

## Sri Rāmānujācārya (II)

### (In Honour of His 1,000th Birth Anniversary)

PRAVRAJIKA SHUDDHATMAPRANA

Now a new chapter began in Rāmānuja's life. Soon after establishing a monastery in Kanchi, disciples began to gather around him, including his two foremost disciples: first, a nephew named Dāsharathi (Mudaliyandan, or Andan); and second, Kuresha (Kurattalvan, or Alvan). Both of these men were brilliant and deeply devoted to Rāmānuja. And they both proved more than worthy of the great trust Rāmānuja put in them.

But one visitor was totally unexpected—Yādavaprakāsha, Rāmānuja's former teacher. For a long time he had been stricken with remorse over the way he had treated Rāmānuja, and he now came to ask Rāmānuja's forgiveness. He had also been told in a dream to become a disciple of Rāmānuja. Rāmānuja immediately welcomed him with great respect, as if nothing had happened. When Yādava mentioned some doubts he had about Rāmānuja's teachings, Rāmānuja asked Kuresha to speak to him. After Yādava's doubts had all been removed, he begged Rāmānuja for initiation, and Rāmānuja agreed. He was also given sannyās by Rāmānuja, who gave him the name Govindajiyar. Rāmānuja then asked him to write a book on the duties of a Vaishnava. Soon after writing this work, *Yatidharmasamuccaya*, Yādava passed away.

The disciples of Yāmuna in Srirangam

had heard that Rāmānuja had taken sannyās and were thrilled. They now felt it was the right time for him to take up the work in Srirangam, but they also knew that everything depended on the Lord's will. So Mahāpurna went to Lord Ranganātha in the temple and begged the Lord's permission for Rāmānuja to come. The Lord, speaking through a priest, told Mahāpurna to send Tiruvaranga, His foremost singer (Araiyar), to sing for Lord Varadārāja in Kanchi. Varadārāja would no doubt grant Tiruvaranga a boon for his beautiful singing, and Tiruvaranga could then ask for Rāmānuja to come to Srirangam. And this is just what happened.

The *Koila Olugu* (The Chronicle of the Srirangam Temple) gives a grand description of Rāmānuja's welcome there. The Lord was even carried in a procession to the door of the sanctum to greet him. Rāmānuja was led into the temple by his guru Mahāpurna, and full temple honours were given to him. The Lord then 'offered him the scepter (of temple management)'. While bestowing on him the name Udayavar (meaning "possessor"), the Lord said:

We have given you all Our wealth and power, to be employed as you wish and desire; and as the "possessor" [Udayavar] and bestower of eternal bliss (moksha) you look after Our affairs. He also commanded His parijanas [temple servants] to take Udayavar to the 'Cheran mutt' [monastery], the first house in the eastern half of the

North Mada Street, within the Trivikraman enclosure (ie, the north Uttara Street). . . . From the next day onwards he [Rāmānuja] assumed and exercised the office of the Sriaryam. . . .<sup>16</sup>

Yāmūnācārya had five close disciples whom he wanted Rāmānuja to be trained by. These five were Kānchipurna, Mahāpurna, Gosthipurna, Maladhara, and Tiruvaranga Araiyar. Kānchipurna had already given much help and advice to Rāmānuja when he lived in Kanchi. Then Mahāpurna was sent by Yāmuna to Kanchi to initiate and instruct him further. But it seems this initiation did not include all the mantras. After Rāmānuja came to Srirangam, Mahāpurna instructed him to go to Gosthipurna, who lived in Tirukkotiyur, to be further initiated.<sup>17</sup>

Rāmānuja then went to Tirukkotiyur and asked Gosthipurna to initiate him, but Gosthipurna refused. Rāmānuja left much distressed, but he did not give up. Some days later he again returned to Gosthipurna, and was again refused. Even though Lord Ranganātha Himself gave Gosthipurna a message to initiate Rāmānuja, he still refused him again and again. When Rāmānuja had come to Tirukkotiyur eighteen times and was still refused, he was in great despair and did not know what to do. At that time a disciple of Gosthipurna reported to the Master about Rāmānuja's state of mind, so Gosthipurna finally relented and said: 'Then let Rāmānuja come to me alone with his staff and pennant.' After receiving this message, Rāmānuja at once set out with Dāsharathi and Kuresha. Gosthipurna was not happy to see two other people with Rāmānuja, and told him that he had asked him to come alone. 'Sir, you said I should come with my staff and pennant,' replied Rāmānuja. 'Dāsharathi is my staff and Kuresha is my pennant. I am never without them.' The guru was pleased with this

answer and agreed to initiate all of them.<sup>18</sup>

### Rāmānuja's heart

After the initiation and instructions were over, Gosthipurna reminded Rāmānuja of the sanctity of the mantra. 'Whoever hears this will, after his death, attain liberation and go to Vaikuntha,' he said. 'So, do not give it to anyone else.'<sup>19</sup> Rāmānuja's heart was overflowing to have this precious treasure. After taking leave of Gosthipurna, he left with his two disciples. As he walked by the Vishnu temple of Tirukkotiyur, he looked at all the people around on the street and was moved with love for them all. Seeing the temple tower in front of him, he ran up to the top and started shouting for the people to gather round the tower, telling them that he had a precious treasure for them that would give them liberation. After a great crowd had gathered below the tower, he proclaimed the mantra in a loud voice, and the people all repeated it three times after him. When he came down from the top of the tower, people prostrated before him, feeling extremely blessed.

Meanwhile Gosthipurna had heard about what had happened and sent a disciple to bring Rāmānuja to his house. He was red with anger, and when Rāmānuja came before him, his anger increased. 'What a fool I was to entrust these sacred teachings to you,' he said. 'Do you know what the consequences are for disobeying the preceptor?' Rāmānuja replied that he knew he would have to go to hell. Then he said, 'If an insignificant creature like me goes to hell and thousands of men and women are thereby enabled to go to Vaikuntha, this is a consummation that I earnestly pray for.'<sup>20</sup> Gosthipurna was stunned to hear these words from Rāmānuja. His anger immediately fell away, and with great love and emotion he embraced his disciple and asked for his pardon. Rāmānuja fell at his

feet in great humility. From then on Gosthipurna firmly believed that Rāmānuja was the incarnation of Lakshmana. Some say that it was at this time that Rāmānuja received the name of Emberumanar (Our Lord) from Gosthipurna.<sup>21</sup>

After this initiation, Gosthipurna asked Rāmānuja to study the hymns of the Ālvārs under Maladhara (Tirumalai Andan), another of the five main disciples of Yāmuna. Rāmānuja was thrilled to be able to learn Yāmuna’s own explanations of the hymns from Maladhara, who had heard them firsthand. But now and then he could not resist interrupting the teachings to give a new interpretation. At first Maladhara was offended by this, but when he mentioned this to Goshtipurna, the latter assured him that Rāmānuja was not an ordinary soul and was not being impudent. After that, Maladhara started listening closely to Rāmānuja’s interpretations and was astonished by their depth and beauty.

In this connection, there is an interesting story related a few generations later by the Srivaishnava Ācarya Nāmpillai. The verse that was being discussed was Nammālvār’s *Tiruvaimoli* 2.7.5:

Visnu, shining rich light—  
the lotus: his feet, hands, eyes;  
the radiant, shining dark shining mountain:  
his body;  
the radiant, shining moon: his lovely,  
excellent conch;  
his discus: the sun;  
radiant, shining hair,  
the Lord, Matucutanan. . . .

When Rāmānuja was studying [‘hearing’] *Tiruvaimoli* with Tirumalai Antan [Maladhara], [Rāmānuja] would always have a few words to add on each verse—asking, ‘Can this be the meaning?’ And Antan would respond, ‘This is Vishvāmītra’s creation;<sup>22</sup> I did not hear this from Alavantar.’

So one day when Antan said, ‘You need not perform an act of Vishvāmītra creation here,’ [regarding the above verse, Rāmānuja] responded, ‘In this verse, [Nammālvār says that] it is by the beauty of His members that He has made me His.’<sup>23</sup>

The last of the five teachers that Rāmānuja studied with was Tiruvaranga Araiyaar, who was looked upon with reverence even by the other disciples of Yāmuna. As Lord Ranganātha’s most beloved singer, Tiruvaranga was often in the temple singing and dancing for the Lord, in spite of his advanced age. Rāmānuja understood that he would be tired and sore after singing in the temple for hours, so he made it a point to go to Tiruvaranga and give him a massage every day, and also serve him some milk every night. But Tiruvaranga also understood that Rāmānuja wanted to learn thereby the secret of his devotion for the Lord. After six months, Tiruvaranga became pleased with Rāmānuja’s service and opened up his heart to him. Quoting from the *Satyaki Tantra*, he said: ‘It is Guru himself who is the supreme Brahman; Guru is the greatest treasure. Guru is the highest among all desirable things. He is the most secure refuge. Guru is the embodiment of the knowledge of Brahman. It is he who is the supreme goal. He being your teacher, there is none greater than he. Know that he is the means to realise God, and God Himself too is he.’<sup>24</sup> With these instructions, Rāmānuja felt himself to be fully blessed.

### Temple administration

As we saw earlier, when Rāmānuja arrived in Srirangam, the Lord Himself greeted him and instructed him to look after the affairs of the temple. Rāmānuja took these words seriously, and immediately set up his post in the temple to inquire into and manage everything. According to the *Koila*

*Olugu*: ‘He appointed Alvan [Kuresha] as his trusted assistant in controlling the religious code. Mudaliyandan [Dāsharathi] was appointed to exercise control over the inner organisation of the temple. With his station on the verandah of the “umikkattu” (probably the place where husk was stored) to the south of the doorway of the storehouse, Udayavar [Rāmānuja] superintended and controlled the temple affairs . . . .’<sup>25</sup>

After observing the disarray in, and quarrels among, some of the departments, Rāmānuja finally decided to completely reorganize the way the temple was run. He replaced the fivefold division of temple workers (consisting of both brahmin and non-brahmin workers) with a tenfold division. The *Koil Olugu* describes in great detail Rāmānuja’s system. Not only were all the duties for each worker delineated, but so were the honours and remuneration they were to be given. Nothing was left to chance.

Many years later, after the Muslim invasions and the sack of the temple, the temple administration went through a great deal of changes, and was often put in the hands of men appointed by various kings, much to the detriment of the temple. But so great was the regard for Rāmānuja’s system of temple management that, as George W. Spencer wrote, ‘These changes [that were made after Rāmānuja’s time] prompted the temple’s chroniclers [in the *Koil Olugu*] to look back to the age of the philosopher-saint Rāmānuja, in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, with admiration and nostalgia, and to perceive the disruptions and intrusions which began in the early fourteenth century as sad departures from the divine plan which Rāmānuja had ordained for the temple.’<sup>26</sup>

Later, in the seventeenth century, Ācarya Srinivāsa Deshikar (who was a

descendant of Dāsharathi) managed to partially restore Rāmānuja’s system of administration, but further changes in Governments dissolved these reforms also. However, it is interesting to note that even now, as this paper is being written, there is again an attempt being made to restore Rāmānuja’s system as far as possible, even though much of the control is exercised by the Indian Government.

Invariably, however, changes are not welcome—especially changes made by a newcomer. Some of the priests were especially disgruntled.<sup>27</sup> Rāmānuja soon discovered that the treasury and accounting departments were in bad need of reform. Among other things, it is said that one of the priests in the temple had stolen a jewel. Either this priest, or another who also feared detection, tried to kill Rāmānuja by persuading his wife to put poison in Rāmānuja’s food. At that time, Rāmānuja followed the traditional monastic custom of begging his food from seven houses every day. When Rāmānuja came to that priest’s house, the priest’s wife hesitantly offered him the food, but through various signs indicated that he should not eat it.

Rāmānuja was stunned that someone would think of doing something like this. According to the *Koil Olugu*, Rāmānuja then left Srirangam and went to Tiruvellarai, where he established a temple. After two years the priests became repentant and sent Tiruvaranga Araiyar to bring Rāmānuja back. Rāmānuja then resumed his duties.

However, according to the *Arayirappati Guru-paramparā-prabhavam*, Rāmānuja went on a fast after the attempted poisoning. When his guru Gosthipurna heard about this, he came to Srirangam from Tirukkotiyyur to see him. Hearing that his guru was approaching, Rāmānuja went outside with some of his disciples to meet him, and he fell prostrate on the ground at the guru’s

feet. Normally the etiquette was that the guru would tell the disciple to get up, but Gosthipurna did not say anything this time. Rāmānuja remained lying on the burning hot ground at the guru's feet. This blatant cruelty, especially when Rāmānuja was weak from fasting, infuriated his disciple Kitampi Accan, and he told Gosthipurna just what he thought of him. It was, of course, a serious offence to scold one's guru's guru. But instead of being offended, Gosthipurna was pleased. He 'replied that he was testing the disciples to see who would find it unbearable to witness Rāmānuja's pain and be so bold as to question the senior teacher's conduct; he then charged Kitampi Accan with the task of guarding Rāmānuja's body and cooking for him.'<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, the priest who had tried to poison Rāmānuja became repentant, and begged his forgiveness. However, there was another priest—the head priest—who also did not look kindly on the changes Rāmānuja was making. In fact, it seems he was a bit of a rabble-rouser, and gave Rāmānuja much trouble. Rāmānuja then decided to remove him, even though the priest was very learned. But one day Rāmānuja had a vision of the Lord, who appeared to him as an elderly Srivaishnava and said: 'For a long time past Periya Koil Nambi [the head priest] has entrusted himself to Our care. You can do as you please.'<sup>29</sup> Rāmānuja understood that the Lord did not approve of his removing the priest, and decided that he would himself leave Srirangam instead. After telling Kuresha of this vision, he said, 'Let us go to Perumal Koil [another holy place].'

Alvan [Kuresha] supplicatingly replied, 'The Perumal [Lord] who told you so would also make him favourable to you, and seek spiritual guidance at your feet.' 'If so, you bring him round,' said Udayavar [Rāmānuja]. Alvan brought round the

learned Periya Koil Nambi and made him seek Udayavar as his guru. Udayavar looked at him with kindness and, because of his skill in speech, gave him the name of 'Amudan' [actually, Tiruvarangattamudanar] and felt pleased.<sup>30</sup>

From then on Amudan was very devoted to Rāmānuja. But for some reason, after a few days Amudan decided to resign his office of head priest and also give up his other duties and privileges. Perhaps it was because he was repentant about his earlier conduct towards Rāmānuja. He then turned everything over to Kuresha<sup>31</sup> and remained by himself at home. Rāmānuja silently observed all this, but was not happy about it. After a few days he thought, 'The learned Tiruvarangattamudanar should not remain idle like this.' Going to the house of one of the Araiyaars, he asked the singer to give him a copy of the Iyarpa section of the *Divya Prabandham* (the hymns of the Ālvārs), and told him that he need not recite that section anymore. This section of the hymns is for the most part chanted rather than sung.<sup>32</sup> Rāmānuja then called Amudan to the temple, and in front of the Lord 'he obtained the divine command that Amudanar should [from then on] recite the Iyarpa Thousand and that all the honours due that day to the Arayar [for chanting that section] were to be done to him.'<sup>33</sup> In fact, the Iyarpa was to be chanted in all the shrines of the temple.

Amudan was so touched by Rāmānuja's love and concern for him that he immediately wrote a hymn of 108 verses to Rāmānuja—the *Rāmānuja Nutrandadi*, in the 'Kalittura' (the Kali metre) 'equaling in number the gayatri japa'.<sup>34</sup> He then handed it out to the Srivaishnavas. A few days later, during a festival procession, Amudan and the Srivaishnavas recited this hymn, much to the delight of everyone there. The Lord then proclaimed that this hymn was to be chanted every day in the sanctum after the Iyarpa

section of the *Prabandham*.

### Search for Govinda

Rāmānuja had never forgotten his beloved cousin Govinda, who had saved his life when they were students of Yādavaprakāsha. The last he had heard about him was that he was living in Kalahasti and had dedicated his life to the worship of a Shiva *linga* that he had found in the Ganga. As Rāmānuja wanted Govinda to join him in Srirangam, he wrote to their uncle, Shailapurna, to try and bring Govinda back to the Vaishnava faith. Shailapurna was then living in Tirupati, near Kalahasti.

As soon as he received the letter, Shailapurna went with his disciples to Kalahasti to find Govinda. When they noticed that Govinda came to a particular lake every day to bathe, Shailapurna and his disciples set up camp there, and the guru started giving classes. Govinda did not at first recognize his uncle, but he became interested in the venerable old Srivaishnava who was expounding the scriptures by the lake. After talking to him for some days, Govinda's Vaishnava heritage reawakened in him, and he decided to go back to his Vaishnava roots. He then took initiation from Shailapurna, and soon after, went to meet Rāmānuja in Srirangam. Though Govinda and Rāmānuja were very happy to meet again, Govinda missed serving his guru, Shailapurna, so he left for Tirupati to live with him there.

Years passed, and Rāmānuja decided to go on a pilgrimage to Tirupati with some of his disciples to have *darshan* of the Lord there, and also to see his uncle. His main intention was to receive teachings on the *Rāmāyana* from Shailapurna. When they reached the mountain, Rāmānuja at first refused to set foot on it, as he considered it so holy. But finally the ascetics there convinced him to climb it, saying that if he

refused to climb the mountain, then no one else would do it. And then who would serve the Lord?

When Rāmānuja was halfway up the mountain, he met Shailapurna coming down to greet him, bringing with him offered food and water. Rāmānuja was embarrassed that his revered uncle would do this, and asked him why he hadn't sent someone else to bring the *prasād*. But Shailapurna humbly replied, 'I too thought so and accordingly searched for a boy; but finding none less in attainments than I, I myself had to carry this.'<sup>35</sup>

Rāmānuja was overwhelmed with ecstasy when he saw Lord Sri Venkatesha there. After Rāmānuja had made the rounds of the temple, Govinda came to meet him, and the two cousins had a joyous reunion. Rāmānuja then stayed with his uncle in this holy place for a year. One day he noticed that Govinda was forcing his fingers down the open mouth of a poisonous snake. When Govinda took his hand away, the snake lay on the ground writhing in pain. Rāmānuja was bewildered by this, and asked his cousin why he had done it, risking his own life and also causing such pain to the snake. Govinda replied that he was only taking a thorn out of the snake's throat, and that it would soon recover.

Rāmānuja understood that Govinda was not an ordinary person. When it was time to take leave of Shailapurna, the venerable sage asked Rāmānuja if there was anything he wanted, and Rāmānuja replied that he wanted Govinda. Govinda was at first reluctant to leave his guru, but when he understood that it was his guru's desire, he gladly went with Rāmānuja to Srirangam. Soon after, when Rāmānuja saw that Govinda was full of intense renunciation, he granted him *sannyās*, giving him the name Embar. Rāmānuja had wanted to give him his own name, but Govinda objected that as

he was but a servant of Rāmānuja, he could not take his master's name. So, as another name of Rāmānuja was Emperumanar, Rāmānuja joined the first and last parts of the name together to make it Empar (or Embar). Govinda then became known as Embar.

### Dāsharathi and Kuresha

Dāsharathi (Mudaliyandan), Rāmānuja's nephew and one of his first disciples, was a great scholar and was deeply loved and trusted by Rāmānuja. In fact, Rāmānuja eventually put the work of the administration of the temple in his hands. One day Dāsharathi asked Rāmānuja to teach him the meaning behind the *Carama shloka* of the *Bhagavad Gitā* (verse 18.66). But Rāmānuja sent him instead to Gosthipurna to learn it. Gosthipurna, however, detected some pride in Dāsharathi's attitude, so he told him to go back to Rāmānuja to get the teaching.

Just as Dāsharathi returned to the ashram in Srirangam, Attulai, the daughter of Rāmānuja's guru Mahāpurna, came there in tears to see Rāmānuja. Her mother-in-law had rebuked her for not bringing a cook with her when she came to live in their house. Mahāpurna was not a wealthy man, so he could not afford to send any servants with his daughter when she left for her husband's home. As Attulai was just like a sister to him, Rāmānuja was very concerned about her predicament. Seeing Dāsharathi there, he told Attulai, 'Here is your cook.'

Instead of feeling humiliated, Dāsharathi gladly went with Attulai to her in-law's house and immediately started working in the kitchen as the cook. For six months he carried on this duty. One day, when he was listening to a Srivaishnava pundit expound on a scripture to some local devotees, he disagreed with an interpretation the pundit was giving, and suggested another. The pundit immediately took offence that a mere

cook was trying to correct him. But then someone in the audience recognized Dāsharathi as a disciple of Rāmānuja and a great scholar, and asked him why he was working as a cook. When Dāsharathi told the assembled devotees that Rāmānuja had sent him there, they immediately went to Srirangam, and after praising Dāsharathi's humility and other noble qualities, asked Rāmānuja to release him from his duty as a cook. Rāmānuja agreed, and then gave Dāsharathi the teaching he had asked for.

Kuresha (Kuruttalvan) was probably Rāmānuja's most beloved and trusted disciple. He, along with Dāsharathi, came to Rāmānuja when Rāmānuja had just taken *sannyās* and was still living in Kanchi. Besides being a brilliant scholar, Kuresha also, it seems, had a photographic memory. He had previously been extremely wealthy, but he was also very charitable. His home near Kanchi was open every day for the poor and others in need to receive help. It is said that Lord Varadārāja's consort Sridevi once requested Kānchipurna to ask Kuresha to come to the temple so that she could bestow her grace on him, but Kuresha was so overwhelmed with humility on hearing this that he decided he needed to first purify himself by serving his guru, Rāmānuja, before he could approach Sridevi.

As Rāmānuja was then living in Srirangam, Kuresha renounced everything that very day and left for Srirangam along with his devoted wife, Andal.<sup>36</sup> It is said that Andal herself was a great scholar. Though women normally did not attend religious discourses, Rāmānuja allowed her not only to attend his classes, but also to participate in the discussions. He, in fact, 'respected her for her vast learning and paid due weight to her opinions'.<sup>37</sup> There are several amazing incidents described in the *Koil Olugu*—incidents that took place after Rāmānuja's passing away—in which her advice and

counsel were sought for solving some serious problems. All these reveal the high regard people had for her, not simply for her scholarly learning, but even more for her practical wisdom, common sense, detachment, and compassion. By all accounts we can understand that she and her husband, Kuresha, were both extraordinary people, and also that their marriage was a genuine partnership.<sup>38</sup> When Kuresha and Andal arrived in Srirangam, after renouncing their vast wealth, Rāmānuja was delighted, and arranged a place for them to live.

### At Sāradāpitha

Rāmānuja now decided it was time to fulfil one of the promises he had made to Yāmunācārya when standing next to his body. This was the promise to write a commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, upholding the doctrine of Qualified Non-dualism (Vishishtādvaita). Rāmānuja had heard that there was an earlier commentary, the *Bodhāyana Vritti*, written by Bodhāyana, and he believed it could help him with his own commentary. He had been searching for a copy of this text for a long time, and could not find one. But at last he heard that there was a manuscript of it at a place called Sāradāpitha in Kashmir, so he decided to go there with Kuresha.

After three months of walking, they finally found the place, and they asked the pandits there if they could see the manuscript. Though the pandits were highly impressed by Rāmānuja's learning, humility, and other qualities, they were reluctant to show him the manuscript, as they feared that by seeing it he would be able to refute the doctrine of Advaita. They at last told him it had been eaten by worms. Naturally, after journeying so far to see it, Rāmānuja was deeply distressed. However, it is said that the presiding deity of the place, Goddess

Sāradā, appeared to Rāmānuja one night. After giving him Her blessings, she handed the manuscript over to him and told him to leave immediately.

It did not take long before the pandits noticed that the manuscript was missing, and they quickly sent some men to find Rāmānuja and Kuresha. And, as these men were very strong and energetic, they could soon catch up with them. The men then grabbed the manuscript and left. At this, Rāmānuja's heart sank. But Kuresha quickly reassured him: Every night, on their return journey, he had been studying the *Vritti* while Rāmānuja slept. He had memorized the whole thing, and it would not take him long to write it out. After a few days, Kuresha was able to duplicate the *Vritti*, and he and Rāmānuja returned to Srirangam.

After studying the *Vritti*, Rāmānuja was ready to begin his commentary. He then asked Kuresha to write down what he dictated, but he stipulated that if Kuresha did not agree with something, he should stop writing. Kuresha agreed, and the writing went on. But it seems there was only one place where Kuresha had to stop writing. And after Rāmānuja thought over the matter, he realized that Kuresha was right and he was wrong. When the commentary was finished, Rāmānuja named it the *Sribhāshya*, in honour of Vishnu's consort Sri Devi.

Now Rāmānuja felt he was ready to begin his *digvijaya*—that is, his pilgrimage all over India to establish the philosophy of Vishishtādvaita Vedanta. He first travelled around South India and then proceeded north. When he reached Sāradāpitha in Kashmir, it is said that Goddess Sāradā was so delighted to hear the exposition of his philosophy that she gave him the name 'Bhāshyakāra', the Commentator. Though the pandits there opposed him in every way,

the king of Kashmir became his disciple. He then went on to Kashi. After staying there for several months, debating with scholars, he went to Puri, on the coast of the Bay of Bengal.

Rāmānuja liked Puri so much that he established a monastery there and named it Embar, after his cousin Govinda. It is also known that he had considerable influence in Orissa, in spite of the fact that the scholars in Puri refused to debate with him. Moreover, another purpose of his trip was to establish the Pancharātra system of worship in all the Vaishnava temples. But in Puri Rāmānuja failed, even though he had managed to get the approval of the king. It is said that the priests of the Jagannāth temple prayed to Jagannāth to remove Rāmānuja so that he would not change their system of worship, and the Lord obliged. One morning, when Rāmānuja woke up, he found himself in Kurmakshetra, in Andhra Pradesh. When he went to visit the local temple, the Lord told him to wait there for his disciples. He understood then that this was the Lord's will. According to G. N. Dash, this story is given in *Rāmānuja Divya Caritai*, and in the *Prapannāmrita* by Rāmānuja's disciple Anantācārya, as well as in the 'Rajabhoga' section of *Mādala Panji*, the chronicle of the Jagannāth temple of Puri'.<sup>39</sup>

Earlier, when Rāmānuja came to the Padmanābhaswāmi temple in Kerala (in what is now known as Tiruvananthapuram, or Trivandrum), he also failed to change the worship to the Pancharātra system.

When Rāmānuja came to the Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh, there was a quarrel going on over whether the image was of Vishnu or of Shiva. As it had signs of both, there was a good case for it to be either. (In fact, there was also reason to believe that the image was of the Devi, the

Divine Mother.) A debate was held in the presence of the king, with Rāmānuja taking the side of Vishnu. And eventually the king ruled in favour of Rāmānuja and the Vaishnavas. Moreover, so that there would not be any more doubt, Rāmānuja requested both sides—the Shaivites and the Vaishnavites—to place the respective weapons of Shiva and Vishnu in front of the Lord overnight, and let Him decide which weapons He would choose. 'When the temple doors were opened the next morning, the Lord was found wearing the conch and the chakra [belonging to Vishnu]!'<sup>40</sup>

There is an interesting story about Rāmānuja that took place either on this trip or on some other. Rāmānuja and his disciples were passing through a town in Tamil Nadu called Tirupulingudi. Meeting a poor woman of the town, Rāmānuja asked her how far the town of Tirukurugur was from there. Most likely the woman recognized that they were Srivaishnavas from the marks on their body, and she responded, 'Don't you know the Ālvār hymns?' 'Immediately Rāmānuja remembered that particular line in one of the hymns which said that Tirukurugur was at "a calling distance" from Tirupulingudi. Rāmānuja turned to his disciples and said: "Even a commoner in this Pāndya country is more than a match for me."<sup>41</sup>

When Rāmānuja returned at last to Srirangam, he was welcomed and greatly honoured by his gurus, disciples, and other Srivaishnavas, and also by Lord Ranganātha. Then, after looking into the affairs of the temple, he was so pleased with the way Dāsharathi (Andan) had managed everything while he was away that he put him permanently in control of the temple. This position was passed down to the descendants of Andan for many generations. ■

(To be continued)

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 16 *Koil Olugu, The Chronicle of the Srirangam Temple with Historical Notes*, ed. by V. N. Hari Rao (Madras: Rochouse & Sons Private Ltd., 1961), pp. 43-44. However, according to those at the monastery of the present Srirangam Jiyar, their building is the site of Rāmānuja's monastery. It is located on the south side, near the entrance of the temple, in the sixth *prākāra*.
- 17 It is not clear which mantra this was that he was to get from Gosthipurna. Some say it was the Tiru mantra—the eight-syllabled Nārāyana mantra. But others say it was the Dvaya mantra—a mantra to Sri and Nārāyana seeking refuge.
- 18 see *Rāmānuja's Teachings*, p. 18.
- 19 Ramakrishnananda, p. 152.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- 21 see Parthasarathy, p. 20.
- 22 This refers to a story in the Vālmiki *Rāmāyana*: King Trishanku wanted to go to heaven in his physical body, so Vishwāmītra performed a sacrifice for him and sent him there. But the gods were horrified at the idea, and sent Trishanku back to earth. Vishwāmītra was so angry that, defying all laws of creation, he used the merit earned from his austerities to create a new heaven for Trishanku.
- 23 *The Art and Theology of Srivaishnava Thinkers*, by Francis X. Clooney (Madras: T. R. Publications, 1994), pp. 58-59.
- 24 Ramakrishnananda, p. 160.
- 25 *Koil Olugu*, p. 44.
- 26 'Crisis of Authority in a Hindu Temple under the Impact of Islam', by George W. Spencer, in *Religion and the Legitimation of Power in South Asia*, ed. by Bardwell L. Smith (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), pp. 15-16.
- 27 Some say that Rāmānuja wanted to replace priests who were doing the worship according to the Vaikhanasa tradition with priests of the Pancharātra tradition, but others say that this had already been done in Yāmuna's time.
- 28 *The Way and the Goal*, by Vasudha Narayanan (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Vaishnava Studies, 1987), pp. 222-23.
- 29 *Koil Olugu*, p. 47.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 This is according to the *Koil Olugu*. But according to *History of the Srirangam Temple*, by V. N. Hari Rao, Amudan 'surrendered his office as high priest and his exclusive right to read out the *puranas* in the temple to Udayavar [Rāmānuja]'. In such a case Rāmānuja would have distributed these duties to others. See *History*, p. 55.
- 32 The *Divya Prabandham* contains approximately four thousand verses, and is divided into four sections of approximately one thousand verses each. The Iyarpa is either the third or the fourth section, depending on which edition is used. As these verses are primarily prose pieces, they are mostly chanted instead of sung. So Rāmānuja did not take the Araiyaar's job away. He just released him from chanting that one section.
- 33 *Koil Olugu*, p. 53.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 35 Ramakrishnananda, p. 181.
- 36 Not the poet-saint Āndāl.
- 37 Parthasarathy, p. 37.
- 38 There is clearly a problem with Rāmānuja's dates and his long life of 120 years. And these stories of Kuresha's wife, Andal, further bring out this problem. It is hard to discount these stories of her, as it was, in those days, so unusual for a woman to be given the kind of respect that she was given. For more about her, see 'The "Other" Antal: Portrait of a 12th Century Srivaishnava Woman', by Nancy Ann Nayar, in *Vaishnavi, Women and the Worship of Krishna*, ed. by Steven J. Rosen (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), pp. 211-33.
- 39 'The Evolution of the Priestly Power: The Gangavamsa Period', by G. N. Dash, in *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, ed. by Anncharlott Eschmann, et al. (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978), pp. 157 & 158.
- 40 *Sri Venkateswara, the Lord of the Seven Hills, Tirupati*, by Pidatala Sitapati (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1989), p. 28. In another version, it is said that this debate took place when Rāmānuja was staying there earlier, while he was studying the *Rāmāyana* with his uncle Shailapurna.
- 41 Parthasarathy, p. 49.