining the meaning of a secret *mantra* to many,

against the wishes of his own preceptor since he believed that instead of his own self, many others should become eligible for liberation. Ramanuja was a great visionary. He saw that to attain liberation, Bhakti is easier to practice by the ordinary masses than Jnana which was propounded by Sankara and his followers. He inherited a rich tradition—Sanskrit Vedas, the Tamil Veda (called the *Divya Prabandha*) of the Srivaishnava mystic saints Azhvārs, the Agama literature and the Puranas. All great ideas flowed in on him from these sources and he responded to all of them with a sympathetic heart. The result is the monumental philosophy called *Viśiṣṭādvaita*. In his interpretation, every scriptural text finds an appropriate place.

Ramanuja's long and eventful life spanning 120 years is marked by several achievements. The tradition he has left is called the Śrī Sampradāya since in his Gadyas (poetic prose passages) he conceived Goddess Śrī or Lakshmī as the benign mother presenting all the erring humans before the Lord and making them eligible for His forgiveness and Grace. He paid glowing tributes to his "large-heartedness" and to his catholicity in admitting the downtrodden to his fold offering them solace and bliss. For sometime in the East and the West the term 'Vedanta' stood for Advaita only. Scholars like Prof. P.N. Srinivasachari and Dr. K.C. Varadachari, through their works countered this trend to some extent. Now, there is a greater awareness of the contributions of Ramanuja to the world of scholars. The present writer has also in recent years, contributed to this trend by giving a series of lectures at the Oxford University (UK) on the salient features of Sri Ramanuja's philosophy.

—M. Narasimbachary

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1

Introduction

Sri Ramanuja (1017-1137 A.D.) is chronologically second in the line of three celebrated scholar-saints of South India who made significant and lasting contributions to the revival of Hinduism. Sri Sankara who systematised the Advaita Philosophy and Sri Madhva who advocated the Dvaita Philosophy appeared a little before and after Ramanuja, respectively. All these three noble souls re-established and revitalised the Vedic thought after a thorough and systematic refutation of the non-Vedic systems like Jainism and Buddhism. They also successfully repulsed the pure conservative Vedic ritualism of the Mimamsakas and upheld the validity of the metaphysical speculations of the Upanishads.

Very often it is wrongly believed that these three saints represented three mutually contradictory and inconsistent systems of thought and that there is more of divergence than unity in their teachings. Nothing can be farther from truth. Depending upon the times and situations of the human society in which they lived, they were obliged to teach their fellow men what they thought was best in their interests. Doctrinal divergences and dialectical debates notwithstanding, all these three giants of spirituality tried to bring the entire nation, rather humanity, under one unique umbrella of Vedantism. The supremacy of the Veda in the scheme of valid means of knowledge, the impersonal character of the Veda (*apaurshyatva*) and the abiding and unexcelled bliss that marks the state of liberation, the highest human end (*paramapurushartha*)—are the points of concurrence among these thinkers. Though they were realised souls who did not need any special spiritual or religious exercises for their own emancipation, they strove ceaselessly for the upliftment of the common masses among whom they moved and worked. They

taught to the contemporaneous people in their own mother-tongue, consecrated temples, worshipped images of gods and goddesses and sometimes suffered great personal losses and hardships at the hands of fanatics and uncharitable zealots. Whether it is pure knowledge that the individual self and God are one and the same, or whether it is the realization that man who is of limited knowledge and poor is always an humble devotee and servant of the omniscient Lord who is full of auspicious perfections, or whether it is the unequivocal conviction that individual and God are eternally two distinct and different entities, the former always depending upon the latter as his humble servant — as taught by these great *acharyas*, the impact they had on society was remarkably the same. They all felt that the survival and revival of Vedantism was the crying need of the hour. It is with this prime objective in view that they chalked out their own course of action and worked meticulously and ceaselessly for its realisation. If we can indulge in a sort of metaphor, liberation is a beautiful mansion to reach which, Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva built a flight of steps in different periods of time. Thus the life and works of these three saints were mutually complementary but not contradictory.

Speaking of Sri Ramanuja in particular, whose life and work form the main theme of this monograph, his contributions to religion and philosophy are outstanding and quite well-known. His social reforms which are as important as his metaphysical writings are not that well-known to many. Tremendous conviction that there are no 'high and low' in the eyes of God from the viewpoint of caste or community was in the very blood of Ramanuja. Accordingly he gave solace to people of all castes and walks of life in his *ahsram*. Nobody was denied counsel if he or she had the genuine desire to be saved. He gave a new direction to the age-old practices of temple-worship. He reformed some of them, reinforced some, renovated some and substituted a few, by new methods, without at the same time, disturbing the fine fabric of tradition and convention. With tremendous love and sympathy to the oppressed and depressed classes of society, he took the epoch-making and daring step of

throwing open the temples to the so-called 'untouchables' to whom he gave an ennobling new name, 'thiru-kulatttaar' (Tamil word), meaning, "people belonging to the family of Lakshmi, the Divine Mother". At a time when conservatism was synonymous with temple worship, Ramanuja defied its rigidity and personally supervised the admission of these so-called 'untouchables' to the temple of Lord Tirunarayana at Melkote, Karnataka. Quite obviously, Ramanuja must have faced the fury of the conservative orthodoxy, but undeterred and unconcerned, he carried out what he believed was correct. What more, he reinforced the tradition of chanting the Tamil compositions of the Srivaishnava mystic saints called Alvars in temple-worship, a step already initiated by Sri Nathamuni, the first among of the Srivaishnava teachers of South India.

Acts like these born out of great conviction that all are the children of God and that they are alike in the eyes of God made Ramanuja the greatest champion of the cause of the down-trodden, illiterate and innocent men and women of society. Ramanuja's great efforts for the spiritual and religious rejuvenation recorded in hagiological works like the Guruparamparas, the Prapannamrita and the Divyasuricarita make beautiful history. Though Ramanuja initiated the bold step of admitting the so-called 'untouchables' into the temple some thousand years ago, the last stigma on Hindu society came to an end only in the year 1944. This shows how deep the roots of conservatism spread into the soil of Hindu society.!

Swami Vivekananda rightly observes that the "heavenly touch of the great Ramanuja converted the down-trodden pariahs into Alvars" and that the large-heartedness of Ramanuja made him the greatest social reformer of our country. A study of his long and eventful life as a metaphysician, mystic and social-reformer is attempted in the following pages. Care has been taken to present a balanced picture of these important dimensions of this great teacher. No effort has been made to depict him as a sectarian head, although a few scholars may view him as such. But the unquestionable historical and traditional evidences disprove all such claims. Painting Ramanuja in a different colour is highly inconsistent with the spirit of liberal orthodoxy

advocated and practised by Ramanuja all his life. The popular image of Ramanuja seen usually in temples and shrines dedicated to Vishnu, greet all with 'anjali' hand-gesture which eloquently summarises the entire theme of his life. It demonstrates very effectively the fact that he is subservient to God and his chosen one-pointed devotees. Our exposition of the life and teachings of this chosen apostle of God therefore conforms to the basic spirit of *daasatva* (status of a servant), which Ramanuja exhibited throughout his life. This broad vision that all are eligible to become devotees of God and that all have the right to know God, worship God and reach God is the sum and substance of Ramanuja's life. With these introductory remarks let us consider the religious and philosophical atmosphere that prevailed before the advent of Ramanuja, in the next section.



2

Religious and Philosophical Scenario

The religion popularised by Sri Ramanuja is known as Srivaishnavism and the philosophy established by him on a firm footing is popularly known as Visistadvaita. Religion without a philosophical basis becomes superstition and philosophy without a religious background becomes dry metaphysics. Ramanuja's system provides a happy blend of these two important dimensions of man's spiritual life. The word Srivaishnavism denotes that system which believes in the supremacy of Lord Vishnu and His divine consort Sri (or Lakshmi). Ramanuja's system is also known as 'Sri Sampradaya' because of the important position it accords to Lakshmi. Lakshmi is the mother of the entire creation. By virtue of this She also mediates between man who is prone to err and the Lord, the strict disciplinarian. By her timely intercession, she mitigates the anger of the Lord and brings in a rapport between Him and the devotee. In this special role she is known as 'Purushakara' (mediatrix). The system is also called 'Emberumanar Darsanam'. The word 'Emberumanar' in Tamil is one of the names of Ramanuja.

The term Visistadvaita as applied to the philosophy popularised by Ramanuja means, the 'oneness' (*advaita*) of the One who is 'qualified' (*visishta*). According to this school, Lord Vishnu, the Supreme Being, is One only and He is "qualified" by the universe consisting of sentient and insentient entities, called Chit and Achit respectively, The universe forms the "body" of the Lord, in a metaphorical sense. Like any physical body possessed by a living being, the body of the Lord also viz., the Universe, is invariably supported, controlled and made use of by Him for His exclusive benefit or excellence. According to Ramanuja, the whole world is without any exception, always controlled by God, supported by Him and is utilised by Him

for His own excellence. In other words, the world by itself, becomes a non-entity if it does not subserve God. The relation (*sambandha*) between God and the world of men and matter is explained by Ramanuja as the *sarira-sariri-bhava* (relation between the body and the soul). It may also be pointed out that Ramanuja himself did not use the word 'Visistadvaita' in his works to refer to the Philosophy popularised by him. This term came into vogue later through the works of Sudarsana Suri and Vedanta Desika.

This philosophy which was prevalent before the advent of Ramanuja bears the indelible impression of the great saints and scholars who, from time to time, inspired people by their teachings and writings. The system of thought may be stated to have three important phases: the *sastraic* works in Sanskrit which owe their authority to the Vedas; the Agamas in Sanskrit which are again two-fold as the Vaikhanasa and the Pancharatra, and the psalms of Alvars in Tamil. The third, i.e., the psalms of Alvars forms a large literature by itself, reflecting a very high state of devotion of the saints who sang them before the various consecrated images of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. These mystic saints drank deep of the love of God and burst into rapturous utterances which assumed the beautiful form of songs. These songs go by the name "Nalayayira Divya Prabandha" (Four Thousand Verses of Divine Composition). They are also referred to briefly as *Nalayiram* or as *Divya Prabandha*. These mystics are said to be twelve in number.

The age of the Alvars is same as that of the saints and scholars of other traditions and faiths who contributed by their own line of approach to the general spiritual renaissance of the country. The mystic saints of Shaiva faith, called Nayanmars were sixty-three in number and they too sang in Tamil. It is also a historical fact that some of the Alvars were contemporaries of a few Nayanmars. It is again significant that all of them—Alvars and Nayanmars flourished in South India. About the same time Sri Sankara advocated his monistic philosophy called Advaita. Another thinker by name Bhaskara advocated his philosophy called Bheda-Abheda.

This situation demanded a scholastic approach as different schools were contending with one another. The devotional outpourings of the mystic saints Alvars in the local language (Tamil) had to be provided with a solid scholastic basis. This gave rise to the line of Acharyas who wrote a series of expositions in Sanskrit in support of their school. Sri Nathamuni appeared as the pioneer who wrote Sanskrit works systematising the Srivaishnava Philosophy in the South. He wrote the *Nyayatattva* and the *Yogarahasya*, neither of which is unfortunately, available now. While the *Yogarahasya* is a mere name to us, a few fragments of the *Nyayatattva* are available in the form of quotations in the works of the later teacher, Venkatanatha (alias Vedanta Desika). On the authority of Desika we understand that the *Nyayatattva* criticised and controverted the *Nyayasutra* of Gautama. Nathamuni is also credited with the honour of having collected the four thousand 'floating' songs of the Alvars (which were being sung in several temples by devotees), and compiled them into their present form. To him also goes the credit of having for the first time, set this Prabandha (collection of the Tamil songs of the Alvars) to music and introduced its recitation as an integral part of Srivaishnava temple worship in the South.

Nathamuni's tradition was continued by Pundarikaksha and after his demise, Srirama Misra became the leader of the tradition. He was followed by Yamunacharya (known in Tamil as Alavandar). He was the grandson of Nathamuni and the celebrated grand-teacher (Paramaguru) of Ramanuja. The task of supporting the Srivaishnava religion and philosophy from the scholarly aspect which was first undertaken by Nathamuni, now acquired new impetus at the hands of Yamuna. He wrote the *Chatussloki*, *Stotraratna*, *Gitarthasangraha*, *Agamapramanya*, *Siddhitraya* (consisting of Atmasiddhi, Isvarasiddhi and Samvitsiddhi) and *Purushanirnaya*. Of these, the last work is lost to us. It has to be pointed out that all the compositions of Ramanuja bear clear evidence of the great influence of Yamuna's works. Several basic concepts of the Srivaishnava Philosophy popularised by Ramanuja can be traced to the works of Yamuna. At a time when Advaita was enjoying wide popularity

and unquestioned authority, and when the teachings of Nathamuni were just nascent, Yamuna had to play a vital role in promoting the cause of the Srivaishnava religion and philosophy through scholarly works in Sanskrit. Yamuna achieved phenomenal success in this task. He was a senior contemporary of Ramanuja. The great regard and love Ramanuja had for his grand-teacher Yamuna can be understood from the following verse of his:

*yatpadambhoruha-dhyana-vidhvasta-asesha-kalmashah
vastutam upayatoham Yamuneyam namami tam*

(I bow down to Yamuna by contemplating on whose lotus-feet all my impurities have been completely destroyed, and I have become an entity.)

Thus it is this rich tradition that Ramanuja inherited. Now let us know the details about the nativity and early life of Ramanuja in the following chapter.



3

Birth and Early Life

Sri Ramanuja was born to a pious brahmin couple, Asuri Kesava Somayaji and Kantimati, at Sriperumbudur in Chingleput District of Tamil Nadu which is about forty kilometres from the city of Chennai. His year of birth is called Pingala and the month, Chitra corresponding to the Saka era, 939. This corresponds to Thursday the 8th May, 1017 A.D. His natal star was Ardra, the 6th lunar mansion. To this day, a small shrine adjacent to the temple of Lord Adi Kesava at Sriperumbudur is shown by the local elders as the place where Ramanuja was born. Ramanuja is also known as Lakshmana (Udayavar in Tamil). He is believed to be the incarnation of Lord Parthasarathi in the famous Vaishnava Temple in Triplicane, Chennai, or that of Vishvaksena, the commander-in-chief of Lord Vishnu's armies, or that of Adi Sesha the primordial serpent-couch of Lord Vishnu. Ramanuja's mother had a younger sister by name Dyutimati. About the same time when Ramanuja was born, Dyutimati also gave birth to a son who was named Govinda, called Embar in Tamil.

Early in life Ramanuja came into contact with one Kanchipurna (called Tirukkacchi Nambi in Tamil) who was a pious and noble soul. Ramanuja had great admiration for him and wanted to have him as his spiritual teacher. But being a Vaisya by birth (and being a strict adherent to the caste hierarchy prevalent in those days), he politely refused to become Ramanuja's preceptor. He was reputed to be the one with whom Lord Varadaraja (in the famous temple at Kanchi) used to converse. In course of time, Ramanuja was married to one Thanjamamba (called *Rakshaamba* in Sanskrit).

After the demise of his father, Ramanuja, along with his mother and wife, moved to Kanchipuram, reputed to be a seat of learning (*Ghatikasthana*). There he joined the Gurukula run

by a well-known Advaita scholar, Yadava Prakasa by name. Being a precocious genius, Ramanuja soon became the most favourite student of Yadava Prakasa. But soon differences arose between the teacher and the taught. When Yadava Prakasa explained the famous *Chandogya* text (I.6.7): "tasya yathaa kapyasam pundareekam evam akshinee" in the traditional way that "the eyes of the person abiding in the orb of the Sun are similar to the hind portions of a monkey," Ramanuja felt highly distressed and shed tears. In all humility, he begged to differ from his master, who was but restating the explanation of Sri Sankara for the passage. When challenged, Ramanuja gave refreshingly different interpretations for that passage, thus: "The eyes of the person abiding in the Sun are like lotuses that are set to bloom by the Sun (or his rays)". The word 'kapi' in the expression, 'kapyasam' does not convey the conventional sense of monkey, but the Sun (or the rays of the Sun). "Kam pibati iti Kapih" (Kapi is that which drinks water i.e., the Sun or his rays). So 'kapyasam' means, that which is blossomed by the Sun or his rays. Or, 'kapi' also means the lotus-stalk. So, 'kapyasam' means the flower that is blooming on the lotus-stalk. Instead of appreciating him for this wonderful interpretation, Yadava felt annoyed and insulted. He called it an expression of audacity and perverted genius. Ramanuja seems to have differed from him regarding the interpretation of other Upanishadic texts also. All this resulted in the expulsion of the student from the Gurukula.

It so happened that the princess of the Chola Kingdom was once possessed by an evil spirit. Yadava Prakasa offered to exorcize but failed miserably in his efforts. The evil spirit itself offered to leave the princess if the teacher would bring his brilliant student Ramanuja and make him touch the princess. Being an affair of the royal harem, Yadava Prakasa was left with no other alternative than to bring Ramanuja to the royal palace. The spirit left the princess and Ramanuja's fame scaled new heights. This infuriated the already estranged teacher.

Tradition records that Yadava Prakasa wanted to somehow liquidate his more popular disciple. Under the pretext of taking all the students on a trip to Benares for a holy dip in the Ganges, Yadava determined to take Ramanuja also with him.

He planned either to abandon him midway in the jungle full of wild, carnivorous animals, or drown him in the Ganges. The unsuspecting Ramanuja joined the tour after entreaties by the teacher. As the entire party was resting for night in a dense forest near the Vindhya mountains, Govinda the cousin of Ramanuja overheard a secret conversation Yadava Prakasa had with a few like-minded disciples about the strategy to be adopted in doing away with Ramanuja. Horrified at this nefarious plan, Govinda alerted Ramanuja.

Poor Ramanuja left the caravan at the dead of night and started proceeding towards Kanchipuram. He was totally unaware of the route. But Lord Varadaraja along with his divine consort, appeared before Ramanuja as a hunter couple. He told Ramanuja that they too were proceeding towards Kanchipuram and offered to escort him thereto. The hunter couple stopped, appeared to have been thirsty and exhausted and asked Ramanuja to get some water to drink from a well nearby. Ramanuja located a well nearby, collected water in a leafy vessel and brought it to the place where the hunter couple was resting. But the couple was missing. In the meantime the day broke. Ramanuja found out that he was in the outskirts of the city of Kanchipuram. His joy knew no bounds when he realised that the fowler couple could be none other than the Divine Couple. Ramanuja from that day onwards, began to draw water from that well and carry it to the temple of Lord Varadaraja for His daily ablutions. This tradition of supplying water from that well to the Lord's temple is being continued even today. One can also see in Kanchipuram, the well from which Ramanuja drew water.

Ramanuja severed all connections with his master from then on. But it was Ramanuja's unique distinction that during the later years, when he became famous as a great ascetic, Yadava Prakasa himself became his disciple, assuming a new name, Govindadasa. He also wrote a work called the *Yatidharma Samucchaya*.

Situation at Home

Back at home, Ramanuja began to meet Kanchipurna very often and learn several metaphysical truths from him. He became

more engrossed in spiritual matters and was not very keen on his role as a house-holder. This naturally annoyed his devoted wife but Ramanuja was helpless. In the meantime, Ramanuja's mother passed away. Ramanuja's association with Kanchipurna became more intimate. He became more and more indifferent towards his house-hold duties. His wife gave more importance to external cleanliness and rituals. She was also conscious of her high caste and considered others as of little significance. One day, Ramanuja invited Kanchipurna for lunch to his house. Kanchipurna first refused to accept the invitation because he knew that Ramanuja's wife would not be happy if he visited their house. But he agreed on persuasion from Ramanuja. He went to Ramanuja's house when he was not in, and asked his wife to serve him whatever was available. He ate hurriedly the food that was served to him, which was the food left over the previous day. Then he left before Ramanuja arrived.

Thanjamamba, a stickler for external purity and cleanliness, threw off the remnant of food, cleaned the vessels and washed the entire house. She took bath again and started cooking food afresh for her husband. Ramanuja came home and asked his wife about the arrival of Kanchipurna. She told him what had happened. An anxious Ramanuja asked if at least the food left behind after Kanchipurna's eating (*bhukta-sesha*) was available. She said that she threw it away. Ramanuja felt extremely unhappy. He was sorry that his wife did not value his sentiments, that she had no consideration for people of a lower caste.

This incident was only the tip of an ice berg. On another occasion, when Ramanuja sent a hungry student to his house for food, she turned him away, uttering a lie that there was no food in the house. On a different occasion, she picked up a quarrel with the wife of Mahapurna (Periya Nambi), Ramanuja's teacher, over a silly matter. Incidents like these were galore and Ramanuja was not able to cope up with her irresponsible and indignant attitude especially towards high and noble souls. All these occurrences apart, Ramanuja's innate urge to devote his time to the service of the Lord (Bhagavan) and his devotees (Bhagavatas) to establish the Srivaishnava System on a firm footing and to lead the life of an ascetic became more intense.

The Six Answers given by Lord Varadaraja

Ramanuja, as already stated earlier, wanted to become a disciple of Kanchipurna but the latter used to politely refuse to accept him as his student. As he was known to be conversing with Lord Varadaraja, Ramanuja put six questions and requested him to get the answers from the Lord. The next day, Kanchipurna conveyed the happy news that the Lord replied to all the questions as follows :

1. "*aham eva param brahma*" (Only I am the Supreme Being).
2. "*darsanam bheda eva cha*" (The correct doctrine is that there is difference between the individual soul and the Lord).
3. "*dehaavasaane muktih syaat*" (Liberation is possible at the end of the body, i.e., after shedding the mortal coil). In other words, liberation while being alive (*jivanmukti*) is impossible.
4. "*antimasmriti-varjanam*" (Remembering Me, the Lord, at the time of death is not necessary).
5. "*mokshopaayah prapattih syaat*" (Whole-hearted surrender is the means of liberation)
6. "*Mahapurnam samaasraya*" (Resort to Mahapurna as your spiritual preceptor)

Having thus been instructed by the Lord Himself, Ramanuja did not want to waste any more time. He proceeded towards Srirangam where he wanted to undergo formal initiation into the Srivaishanva tradition at the hands of Mahapurna. It so happened that both of them met at a place called Madhurantakam (40 kms. from Chennai). Both of them were extremely happy at this unexpected meeting.

Initiation into the Monastic Order

Ramanuja received what is called the Panchasamskaras (five kinds of sacraments) from his preceptor Mahapurna (Periyambadi) who was a disciple of Yamuna himself. These five sacraments are: *taapa* (branding the shoulders with the heated emblems of Sankha and Chakra); *pundram* (the vertical

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mark applied on the forehead and other parts of the body); *naama* (assuming a new name ending with the suffix *dasa*); *mantra* (three formulae collectively known as *Rahasyatraya-Astakshari* (eight-syllabled mantra: Om Namō Narayanaya), *Dvaya* (Sreeman-Narayana-charanau Saranam Prapadye, Srimate Narayanaya Namah) and the *Charama Sloka* (verse 66 of the 18th Chapter of the Gita, viz., sarvadharmā parityajya mamekam saranam vraja/aham tvam sarvapapebhyo mokshayishyami ma suchah) and *yaga* (means *Saranagati* or whole-hearted surrender performed normally by the Guru on behalf of the student). These sacraments make one a one-pointed devotee of Lord Vishnu.

Apart from this formal initiation into the secret teachings of the Srivaishanva tradition, Ramanuja also heard from his preceptor Mahapurna, a detailed interpretation of the *Divya Prabandha* of the mystic saints, Alvars. It is during this period that news was received that the great Yamuna was seriously ill at Srirangam and that he was anxious to meet the young Ramanuja. Ramanuja rushed to Srirangam but as ill-luck could have it, Yamuna passed away before Ramanuja could meet him. It is said that Ramanuja noticed three fingers on the right hand of Yamuna folded which was rather unusual. He understood this as symbolic of three unfulfilled desires lurking in the heart of Yamuna. Being a great Yogin and visionary, Ramanuja swore before the mortal remains of Yamuna in the midst of the disciples of Yamuna gathered there that he would: (a) write a lucid and detailed commentary on the *Brahmasutra* of Badarayana upholding the Srivaishnava tradition; (b) popularise the tradition of the *Divya Prabandha* of the Alvars (especially the *Tiruvaymozhi* of Nammalvar) by arranging for writing an authoritative commentary; and (c) by making sure of an able successor to himself whom he would name Parasara who could carry on the great mission of popularising the system among the masses. It is stated in the traditional accounts that the folded fingers on Yamuna's fingers had straightened up after this declaration of Ramanuja. Ramanuja indeed, did keep his promises in the course of his life. He wrote a monumental commentary on the *Brahmasutra* under the name *Sribhasya*,

made his disciple Pillan write a commentary (the 6000-*Arayirappadi* on the *Tiruvaymozhi*) and nominated Parasara Bhatta as his successor to the pontifical seat at Srirangam. It may be pointed out in this context that Parasara Bhatta was the son of Kuresa, the foremost disciple of Ramanuja who, more than lived up to the expectations of Sri Ramanuja.

Ramanuja who had to carry the mantle of his Paramaguru Yamuna, decided to take up *Samnyasa*. With *vairagya* (detachment) and *jnana* (knowledge) at their acme, Ramanuja renounced his family life. He went to Srirangam and occupied the pontificate. The great mission with which he came to this world soon began to take a clear shape and he devoted himself heart and soul to the fulfilment of that task. Ramanuja came to be known as Yatiraja or Yatipati (King or Master of Ascetics). His name spread far and wide and many scholars, some vanquished by him in debates and some on their own, became his ardent disciples and admirers. Srirangam became the stronghold of Ramanuja and his disciples.

Ramanuja had the good fortune of studying under five teachers who were all the disciples of Yamunacharya. While Mahapurna gave him the five sacraments (Pancha-samskaras), Gosthipurna taught him the Upanishads. Tiruvaranga Perumal Araiya (Yamuna's son) and Thirumalai Andan (or Maladhara) taught him the *Tiruvaymozhi* of Nammalvar. Periya Thirumalai Nambi (Srisaila Purna) taught him the Ramayana. As already pointed out, Ramanuja had the full benefit of further association with Kanchipurna and other contemporary saints and seers. All these contacts broadened his vision and outlook. He developed a cogent and consistent philosophical basis for the doctrine of devotion to God based on the *Divya Prabandha*. This was in sheer contrast to the teachings of the Advaita according to which there is no difference between the individual soul and the Brahman.

Ramanuja strove hard to spread his message and make his reforms and other religious arrangements abiding and everlasting. For this he, with missionary zeal, groomed a whole army of disciples, young and old. Men and women, people from all walks of life, all castes and communities joined his

ashrama. These disciples and followers carried on the great religious mission which Ramanuja assigned to them, with tremendous faith and conviction. As a result, for over nine centuries and more, he has been accepted as the spiritual guide by millions of Hindus. The following verse is recited in Vishnu temples in South India at the end of the *puja*-routine:

*Raamaanujaarya-divyaajnaa prativaasaram ujivalaa
Diganta-vyaapinee bhooyaat saa hi lokahitaishinee*

“May the divine command of Ramanuja shining effulgently day after day, pervade the different directions! For, indeed, it is congenial for the welfare of the people at large.”

Discovery of the Bodhayanavritti

The foremost disciple of Ramanuja was Kurattalvan, known severally as Srivatsanka, Kuresa, Yatindracharana etc. He hailed from a village called Kuram near Kanchipuram. He was proficient in all the *sastras*. His wife Andal was also a great scholar. Kuresa was quite wealthy and he gave up all his possessions for the sole purpose of becoming Ramanuja's disciple. He is said to have been senior to Ramanuja by age. He accompanied Ramanuja on his tour of North India, in search of the *Bodhayana Vritti* on the *Brahmasutra*, said to have been available in Kashmir. It is believed that this *Vritti* was the first commentary on the *Brahmasutra* of Badarayana from the view point of the Srivaishnava religion and philosophy. Before writing his monumental commentary *Sribhasya* on the *Brahmasutra*, Ramanuja wanted to glance the famous *Bodhayanavritti* at least once. He succeeded in his task. Ramanuja and Kuresa were given the manuscript of the *Vritti* by one considerate scholar of Kashmir on the condition that it should be returned after one night's perusal. Both the preceptor and the disciple, known for their intellectual sharpness and powerful photographic memory, are said to have memorised the entire *Vritti* in one night. They promptly returned the manuscript to its owner and returned to Srirangam. Ramanuja began to write the *Sribhasya* on the lines of the thought presented in the *Bodhayanavritti*. Whenever he had a doubt regarding the exact passage of the *Bodhayanavritti*,

Kuresa used to come to his assistance. Kuresa had two sons, Parasara Bhatta and Veda Vyasa. Kuresa wrote five beautiful hymns in Sanskrit which are collectively known as Pancastavi. They are: Sri-stava, Atimanusha-stava, Sundarabahu-stava, Vaikuntha-stava and Varadaraja-stava.

The persecution of Srivaishnavas by the Chola King

Kuresa's love for his master Ramanuja was exemplary. As Ramanuja became very popular and as his doctrine of one-pointed devotion (Bhakti) to Lord Vishnu and His Consort Sri, began to attract many people, the then Chola King Kulottunga I began the persecution of Ramanuja and all the Srivaishnavas. He was an ardent Saivite and a fanatic, at that. He wanted to suppress the Srivaishnava Bhakti Movement with an iron hand. He issued an order that Ramanuja should present himself in the royal court. Sensing grave danger to the life of his master, it is said that Kuresa put on the ochre robes and presented himself in the Chola Court in the place of Ramanuja. The fanatic Saiva King demanded him to accept the supremacy of Siva and asked him to sign a document to that effect. Kuresa, it is said, signed the document in such a way that the King felt insulted. The King ordered that the eyes of Kuresa be put out with a red hot iron. Not allowing the royal executioners to do it, Kuresa took the red hot iron and blinded himself with that, it is said. Kuresa has entered the records of religious history as one who gave up his *darsana* (eye-sight) for the sake of the *darsana* (religious faith/system).

Ramanuja fled the Chola country and reached the hospitable Hoyasala territory (the Karnataka State). There he converted the Jaina ruler Bittideva to Vaishnavism and gave him the name Vishnuvardhana. He built a temple for Lord Sampatkumara (Selvappillai in Tamil) there. He taught the doctrines of his Philosophy from there. He stayed there for fourteen years. He returned to Srirangam only after the death of the Chola King who was responsible for his exile.



4

Ramanuja's disciples and followers

Another important disciple of Ramanuja was Dasarathi (alias Mudaliyandan) who was Ramanuja's sister Bhumadevi's son. He is referred to as the *danda* (supporting staff) of Ramanuja. As Ramanuja left Srirangam for his north Indian tour along with Kuresa, he entrusted Mudaliyandan with the superintendence of the temple affairs at Srirangam. Since then Mudaliyandan's family was in full charge of the temple for nearly two centuries. He was responsible for the installation of Ramanuja's image at Sriperumbudur. Such was the devotion Mudaliyandan had for Ramanuja that Ramanuja's sandals came to be known as Mudaliyandan. He is said to have composed a work called *Rahasyatraya*.

Govinda, Ramanuja's cousin has already been referred to. He was a co-student with Ramanuja in the Gurukula of Yadava Prakasa. It was he who alerted Ramanuja about the evil plan of his master to liquidate him on his trip to Benares. Later on, it is said that as he was taking bath in the Ganges, he obtained a Sivalinga. Thereupon, Govinda took to Saivism and worshipped Siva at Srikalahasti in Andhra Pradesh. Now, even Govinda became attracted to Ramanuja's teachings. He joined Ramanuja's camp. He is called Embar in Tamil, which is an abbreviation of the name 'Emberumanar' by which Ramanuja was known. Embar is nicknamed as 'Ramanuja-pada-chaya' (shade of Ramanuja's feet). His wife also became an ascetic wearing the ochre robe. She was named 'Siriya Andal' (the younger Andal) by Ramanuja and was given the *sannyasa* order at her own request. It is said that Embar along with Mudaliyandan and another disciple of Ramanuja by name Kidambi Acchan, was supervising the construction of temples in the Hoysala territory (Mysore State).

Ramanuja had an illustrious band of followers. They were very large numerically also. It is said that there were under his

control 700 ascetics (*samnyasins*), 12,000 bachelor servants wearing a single garment (*ekangis*), 300 women and innumerable non-brahmins belonging to various communities like Sattada Mudalis, Nattattu Mudalis, Kongil Mudalis, Sthanatta and others. They were known as the Srivaishnava Mudalis (or leaders).

So as to perpetuate his teachings and traditions, Ramanuja left behind 74 personal disciples, and gave them organisational authority. They are known as *Simhasana-adhipatis*, i.e., occupants of Episcopal thrones. It seems some of them were in charge of imparting the three Rahasyas like the eight-syllabled *mantra*, twin-*mantra* and the *Charamasloka* (Gita XVIII.66), and of initiating willing men and women into the fold with the five *samskaras*, to which reference has already been made. Some of the *Simhasana-adhipatis* were in charge of spreading the message of the *Divya Prabandha* of the mystic saints Alvars. Some were in charge of teaching and expounding the *Brahmasutra* with Ramanuja's commentary, the *Sribhasya*. Some were asked to move to different parts of the country and expound the Srivaishnava religion and philosophy, debate if necessary with rival thinkers and give them the Srivaishnava faith, if they be willing. Some were in charge of carrying on temple renovations, administration and superintendence of the worship routines strictly according to the sanction of the Agamas. Parasara Bhatta, Mudaliyandan (Dasarathi), Varada Vishnu Mishra (Nadadur Alvan), Anantarya, Govinda (Embar), Tirukkurugaippiran Pillan, Andhra Purna and Devaraja are the names of some of these Simhasanadhipatis. Even among these, a few were fortunate enough to be very closely associated with the great master. Thus for instance, Andhra Purna was a sort of personal guard of Ramanuja. Kidambi Acchan (also called Pranatartihara) was his cook. Embar was his chamberlain. Kuresa functioned as his treasurer and private secretary.

Ramanuja's popularity grew day by day and men of different philosophical leanings began to join his ranks accepting his guidance and leadership. A great Advaitin known as Yajnamurti is said to have debated with Ramanuja for seventeen days on the meaning of the *Chandogya* passage (VI.2.1) "*ekameva*

advitiam Brahma.” Ramanuja found it difficult to defeat him. One night as he was brooding over the inner meaning of the passage and thus slept, it is said that Yamuna, his departed *paramacharya* appeared in his dream. The great teacher asked Ramanuja in that dream to go through the interpretation he gave in his *Samvitsiddhi* (a part of the *Siddhitraya*). Ramanuja woke up very happily, convinced that the defeat of Yajnamurti was quite certain and imminent. He went through Yamuna’s interpretation of the crucial text. A brief explanation of its meaning may not be out of context here.

According to the Advaitins, the passage, “*ekameva advitiam Brahma*” points out that Brahman alone existed prior to creation (*ekam eva*). The word *advitiam* means that He has no other entity as the second. In other words, the entire world of sentient and insentient entities is unreal. The Advaitins are of the view that the Supreme Brahman Himself, from time immemorial is covered by what is called Maya. Under its influence He imagines himself as a helpless individual self. Once he hears about his true nature from a spiritual teacher to the effect, “*tat tvam asi*” (That Thou Art), he realises “*aham brahmasmi*” (I am the Brahman). Then the entire world of plurality becomes unreal. This, according to the Advaitins, is the truth conveyed by all the Upanishads. The Chandogya text quoted above is very important from the viewpoint of the Advaitins since it declares the ultimate truth about the Brahman and the world.

But Yamuna’s interpretation is virtually different from this. The word *advitiam* means that there is none in the universe equal to the Supreme Being. When we say for example, “This Chola Emperor is *advitiya*,” we only mean that there is no other Emperor equal to him. We do not mean that the Chola King is all alone, without his queen, children, subjects, ministers and others. When we start counting, we count only equals but not inferiors. When we enumerate the Oceans, we say “the Milky Ocean, the ocean of Sugarcane Juice, the ocean of Pure Waters” etc. We do not count the waves, bubbles etc. Likewise the words “*ekameva advitiam*” in relation to the Brahman mean that in the three periods of time—past, present and future, there was, there is, and there will be NONE equal to Him.

It is stated in the chronicles that Yajnamurti felt convinced by this new kind of interpretation and accepted defeat at the hands of Ramanuja. Embracing the Srivaishnava faith, Yajnamurti assumed a new name Devaraja and served Ramanuja with great devotion. He composed two works in Sanskrit, the *Jnanasara* and the *Prameyasara*.

Ramanuja, the Friend of the Lowly

The popularity of Ramanuja's faith owes much of its spirit to his large-heartedness. His compassion for the innocent and ignorant, the illiterate and the uneducated masses was unbounded and magnanimous. Instances to point out his compassion for the ordinary people are many. Only a few may be cited here.

There lived in Srirangam a man named Uranga Villi Dasa (called Dhanurdasa in Sanskrit). He had a beautiful wife with more beautiful eyes. He was enamoured of the beauty of those eyes. Everyday as his wife moved out into the town or to the river Kaveri nearby, Dhanurdasa used to accompany her with a huge umbrella in his hand. He used to hold it in such a way that the sun's rays did not fall on her eyes. Once as Ramanuja was going to the river for ablutions along with his disciples, he saw the strange phenomenon of a young man providing shade to the face of a young lady. The curious Ramanuja knew from his disciples the story behind this act. He asked one of his disciples to bring the man to his *ashrama*.

Dhanurdasa went to Ramanuja's *ashrama* and paid respects to him. Ramanuja asked him why he was acting in that peculiar manner, providing shade to the eyes of his wife. Dhanurdasa replied with gusto that his wife had the most beautiful and enchanting eyes and that they would fade if the sun's rays fell upon them. Amused at this explanation Ramanuja asked him what he would do if he is shown eyes more beautiful than his wife's. Dhanurdasa submitted that no eyes could be more beautiful than his wife's. Ramanuja asked him to come to him the next day, when he promised to show him those more beautiful eyes.

As Dhanurdasa in all anxiety, presented himself the next day before the great Acharya, he took him to the temple of Lord

Ranganayaka, pointed to the eyes of the recumbent Lord and said: "Behold! How beautiful are the Eyes of our Lord!" The startled Dhanurdasa could not believe his own eyes. What he saw before him was not the 'idol' of the Lord. He saw the Lord 'live' in His Divine form, full of unexcelled charm and brilliance, reclining on Adi Sessa. The eyes of the Lord were more handsome and larger than lotuses that had just bloomed, seemed to smile at him and shower unbounded grace upon him. Dhanurdasa at once felt the bliss of divine communion. Afterwards, Ramanuja brought him back to his *ashrama* and asked him if the Lord's eyes were not more beautiful than the eyes of his wife. The repentant Dhanurdasa asked for his forgiveness and joined the service of the great master. His wife also joined the *ashrama* rendering different *kainkaryas* (services) to the great ascetic and his devotees.

That Ramanuja's love and affection for the lowly and uneducated were more abundant than for the intelligent and educated can be illustrated by one more instance. It has already been pointed that Ramanuja had among his spiritual preceptors, one Gosthipurna (Tirukkottiyur Nambi in Tamil) who was a direct disciple of Yamunacharya. He stayed at a place called Tirukkottiyur (in Tamil Nadu) and hence was known as Tirukkottiyur Nambi. Ramanuja wanted to know the meaning of the Astakshari Mantra from this great master. For this purpose, he had to go to Tirukkottiyur from Srirangam. Every time he went, the teacher would send him away, asking him to come again some other day. It is said that at least eighteen times Ramanuja had to make trips to Tirukkottiyur to learn the secret teaching of the Mantra. At long last, the efforts of the undaunted Ramanuja bore fruit. The teacher gave him the esoteric meaning of the Mantra and cautioned him thus: "My dear boy! This Mantra is the best among the Mantras. Do not give it to all and sundry. This Mantra can bring liberation to one and all by mere repetition under proper guidance. However, if you impart it to the undeserving, you will go to hell and dwell there for eternity. So, be careful."

Liberation for one and all

Ramanuja's joy knew no bounds. "Here is the King of Mantras which would send one and all to Vaikuntha! How I wish I give it to all humanity!" These were the thoughts that were crossing his mind. Having thanked his teacher for giving him the great Mantra, he decided to impart it to one and all, without any discrimination of caste and creed, the deserving and the non-deserving, male and female, young and old. His only concern was that everyone genuinely interested in getting liberated should be given an opportunity—a golden opportunity at that. So the large-hearted Ramanuja arranged to be proclaimed in the town of Tirukkottiyur that whoever was desirous of liberation should gather near the temple of Lord Saumya Narayana. Men and women of all walks of life gathered at the temple. Ramanuja got up to the temple tower and in a stentorian voice declared the significance of the sacred Astakshari Mantra. The Mantra (*Om Namō Narayanaya*) proclaims that the individual soul is a humble instrument meant for the service of the supreme Lord Narayana. The sacred syllable OM (A-U-M) itself is a compact expression implying that the individual soul (M) exists only (U) for the sake of the Lord (A). How kind and compassionate, considerate and exemplary was Ramanuja's act! History lacks in such noble-minded souls who believed that there are no walls in the spiritual empire.

This news soon reached the Guru, Tirukkottiyur Nambi. He immediately summoned Ramanuja. As he came with folded hands, the preceptor admonished him for violating his counsel. "How dare you impart the sacred Mantra to one and all, without considering their eligibility! Don't you know that you would surely go to hell for this sacrilegious act?" frowned the teacher. Ramanuja prostrated before the master and submitted in all humility, "Revered master! If by the efficacy of the Mantra all people can attain liberation, what is wrong if I, a single soul, suffer in hell?" This wonderful quality of self-effacement and deep concern for the common masses moved the teacher to tears. He embraced the disciple and said in exclamation: "You are greater than our Lord! ("Emberumanar Nee!" in Tamil). Since then Ramanuja came to be endearingly known as Emberumanar.



5

Philosophical Writings

Ramanuja, in the midst of his busy activities concerning the spread of the teachings of the Alvars and early teachers of Vaishnavism, found time to write works highlighting the philosophy of the school. He wrote the *Vedarthasangraha*, *Sribhasya*, *Vedanta Sara*, *Vedanta Dipa*, *Gitabhasya*; *Saranagati Gadya*, *Srirangagadya* and *Vaikuntha Gadya* (called the *Gadyatraya*) and the *Nityagrantha*. In the Hindu philosophical traditions, the Upanishads, the *Brahmasutra* (of Badarayana) and the *Bhagavadgita* (forming part of the *Bhisma Parva* of the *Mahabharata*) are collectively known as the *Prasthanatraya*. All the propounders of new religious or philosophical systems are expected to present their doctrines within the framework of the *Prasthanatraya*. As for Ramanuja, his commentary on the *Gita* and the *Brahmasutra* are quite well known as conforming to this practice. But he did not write any regular commentary on the Upanishads as other philosophers like, say, *Sankara* and *Anandatirtha* (*Madhva*) did. But the *Vedarthasangraha* fills in this gap, if we may say so, wherein Ramanuja discusses all the important Upanishadic texts offering his own traditional interpretations thereon. The *Vedarthasangraha* has a lucid commentary by *Sudarsana Suri* who also commented upon the *Sribhasya*. In the introductory to his commentary called *Tatparayadipika* to this work, *Sudarasana Suri* observes that the *Vedarthasangraha* was delivered in the form of a series of lectures by Ramanuja in the immediate presence of *Lord Venkatesvarā* at *Tirumala* (*Andhra Pradesh*).

The *Sribhasya* is the *magnum opus* of Ramanuja. It is highly polemical in nature. Apart from the systems of *Buddhism*, *Jainism* and *Materialism*, it controverts and refutes a number of schools of thought, especially the *Advaita* of *Sri Sankara* and

the Bhedabheda schools of Bhaskara and Yadava Prakasa. It has been stated earlier that Ramanuja did not want to compose any commentary on the Brahmasutra without first going through the legendary commentary on it by sage Bodhayana and that he procured a manuscript of it in Kashmir. He and his disciple Kuresa went through it and memorized it. After returning to Srirangam, Ramanuja wrote the Sribhasya, quoting as authority, passages from this Vritti. In the opening portion of the Sribhasya, he says that the earlier preceptors summarized the elaborate Brahmsutra-vritti of the venerable Bodhayana and that he was interpreting the aphorisms following their opinion (*tanmata-anusarena sutraksharani vyakhyasyante*).

George Thibaut who translated Ramanuja's Sribhasya into English observes that Ramanuja's interpretation of the *Brahmasutra* is closer to the original than the interpretation of Sankara and others. What Ramanuja tried to establish in this voluminous work is that the Supreme Brahman is Srinivasa (called Purushottama, Vishnu, Narayana and so on) and that he is full of auspicious qualities and that liberation for the human beings who are different from Him, consists in attaining to His Highest abode (Vaikuntha) and serving Him in different capacities. The views that the world is unreal, that the individual soul and God are identical and that God is Absolute Knowledge and Bliss etc., but not the One who possesses them as attributes, etc., are all rejected by Ramanuja in the course of this work. It has to be pointed out in this connection that before Ramanuja, his grand-teacher Yamunacharya (called Alavandar in Tamil) already refuted Advaita and other schools in his Siddhitraya. Ramanuja got the direction from that work in writing the Sribhasya. So as to help the ordinary people who do not have either the time or the scholarship needed to go through the Sribhasya, Ramanuja also wrote two other works which are actually brief expositions of the Brahmasutra. They are the *Vedantasara* and the *Vedanta Dipa*. Of these, the *Vedanta Sara*, true to its name, is a very brief commentary, confined to giving the simple meaning of the aphorisms, without going into the details. A little more elaborate than this is the *Vedanta Dipa* where one can find a brief exposition of the prima facie view

(*purvapaksa*) and the conclusion (*siddhanta*). It appears that these three works, viz., the *Vedanta Sara*, the *Vedanta Dipa* and the *Sribhasya* are meant for three different classes of students (readers) such as the beginners, those who are a little advanced and the scholarly readers, respectively.

The *Gitabhasya* is an authentic interpretation of the Gita from the viewpoint of Srivaishnava tradition. It is more devotional in its approach than the *Sribhasya* as may be noticed from the invocatory stanza. It is inspired by and based on the *Gitarthasangraha* of Yamuna, his grand-teacher. The *Gitarthasangraha* in its turn, was the traditional teaching about the Gita handed over to him by his immediate preceptor, Sriramamisa. He must have received it from his own teacher Pundarikaksha and he, from his own guru, Nathamuni. The *Gitarthasangraha* is a brief compendium of the Gita in 32 verses. Ramanuja's elaborate commentary on this work might have been inspired by the oral tradition he received from the disciples of Yamuna in the understanding and interpretation of the Gita. According to this, Bhakti or loving devotion is the only means of liberation. Although Saranagati (Prapatti) or whole-hearted Surrender is also mentioned in the Gita in several places, especially in the verse "sarvadharmā parityajya..." (XVIII.66), Ramanuja, basing himself upon the teaching of the Upanishads, explains Saranagati as an auxiliary to Bhakti itself. In other words, one has to do Saranagati (surrender) to the Lord with the prayer that He should make his Bhakti stronger. It is opined by scholars that Ramanuja addressed the *Sribhasya* and the *Gitabhasya* to the pan-Indian audience (i.e., for people living in different parts of the country) who attach great importance to the Upanishads only. For them the concept of Saranagati may be something not quite familiar and so, not quite acceptable. Moreover, Saranagati is a secret doctrine (*rahasya*) which has to be imparted only to a limited circle of disciples who have absolute faith (*mahavisvasa*) in the saviourship of God. It is the essence of Dvayamantra (*Srimannaaraayana-charanau saranam prapadye, Srimate Naaraayanaaya namah*). This teaching is not meant for one and all. There is what is called "difference in eligibility" (*adhikarabheda*) in the people. Those

who are *not fit* for the arduous Bhakti-marga alone are qualified for the Prapatti-marga.

What Ramanuja meant for his inner circle of disciples is enshrined in his three Gadyas (poetic prose pieces) called the *Saranagati Gadya*, the *Sriranga Gadya* and the *Vaikunthagadya*. These works highlight the importance of Saranagati (whole-hearted surrender) as the sole means of liberation. The *Vaikunthagadya* teaches us that the ultimate goal of human endeavour is Sri Vaikuntha which is called Nityavibhuti in tradition, and which is referred to as the Parama-akasa, Paramavyoma, Paramapada, etc. in the Upanishads. This Gadya gives a graphic description of Sri Vaikuntha, the eternal abode of the Lord, where the Supreme Being Narayana and His Consorts Sri, Bhru and Nila are served by the ever-liberated and the liberated souls in different capacities. The main purpose of this prose piece is to show that Kainkarya or selfless Service to the Lord is the *summum bonum* of human life.

The Saranagatigadya in particular, is a dialogue between Ramanuja and the divine couple Lakshmi and Narayana. This opens with a categorical statement of Prapatti (Surrender) made by Ramanuja to Lakshmi, the Divine Mother. Here Ramanuja seeks forgiveness, enlightenment and experience of the spirit of total surrender to the Lord. Only after surrendering to Lakshmi, Ramanuja approaches the Lord who graciously grants him his request. Doing Prapatti to Lakshmi first and then surrendering to the Lord, has now become part of the Srivaishnava tradition. The opening part of this Gadya which is popular among the Srivaishnavas may be quoted here:

“Om bhagavan -narayana- abhimata- anurupa- svarupa- rupaguna- vibhava- aisvarya- siladhyanavadhika- atisaya- asankhyeya- kalyana- gunaganaam padmavanaalayaam Bhagavatim Sriyam Devim Nityanapayinim.....saranam aham prapadye”

“I surrender to the adorable Sri, the Goddess who is inseparable from Her Consort Bhagavan Narayana and who abides in lotuses, who possesses innumerable and unexcelled auspicious qualities such as easy affability, lordship, form and essential nature which are agreeable to and in conformity with Lord Narayana.”

The Saranagati Gadya points out that Saranagati or whole-hearted surrender is the sole means of attaining the unique status of being an eternal servant of the Lord in Sri Vaikuntha. The Sriranga Gadya points out that Srirangam¹ is a unique place (*divyadesa*) to do Saranagati while a man is alive in this world (which is called *Lilavibhuti* in tradition) and that an ardent devotee should try to live happily in Srirangam itself. Thus the Gadyatraya teaches us three important things – the *upeya* (goal to be achieved), the *upaya* (the means to be adopted) and the *desa-visesha* (particular place in this world) where this means can be implemented.

The *Nityagrantha* (manual of daily worship) is a digest of how Ramanuja himself was worshipping the Lord during his lifetime. An ardent devotee is expected to follow that procedure. Worshipping the sacred, sanctified image of the chosen deity (called *archavatara*) with one-pointed devotion or Bhakti (called also *upasana* and *jnana* in the Upanishads) should form the daily routine of a man.

□

1. This is a famous pilgrim centre in Tamil Nadu (South India), close to Tiruchirapalli.

6

Last Days of the Master

Ramanuja spent 120 years on this earth and he felt that his mission neared completion. Of this span, he spent sixty years in Srirangam itself. In spite of his old age, he performed the daily duties punctiliously. He used to perform Sandhya-vandana day after day getting up slowly from the seat. He adored Lord Ranganatha and His Consort Ranganayaki every day with love and a supreme sense of satisfaction. Realising that it was time for him to depart, Ramanuja one day called all his disciples and devotees to his side and expressed his desire to give up the mortal coils. His devotees could not bear with the thought that he would not be there with them. They got his permission to install three metallic images of his – one at Sriperumbudur, another at Melkote and the third, at Srirangam. The image at Sriperumbudur, it is stated in ancient accounts, very closely resembled Ramanuja. He liked it very much and embraced it, investing it with his spiritual power. One may notice to this day, a mark resembling the Srivastva on the chest of the image. It is said that Ramanuja originally had that mark on his chest and that it got imprinted on the image when he hugged it in appreciation.

The great master gave a series of counsels to the sorrowing gathering. Some of the important instructions of the great master are listed hereunder:

- Worship the Srivaishnavas as you would, your spiritual teacher.
- Do not become slaves of your senses.
- Repeat the names of the devotees of the Lord with as much gusto and joy as you display when chanting the holy names of the Lord.
- Earmark a part of the day for contemplating on the greatness of your spiritual preceptor and for reading the compositions of the Alvars or the Acharyas.

- Always seek the company of those who have surrendered to the Lord whole-heartedly.
- Avoid the company of those who are always bent upon worldly, sense-pleasures.
- One who has surrendered at the feet of the Supreme Lord should not worry about the future since the Lord will certainly take care of it.
- Since the present life is the result of the past Karma, there is no point in grieving over it.
- Discharge your duties without any desire for fruits, considering that as the service of the Lord Himself.
- Study the *Sribhasya* and teach it to others since all that is needed to make one's spiritual life fruitful has been incorporated in it.
- If this is beyond your capacity, then study the works of St. Nammalvar and other mystics, and teach them to eligible disciples.
- However, if you consider yourself unequal to this task, then render service to the Lord who has manifested Himself in different sacred places.
- If you are incompetent even to do this, then try to put up a small hut at Melkote and live there in perfect peace.
- If this is also not possible, then, stay where you are; entrust your burden to the Lord Himself or to your spiritual preceptor; chant the Divaya Mantra and contemplate on its import.
- Even if this be impossible, then seek the friendship of a good Vaishnava who is full of devotion, wisdom and detachment and move with him in such a way that he takes pity upon you. That way, you will become free from egotism. Abide by the words of that Vaishnava; that alone is the sure means of your liberation.
- There are three types of men in this world: some are favourably disposed to God (*anukula*); some are antagonistic (*pratikula*) while others, being worldly-minded, are indifferent (*anubhaya*). The first category of people are your friends; the second, your enemies.

At the sight of your friends, let your heart feel happy as if you have come across betel leaves, flower and perfume. At the sight your enemies, your heart should tremble as if you are facing a cobra, tiger or fire. At the sight of the indifferent, you should just ignore them as you would, when you come across stocks and rocks. They are of no significance at all to you.

- Association with 'friends' will help you attain spiritual illumination.
- Shun the company of your 'enemies' and the 'indifferent' ones also since they may make you soon an enemy of God.
- Remember that the all-compassionate God is always ready to provide you with all that you need and pray for.
- Live happily with this conviction.

Having advised and blessed the gathering in this manner, Ramanuja closed his eyes half and laid himself down in such a way that his head which rested on the lap of Embar was turned towards the temple of Lord Ranganatha and his feet rested on the lap of Andhra Purna (Vaduga Nambi). Thus came the physical end of the long and eventful life of the great Master. It was a Saturday noon on the tenth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Magha, in the Saka year 1059, corresponding to the year 1137 A.D. The whole assembly was struck with grief and cried in utter distress. It suddenly realised that a void was left by the departure of the master. The band of devotees and disciples performed the last rites of the master in a befitting manner.

But the great Ramanuja lives on, in his works. The great legacy left behind by him continues to inspire whole generations of men and women to follow the path shown by him. Universal love and compassion and the spontaneous willingness to extend a helping hand to the uneducated and downtrodden people of society are some of the divine virtues which make Ramanuja an all-time saviour of humanity. All the succeeding saints and philosophers of our country emulated Ramanuja in several ways and tried to convert every act of man in this world into a

veritable service to the Lord. Ramanuja is undoubtedly the brightest star of the greatest magnitude in the firmament of religious and Philosophic thought which continues to guide and help many a sincere soul that feels lost in the wilderness of worldly existence, all over the world. His fame cut across the frontiers of space and time. He showed through his life that spirituality is not mere theory or philosophical concept. He has demonstrated how it can pragmatically alleviate the sufferings of humanity. He suffered persecution and insults but he never gave up his fight against evil to establish what he believed was right and the need of the hour. We may now conclude this saga of the sage Ramanuja by quoting the following verse from an English poet, Longfellow:

“The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.”

(The Ladder of St. Augustine)



॥ श्रीः ॥

श्रीमते रामानुजाय नमः । श्रियै नमः । श्रीधराय नमः॥

ॐ

श्री भाष्यम्

श्रीभगवद्रामानुजविरचितं शारीरकमीमांसाभाष्यम्

[शास्त्रार्थसूचनगर्भितं मङ्गलाचरणम्]

अखिलभुवनजन्मस्थेमभङ्गादिलीले

विनतविविधभूतव्रातरक्षैकदीक्षे ।

श्रुतिशिरसि विदीप्ते ब्रह्मणि श्रीनिवासे

भवतु मम परिस्मन् शेमुषी भक्तिरूपा ॥1॥

[भाष्यप्रणयनप्रयोजनम्]

पाराशर्यवचस्सुधामुपनिषद्दुग्धाब्धिमध्योद्घृताम्

संसाराग्निविदीपनव्यपगतप्राणात्मसञ्जीवनीम् ।

पूर्वाचार्यसुरक्षितां बहुमतिव्याघातदूरस्थितां

आनीतां तु निजाक्षरैः सुमनसो भौमाः पिबन्त्वन्वहम् ॥2॥

[प्रतिज्ञा]

भगवद्बोधायनकृतां विस्तीर्णा ब्रह्मसूत्रवृत्तिं पूर्वाचार्याः सञ्चिक्षिपुः, तन्मतानु-
सारेण सूत्राक्षराणि व्याख्यास्यन्ते ।

[प्रथमे समन्वयाध्याये, आद्ये अयोगव्यवच्छेदपादे सिद्धे व्युत्पत्तिसमर्थनपरम्]

जिज्ञासाधिकरणम् (1-1-1)

[ब्रह्मैव जिज्ञास्यम्]

ॐ अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा ॥1॥

[सौत्रपदानामर्थवर्णनम्]

अत्र अयम् 'अथ' शब्दः आनन्तर्ये भवति । 'अतः' शब्दः वृत्तस्य हेतुभावे । अधीतसाङ्गसशिरस्कवेदस्य, अधिगताल्पास्थिरफलकेवलकर्मज्ञानतया सज्ञातमोक्षाभिलाषस्य, अनन्तस्थिरफलब्रह्मजिज्ञासा हि अनन्तरभाविनी ।

ब्रह्मणो जिज्ञासा ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा । ब्रह्मणः इति कर्मणि षष्ठी ।

'कर्तृकर्मणोः कृति' (पा. सू. 2-3-65)

इति विशेषविधानात् ।

यद्यपि सम्बन्धसामान्यपरिग्रहेऽपि जिज्ञासायाः कर्मपिक्षत्वेन कर्मार्थत्व-सिद्धिः, तथापि आक्षेपतः प्राप्तात् आभिधानिकस्यैव ग्राह्यत्वात् कर्मणि षष्ठी गृह्यते ।

न च—

'प्रतिपदविधाना षष्ठी न समस्यते' (पा. सू. वा. 2-2-10)

इति कर्मणि षष्ठ्याः समासनिषेधः शङ्कनीयः;

'कृद्योगा च षष्ठी समस्यते' (पा. सू. वा. 2-2-9)

इति प्रतिप्रसवसद्भावात् ।

'ब्रह्म' शब्देन च स्वभावतो निरस्तनिखिलदोषः अनवधिकाति-शयासङ्ख्येयकल्याणगुणगणः पुरुषोत्तमः अभिधीयते । सर्वत्र बृहत्त्वगुणयोगेन हि ब्रह्मशब्दः । बृहत्त्वं च स्वरूपेण गुणैश्च यत्र अनवधिकातिशयम्, सः अस्य मुख्योऽर्थः । स च सर्वेश्वर एव । अतः ब्रह्मशब्दः तत्रैव मुख्यवृत्तः । तस्मादन्यत्र तद्गुणलेशयोगात् औपचारिकः । अनेकार्थकल्पनायोगात्, भगवच्छब्दवत् । तापत्रयातुरैः अमृतत्वाय स एव जिज्ञास्यः । अतः सर्वेश्वर एव जिज्ञासाकर्मभूतं ब्रह्म ।

ज्ञातुमिच्छा 'जिज्ञासा' । इच्छायाः इष्यमाणप्रधानत्वात्, इष्यमाणं ज्ञानम् इह विधीयते । मीमांसापूर्वभागज्ञातस्य कर्मणः अल्पास्थिरफलत्वात्, उपरितन-भागावसेयस्य ब्रह्मज्ञानस्य अनन्ताक्षयफलत्वाच्च, पूर्ववृत्तात् कर्मज्ञानादनन्तरम् तत एव हेतोः ब्रह्म ज्ञातव्यम् इत्युक्तं भवति । तदाह वृत्तिकारः—

'वृत्तात् कर्माधिगमादनन्तरं ब्रह्मविविदिषा' (बो.वृ.)

इति । वक्ष्यति च कर्मब्रह्ममीमांसयोः ऐकशास्त्र्यम्—

[पूर्वोत्तरमीमांसयोः एकशास्त्रता]

‘संहितमेतत् शारीरकं जैमिनीयेन षोडशलक्षणेन इति शास्त्रैकत्वसिद्धिः’
(बो.वृ.) इति । अतः प्रतिपिपादयिषितार्थभेदेन षट्कभेदवत् अध्यायभेदवच्च
पूर्वोत्तरमीमांसयोः भेदः । मीमांसाशास्त्रम्—

‘अथातो धर्मजिज्ञासा’ (पू.मी.सू. 1-1-1)

इत्यारभ्य,

‘अनावृत्तिः शब्दादनावृत्तिः शब्दात्’ (ब्र.सू. 4-4-22)

इत्येवमन्तम् सङ्गतिविशेषेण विशिष्टक्रमम् । तथा हि प्रथमं तावत्—

‘स्वाध्यायोऽध्येतव्यः’ (तै.आर. 2-25)

इति अध्ययनेनैव स्वाध्यायशब्दवाच्यवेदाख्याक्षरराशेः ग्रहणं विधीयते ।

[अध्ययनस्वरूपप्रकारौ]

तच्चाध्ययनम् किरूपम्? कथं च कर्तव्यम्? इत्यपेक्षायाम्—

‘अष्टवर्षं ब्राह्मणमुपनयीत तमध्यापयीत’ (श. ब्रा.)

इत्यनेन, ‘श्रावण्यां प्रोष्ठपद्यां वा उपाकृत्य यथाविधि ।

युक्तश्रृण्दान्दास्यधीयीत मासान् विप्रोऽर्धपञ्चमान् ॥ (म. सू. 4-95)

इत्यादिब्रतनियमविशेषोपदेशैश्च अपेक्षितानि विधीयन्ते ।

एवं सत्सन्तानप्रसूतसदाचारनिष्ठात्मगुणोपेतवेदविदाचार्योपनीतस्य
व्रतनियमविशेषयुक्तस्य आचार्योच्चारणानूच्चारणरूपम् अक्षरराशिग्रहणफलम्
अध्ययनम् इत्यवगम्यते ।

[अध्ययनविधिः नियमविधिः]

अध्ययनं च स्वाध्यायसंस्कारः । ‘स्वाध्यायोऽध्येतव्यः’ इति, स्वाध्यायस्य
कर्मत्वावगमात् । संस्कारो हि नाम कार्यान्तरयोग्यताकरणम् । संस्कार्यत्वं च
स्वाध्यायस्य युक्तम्; धर्मार्थकाममोक्षरूपपुरुषार्थचतुष्टयतत्साधनावबोधित्वात्,
जपादिना स्वरूपेणापि तत्साधनत्वाच्च ।

एवम् अध्ययनविधिः मन्त्रवन्नियमवदक्षरराशिग्रहणमात्रे पर्यवस्यति ।

[वेदार्थज्ञाने स्वतः प्रवृत्तिः]

अध्ययनगृहीतस्य स्वाध्यायस्य स्वभावत एव प्रयोजनवदर्थवबोधित्व-
दर्शनात् गृहीतात् स्वाध्यायात् अवगम्यमानान् प्रयोजनवतः अर्थान् आपाततो
दृष्ट्वा, तत्स्वरूपप्रकारविशेषनिर्णयफलवेदवाक्यविचाररूपमीमांसाश्रवणे
अधीतवेदः पुरुषः स्वयमेव प्रवर्तते ।

तत्र कर्मविधिस्वरूपे निरूपिते कर्मणाम् अल्पास्थिरफलत्वं दृष्ट्वा, अध्ययनगृहीतस्वाध्यायैकदेशोपनिषद्वाक्येषु च अमृतत्वरूपानन्तस्थिर-फलापातप्रतीतेः, तन्निर्णयफलवेदान्तवाक्यविचाररूपशारीरकमीमांसायाम् अधिकरोति ।

[उक्तार्थस्य श्रुतिसिद्धता]

तथा च वेदान्तवाक्यानि केवलकर्मफलस्य क्षयित्वम्, ब्रह्मज्ञानस्य अक्षयफलत्वं च दर्शयन्ति—

‘तद्यथेह कर्मचितो लोकः क्षीयते एवमेवामुत्र पुण्यचितो लोकः क्षीयते’
(छां.उ. 8-1-6)

‘अन्तवदेवास्य तद्भवति’ (बृ.उ. 5-8-9)

‘नह्यध्रुवैः प्राप्यते’ (कठ. उ. 2-10)

‘प्लवा ह्येते अदृढा यज्ञरूपाः’ (मुण्डक. उ. 1-2-7)

‘परीक्ष्य लोकान् कर्मचितान् ब्राह्मणो निर्वेदमायात् नास्त्यकृतः कृतेन ।

तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् ॥

‘तस्मै स विद्वानुपसत्राय सम्यक्प्रशान्तचित्ताय शमान्विताय ।

येनाक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम् ॥

(मुण्डक. उ. 1-1-12-13)

‘ब्रह्मविद्याप्नोति परम्’ (तै. उ., आन. 2-1-1)

‘न पुनर्मृत्यवे तदेकं पश्यति’ (छां. उ. ..?)

‘न पश्यो मृत्युं पश्यति’ (छां. उ. 7-26-2)

‘स स्वराङ् भवति’ (छां. उ. 7-25-2)

‘तमेवं विद्वानमृत इह भवति नान्यः पन्था अयनाय विद्यते’

(तै. पु., सू. 17)

‘पृथगात्मानं प्रेरितारं च मत्वा जुष्टस्ततस्तेनामृतत्वमेति’ (श्वे. उ. 1-6) इत्यादीनि ।

[कर्मविचारनैरपेक्ष्यशङ्का-समाधाने]

ननु च साङ्गवेदाध्ययनादेव कर्मणां स्वर्गादिफलत्वम्, स्वर्गादीनां च क्षयित्वम्, ब्रह्मोपासनस्य अमृतत्वफलत्वं च ज्ञायत एव । अनन्तरं मुमुक्षुः ब्रह्मजिज्ञासायामेव प्रवर्तताम् ; किमर्था धर्मविचारापेक्षा ? □

ŚRĪ BHĀSHYAM

*The Commentary of the Adorable Sri Ramanuja
on the Śariraka Mīmāṃsā*

(Invocation briefly implying the import of the work)

May my understanding assume the form of loving devotion to that Highest Brahman who is the Home of Lakshmi, and to whom the creation, preservation, destruction etc., of all the worlds is (mere) play, whose main resolve consists in the protection of hosts of multiform subordinate beings, and who is specially seen to shine forth in what constitutes the head of the Vedas.

(The main purpose of composing the commentary)

May the fair-minded, god-like ones of the earth drink in daily the speech-nectar of the son of Parasara – (the nectar) which has been churned out of the heart of the milky ocean of the Upanishads, and quickens such souls as have lost hold of their life in God through the excessive flaming forth of the fire of *samsara* – (may they drink in that nectar) which has been carefully preserved by ancient teachers and has (hitherto) been held at a distance (from us all) on account of the mutual conflict of many schools of thought, and which is now brought within the reach (of all) by means of (our) appropriate words.

(Declaration)

Ancient teachers (such as Dramidacharya and others) abridged that extensive commentary on the Brahma-Sūtras which was composed by the venerable Bodhayana. In accordance with their opinion, the words of the *sūtras* (i.e., aphorisms) are (here) explained.

(Now commences the Section on Jijñāsā [Desire to Know] which is devoted to establish that words denoting existent entities are valid in their own right; this forms part of the first quarter which sets aside the view that there is non-connection between the scriptures and the Brāhmaṇ, which is found in the first Chapter called Samanvaya [Synthesis])

(Brāhmaṇ alone is the object of the desire to know)

Sutra I. Athāto Brahmajijñāsā

Then, therefore, the enquiry into the Brāhmaṇ.

Here the word *then* is used in the sense of *coming immediately after*; the word *therefore* is used in the sense that (enquiry) which has been concluded (viz., the enquiry into the *Karma Kaṇḍa*) is the reason (for undertaking the present enquiry). With him who has (first) studied and learnt the Vedas with all their limbs and head, and who, through realizing that the mere knowledge of (ritualistic) works gives small and transitory results, has the desire for final release born in him – (with him), the desire for that knowledge of the Brāhmaṇ, which is productive of infinite and eternal results, is, indeed, of subsequent origin.

Brāhmaṇo jijñāsā = Brahmajijñāsā. Brāhmaṇas, the genitive of the word *Brāhmaṇ*, has (here) the objective significance, in accordance with the special rule – “The genitive followed by a word having a *krit* affix is used to denote the agent or the object.” [*Panini* II.3.65]. Even if the genitive is taken as expressing relation in general, the objective significance (of the genitive) is well established (here), because the desire to know requires an object. Yet again, because what is made out by the direct denotative power (of the genitive in accordance with *Panini*, II.3.65) is more acceptable than what is obtained by a process of inference (in accordance with *Panini* II.3.50, where the genitive is declared to be capable of expressing relation in general) – the genitive (here) has to be understood in the objective significance.

It should not be supposed that because there is the rule – “The genitive prescribed specially for particular words is not to be compounded” – (*Paṇinī* II.2.10. *Vārtika*) this genitive in the objective significance, (being one such) is prohibited from being compounded (with other words); for, there is the rule of counter-exception (to this), viz., “The genitive, with a *krī*t following, is to be compounded.” (*Paṇinī* II.2.9, *Vārtika*).

By the word *Brāhmaṇ* is denoted the Highest Person who is, by nature, devoid of all evil, and is possessed of hosts of auspicious qualities, which are innumerable and unsurpassed in excellence. For, everywhere (i.e., in all contexts) the word *Brāhmaṇ* is seen to derive its meaning from the association of *brihattva*, i.e., greatness (with the thing devoted by it); and whatever greatness is, by nature as well as qualities, unsurpassed in excellence, that is its primary and natural meaning. And He (who possesses such greatness) is alone the Lord of All. Hence the word *Brāhmaṇ* is primarily used to signify Him alone. In cases where, on account of the association of a small modicum of that quality, other things than He are meant (by the word *Brāhmaṇ*), it must be used in a secondary sense; because it is improper to postulate variety of meanings (for it), as (it is improper) in the case also of the word *Bhagavat*. For the sake of attaining immortality, He alone has to be desired and to be known by (all) those who are afflicted with the three miseries. Hence, the Lord of All is indeed the *Brāhmaṇ* who forms the object of (our present) enquiry.

Jijñāsā is (literally) the desire to know. As (every) desire has for its basis the thing to be desired, here, that very knowledge (of the *Brāhmaṇ*), which is the thing desired, is enjoined. What is said is this – As the (ritualistic) works learnt from the earliest part of the *Mīmāṃsā* are capable of producing only small and transitory results, and as the knowledge of the *Brāhmaṇ*, conclusively dealt with in the later part (thereof), is capable of producing infinite and indestructible results, for this reason alone, immediately after the antecedent knowledge of works, the *Brāhmaṇ* has to be desired and known. Says the *Vṛttikāra*

(Bodhayana): "The desire to Brāhmaṇ comes immediately after the acquisition of the knowledge of (ritualistic) works is completed."

(Moreover, he says in the following manner, that between the *Karma-mīmāṃsā* and the *Brahma-mīmāṃsā* there is a *śāstraic* (i.e., scientific) unity (whereby the antecedence of the *Karma-mīmāṃsā* is implied) :

(Declaration that the earlier and later Mīmāṃsās constitute a single text)

"This *Mīmāṃsa* of the Embodied (i.e., of the Brāhmaṇ) is composed so as to be one with that of Jaimini (i.e., the *Karma-mīmāṃsā*) which consists of sixteen specific chapters; and so there is the establishment of *śāstraic* unity between them."

Hence the difference between the *Purva-mīmāṃsā* and the *Uttara-mīmāṃsā* is due to the difference in the subject-matter taken up to be propounded, like the difference between the first six and the second six chapters (of the *Purva-mīmāṃsa*), as also like the difference between one chapter and another (of either of the *Mīmāṃsās*). The *Mīmāṃsā-śāstra* (as a whole), beginning with—"Then therefore the enquiry into *dharma*, (i.e., duty) [*Pur.Mim.* I.1.1]; and ending with—"There is non-return, according to scripture" [*Ved. Sut.* IV.4.22] has a certain of sequence (in the treatment of its subject) in accordance with the peculiarity of the topics dealt with (therein). Accordingly, by the statement—"The Veda (*Svādhyaya*) has to be learnt"—(*Taitt. Ar.* II. 15), the mental reception of syllables known as the Veda, which is denoted by the word *Svādhyaya* is enjoined in the very beginning.

(The nature and method of Adhyayana)

And if it be asked, "Of what nature is that learning through oral recitation and how is it to be gone through?" – we reply as follows: – The requirement (for learning the Vedas) are enjoined by means of this passage, viz., "A Brāhmaṇ of eight years of age should be initiated (as a Vedic student) and be taught (to

repeat the Vedas)—“(Sat. Br.?)”; as also by means of the teaching about special preparatory and purificatory ceremonies and restrictions (as to time, place, food etc.) – such as are laid down in this passage among others, viz., “Having, according to scriptural injunctions, made preparations to begin (to learn the Vedas) either (on the full moon day) in the month of Sravana (i.e., July-August) or (on the full moon day) in the month of Praushthapadi (i.e., August-September) and having become fitted therefor (a Brāhmaṇa should learn the Vedas for four months and a half.” (Manu. IV.95). Thus it is understood that learning the Vedas turns out to be the mental reception of a collection of syllables, and consists in their recitation by the teacher followed by the after-recitation (of the pupil) who is in the habit of observing special preparatory and purificatory ceremonies and who has been initiated by a teacher born of noble lineage, accustomed to pious observances, possessed of spiritual qualities, and also having a thorough knowledge of the Vedas.

**(The injunction ordaining Svādhyaya
is an obligatory one)**

Learning the Vedas is, moreover, a *saṃskāra* (i.e., a refinement of an exaltation of excellence) in relation to the Vedas, since it is seen that Svādhyaya forms the object (of such a *saṃskāra*) in the passage – “The Veda has to be learnt.” [Taitt.Ar. II. 15]. *Saṃskāra* (i.e., refinement or exaltation of excellence), it is well-known, is the means of qualifying (a thing) for the fulfillment of other objects (than those for which it is suited without that *saṃskāra*). And it is proper for the Vedas to be worthy of *saṃskāra* (i.e., of getting their excellence exalted), because (when so qualified) they enable us to know (the nature of) duty, wealth, desire and final release, which form the fourfold objects of human pursuit; and (they enable us to know also) the means of accomplishing them. And again (they are worthy of such *saṃskāra*), because in the way of a mere silent repetition (of prayers) etc., they form even as they are verbally, the means of accomplishing these objects of human pursuit).

Thus the injunction as to learning the Vedas finally comes to mean a mere mental reception of a collection of syllables, after (reciting) certain mantras and (obeying) certain regulations.

Because the Vedas, as learnt by oral recitation, are, of their own nature, seen to give us knowledge of purposeful (i.e., fruit-giving) things, the person who has learnt the Vedas perceives, in the first instance, those purposeful (fruit-giving) things which are disclosed to him by the Vedas as learnt; and then betakes himself, of his own accord, to the 'nearing' (i.e., the study) of the *Mīmāṃsā* which is of the nature of an enquiry into Vedic texts, having for its result the determination of the special character and mode of those (purposeful and fruit-giving) things. There (i.e., in the Vedas), after the true nature of the injunctions regarding works has been ascertained, he observes the insignificant and impermanent character of the result of the works. And then because, from the passages of the Upanishads which are a part of the Veda learnt by oral recitation, a prima facie mental impression about an infinite and permanent result in the form of immortality arises, he therefore becomes qualified for the study of the *Mīmāṃsā* of the Embodied – (the *Mīmāṃsā*) which is such an enquiry into Vedantic texts as results in the determination of the nature of that (immortality).

(The matter stated so far finds support
in the scripture)

Accordingly, Vedantic texts declare the destructibility of the results of mere works and the indestructible character of the results arising from the knowledge of the Brahman—“Just as the world obtained by works perishes here, so also, there, the world obtained by merit perishes.” (Chand. Up. VIII.1.6). “To him that (world obtained by works) indeed comes to an end.” (Brih. Up. III.8.10). “It is not reached by the non-èternal (works)” (Kath. Up. II. 10). “Frail, indeed, are these floats in the form of sacrifices” (Mund. Up. I.2.7). “Having examined the worlds obtained by works, let a Brahmana acquire freedom from all desires. The changeless is not (gained) by the changeable; to know that, let him approach, with fuel in hand, a preceptor who

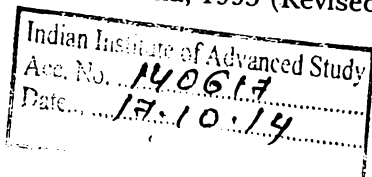
is learned in the Vedas and has a sure footing in the Brahman. To him (i.e., to such a pupil), who, with restrained senses and fully tranquil mind, has thus approached him (i.e., the preceptor), that wise man (the Guru) should speak of that knowledge of the Brahman by which the ever-existent and indestructible Person (*Purusha*) is known." (Mund. Up. I.2.12 & 13). *Should speak of* has (here) the same meaning as *should teach*. "He who knows the Brahman attains the Highest." (Taitt. Up. II.1.1). "He comes not to death again who sees that One." (?). "He who sees (that One) does not see Death." (Chand. Up. VII. 26. 2). "He (who knows the Brahman) becomes free." (Chand. Up. VII.25.2) "He who knows Him thus becomes immortal here. There is no other path for the attainment of final release." (Taitt. Ar. III.12.7). "Knowing the individual self and the Impeller (i.e., the Brahman) to be separate, and being therefore blessed by Him, he attains immortality." (Svet. Up. I.6). To the same effect there are also other texts.

(Extract from the English translation of *Sribhasya* by Prof. M. Rangacharya & Sri M.B. Varadaraja Aiyangar, Pub. Educational Publishing Co., Madras, 1961.)

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Sri Ramanuja (1017-1137) was the great systematiser of what is now popularly known as Viśiṣṭādvaita Philosophy. He differed from Sankara, Bhaskara and Yadava Prakasa in his interpretation of the *Prasthanā Traya*. According to him, the Supreme Brahman is Lord Sriman Narayana or Srinivasa. Brahman is the 'soul' of which the universe of men and matter constitutes the 'body'. Bhakti (loving devotion) and whole-hearted surrender (*prapatti*) are the alternative means of liberation. He wrote nine works in Sanskrit highlighting these truths. To him goes the credit going through the *Bodhayāna Vritti* on the *Brahmasutra* during his visit to Kashmir on the basis of which he composed his celebrated commentary, the Śrībhāṣya.

The present monograph is the moving account of the life and activities of this noble soul Sri Ramanuja. His philosophy and especially, his concept of *bhakti* and *prapatti* inspired several later Vaishnava thinkers like Nimbārka, Madhva, Vallabha, Ramananda, Srikrishna Chaitanya and Swami Narayana in formulating and shaping their own systems of thought.

Dr. M. Narasimhachary (b. 1939) writer of the present monograph, is an erudite scholar of Vedānta with specialization in Viśiṣṭādvaita is the founder professor of the Deptt. of Vaishnavism, University of Madras. He was awarded Ph.D. for his thesis 'Contribution of Sri Yamunacharya to Viśiṣṭādvaita'. He taught Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy at Kualalumpur (1982-84). Visiting Professor in USA and Visiting Academic at the Oxford Uni has authored about 75 research articles and of titles such as *Āśukavisekhara*, *Śāstra Ratna* and *Desika Bhāvājna*.



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