



RAMANUJA DARSHANAM

(Philosophy of Ramanuja)

श्रीमते रामानुजाय नमः



Sri Ramanuja, Vanamamalai

A VEDICS JOURNAL
Volume 1 Issue 4: Oct - Dec 2003

Vedics Foundation (<http://www.vedics.net>)

Table of Contents

Blessings from Vanamamalai Jeeyar Swami	1
Editorial	4
Swami Manavala Mamuni - The matchless Acharya	8
Great Saints and Teachers	15
Sri Pillai Lokacharya's influence on me	19
Sri Pillai Lokacharya's Biography	23
Sri Vedantacharya's appreciation of Thiruvaymozhi	26
Swami Vedanta Desika's Biography	33
Swami Manavala Mamunikal - A biographical appreciation	35
Divine Places - Thiru Narayanapuram	40
Saranagathi Deepika - A definitive guide to surrender	43
Q&A	49
Vedic Activities	51
Website in focus	52
Vedics Quiz	53
Calendar	55

Ramanuja Darshanam

Editor:

Sri Sridhar Srinivasan

Associate Editor:

Smt Harini Raghavan

Advisory Board:

Sri Mukundan Pattangi

Sri TA Varadhan

Sri TCA Venkatesan

Subscription:

Each Issue: \$2

Annual: \$8

Address

15934 Fleetwood Oaks,

Houston, TX 77079

Email

vedics@yahoo.com

About the Cover image

The cover of this issue presents the image of Sri Ramanuja, as he is present in the holy temple of vAnamAmalai (present day nAngunEri, in thirunelveli district in tamilnadu). This holy place is very important to all followers of Ramanuja. This place is the seat of a monastery that derives its lineage directly to Ramanuja, and is one of the very few monasteries that can trace such a lineage. Sri Manavala Mamuni, who is considered to be a reincarnation of Ramanuja Himself, initiated the first pontiff of this monastery, sri ponnadi-k-kAl jlyar. Sri Manavala mAmuni passed on the torch of the Ramanuja religion to this pontiff, and to this day, the current pontiff of this monastery is considered the symbolic torchbearer of the Ramanuja Religion (*orAn vazhi AchArya*, in Tamizh).

BLESSINGS FROM VANAMAMALAI JIYAR SWAMI

His Holiness Sri U Ve Kaliyan VanamAmalai Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami

I am extremely pleased to learn that my dear spiritual friends and devotees of our Sri Ramanuja sampradaayam, who live in different parts of USA have established the "Vedics Foundation" and have started a journal called 'Ramanuja Darshanam', a journal to highlight main features of our *Sanatana* (truth) Vaishnava Dharma. I perused Volumes I & II (Issue I & II) of this journal to a limited extent, per time available for this purpose. I read the table of contents, which was very interesting and which, I am sure, would have proved of much value to all readers.

I am told that after dealing with Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja, the *Darshana-pravartakAcharya* (the progenitor) and *Darshana-pravardhakaarya* (One responsible for growth / furtherance) of this wonderful movement called Sri Vaishnavam, the current issue, very appropriately, will deal with Sri Manavala mamunikal, the *aparAvatara* (incarnation) of Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja Swami. I am writing "appropriately" not only because of the said reason, but also because the *thirunakshatram utsavam* (appearance day celebration) of Sri Mamunikal will be celebrated with fervor and devotion in almost all Divya desams by followers of Ramanuja Sampradayam during the month of *aaSwayuja/aippasi*.

Dear Spiritual friends, Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja Swami is hailed, as verily the incarnation of AdisEsha/ ThiruvananthAzhvaan, the embodiment of *sEsha bhAva* (servitude) towards Sriman Narayana. Sri Ramanuja's aparavatara, Sri Mamunikal, quite naturally too, was an incarnation of Adisesha. In this context, I wish to remind my friends of two famous stanzas, one in tamil,

*"chentamizh vEdiyar sinthai theLindhu.....
aippasiyil thirumoolamadenum nALE"*

and another in Sanskrit,

*"yanmoolam ASwayuja masyavataara moolam.....
.Jagadabhyudayaikamoolam".*

Another wonderful event also I have to narrate in this context. The moola star was the Thiru-avatara nakshatra of Swami Sri Manavala Mamunikal in the month of aippasi. Similarly the moola star in the month of ANi (JyEsta/mithuna) has got its own place of pride, because it

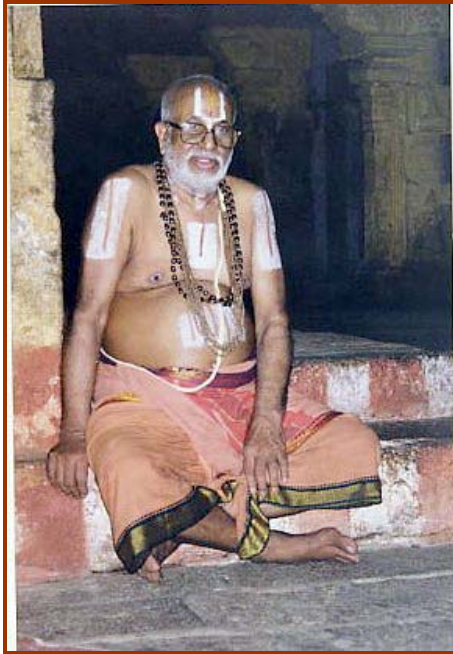
was on this auspicious day, the famous *thaniyan* (salutation) sloka "SriSailESa dayApAtram" on Sri Mamunikal was uttered by *Namberumal*, the lord Ranganatha Himself. This divine event occurred amidst the *Bhagavad vishaya kalakshepa ghosti* (discourse on thiruvAimozhi) attended by hundreds of meritorious scholarly Sri Vaishnavas. This was the dedication, a *Guru dakshina* (token of appreciation for Acharya), offered by Lord Ranganatha, to His great Acharya Sri Manavala Mamunikal. History tells us that for a whole year, Namberumal had enjoined cessation of all festivals of the temple at Srirangam, world renowned by the name kOil, a temple that is considered to be the foremost amongst the 106-Divya desams that adorn our *puNya BhArata varshA* (sacred land of India). The above-mentioned, spiritually uplifting event occurred on the final *kalakshEpa* (discourse)-day, the day adorned, interestingly, by the Ani thiru-moola star. So, Sri Vaishnava-world attaches equal importance to this Ani moola auspicious day also, in a manner akin to the day of Sri Mamunikal's appearance, Sri Aippasi Thirumoola day.

Azhwar thirunagari, the divine place of Swami Nammazhvar's *ThiruAvatara* (divine incarnation), was the ThiruAvatara *kshetra* (place) of Sri Mamunikal also. What an ineluctable and appropriate connection this establishes!! It would seem that AdisEsha manifested as Swami mAmunikaL only to successfully complete those objectives he could not bring to fruition, in his avatara as Bhagavad Ramanuja. As Sri Ramanuja, he could not give his most precious attention towards writing *vyAkhyanam*s (commentaries) of *Naalaayira Divya prabhandham* (the 4000 divine verses) and *Rahasya granthas* (esoteric scriptures) of our tradition and viSiStadvaita *siddhantha* (philosophy). Sri Ramanuja's divine order for commentaries was carried out by our great *poorvacharyas* (great teachers), *Thiruk-kurukai-pirAn-piLLAn*, *NampiLLai*, *Peria-vAchchAn piLLai* and so on. Eighteen *Rahasya Granthas* were authored by *Sri PiLLai Lokacharya* (the teacher of all the universe), whose contributions aptly reflected his great name. An unparalleled great work- the "Acharya Hrudayam" was written by *azhakiya maNavALap perumAL nAyanaar*, the younger brother of Sri Pillai Lokacharya. Among 18-rahaya granthas of Sri Pillai Lokacharya, three are hailed as gems of spiritual insight and sampradAyic wisdom:

- i) Mumukshuppadi
- ii) Tatvathrayam and
- iii) Sri Vachanabhooshanam.

The most prestigious commentaries for these three Rahasya Granthas and the wonderful work Acharya Hrudayam have been written by Sri Mamunikal. These commentaries are matchless masterpieces of erudition and insight,

so simply wonderful that they defy appropriate description. Sri Manavala Mamunikal is famous by the name “*vishadaoAkSikhamaNi*”. Apart from these commentaries, his *upadEsarattinamAlai* (garland of jewels of teaching) and *thiruvAimozhi nUtrandAdi* are excellent compositions that have received much encomia and with good reason too. The famous Tamil literature meter for literary compositions (‘VeNbA’) seems to be performing divine dance on the holy tongue of Sri Mamunikal in these two verse-compositions. Sri Mamunikal lived on our earth for 73 glorious years. Perhaps to indicate the unmatched glory he achieved, life-limit factor to all of us merely human, *upadEsarattinamAlai* contains 73 verses!



Vanamamalai jlyar Swami

In this context, my dear friends, to state a historical fact of our sampradAyam would be appropriate. During the time of Swami mAmunikaL, there were no then-kalai or vada-kalai sects in Sri Vaishnavam. Our holy dynasty of poorvacharyas ended, appropriately, with Sri Mamunikal. Sri Mamunikal was a great and bountiful reservoir of our Sri Vaishnava sampradayam. Of course, from this great reservoir many Acharya paramparas/streams started flowing, many of which are still extant. In this context, it is a matter of great bhAgyam, pride for me to inform you that our Sri Vanamamalai *mahapeeta* (mutt) also shares an intimate connection with Sri Mamunikal.

This Mahapeeta was established by Sri Manavala Mamunikal through PonnadikkAl Jeeyar Swamin, the first pontiff for the Sri Vanamamalai Jeeyar parampara. The first Vanamamalai Jeeyar Swami was considered, the foremost amongst the eight prominent and famous sishyas of Sri Mamunikal, who were called *ashTa diggajAs*. Akin to Sri MamunikaL, our Ponnadikkal Jeeyar Swami also had *ashta diggajas*, his eight most prominent disciples. *Sri Appachiar ANNa* of Sri Mudaliandan Acharya Parampara became one among those *ashTadiggajAs*. Likewise, Mahacharya, the Doddacharya of *chOLasimhapuram* (Ghatikachalam) was also one among *ashTadiggajas* of our first Sri Vanamamalai Jeeyar Swami. It was *Sri doDDAchArya* who authored the thanian “*ramyajamaatru yogeendra paadarEkhamayam sada*”. Sri Mahacharya composed the prapatti and *mangalashasana* (wishing well) stotras on his great Acharya Ponnadikkal Jeeyar.

My Dear Friends, if these few words of mine motivate you to read Sri Mamunikal’s wonderful biography, “*Yateendra pravaNa prabhaavam*” and other similar books, I shall consider this small essay of mine to have borne its fruit. I wholeheartedly wish the Ramanuja darshnam journal a very steady and healthy growth.

My heartfelt Mangalashasanas again to you all.

EDITORIAL

A PHILOSOPHY FOR ALL OF MANKIND, FOR ALL TIMES

Sridhar Srinivasan

Of all the philosophical and religious systems that have influenced life for Mankind, very few can claim the depth of spiritual insight or the grandeur of universal vision enshrined in the Vedas. The timeless Vedas, epitomized as the embodiment of perfect knowledge, have been the substratum supporting sanAthana dharma, both as a beacon for understanding abstract aspects of the fundamental relationship between God, Man and Nature, as well as the pathway to liberate oneself from the cyclical, miasmatic struggle of karmic birth and death. However, the abstruse message of Veda and Vedantha, divined as they were by exalted sages spiritually equipped to do so, had become the domain of a *qualified few*, since learning the Vedas necessarily meant a rigor of being, training and living inaccessible to a majority of the common-folk.

It needed an *avathAra purusha* (Divinity Incarnate) of Swami Ramanuja’s stature, erudition, brilliance, compassion and humanity, to unravel the fundamental message of Veda and Vedas in terms accessible to the common man. Swami Emperumanar brought the joy and nectar of

divinity to the hearts of all people, irrespective of their caste, creed, gender, upbringing or social status and he did so, because he gleaned the same truths from the divine, mystical outpourings of the original carriers of the philosophy of Sri Vaishnavam, the Azhvars. It was left to Swami Ramanuja to establish the philosophy of the Azhvars as the truth revealed in the Sastras (vedas and upanishads), and established the Tamil Divya Prabandham as the equivalent of the revelations represented by the Sanskrit Vedas. His brilliant expositions of vedic truths revealed a compassionate, universal philosophy, a philosophy that at once juxtaposed the fundamental truths that connect Man and God to the incontrovertible fact that the love and grace of God for Man is a pervasive and omni-present element, accessible to all those that don't turn away from it.

Sri Vaishnavam, hence known as Ramanuja Darshanam, has seen the manifestation of many Acharyas that strove to perpetuate this wonderful spiritual vision of Swami Ramanuja. Interestingly, Swami Ramanuja, verily the incarnation of Adi sEsha, had to limit his tenure on this earth to 120 years due to various local events and forces. And subsequent times witnessed a steady decline in the social relevance and influence of Sri vaishnavam, mostly due to the persistent attacks by marauding hordes of Muslim invaders, who spared no pains in pillaging and plundering temples and places of worship that formed the center of the Indian polity in those days. The time was ripe for an Acharya like Swami Emperumanar to take charge and re-establish the glory of Sri Vaishnavam. As is often said in our sampradayam, both our Lord and Acharya (emperumanar) are inimitable, there is not *another* like them. Hence, Swami Ramanuja, re-appeared for our benefit, as Swami maNavALa mAmunikaL, only, as subsequent historical chronicles indicate, to bring even greater glory and joy to the hearts of sri vaishnavas and our Lord Himself. It is indeed our good fortune that we have this opportunity to put together an issue of Ramanuja Darshanam celebrating the other, and by many accounts more illustrious Ramanuja, Swami maNavALa mAmunikaL.

Swami MamunikaL occupies *the* place of pride in our hoary lineage of Acharyas, because he was hand picked by Lord Sriman Narayana to be His Acharya. Appropriately, for the first time, we have the good fortune of receiving *mangaLa* (auspicious) *AshAsanams* (blessings) by His Highness Sri U Ve Kaliyan VanamAmalai Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami, whose kindness and compassion in taking time from his busy schedule to bless us with insightful words of wisdom cannot be understated.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that AzhvAr thirunagari mahA vidwan Sri U Ve ES BhuvarAhAchar Swami is one of the most authoritative and knowledgeable scholars in the sampradAyam today. His article on our very dear 'periya jeeyar' (as mAmunikaL is affectionately known) is the quintessential primer that every sri vaishNava needs, to understand how and why Swami MamunikaL is the Lord's AchArya. Alongside, Sri BSS Iyengar and Sri Narayanan have written a succinct, informative biographical sketch on Swami MamunikaL, the first of a two part article.

The current month of ashwayuja (aippasi in Tamizh) is a time of joyous celebration, because *thiru nakshattirams* (birth dates) for two of the foremost acharyas of Sri Vaishnavam, Swami maNavALa mAmunikaL and Swami piLLai lOkAchAryar occur in this month. Also, the early part of October (latter half of the month of bhadrupada, puraTTAsi in tamil) featured the birth day for Swami dESikan, an exalted Acharya whose divinity-inspired stotrams and philosophical compositions to this day engender much awe and reverence. Consequently, the current issue of your favorite spiritual magazine features articles on works of both Swami piLLai lOkAchArya and Swami Desikan, considered by many to be the two eyes of Ramanuja Darshanam, who saved the essence of sri vaishNavam from the dark forces of pillaging invaders during some very difficult times (early 1300s) for Sri Vaishnavam. Swami Pillai Lokacharyar, the very name embodying his pristine status as the 'guru' for all of mankind, left us with a set of *rahasya granthas* (esoteric scriptures) that lay bare the essence of the sri vaishnavam and *vaidika dharma* (the dharma shown by vedas) for all to comprehend and adopt. It is said that Swami piLLai lOkAchAryar completed what Swami Ramanuja intended to, to show in compelling, unequivocal terms, that ours is a philosophy that leaves no one behind, that offers the ultimate reward of *mOksham*(liberation) to all sentient beings, if only they are willing to not move away from the effusive, uninstigated grace of Sriman NARayana. And Sri Vedaraaman Sri Raman's article on Swami piLLai lOkAchAryar (PL) brings to fore a modern perspective on both the relevance and rationale, uplifting insights and mind-numbing brilliance of fundamental ideas, enshrined in Sri PL's work of immense significance, Sri Vachana BhushaNam.

Swami Desikan, that scholar / Acharya par excellence, is celebrated as the quintessential divinely-inspired scholar, poet, Acharya. With some 120 plus compositions to his credit, he verily laid the foundation for providing the bridge between the mystical etherialism of Azhvars and the systemic brilliance of Swami Ramanuja. Both Sri PB Rajahamsam Swami and Sri Embar Rangachary Swami, acclaimed scholars of Sri

VaishNava tradition, shed light on how Swami Desikan spoke in consonance with the true spirit of Swami Ramanuja's vision of universality of divinity and uninstigated divine compassion. While Sri PB Rajahamswam Swami's insights from SaraNagathi deepika highlight the sense of innate dependence on Sriman Narayana that Swami Desikan espoused, Sri Rangachary Swami demonstrates how in-sync Swami Desikan was to the true spirit of the sampradAyam, the uplifting outpourings of Swami nammAzhvar. After all, all our Acharyas, *every one of them*, were *Eka kanTasthAs* (Spoke with one voice).

If there are differences in current day Sri Vaishnava traditions due to modern-day mis-interpretations and extrapolations of an essentially unified view point of the ultimate truth handed down through an exalted lineage of Acharyas, it is simply a reflection of ignorance and/or ego on part of a few refusing to accept the hoary truths that have been passed on. Such efforts seem to be driven by a need to accost and make the ultimate reward accessible only to a chosen few, an unnecessary re-orientation of the truth that tends to more undermine the true spirit of our philosophy than assist in extending its comprehension. That such efforts fail to reflect the one message of universality of divinity and compassion of Swami Ramanuja is something to take to heart; that such efforts *exist and continue their attempts at distortion*, underscores the need for all of us to simply allow the omnipresent Divinity to work through us, to bring to light the true essence of *Ramanuja darshanam*, a philosophy for all of man kind, for all times.



Swami Manavala Mamuni doing idu vyakyanama at Sri Rangam

SWAMI MANAVALA MAMUNI THE MATCHLESS ACHARYA

Sri U.Ve. Ilayavalli Srinivasa Bhuvanachariar Swami

Sriman Narayana, even though He re-incarnated through infinite number of births (*Avatharas*) in this world, failed miserably in achieving His primary goal, i.e. the liberation of the *jeevatma* (sentient souls) from worldly bondage. He did carefully scrutinize the pros and cons of this abject failure. He could discover the reason quickly and that was that he did not belong to the category of souls, because of which whatever He did during his births were quickly dismissed as irrelevant by the *jeevatmas* as not of relevance to themselves. Therefore, whatever He said, even in the 'Bhagavad Gita', fell on ears that discounted his preaching as those coming from someone unlike themselves. So, He thought of liberating the souls through another *jeevatma*. He immediately summoned His serpent couch, the *nitya-soori* (eternally free soul) *AdishEsha*, and instructed, "Go down to the mortal world and live there for 200 years, and through your exhortations, empower the people with knowledge about their true nature and make them come to My world, so that they enjoy eternal bliss".

Accordingly, the serpent *Adishesha* was born as "Sri Ramanuja". Of course, the age of *Kali*, known as the time when *adharmA* (atrocious actions) reigns supreme, was powerless during the tenure of Sri Ramanuja to rear it's ugly head, but as the people of those times, a reflection of their ignorance and *kArmic vAsana* (effect of actions done over years), made this world a hot bed for him, he had to cut short his stay here in this world and depart to Sri Vaikunta, at the age of 120.

The Lord was not happy at this behavior of Sri Ramanuja. Hence, he asked him to complete the original assignment of 200 years. With implicit obedience, *Adishesha* came down to this world as Swami *maNavALA maMunikaL*. *AdisEsha*, in his previous incarnation as Sri Ramanuja, was very much fascinated by *Nammazhvars*'s appearance and his divine outpouring (*thiruvAimozhi*), and hence, earned the appellation "maRan adipaNindhu Uyinthavan". In keeping with this overwhelming love for *Nammazhvar*, the second time around, *AdisEsha* selected *Azhvar Thirunagari* as the place most suited for his birth.

He was born in *sAdharaNa* year in the month of *Thula* and when the star *Moola* was reigning supreme. His father was called 'Tigazhaakkidanthan Tirunaaveerudaiya pirAn dAsar aNNar' and the

mother's name was Sri-ranganAcchiar. His father performed all requisite *samskaras* (all requisite ritueal to be performed for a man) and educated his son suited to Sri Vaishnava *samaya achara* (religious practices). When he attained marriageable age, azhakiya maNavALapperumAL nAyanAr (the name for mAmunikaL in his *pUrvAshrama*) became a *grihastha* (house holder). It should be noted that Swami MamunikaL excelled as the disciple of none other than the famous SriSailesha (Tiruvaimozhi pillai), the *OrAn vazhi* (the chosen lineage of sri vaishnava Acharyas) Acharya who desired that the erudite and brilliant Mamunikal should succeed him as the head of the Sri Vaishnava pontificate, a desire realized as a course of normal, appropriate occurrence. Hence, the *Guru-parampara hAra* (the garland of the chosenAcharya lineage) ends with Manavala Mamunikal. (For the rest of the biography of Swami mAmunikaL, kindly refer to YathIndra PravaNa Prabhaava). Here, I speak of some of the great qualities of this divinely inspired Acharya and rare events that bring to light to his illustrious character.

Swami Manavala Mamuni was the reincarnation of AdishEsha. This was shown in a manifest fashion to his nearest and dearest disciples. Hence we find in his Sri Rangam abode (mutt) a picture on a pillar inside the sanctum sanctorum, depicted as seated on the serpent AdishEsha with several hoods. This proves beyond doubt that he is the reincarnation of Adishesha.

SrisailEsha erected a temple at Azhvar-thirunagari for Sri Ramanuja and installed Sri Ramanuja's idol, which had been presented to Sri Madhurakavi Azhvar and which lay buried at the foot of the famous Tamarind tree. Sri Sailesha had the good fortune of clearing the wild forest/vegetation that had engulfed the village of Azhvar-thirunagari after nAthamunikaL's period. He also brought back, after overcoming substantial obstacles, the sacred idol of Nammazhvar, which had been discarded into a muddy lake at the foot of a hill at TrikaNaambi. This is the currently consecrated archA thirumEni (idol) of our *kulapathi* (leader of our tradition), Swami Nammazhvar. At the same time, it was Sri SailEsha who brought out the buried idol of Sri Ramanuja's *Bhavishyad* (future) Acharaya vighraha (idol). As Sri Sailesha was responsible for Nammazhvar's archA vighraha for daily abhishEka (ablution), even now SrisailEsha's descendants receive the unique honor of being blessed with the daily remnants of ThirumaN kAppu, applied to the archA *thirumEni* (divine body) of Swami Nammazhvar.

Sri Ramanuja's temple at Azhvar thirunagari was handed over to Swami Manavala Mamunikal in due course of time, and hence, daily *thiru*

ArAdhanam (ritual worship) was performed by Swami mAmunikaL, i.e. Sri Ramanuja in his incarnation as Manavala Mamunikal, worshipped himself. This may appear rather inappropriate, but this act is similar to Sri Rama's worship of Lord Ranganatha (they both represent Sriman Narayana) in that, given the exalted position of Swami Ramanuja within our tradition, Swami emperumAnAr (meaning mAmunikaL) was uniquely qualified to perform daily *thiru ArAdhanam* to himself. YathirAja VimSati, a panegyric poem extolling the supreme blissful virtues of Sri Ramanuja, was composed during this period by Mamunikal with specific reference to the archA murthy of Sri Ramanuja at Azhvar thirunagari.

SriSailEsha once ordered his ardent disciple Swami Manavala Mamuni, who had learnt all sastras from him, "Oh! My dear son! All our previous acharyas learnt Vedas and vEdantha for the vanquishment of other philosophers and for the firm establishment of our Vishisthadvaita philosophy. However, they all dedicated the remainder of their life time for the study and propagation of *divya prabandham* (azhvar's 4000 hymns and their commentaries). They also went and lived in Sri Rangam, the capital city of Sri Vaishnava *Saamraajya* (Kingdom). Similarly, you too must spend the rest of your lifetime, after my departure from this material world to the eternal abode of our Lord, living in Sri Rangam and propagating the true tenets of the Sri Vaishnava Sampradaya as given in the hoary *aruLiccheyal* (divya prabandham). The devoted disciple that he was, Swami Mamuni did act according to the commandments of his teacher. So Sri Rangam, the citizens of Srirangam & the Lord of Sri Rangam - all of them begot the good fortune of counting Swami Mamuni as one amongst themselves.

Manavala Mamunikal came to Sri Rangam as a *gruhastha* (householder). He had numerous relatives and the birth / death of anyone in their families as well as related *samsaric* (worldly) activities impeded his ability to perform *kaikaryam* as well as propagate the glory of Sri Vaishnavam. Hence, Swami Manavala Mamuni accepted asceticism (*sanyaAsa Ashrama*). It was required that a householder, while entering the fourth stage of life (Sanyasa Ashrama), sever all his connections to his relatives and to take a new name. However, The Lord Ranganatha, with characteristic foresight and prescience, bade the Acharya to retain his name as "Azhakiya Manavalan"; this divine intervention becomes clear when placed in the context of our Lord's desire to become Swami mAmunikaL's disciple and as it is worthy of a disciple to have the name of his Acharya. At this point, it would be instructive to examine the events that elevated Swami Manavala Mamuni to a position of exaltedness not offered to any one else.

Lord RanganAtha, reclining on his serpent bed decided to have Swami Manavala Mamunikal for His guru, as he wished to complete the Sri Vaishanva Acharya parampara (lineage) with Swami MamunikaL, a lineage that started with Himself (Periya Perumal, Periya PirATTiAr on to Swami maNavALa mAmunikaL is our Acharya Parampara). There are several compelling reasons as to why Lord RanganAtha selected Swami mAmunikaL:

AdishEsha was born as the brother of Sri Rama (LakshmaNa) and served him devotedly, so Rama felt that he was highly indebted to Lakshmana and desired to repay this debt of gratitude. Hence, he ordered AdishEsha to be born as his brother again in His next incarnation. But the shrewd Adishesha took this order to spirit of the letter and was born as the elder brother of Krishna namely Balarama. Even though Krishna was younger to him, Balarama did not give him a chance to serve Him adequately due to the nature of the prevailing situation, so the Lord was disappointed. The same Adishesha was born as Sri Ramanuja; Lord Venkatesha stole a march over Ranganatha and became the disciple of Ramanuja. Moreover, Sri Ramanuja took refuge under Lord Ranganatha (as described in the sharaNagathi gadyam) and performed *sharaNagati* (complete surrender), thereby not giving the Lord the opportunity to serve him. On the other hand, it was only Sri Ramanuja who served Him in so many ways. Thus, this attempt of the Lord to serve AdishEsha was also thwarted.

Hence, when the same AdishEsha was born as maNavALa mAmunikaL, the Lord realized that this was His opportunity to capitalize and realize his long cherished desire. He seized the golden opportunity of Mamunikal's arrival to the city of Sri Rangam & ordered him as follows, "You shall come to our temple & give a public discourse on the *Eedu* (36000 padi), the super-commentary of Sri Nampillai on Thiruvaimozhi along with other commentaries, in your alluring style. You are the most qualified person for this task, as you have the good fortune of being trained by the esteemed acharya Sri SailEsha (Thiruvaimozhipillai). In order to accommodate unhindered conduct for your *kAlakshEpam* (discourse), I have instructed that all festivities of the temple be held in abeyance during this period. I will be present to partake of your glorious *upanyasam* (lecture), in tandem with my nAcchiyArs & all Srivaishnavas". Thus ordered by the Lord Himself, Swami mAmunikaL, with implicit obedience, accepted this clarion call to perform service to the Lord.

On the concluding day of Swami mAmunikaL's wonderful lectures on thiruvAimozhi and Eedu, the Lord appeared amidst the august assembly of mAmunikaL and sri vaishnavas, in the guise of an *archakar's* (priest)

son by the name *Aranga Naayakam* and brushing aside the opposition (after all, how is it possible for a little boy to cut through the large, gathered, assembly if He were not the Lord Himself?) preventing Him from getting proximate presence to Swami mAmunikaL's seat, recited the following stanza in His inimitable, majestic voice resembling the thunder of a rumbling cloud,

"SriSailEsha dayA pAthram dheibhakthyAdi guNarnavam
Yetheendra pravaNam vandE ramyajA mAtharam munim"

He kept a palm leaf containing the aforementioned sloka on a golden plate full of flowers, fruits, coconuts and other sacred components of guru *dakshiNa* (token of appreciation) and after offering it at the holy feet of Swami mAmunikaL, ran towards the sanctum sanctorum & disappeared. To add to this magnificent miracle, Periya Perumal, the Lord Ranganatha Himself, immediately ordered through the archaka - 'let this sloka be recited at the beginning of all divya prabhandam recitations; just as a Vedic recital begins and ends with the sacred 'Om', so also all recitals of the tamil veda, the divya prabhandam, shall commence and end with 'srI SailESa dayA pAtram'.

It is quite possible that many people, especially those who have been untouched by the uplifting grace of our Acharyas and our Lord, may question the authenticity of this particular episode, that the sloka was indeed an offering made by Lord Ranganatha to Swami mAmunikaL. The answer is provided by our elders as follows.

This sloka is an outpouring of the not so heartening experience of the Lord in His previous incarnations as Rama & Krishna. This sloka is to be construed as follows:

"SailESa daya pathram vande" - I (Sri Rama), salute the monkey Sugreeva, who the object of the mercy of Sailesha, the Lord of the mountain Rishyamukha, namely Mathanga Maharshi. Obviously this has a reference to Rama's surrender to Sugreeva hoping that he (Sugreeva) would help Him (Rama) in getting back Sita. But Sugreeva after getting kingdom with the help of Rama was asked by the latter to dispatch his monkey subjects, in search of Sita, in all the directions. The rainy season intervened. During this period, Sugreeva enjoying the pleasures of the kingdom, forgot all about his promise to Sri Rama. Rama had to send Lakshmana, to make sugreeva aware of the dire consequences that would follow if he did not work to keep his promise. So, Sri Rama's sharanagathi in this instance was a total failure. Therefore, now as Ranganatha, our Lord performed sharanagathi under the holy

feet of 'SrishailEsha daya pathra', namely Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL, the receptacle of mercy of SrishailEsha also known as Thiruvaimozhi pillai.

"ArNavam vande" - 'I (Sri Rama), take refuge unto the ocean, in order to cross the ocean & reach Lanka'; such was *SaraNAgati* (surrender) performed by Sri Rama to Samudra Raja (the king of the oceans). But even after the lapse of 3 whole days, the king of the ocean did not bother appear before Sri Rama. Highly enraged at this misbehavior of the King of the oceans, Sri Rama ordered Lakshmana to fetch his bow and arrows, so that he might dry up the ocean itself. After all, the samudra raja is but a kinkara (a servant) to Sriman Narayana, whose embodiment was Sri Rama! Here also our Lord's sharanagathi misfired. Hence, Lord Ranganatha takes refuge now under the veritable ocean (ArNavam) of knowledge (dHI), bakthi - devotion, Adi - etc., namely, Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL.

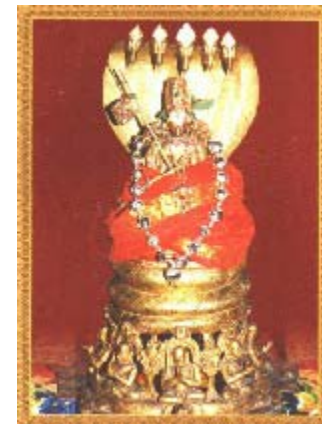
"Munim vande" - In His incarnation as Rama, Lord Ranganatha became the disciple of Vishwamitra Muni and provided all required services as a disciple. However, subsequent awareness as to Vishwamitra's undesirable traits such as Lust, anger, Ego made our Lord feel unhappy about His choice of this Guru. After all, was not Sri Rama known as the perfect one (*shAdguNya paripoorNa*)? The same plight befell Lord Krishna when He learnt the 64 arts under the preceptor SAndipanI Muni, within 64 days. When offered *Guru Dakshina* (token of appreciation for Acharya) by the most magnificent Lord of the Lords Sriman Narayana, sAndipani, instead of asking for Moksha, the ultimate reward, asked for a petty favor, viz the retrieval of his son who had drowned as a child. The Lord became displeased at this. So, now Lord Ranganatha adopted Swami MaNavALa (Ramyajamathru Muni) mAmunikaL as His teacher.

"Yathindra pravaNam vande" - Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL, in his previous incarnation as Ramanuja, had been anointed as His Acharya by Lord Venkateshwara. Even though no ill-will arose between the teacher & the taught, Lord Ranganatha considered it appropriate to be the disciple of Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL, who was highly devoted to Yatheendra (Sri Ramanuja) and had earned the appellation Yatheendra PravaNa.

The depth of meaning embedded in this sLOka will enlighten even a common man, and it is not difficult to perceive only the highest abode of Divinity, the Lord RanganAtha himself, could have composed such a sLOka. Though Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL was elevated to this highest position of being the Acharya to Lord Ranganatha, his was a life

marked by humility and service to the spirit of Azhvars and Acharyas. Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL thought that it was up to the Lord to determine the position given to Swami mAmunikaL. This is the true nature (swarupa) of the jeevAtma, a state of dependence not unlike the inanimate (Achitvat Parathantrya) and Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL embodied this exalted spirit of existence. The sacred oscimum (thuLasi) is not elated when placed by Lord on His crown; nor does it become unhappy while put down over His feet. The sentient soul should have the same disposition as that of the sacred thuLasi, the awareness that he/she is merely an object belonging to the Lord, to be utilized per the Lord's whims and fancies. Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL demonstrated and lived this exalted principle of *ananyArha sEshatvam* (quality of complete surrenderance to Lord, without an iota of blemish) and *achitvat pAratantryam* (a state of dependence not unlike the inanimate).

Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL wrote several commentaries on the Rahasya Granthas (esoteric scriptures). But for his lucid, illuminating commentaries, all the 4000 divya prabhandas have become too abstruse for the rest of us. The simplicity of his style, the clarity of thought and majesty of expression are unparalleled. There is no way to discharge the debt that all Sri Vaishnavas have incurred at the holy feet of Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL. Yet, there is one-way to perform service to his spirit and all that he represented; a sincere effort at studying all his works under the feet of a qualified teacher and practice all his exhortations.



Swami Mamuni at Sri Rangam

Homage offered at the holy feet of Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL.

GREAT SAINTS AND TEACHERS MUDHAL AZHVARS

The Gregorian months of October, November and December feature an abundance of manifestation days of great saints and Acharyas from Sri Vaishnava tradition. December is also the month in which the holiest of months in the Indian solar calendar *mArgasIrsha* (mArgazhi in tamil), commences, and the holy *paavai nOnbu* (vow of the female devotees) that forms the basis for the famous *thiruppAvai* of Andal is celebrated. It is also in the month of margazhi, highlighted by Lord Sri Krishna in the Gita as '*mAsAnAm mArgasheershOham*', that the grandest of festivals in divya desam temples, the *adhyayana Utsavam* starts. In the context of the joy and celebration these months bring forth, it is appropriate to know about our preceptors who made these months famous by being born in these months.

The following great saints and Acharyas appeared during the months of October through December, in chronological order -

- (i) Swami vEdAnta dEsika
- (ii) Swami maNavALa mAmunikaL
- (iii) Swami piLLai lOkAchAriAr
- (iv) Swami poigai AzhvAr
- (v) Swami bhUdhaththu AzhvAr
- (vi) Swami pEy AzhvAr
- (vii) Swami thirumangai AzhvAr
- (viii) Swami thiru-p-pAN AzhvAr
- (ix) Swami thoNdar-adi-p-podi AzhvAr and
- (x) Swami aruLaLap-perumAL emperumAnAr.

In addition, the appearance day of srI visvaksEna, the commander-in-chief of all of our Lord's *nitya sUris* (eternally free souls who reside with the Lord), also occurs during this time period.

In this issue of Ramanuja Darshanam, we will briefly enjoy the life histories of the first of the Azhvars - poigai AzvhAr, bhUdhaththu AzhvAr, pEy AzhvAr, collectively known as the mudhal AzvArgaL (the first AzhvArs) in Tamil.

Mudhal AzhvArgaL: The three AzhvArs - poigai AzvhAr, bhUdhaththu AzvhAr and pEy AzhvAr are chronologically the earliest of all AzvhArs. These three Azhvars are "*ayOnijAs*" - "ones who were not born from a womb". They appeared on water-flowers in three different water

sources. Poigai AzhvAr manifested on a lotus flower in the temple tank of *srI yatthOkthakAri perumAL* in Kanchipuram in the "thiruvONam" star during the month of "aippasi" (This corresponding date this year is Nov 1, 2003). BhUdhaththu AzhvAr appeared on a *nllOthphala* (*kurukkaththi* flower in tamil) on the seaside at thiru-k-kadal-mallai (present day Mahabalipuram), on the day subsequent to Poigai AzhvAr (month of aippasi, avittam star; Nov 2, 2003). PEy Azhvar appeared on a *sengazhuneer* flower in a well in thiru-mayilai (present day Mylapore, in the temple of srI AdikEsava-p-perumAL) on the day after bhUdhaththu AzhvAr was born (aippasi month, sathayam star; Nov 3, 2003).

All three of them were born, blessed by the Lord with supreme knowledge, and as a result, they lived a life focused on divinity, worshipping the Lord at different temples, and living the life of ascetics. Since the appearance of such great souls is invariably tied to a reason of divine intent, the three Azhvars had to meet to fulfill the purpose of their appearance, to wit, give the world the esoteric Vedas in a manner accessible to the common folk. And this Sriman Narayana achieved by making the Azhvars meet and become the harbingers in the effort towards the composition of the holy Tamil Vedas.

The Lord made each of them go to the town of thiru-k-kOvalUr (a place in present day Tamilnadu, where there is the most beautiful temple of Sri Trivikrama), to the *Ashrama* (hermitage) of a saint called "mrgaNdu". Poigai AzvhAr reached there the earliest. Night time had come, and he was lying down in a small room at the entrance to the Ashrama, reflecting on the glories of the Lord. At that time, bhUdhaththu Azhvar arrived at the same location. Poigai Azhvar welcomed him and indicated "we have enough space for one to be supine, two to sit; please come in".

Both of them were sitting, and were indulging in *bhagavad guNa anubhavam* (recounting the innumerable auspicious qualities of the Lord) when, pEy Azhvar came by to the same Ashrama. The two Azhvars already present in that little room said, "in this place, one can lie down, two can sit, and three can stand; please come in".

PEy AzvhAr joined them, and the three Azhvars continued their joy-filled discussion of the Lord's auspicious qualities and His divine activities (*leelAs*). At this time, the Lord, never one to give up on an opportunity to interact with His true devotees (*priyO hi gnyAninOthyartham aham sa cha mama priyaha*, BG 7.17), Himself arrived at the Ashrama, invisible to the three Azhvars. As He entered the room, the three Azhvars began to feel His presence, because suddenly, the room which could accommodate the three of them in a standing posture

was beginning to feel inadequate. The Azhvans wondered on the cause for this change, and immediately, using his yogic powers, poigai Azhvar, realizing the divine presence, lit a spiritual lamp to the Lord of the lords “*vaiyam thagaLiyaa vaarkadalE neyyaaga, veyya kadhira viLakkaga*” “using the earth as the physical lamp structure, the sea of ether as the ghee for the flame, and the lit flame being verily the Sun himself!” What poured forth was divine poetry, now famous as, *mudhal thiruvandhAdhi* (first poem of the type andhAdi, meaning the last word becomes the progenitor of the thought for the following verse). These hundred verses bring out the essential auspicious nature of the supreme Lord and His infinite *kalyANa guNas* (auspicious qualities).

BhUdaththu AzhvAr, in turn, offered a lamp using his yogic powers too, yet different - “*anbE thagaLiyaa, aarvamE neyyAga*” - using his immense love for the Lord as the lamp structure, and his longing for union with the Lord as the energy engendering the flame. He composed a set of 100 verses known as “*iraNdaam thiruvandhAdhi*” (second poem of the type andhAdhi).

The two lamps of spiritual love, lit by poigai Azhvar and bhUdaththu Azhvar, allowed the three Azhvans to see and experience the Lord in manifest proximity. That Divine experience inspired pEy AzhvAr to sing,

“*thiru-k-kaNdEn, pon mEni kaNdEn;
thigazhum aruKkan aNi niramum kaNdEn;
seRukkiLarum ponnAzhi kaNdEn;
purisangam kai-k-kaNdEn;
en Azhi vaNNan pAl inRu*”

meaning, “I saw the divine consort of the Lord - Lakshmi; I saw the divine body of the Lord; I saw the beautiful complexion of the Lord and the auspicious discus (*chakra*) verily the remover of obstacles that prevent us reaching the Lord, and the beautiful, white, divine conch in the hands of the Lord”. This is the first verse of *mUnRaam thiruvandhAdhi* (third poem of the type andhAdi), which is a set of 100 verses too.

This uplifting divine experience bound them into a state of togetherness, and they traveled across various parts of South India spreading the message of the Lord, a message given by the Lord Himself through the three thiruvandhAdhis. Another Azhvar, thirumazhisai Azhvar, became a disciple of the three mudhal Azhvans - pEy AzhvAr in particular, upon exposure to their message of Sriman Narayana as the *para tattva* (supreme concept) and verily the all-auspicious progenitor of all that is manifest and un-manifest.

The three Azhvans returned to thiru-k-kOvalUr after spreading their message of love for the Divine and love of the Divine, and through their yogic powers, left their earthly bodies and went to Sri Vaikuntam, the wonderful abode of Sriman Narayana, which represents *mOksham*, liberation from the miasma of *samsAra* (the ocean of life).

Poigai Azhvar



Peyazhvar



Bhoothathu Azhvar



SRI PILLAI LOKACHARYA'S INFLUENCE ON ME

Sri Vedaraman SriRaman

Every individual's secular and religious views are shaped by the environment in which he/she is raised. Mine were influenced considerably by the fact of having grown up in a Tamil Brahmin family and the political/social upheavals associated with the upsurge of the regional Dravidian political parties in Tamil Nadu in the 70s and 80s.

Typical of someone raised in a Brahmin family, I was used to the performance of the daily *sandhyAvandanam* (prayer to the sun), chanting of slokas in Sanskrit for various deities, observance of religious festivals such as Sri Rama Navami, Saraswathi Pooja, *UpAkarma* (beginning of learning of Vedas); all in accordance with Vedic injunctions. On the political/social side, I was bombarded constantly by a political environment and a polity bent upon espousing their anti-vedic and anti-religious sentiments in a blatant and often, flagrant display of atheism mixed with personal hatred. Such negative attitudes to a theistic way of life were further amplified by a caste based admissions policy in education that denied opportunity to qualified candidates simply based on their religious affiliation.

It is not unusual for those of us who come to the US to get drawn into a materialistic and worldly lifestyle, and my arrival in the US for graduate education, at least during the early years, was marked by an absence of any real interest in religion and/or philosophy. Owing to the Lords un-instigated grace (*nirhEthuka krupA*), I chanced upon a few ISKCON publications some years ago, an activity that I came upon more as an accident than by intent. A certain degree of mock curiosity (pictures of westerners clad in "*panchakachcham*" style dhoti, wearing Nike sneakers) caused me to read on. Soon I was thoroughly impressed by the sincerity of the ISKCON devotees and got interested in Vaishnavam. As I read more ISKCON literature, one thing lead to another and I found myself regularly browsing the posts on the Bhakti List started / maintained by Sri Mani Varadarajan.

Here I was introduced to a whole new universe of thought and spiritual endeavor. I became familiar with the life and works of Azhvans and Acharyas. I found Visistadvaita's repudiation of the concepts of *nirguNa Brahman* and Maya and the upholding of the *paratvam* (supremacy) of Sriman Narayana thoroughly captivating. To start with, I was comfortable with the vedantic aspects of Sri Vaishnavam due to my upbringing. That this new universe of thought provided a compelling

and convincing interpretation of Vedanta provided a firmament of comfort for further spiritual and philosophical investigation.

One day I chanced to read an English translation of the aphorisms of Sri Vachana BhUshaNam (SVB) by Swami Pillai LOkAchAriar (PL), considered by many to be the most brilliant acharya in what we know today as Ramanuja darshanam. During my first reading of this book, the concepts of *nirhEthuka krupa*, *acharyAbhimanam* (absolute reverence to the acharya and his teachings), and the non consideration of *prapatti* (surrender) as an *upAyam* (means) were too esoteric for me to grasp. My sense of this inability, looking back, is that we are too conditioned by the punish-reward system of every day life to grasp these critically insightful concepts. However, I was absolutely mesmerized by the aphorisms that dealt with the notion of caste of a *bhAgavatha* (devotee). For instance, consider the following sutras from SVB:

194. *BhAgavathApachArandhAn anEka vidham*
(Offences against Bhagavathas are of many kinds)

195. *athilE onRu avarkaL pakkal janma niroopaNam*
(One of these is inquiry about their birth.)

196. *ithuthAn archAvathAraththil upAdAnasmruthiyil kATTil krooram*
(This, indeed, is more cruel than examining, thinking about, the material of which perumAL's *archA tirumEni* (idol) is made)

197. *aththai mAtru yOni pareekshaiyODu okkumenRu shAstram sollum*
(It is said in the scriptures that an inquiry about the birth of a devotee is so heinous and repulsive an act of character-less-ness, that it is equivalent to a man inspecting the reproductive organ of his own mother)

What struck me very profoundly were both the radical nature of the truth in the message that SVB contained and the clarity with which the same was delivered. I was very thrilled to come across an Indian/Vedic acharya/guru who so explicitly hammered home the message of the irrelevance of a bhagavatha's caste, gender, economic or physiological/psychological state as a qualification for release/redemption. Sri PL provided a practical means for every sentient being to internalize the fundamental truth that all of us are Sriman Narayana's children and that we all belong to one *ThonDar Kulam* (community of servants), unburdened by caste or gender-based distinctions. In a day and age when such remarks could have resulted in excommunication (and as it turned out Sri Azhagiya Manavala Perumal Nayanar (AMP) had to defend Sri PL!!!), Swami PL had such a clear grasp of the universality of the Sri Vaisnavam as bequeathed to us by the Azhvans and Acharyas like Swami Emperumanar, and the extreme

courage of conviction, that he gave voice to some revolutionary, and unpopular (with a certain segment of the population) opinions; *unpopular then and sadly, in many instances, even now!*

Today, it is fashionable for political and religious leaders to proclaim that spiritual oneness of all life forms transcend caste and gender based considerations. However, it took a true visionary such as Swami PL to expound the vedic wisdom of Ramanuja darshanam in terms that elevated all of humanity to a state of close proximity to the ultimate God. *Since, I have always experienced goose bumps at the mere mention of the two brothers Sri PL and Sri AMP Nayanar, to me, they represent literally the two eyes of our glorious Sri Vaishnava tradition.*

Sri Vaishnavam is replete with practical applications of the glorious precept of equality for all sentient-beings. Consider the following:

- Sri Rama performing funeral rites for Jatayu
- Sri Krishna preferring to dine with Sri Vidura even though he had the option of dining with exalted elders such as Drona or Bheeshma.
- The episode of ThiruppAN azhvar and LOKasAranga Muni
- Our *kulapathi* (leader of community) Sri Nammazhvar who belonged to the *panchama jathi* (fifth caste)
- Sri Periya Nambi and his attachment to Sri MaranEri Nambi
- Swami Ramanuja and his deep devotion to Sri Thirukachchi Nambi

However, it is Swami PL, who went to considerable lengths to explicitly expand on this concept and establish its relevance within the Indian social and philosophical framework. Prof. M. R. Sampathkumaran in the January 1988 issue of "Sri Ramanuja vANI" says "Sri Lokacharya carried to their logical conclusions many precepts and practices of Sri Ramanuja regarding such things as prapatti, the value of Nammazhvar's mystical experiences, **and the irrelevance of caste in the scheme of salvation**". It is no exaggeration to assert that if society had taken up on Swami PL's vision of universality of equality amongst the sentient, some of the caste-based upheavals that so dominate India's political and social landscape may have been obviated. Indeed, I feel Swami PL's vision for man and society would have rendered irrelevant a number of pseudo-religious and political movements that have corrupted and harmed the Indian polity in no small measure.

Thus, after several years of browsing the web and reading books on Vaishnavam, this fortuitous contact with SVB (owing to Lord's nirhetuka krupa) ended my quest. At last, I feel that I have found my true home.

The life and works of Sri PL and Sri AMP Nayanar epitomize and crystallize the essence of Ramanuja darshanam as I understand it. Years ago I used to be very cynical about the prospects for any personal spiritual advancement in the light of the knowledge of my own errant past. Like a shining beacon of light SVB steps in and has the following to offer:

15. *purushakAraththukkum upAyaththukkum vaibhavamAvadhu - dOshaththaiyum guNa hAniyaiyum pArththu upEkshiyAdhavaLavanRikke angeekAraththukku avaithannaiyE pachchaiyAkkugai*
(The greatness of *purushakaara* (mediator, the role played by Lakshmi) and *upaaya* (Sriman Narayana) lies in not merely disregarding the *jeevAtma's* (soul) defects and lack of merit, but also in making these the very basis for the acceptance of the *jeevAtma*).

16. *iranDum iranDum kulaiyavENumenRirukkil iranDukkumiranDum unDayiRRithAm*
(If it be said that it is necessary to remove both of these - the defects and lack of merit-, then both become the Lord's).



Sri Pillai Lokacharyar

SRI PILLAI LOKACHARYAR: A BIOGRAPHY

Sri Vedaraman Sriraman

*IOkAchAryAya guravE krishNapAdaSya sUnavE |
samsArabhOgisandashta jIvAjIvAtavE nama: ||*

Sri Manavala Mamunigal (MM), in his much celebrated UpadEsarattinamalai, commemorates the lives and works of Azhvars and Acharyas. In this wondrous composition, he has singled out one Acharyan, more than any one else, in whose honor, he has devoted several pasurams. This acharyan so revered by Sri MM is Sri Pillai Lokacharya (also known as *ulagAriyan* – teacher of the universe).

Sri PL was born around 1205 AD on the occasion of Ashwayuja (Aippasi in tamil), under the asterism of shrAvaNa (thiruvONam). Those were days when Sri Vaishnavam flourished under the able leadership of the august Sri Nampillai. His disciples included several luminaries; prompting the oft quoted “*Nampillai ghostiyO, Namperumal ghostiyO*” (“Is it the gathering of devotees who came to listen to Nampillai or who came to see Namperumal”). The most prominent amongst these disciples were Sri Vadakku Thiruveethip Pillai (VTP) and Sri Periya Vaachan Pillai (PVP), who authored the two most authoritative commentaries on Sri Nammazhwar’s Thiruvaimozhi, viz. muppaththi-aaRaayirappadi (36,000) or Edu and the irupaththi-naalaayirappadi (24,000) respectively. Sri VTP was blessed with two sons. The eldest of the two was Sri PL and the second was Sri Azhakiya Manavalap Perumal (AMP) Nayanar. Sri VTP named his eldest son after his acharya Sri Nampillai who was also known as Lokacharya or Ulagariyan. To gain the quintessence of Ramanujar’s darsanam very clearly, one need look no further than the works of Sri PVP, VTP, PL and AMP Nayanar.

Both brothers grew up and lived in Sri Rangan. They learned from their illustrious father as well as from other contemporary acharyas like Sri Nampillai. It is said that when they were young they overheard their father expressing some regrets about *gruhastarama* (house holder). This incident left an indelible impression on the young minds and as a consequence they remained *brahmacharis* (bachelors) throughout their lives and rendered magnificent kankaryams to Namperumal and sri vaishNavam.

Sri PL would be considered a social revolutionary in that he was the first Acharyan who wrote independent works in the vernacular language that expounded on Vedanta and an account of his views on caste. In the latter

instance, he was a blazing visionary and pioneer, the likes of which finds no rival in the past or present, saving his younger brother. He very staunchly held that all that mattered was a *bhagavatha*’s (devotee’s) devotion to Perumal and that any consideration of the caste of a bhagavatha constituted a grave *apachAram* (sin)!!! Sri PL was a practical man who practiced what he preached and included amongst his principal disciples was a Harijan by the name of Vilancholaipillai. This *mahatma* (great soul) had several Brahmin bhagavatas as disciples. To fully grasp the immensity of Sri PL’s views and actions, they must be evaluated in the timeframe in which they occurred, ie, almost 800 years ago. Understandably then, several bhagavathas in Srirangam took exception to Sri PL’s position. These objections reached a level of criticality that in turn necessitated Sri AMP Nayanar’s having to formally vindicate his brother. However, Sri PL never soft peddled these issues!!! He composed several works in which he very directly and explicitly covers controversial issues of absence of qualificatory states for prapatti. Notable amongst the many works that were composed for the benefit of future generations by this supremely benevolent Acharyan are eighteen in Manipravala style, that are called *Ashtaadasa Rahasyangal* (18 esoteric scriptures), and that leave no aspect of sri vaishNava philosophy uncovered.

Sri PL, along with Sri Vedanta Desikan, represent two stalwarts of sri vaishNavam, who put their very lives in harm’s way to save critical aspects of our sampradAyam during the difficult times of Mohammedan invasions. Details of Sri PL’s role is expounded in greater detail in guru parampara prabhAvam.

His Works

1. Srivachanabhusanam (SVB)
2. Tattvatrayam
3. Mumukshuppadi
4. Arthpanchakam
5. Archiradi
6. Prameyasekaram
7. Prapannaparitranam
8. Sarasangraham
9. Samsarasamrajyam
10. Navaratnamalai
11. Navavidhasambandham
12. Yadrccikapadi
13. Parantapadi
14. Sriyapatippadi
15. Tattvasekharam

16. Tanidwayam
17. Tanicharamam
18. Tanipranavam

Orthodox accounts indicate that Sri PL reached the lotus feet of Sriman Narayana at the advanced age of 95, after a lifetime dedicated to service of bhAgavathas and our Lord.

Nothing more need be said about Sri PiLLai IOkAchArya's significance of contributions or heights of intellectual achievement, when one of the brightest stalwarts of srI vaishNavam, Swami dESikan, inspired by his senior contemporary, extols Sri PL's virtues in IOkAchArya panchashat, a stotra composed by Swami dESikan in praise of Swami PL:

janijaladhi parIthAkAra leenAtma panktyau
 trividha vishaya trishNa rAkshasI peeDithayau
 Bhuvanaguru varOdAth srImatIm sukti bhUshAm
 Pavanaja iva dEvyai pANi bhUshAm svabharThAm
 (IOkAchArya panchashat, 15)

(As did Sri HanumAn relieve Sita's suffering by giving her Sri Rama's ornament, so has the esteemed IOkAchArya given the array of ornaments called srI vachana bhUshaNam, guaranteed to bring relief to the multitude of souls, lost in the quagmire of samsAra, enslaved by three kinds of rAkshasis (demons) called sensory thirst)

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

In the last issue, we mentioned about Lord SundaraRaja, near madurai, being presented with 100 small vessels full of sweet (akkAra adisil). There is a connection between Ramanuja and ANdAL in this practice. ANdAL, in one of the verses in her work - nAchchiyAr thirumozhi, says "nARu narumpozhil mAlirunchOlai nambikku, nAn nooRu thadaavil vAy nErndhu parAvi vaiththEn, nooRu thadaa niraindha akkAra adisil sonnEn" - {I offered to the Lord of ThirumAl irun chOlai (srI sundara rAna), 100 vessels full of akkAra adisil (a type of sweet)}. Apparently, in her lifetime, she was not able to physically offer that to sundara rAja. Ramanuja wanted to fulfil that wish of ANdAL, and he organized a festival, and offered 100 vessels full of akkAra adisil to Lord Sundara Raja. Because of this, Ramanuja is known as the elder brother to ANdAL.

SRI VEDANTACHARYA'S APPRECIATION OF THIRUVAIMOZHI

Sri Embar Rangachari Swami

The primary focus of Acharyas preceding Nampillai in the Sri VaishNava tradition was to counter the principles of advaitism, primarily, and of Jainism and Buddhism, to some extent, since these schools of philosophy had taken roots in India and more so in southern parts of the country. The works of the Azhvars had been the source for arguments towards this end. It was true that only Buddhism and Jainism were popular in India at the time of the Azhvars, though ideas from advaita were also in vogue. In fact, Nammazhvar provides the right interpretation of *antharyaamitoam* (the Lord's in-dwelling for all objects of the cosmos, as the *facilitator par excellence*) by two phrases '*uruvum perum seihaiyum vEraavaan*' (distinguished from other objects in form, qualities and action) (Thiruvaaaimozhi - 7 - 3- 11) '*uruvaaadhaavathu eththEvum evvulahangaLum maRRum thanpaal maruvil moorthiyodutthu itthanaiyum ninra vaNNam nirkave*' (having all gods, worlds and other objects that are observed in Him as if they are one with His blemish less form but keeping these distinct per their nature) (Thiruvaaaimozhi 4-10-10). These phrases refute the interpretation of 'aham brahmaasmi' from the Upanishads as meaning that there are no differences such as jeevaatma (soul) and paramaatma (the Lord) and that there is only one *Atman*, the rest being illusory. The Azhvars are mostly charitable in their criticism of other religions, as is revealed by Nammazhvar's '*vanangum thuraikal ...*' (Thiruviruttam-96) where he attributes to the Lord the existence of other religions as an intention to spread His own form (moorthi). Thirumangai Azhvaar (Periya thirumozhi 9-8-9) calls the Jain and Buddhists as lacking thinking (pundhiyil), in setting aside the need for the concept of a conductor (Isvara). He provides a compelling refutation of Jain philosophy using dialectic logic alone (tarukkinaal) and their practice of eating in one stretch (Periya thirumozhi 2-1-7).

It is thus clear that the Azhvars precede Sankara in refuting other religions. This apparently was not taken 'cognizance of' by the Vaishnavites themselves, since the language of Azhvars' message was not Sanskrit. As for Sankara (and even Madhva who came after Ramanuja), either an absence of exposure to the Azhvars' works or a fear about lack of acceptability of Azhvars by the then existing scholars (in view of the language and caste of the authors) had encouraged Sankara propounding advaita, ideas clearly repudiated by the Azhvars (or dvaita as the case may be).

Coming to advaita, the proposition of nirguNa Brahman (the Supreme

without qualities and hence without form) was clearly demolished by Azhvars even before it was proposed by Sankara (e.g. *uyarvora uyarnalam udaiyavan* - Thiruvaaimozhi 1-1-1), thus advocating unsurpassed auspicious qualities for the Supreme. So also, other Saivite Saints that preceded Sanakara, e.g. *thOdudaiya seviyan* - indicating form for the Supreme. Vedaanthaacharya (synonymously called nigamaantha desika or nigamaantha mahadesika - the latter to indicate his greatness) concentrated on this aspect (anantha kalyANa guNAs, infinite auspicious qualities of the Lord) in his coverage of the contents of Nammazhvar's Thiruvaimozhi in his Dramidopanishad tattparya ratnaavaLi and DrAmidOpanishad saaram in the form of Sanskrit verses. He goes to the extent of listing out qualities of the Supreme Being in each verse of Thiruvaaimozhi in the former work. There have even been attempts by later authors to rewrite some of the verses (Uttamoor Veeraraaghavaacharya, 1983) in Vedantacharya's RatnaavaLi with a feeling that qualities brought out in some Thiruvaaimozhi verses have not been covered in the original verses in the RatnaavaLi. Vedantacharya never fails to include a verse praising Nammazhvar whenever he indicates the lineage of Acharyas starting from Periya perumAL to Ramanuja in his stotras. Besides, examining one of his oft quoted Tamil works, about works of Azhvars clarifying unclear aspects of the Vedas, it is clear that he, in consonance with earlier Acharyas such as Alavandar, Ramanuja, Parasara Bhattar, Nampillai, Pillai Lokacharya, held the Azhvars in high esteem and was an exponent of their ideas. For instance, consider the following Yathiraajasaptathi (seventy verses on Ramanuja) shLOka:-

यस्य सारस्वतं स्त्रोतो वकुलामोदवासितम् ।

श्रुतीनां विश्रमायालं शठारि तमुपास्महे ॥

yasya sarasvatham strOtO vakulAmOdavaasitam |
shrutInAm vishramAyAlam SaTarim tamupaasmahE ||

(I meditate upon SaTakOpa whose streams of words, scented by the vakula flowers, are so exalted that they provide respite to the Vedas)

We deal here only with Dramidopanishad taatparya ratnaavaLi to bring out the fact that Vedantacharya always adhered to interpreting the Thiruvaaimozhi verses according to the principles upheld by Nammazhvaar and expounded by orthodox commentators. To be brief, we limit ourselves to a few instances.

In the decad starting with *veeDumin* (Thiruvaimozhi 1-2), on the face of it Namamzhvar seems to preach that we should seek the feet of the Lord.

In fact, in the Thiruvaaimozhi nooRRandaadi of Manavala Mamuni (verse 2) the decad is summarized as

Veedu seidu maRRavaiyum mikkapugazh nAraNan thAL
Naadu nalathaaladaiya nankuraikkum - needupugazh
vaNkurukoor maaRan indha maanilathOr naam vaazhap
paNpudanE paadiya nal paththu.

(Maaran of eternal fame, of the fertile Kuruhoor sung these 10 verses with concern preaching well, to the benefit (of the world), to leave all other things and seek the feet of the Lord Narayana of great qualities)

The RatnaavaLi verse for this decad:

स्वामित्वात् सुस्थिरत्वान्निखिलनिरुपधिस्वात्मविद्ब्रह्मभावात्

ताहक्सर्वानुकल्यात् च्यवनवदितर प्राप्यवैषम्यवत्वात् ।

सर्वत्रापक्षपातात् शुभविभवतया मानसाधर्च्यभावात्

सम्क्लोचोन्मोचकत्वाज्जगदयनतयोपादिशत् सर्वयोग्यम् ॥

svaamitvaat susthiratvaannikhilanirupadhisvaatmaavidgraahyabhavaat
taahaksarvaanuklyaat chyavanavaditara praapyavaiShamyavatvaat ,
sarvatraapakshapaataat shubhavibhavatayaa
maanasaadharchyabhaavaat
samqkochonmochakatvaajjagadayanatayopaadishat sarvayogyam

(Swami nammAzhvAr exposes the accessibility of the Lord to all beings, through His qualities, Lordship, permanence, comprehensible to the soul bereft of sAmsAric impediments, affability to all such, distinction from all other losing goals, equanimity to all, auspicious control over the cosmos, adaptability of worship by mind, capability for deliverance, cause for the existence and activities of the cosmos)

The above verse, as with the Tamil verse of MaNavALa MamunikaL quoted earlier, advocates that the individual should take effort to remove the impediments in the way of reaching the Lord, (viz. ego) for Him to become accessible, as conveyed, by the Thiruvaaimozhi verse:

nIrnumathenRivai vErmudhal maiththiRai
sErmin uyirkkatha nErniRai ille

(Get to the Lord by uprooting ego; there is no equivalent state (of glory) the soul).

If the earlier verse did not communicate the above idea, the next verse in Dramidopanishad taatparya RatnaavaLi sets things right.

बन्धाहृत्वात् स्वभक्तैः अधिकतरगुणानन्तदिव्यावतारात्

सर्वेष्व्वासक्तिमत्वात् नतसुगमतथा स्वप्रबोधप्रदत्वात् ।

ख्यातभिख्यादिचिद्वात् स्वरुचिवितरणात् सर्वकालाश्रयत्वात्

शब्दः स्वान्नादानात् प्रहितपदतयाऽनन्तसोलभ्यमाह ॥

bandhaarhatvaat svabhaktaiH adhikataraguNaanantadivyaavataaraat sarveshhvaasaktimatvaat natasugamatatha svaprabodhapradatvaat khyaatabhikhyaadichidvaat svaruchivitaranaat sarvakaalaashrayatvaat sharvaadeH svaanGadaanaat prahitapadatayaa.anantasoulabhyamaaha

(Azhvar exposed the limitless easy accessibility of the Lord because of His qualities; being able to be bound by His devotees, surpassing qualities in His endless divine incarnations (even in His abode), closeness to all, easily understood by those who submit themselves to Him, giving good realization of Himself, famous actions and signs, providing a taste (desire) for Him by Himself, accessibility at all times, sharing his form with Rudra and others, having His feet with great interest in all.)

The key words in the above verse are 'svaprabOdhapradathvaath' and 'svaruchivitharaNaath' meaning respectively 'giving well by Himself good realization of Himself' 'providing by Himself a taste for Him'. These words stress that the Azhvar upholds that it is the Lord Himself who gives the soul knowledge about Himself and a taste, desire for Him. Besides the word 'adhikatharaguNaanantha divyaaavathaaraath' signifying that the incarnations of the Lord are divine (by His Will) and reflect His qualities which are more pronounced (than in His permanent abode). These facts are echoed by the third Thiruvaaimozhi nooRRanthaathi verse.

paththudaiyOrkku enRum paran eLiyanaam - pirappaal
muththitharum maanilaththIr mUNdavanpaal - paththi seiyum
endRuraiththa mARanthan insollaal pOm nedugach
chendRapirap paamang chiRai

(The Supreme Being is easily accessible to those who have Bhakti towards Him. People of this world! He gives deliverance through His incarnations. Perform Bhakti to Him with love towards Him induced by

Him. By these sweet words of Maaran the cruel prison of long cycle of births will go away.)

Manavaalamaamuni explains 'svaprabOdhapradathvaath' of Vedaanthaachaarya succinctly in terms of the Azhvars' doctrine (Vaikuntham eeppaayum evvuyirkkum nee! You give heaven to all souls - Naanmukan thiruvanthaathi 19. ; Vaikuntham pukuvaathu mannavar vidhiye - It is the destiny of people of this world to go to heaven- Thiruvaaimozhi 10-9-9.; ukanthavar thammai maNmichai mEviyaatkondupoi vicumperavaikkum enthai - my father Who goes over to this world , places those whom He desires under His feet and lifts them to heaven - Periyathirumozhi 2-1-2.)

Swami MaNavALa Maamuni puts 'svaruchivitharaNaath' more clearly through the word 'moonda anpaal' - love induced by Him without effort on part of the individual. There have been heated discussions amongst scholars, who are supposedly upholders of Manavaala Maamuni's tradition, whether Nammaazhvaar speaks about *saadhana Bhakti* (Bhakti as a tool) or *saadhya Bhakti* (Bhakti as an end result of the Lord's blessings) in the Thiruvaaimozhi decad 1-2., notwithstanding Azhvar's advise 'neer numathenrevai vEr muthal maaitthu' - uproot all attachments and ego.

We take up only one more instance illustrated by the idea in the Thiruvaaimozhi verse 8-7-8.

aRiyEn matRaruL ennaiyaaLum piraanaar
veRithE aruL seivar seivaarkatkuugandu
siRiyEnudaich chinthaiyuL mUvulagum than
neRiyaavayitrikkondu nindrozhinthaarE

(I don't know any other blessing. The Lord who rules over me blesses those whom He is pleased about, for nothing. He has stationed Himself with the three worlds in His interior, in this little one's mind.)

The Azhvars are unequivocal in declaring Sriman Narayana as 'nambi', one Who could be believed without any suspicion since He is 'kuraiyoNRum illaatha Govindan' 'pazhuthiltholpukazh paampaNaippaLLiyaan' i.e., 'poorNan' or 'avaapthasamasthakaaman'. In other words, He does not expect want anything in return for him to shower His blessings, i.e., He blesses for nothing to whomever He wants to. This is the message passed to us by the above Thiruvaaimozhi verse that redemption, mOksha, comes as a consequence of His uninstigated grace, not because there is any He desires or we can offer. Nampillai,

when commenting on this verse, demolishes arguments that the Lord will bless only those who do something (*cheyvaarkatku*), possibly as a response to put to rest ideas generated by those oriented towards the theory of karma (as indicated by an alternative version suggested for the corresponding verse of Dramidopanishad Ratnaavali by Uthamoor Veeraraaghavaacharya by the word '*svayam anantha krthishu aadaraath*' blessing by Himself in the case of or in doing good acts). As is clear, the word '*veRithE*' meaning 'for nothing' is inconsistent with this interpretation offered by Uthamoor Veeraraaghavaacharya. Thus, Nampillai suggests the only sequence, which rules out any other:-

ennaiyaaLum piranaar (aruL) seivaarkatku uganthu veRithE (aruL) seivar.

The original verse of Dramidopanishad taatparya Ratnaavali:

भव्यत्वात् रक्षत्वात् त्रिजगदधिक कारुण्यतो गोपभावात्

नीलारमाविप्रभावात् स्वजन कृतनिजात्मप्रदान प्रभुत्वात् ।

मन्दस्मित्या स्थितत्वात् हृदिसुकृतिषु च अनर्कितानुग्रहत्वात्

स्वाताम् चित्रानपयात् स्वजनहृदिरतो माधवः चेत्यवोचत् ॥

bhavyatvaat rakshatvaat trijagadadhika kaaruNyatO gOpabhaavaat
nllaaramaaviprabhaavaat svajana krutanijaatmapradaana prabhutvaat
mandasmityaa sthitatvaat hRRiudisukRRiutiShu cha
anarkitaanugrahatvaat
svaataam chitraanapayaat svajanahRRiudirato maadhavaH
chetyavOchat

(Azhvar describes the Lord as the consort of Lakshmi, stemming from the following wonderful traits: His concern for His devotees, His submissiveness, protection, His indescribable kindness in becoming a cowherd, which Surpasses the three worlds, qualities akin to mountain of blue stones, transferring even His universal Lordship to those that align with Him, His smiling, pleasant demeanor, showering His blessings without regard for the state of mind and actions of His subjects, and removing the defects in the minds of His devotees.)

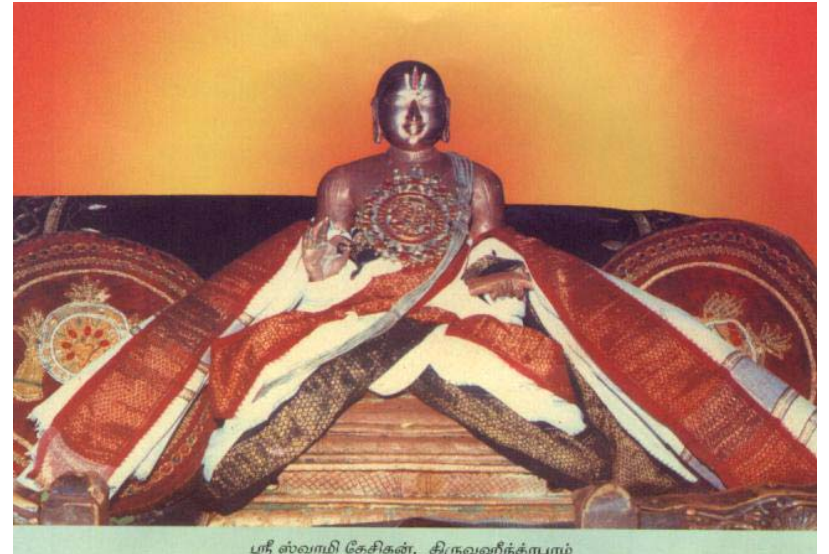
'ithi krthishu cha atharkitha - anugrahathvam' is a Sanskrit explanation of '*veRithE aruL cheyvaar*' , par excellence. That the Lord does not verify the state of mind and actions of individuals whom He wants to bless, is one combination which interprets '*veRithE*' correctly. Another is that without finding a rationale (for His blessing) the Lord blesses the

individual in His heart and actions. 'Atharkitha' even excels 'nirhEthuka' in the sense that the former points out the absence of even an effort on His part to find a reason while the latter points out only an absence of a reason. In the Thiruvaaimozhi nootrandhaadhi Manavaala Maamuni is not as explicit as Vedaanthaachaarya. He just mentions '*kalantha neri katturaithaar*' - that Azhvar describes the upaaya or means by which the Lord got to the Azhvar - His atharkithaanugraha'. It is worth reproducing here a part of Nampillai's commentary on the Thiruvaaimozhi verse '*cheyvaarkaTku*'

तमेवैषवृणुते तेन लभ्यः (tamevaiShavRRiuNute tena labhyaH)

प्रियतम एव वरणीयो भवति (priyatama Eva varaNIyO bhavati)

He is attained only by those to whom He wants to consider. If it were to those who do a thing by themselves, the word (*veRithE*-for nothing) does not fit in. Even then, if one would expect a reason for His blessing, it is only His pleasure. If there were a taste, a desire, to attain the Lord, (on part of the individual) it is only because of his being a sentient being, and it cannot be deemed as a means for salvation. Vedaanthaachaarya's 'atharkitha' dispenses with above arguments (that the looks for anything at all from the sentient), as also the absence of arguments on part of the Lord Himself to bless or not to bless!



ஸ்ரீ ஸ்வாமி தேசிகன், திருவஹேந்திரபுரம்
Swami Desikan, Thiruhaendrapuram

SWAMI VEDANTA DESIKA: A BIOGRAPHY

Swami vEdAnta dESika, one of the greatest exponents of the Ramanuja philosophy, epitomized the ineffable of spirit of srI vaishNavam in thought and practice. He is, appropriately, considered by many to be amongst the greatest Acharyas produced by the spirit of Sri Vaishnavam set in motion by Swami Ramanuja, and is held by some on par, even with the inimitable piLLai lOkAchArya, who coincidentally happened to be Swami dEsikan's senior contemporary and a great influence on Swami Desikan's life.

Swami dESikan, like a number of *mahAn* (great) Acharyas, manifested on this earth at "thUppul" (near current day kanchipuram), near the temple of Lord dIpa-prakAsa, in the year 1268 AD, in the month of bhadrapada (purattAsi in tamil), under the asterism of shravana (thiruvONam). He is considered to be an incarnation of the holy bell of Lord srInivAsa at Thirumala. Even at an early age, srI vEdAnta dESika displayed characteristics indicative of divine influences and it was clear to everyone who knew him that this was no ordinary child. He moved to a place called thiru-vaheendra-puram for a few years, where he worshipped the Lord dEvanAtha. Here, the Lord is said to have blessed Swami Vedanta Desika with an idol of Lord Hayagreeva (horse-faced Lord, considered as the Lord of Knowledge), which to this day can be seen at the ParakAla mutt, the original (and the only) pontificate established by Swami Vedanta Desika.

Swami Vedanta Desika was a prolific writer and scholar. His was an intellect that left one wondering at the heights he was able to scale. He composed extensively in Sanskrit, and had complete mastery over both tamil and *prAkrit* (older Sanskrit). In a feat that defies modern comprehension, Swami desikan has over 1200 stotrams (poems) to his credit, all of them of the highest caliber, many capturing the essence of Ramanuja sampradAyam .

Swami Desikan lived as a true srI vaishNava, with total disregard for material possessions, and consequently a life in *uncha vrutti* (food obtained through alms on a daily basis).

His disregard for wealth was as legendary as his devotion to the Lords of Kanchipuram and SriRangam. It is said that once, the local king of Kanchipuram asked Swami Vedanta Desika to sing about him for money. Swami Desika composed "*vairAgya panchakam*", a stOtra that poetically makes the point that the only wealth that is valuable for Swami Desika is the Lord standing on the hill of kAnchi - "*asti mE hasti*

sailAgrE vasthu paithAmaham dhanam" (my Lord present on top of the kanchi hill is the only material wealth that has been handed to me by my forefathers)

During the Muslim invasion of Sri Rangam, Swami Vedanta Desika heroically saved the manuscript of srutaprakAsika (a great commentary on srI bhAsya by srI sudarSana sUri, also known as sruta prakAshika bhaTTa), and saved the children of srI sudarSana sUri. Without his great sacrifice (in which, he hid among corpses to escape the invaders), we will not have a way of understanding the srI bhAsya, one of the bedrocks of the Ramanuja sampradAya.

It is clear that Swami Desika played a vital role in both protecting and sustaining srI vaishNavam during a critical period for Indian history in general, and srI vaishNavam in particular. This was the time when life in India, dominated by sAttvic values and docility, had been torn to shreds by the insane, marauding mobs of Muslim invaders that killed, plundered and destroyed all that was not theirs. During this difficult period, Swami Desikan, along with Swami piLLai lOkAchAryar (head of the pontificate of srI vaishNavam at Sri Rangam at that time) were instrumental in saving the very essence of our sampradAyam for later generations.

His mastery of essential of SAstra and visishTadvaita were aptly complemented by his mastery of Sanskrit, tamil and literature. Swami Desikan was one of those rare gems, who excelled at everything he touched. A poet philosopher, it is often difficult to determine how his mastery of poetry shone through his critical expositions of philosophy, and how his philosophy had the lyrical allure that is clearly the domain of poets. His consummate mastery of sastra and vedanta brought him the titles 'kavitArkika simha', 'brahma tantra swatantra' and 'vEdantachArya'.

Even though modern accounts may attribute philosophical differences between Sri PiLLai lOkAchAryar - the intellectual giant who fashioned the vision of Ramanuja in a direction of revolutionary simplicity and exalted universality, and Swami Desikan, it is clear from their respective lives that they held each other in great esteem.

Swami dEsikan lived a full life of 101 years, and departed from this earth in the year 1369 A D.

SWAMI MANAVALA MAMUNIKAL A BIOGRAPHICAL APPRECIATION

Sri BSS Iyengar & Sri KS Naryanan

Over 300 years had transpired since Swami Ramanuja's arrival at Sri Rangam, an event that acted as the harbinger to a glorious era of two and a half centuries of uninterrupted Sri Vaishnavam. It was also sixty years since the cultural and social life of the whole of south India, in general, and SrIrangam in particular, had been laid to waste by the invading armies of the irreverent, marauding Muslim hordes. The illustrious vEedanta dEsika had just then passed away. The cherished idol (*thirumEni*) of azhakiya maNavALan, the processional deity at SrIrangam, had just then been restored and re-consecrated at SrIrangam temple, where sAmpradAyi activities were still subdued. It was only in a few pockets like AzhvAr Thirunagari, Kanchipuram and Melkote that Sri Vaishnavam was asserting itself. The year was 1370 A D, just a mere 35 years since Vijayanagar was established and trying to find feet of stability.

Under the above circumstances, the Sri Vaishnava community, grown to large numbers due to the compassionate efforts of Swami Ramanuja and subsequent Acharyas such as piLLai IOkAchAryAr and Swami dEsikan, was crying for a leader to organize and lead it to its pristine glory. *As it is often said, the hour shows the Man* and that man was Azhakiya maNavAlapperumAL naayanaar (not to be mistaken for the illustrious brother of Swami Pillai Lokacharyar, who had the same name (*thirunAmam*)).

Swami Mamunikal was born in the year 1370 AD, under the asterism of moolam, in the month of ashvayuja at a village called '**sikkil kidaaram**' near Madurai, to 'Tigazhaakkidanthan Tirunaveeru Daiya pirAn dAsar aNNar' and 'SriranganAcchiar'. Swami MamunikaL's father was the son-in-law and also a disciple of KollikAvala dAsar, a junior disciple of Swami Pillai Lokacharya.

The young maNavALan had his basic education under his father and maternal grandfather. He entered *grihasthAshrama* (married state) at the age of 16 years and soon after, his father reached the lotus feet of our Lord. He shifted his residence from Sikkil Kidaaram to Azhvar Thirunagari to become the disciple of the illustrious ThiruvaimOzhippiLLai. In a very short while, the young, brilliant maNavALan mastered everything that could be known of sastram and Divya Prabhandham. He also developed, expectedly, a very deep devotion towards his Acharya ThiruvaimOzhippiLLai and Swami Ramanuja.

Swami Thiruvaimozhipillai was instrumental in reviving the archA thirumEni (Idol) of Swami Ramanuja at Azhvar thirunagari and in building a temple for Emperumanar. Appropriately, he put the young maNavALan in charge of the temple. Manavalan's earnest devotion towards Swami Ramanuja made him write a beautiful composition called "Yathiraja VimSati", considered to epitomize the very essence of the exalted 'irAmAnusa nooRRanthAdi'. The sincerity, commitment, and devotion displayed by the young maNavALan so pleased ThiruvaimozhipiLLai that he gave the title "Yatheendra PravaNa" to the young Manavalan.

Quite early in his life, maNavALan begot two sons, abhirAma VarAdhipa and vishNuchitta Ramanuja. VishNu-chitta Ramanuja passed away very early in his life, while AbhirAma VarAdhIpa took sanyAsAshramam by the name of Jeeyar nAyanAr and was the chief aide and successor to Swami mAmunikaL. Very soon, the aged and venerable Thiruvaimozhip-piLLai passed away. Young maNavALan's grief was immense and he was inconsolable. He immersed himself completely into studying commentaries (*vyAkhyAnams*) and *aruLiccheyal* (Divyaprabandham), expositions dear to his Acharya Thiruvaimozhip-piLLai. Young maNavALan's knowledge, erudition and brilliance spread the flames of his fame far and wide, and he gathered an impressive set of disciples. The young maNavALan was so intent on fulfilling the desires of his Acharyan that he decided to move to Sri Rangam by way of Sri VillipuththUr and thirumAlirun sOlai, consistent with wishes of Swami Thiruvaimozhip-piLLai.

Things were still in disarray at Sri Rangam. Misuse of rights, corruption, and disorder were rampant. Nayanar had to exert tremendous effort and bring to force his divinely inspired organizational skills to restore the original pristine glory for sAmpradAyi events at Sri Rangam, without antagonizing the people who were functioning in different capacities at that point in time. He realized the importance of bringing the focus back to the essential tenets of Sri VaishNavam, and achieved this objective by bringing to fore scholarly works of Acharyas that had hitherto been pushed into the background. As a matter of natural consequence stemming from his commitment, devotion, erudition and capabilities, nAyanAr was put in charge of everyday temple administration as well as anointed the leader for all Sri Vaishnavas of his time.

Famous though he was for his depth of sAstric knowledge and felicity with divya prabandham, Swami nAyanAr was restless with the thought that his formal education was still incomplete, incomplete because he

had not formally studied and mastered the intricacies of Swami emperumAnAr's magnum-opus, Sri BhAshyam. Consequently, Swami Nayanar left Sri Rangam and reached Kanchipuram, after visiting ThiruveLLarai, ThirukkOshtiyUr, Thirumalai and SriperumbudhUr and studied Sri bhAshyam at the YathOkthakAri temple at Kanchi. He utilized SriperumbudhUr as a testing ground before returning to Sri Rangam to assume his position as the, Head of affairs.

Thus fully equipped, Swami nAyanAr was ably managing the affairs of the temple with a whole-hearted sense of commitment and conviction. However, he felt handicapped, at times, by the notion that his work and life, dedicated to the sampradAyam, was often interrupted by sAmsAric events, such as demise of one or the other of his vast set of relatives. He therefore took *sanyAsAshrama* (asceticism) from Adivan saTa kOpa jeevar and it was at this point that he got the popular appellation, maNavALa mAmoni and vara vara muni. Swami mAmonikaL's divinely inspired brilliance, compassion and commitment endeared him to one and all, and He was aptly given the *thiru nAmam* (name) "Periya Jeevar" (The 'Big' jeevar) commensurate with his position as the man in charge of the affairs of 'periya perumAL', our Lord RanganAtha.

With the situation at Sri Rangam thus returning to normal and Sri vaishnavam restored to its place of primacy, Swami Manavala MamunikaL was overcome by the urge to pay homage to our kulapathi, nammAzhvAr. Therefore, he set out again, by way of Kunthinagar, the birthplace of his Acharya ThiruviymozhipiLLai, to Azhvar Thirunagari, the famous divya dEsam that is known as the home of *kArimAran satakOpan* (nammAzhvAr).

At Azhvar Thirunagari, instigated by the environment that is often called the birthplace for Sri vaishnavam, Swami Manavala MamunikaL wrote his critically acclaimed, lucid, perspicacious commentaries for the rahasya Granthas (tattvathraya, mummukshuppaDi and sri vachana bhooshaNam), handed down to us by the brilliant Acharya Swami piLLai IOkAchArya. It is said, to this day, without the commentaries of Swami Manavala MamunikaL, the insightful and revolutionary ideas fundamental to Sri Vaishnava sampradayam buried in the aphorisms (*sutras*) of Sri Vachana BhooshaNam, would have been unavailable to us. Swami Manavala MamunikaL's intellect and erudition cuts through to the meanings in the rahasya granthAs and lays bare tremendous insights otherwise beyond the reach of the ordinary lay folk such as ourselves. (*Editor's note: For further related insights, please see the article on Swami piLLai IOkAchArya by Sri Vedaraman Sriraman in this issue*)

Azhakiya Manavalapperumal Nayanar's (the illustrious brother of Swami piLLai IOkAcharya and considered to be the most brilliant AchArya in our hoary lineage) AchArya Hrudhayam is a sutra grantha of such intricate brilliance, it is beyond the grasp of comprehension of even well-read sAmpradAyic scholars. It, at once, captures the essence of thiruvaimozhi and reveals the corresponding complementary insights from shruthi, smruthi, ithihAsa and purANa. Swami Manavala MamunikaL, uniquely qualified to write a commentary on this magnificent work, had to pause at *churNikai* 22 (verse 22), because he would not write an expose for this chUrNikai till he understood the essential message without ambiguity. Coming to know that the famous Ayee Jananyacharya Swami of Melkote was very conversant with Acharya Hrudayam, Swami Manavala MamunikaL fearlessly began a journey from Azhvar Thirunagari to Melkote, a journey of over 800 kilometers. But, as divine intervention would have it, Ayee JananyAchArya Swami (a senior scholar of Sri Vaishnavam and a direct disciple of azhakiya maNavALapperumAL nAyanAr) too was on his way to Azhvar Thirunagari at the same time, to meet Swami Manavala MamunikaL, of whom he had heard justifiably eloquent reports. Both these great souls met, pre-ordained as it should be seen, at a place not far away from Azhvar Thirunagari. This joyful union led to an ardent effort on both their parts to compare notes and enlighten one another. **Such was the intellectual honesty and sincerity of our AchAryas, that they, in spite of their immense knowledge and comprehensive mastery of vEda, vEdAnthA and divya prabandham, were the embodiments of humility and subservience to other bhAgavathas.** That they would spare no pains to re-iterate the exact message passed down through our exalted lineage (and stay away from fanciful, irreverent and mostly incorrect interpretation that is the norm these days) is evident from this incident.

Thus, Swami Manavala MamunikaL wrote the definitive commentary on Acharya Hrudhayam without which, Acharya Hrudhayam would have remained an abstruse piece of poetic excellence. However, due to the overwhelming compassion of Swami Manavala MamunikaL, we have a way of studying this master piece in intellectual achievement and understanding the fundamental, intricate ideas contained therein. His mission almost fulfilled, Swami Manavala MamunikaL returned to Sri Rangam.

Swami mAmonikaL's life was punctuated by many events that demonstrated that he was no ordinary person. In fact, authentic accounts of Sri Vaishnava literature and lineage, position Swami maNavALa mAmonikaL at the very pinnacle of the orthodox lineage of

Sri Vaishnava Acharyas (called 'OrAn vazhi') and identify him as the Acharya (guru) for Lord RanganAtha himself!! (For a detailed account about this magnificent episode in Swami maNavALa mAmunikaL's life, please see the accompanying article by Sri ES BhuvarAhAchAr Swami in this issue). The *thaniyan* (salutary verse) for Swami Manavala Mamunikal (*sri SailESa dayA pAtram*), composed by the Lord himself, is invoked at every Sri Vaishnava home and temple, at the time of commencement of prayers and at conclusion, akin to the pride of place offered to 'OmKArA' when chanting vEda mantras.

Swami Manavala Mamunikal had a charming personality with a very fair complexion. His allure in person is compared favorably with the kind of Divinity exuded by Swami Ramanuja. After all, they were both the incarnation (*avathAram*) of our Lord's dear serpent servant Adi sEsha. Swami maNavALa mAmunikaL departed from this earth in the year 1443 A D after 73 glorious years of service to Sri Vaishnavam and Sriman Narayana.

(Editor's note: This biographical article is produced in two parts. The second part of the article, highlighting various uplifting, mysterious events that reinforced Swami Mamunikal's divine origins will be published in the next issue of Ramanuja darshanam magazine)



Swami Mamuni at Sikkil Kidaaram (no sathuppadi)

DIVINE PLACES - THIRU NARAYANAPURAM

NC Nappinnai

Presiding Deity:

Thiru nArayaNan, also known as *cheluva nArayaNa Swami* - is in a standing posture facing towards the East. *Yadugiri Nachiyar* or *Yadugiri ammAL* is the Divine Consort and there is no separate shrine for Andal. The *utsava mUrthy* or the processional deity is called *Sampatkumaran*, *Selva pillai*, *Ramapriya*.

Temple Legend:

MElkOte (known as Thiru-Narayanapuram among Sri Vaishnavas) has a very long history, dating back to Krta Yuga, when it was called *vEdAdri*. Brahma requested Lord Narayana (Vishnu) to provide him an idol, to perform daily prayers. Vishnu in turn gifted an idol to Brahma, which was created from his Atma Kalasha. Brahma, who was using it for regular prayers, presented it to his son (*mAnasika putra*) Sanatkumara, for his daily prayers when Sanatkumara came down to Earth in *thrEtha* yuga. Sanathkumara brought this idol of Narayana to south India and installed it in the present day Melkote. Hence this place gained the name *nArAyaNAdri*. Now, in the absence of Vishnu's idol for offering prayers, Brahma once again approached Vishnu with the request. Vishnu gifted him another small *archA murthy* (idol) along with the idols of both his consorts, *Bhudevi* (Mother Earth) and *Sridevi* (Lakshmi).

In *thrEtha* Yuga, Sri Rama required an *archA murthy* for his prayers because He himself was the human incarnation of Sriman Narayana. Thus Lord Rama looked to Brahma for an idol of Lord Vishnu. Brahma gifted these precious idols bequeathed to him from krta yuga, to Lord Rama. Lord Rama was greatly attached and deeply devoted to these idols. In view of Rama's deepest love and reverence to this Thirunarayana's idol, it gained the name *Raamapriya*. Kusha, Lord Rama's son inherited Ramapriya idol, which he gifted to his daughter Kanakamalini during her wedding to a Yadava king. Sri Krishna and Balarama of the Yadava family inherited this idol in Dwapara Yuga. Balarama during his travel, observed the verisimilitude between the main deity (*moolavar*) of Cheluvanarayana in Narayanadri, with the Ramapriya idol in his possession. Balarama and Sri Krishna brought Ramapriya idol to Narayanadri, installed it in the temple as the *utsavamUrthy* (processional idol) and offered their prayers. Thus the place gained the name *YAdavAdri*.

During Kali Yuga (current yuga), the famous Yadavadri, including the temple, fell to ruins, due to incessant wars between native Hindu Kings and marauding hordes of Muslims that invaded India during the last 1200 years. The main deity Cheluvanarayana lay buried under the ruins. The Utsavamurthy was however taken away to Delhi, along with the other riches of the temple, by the king Mohammed Badshah. Swami Ramanuja, with the help of King Vishnuvardhana and his subjects, arrived in Yadavadri in 1099, and dug up the idol of *Cheluvanarayana* and reinstalled the Lord in a newly constructed temple. He also established a framework for systematic worship consistent with *pAncarAtra* Agama, a process that continues to be scrupulously adhered to even to this day. From then, the place gained the name *Yatishaila* (Hill of the Saint).

Salient Aspects:

vimAnam(name of the tower above the presiding sanctum): *Ananda thIrtham*(the name of the holy tank whose water is used for various purposes in the temple): *tirukkalyANi* and there are many other *thIrthams pratyaksham*: Sri Ramanuja and Garuda
Agama: Pancaratra

Melkote is one of the four most sacred centers for Sri Vaishnavam in South India, the others being Sri Rangam, Thirumala and Kanchipuram. It is equated to the Holy Badarinath in north India and hence called *dakshina badari kshetra* (Badari of South India).

Divine Outpourings on the Lord:

Strictly speaking, none of the Azhvars have sung on the Lord in this temple. But Sri Ramanuja interpreted and offered Nammazhvar's Thiruvaimozhi 4.1.1. "*oru nAyagamAy Oda ulagu udan ANdavar*" at the feet of this Lord, as the first verse (*pAsuram*) contains the name ThirunAraNan which refers to none but only this Lord. Sri Ramanujacharya composed the following sloka in recognition of the places.

"srIranga mangaLa maNim karuNANivAsam
 srIvEnkatAdri shikharAlaya kALamEgham
 srIhastishaila shikharOjwala pArijAtam
 srIsham namAmi shirasA yadushaila dIpam".

ThiruNarayanapuram, which was close to Swami Ramanuja's heart, is also celebrated in Sri Thirumalai Ananthazhwan's (one of Swami Ramanuja's closest disciples) Ramanuja catuSIoki as

JayamAya mathAndhakAra bhAnO
 JayabAhya pramukhATavi krshAnO
 Jaya samshritha sindhusheethabhAnO
 JayaRamanuja yAdavAdri shringE

Great Teachers and Saints:

ThiruNarayanapuram, is called *jnAna maNtapam*, as the Lord of this temple radiates knowledge and also this is the place where Sri Ramanuja revolutionized some of the religious customs that were in practice those days. Hence, it is no wonder that Thiru Narayanapuram and *tirunAraNan* (primary deity), *selvappiLLai* (processional deity) of this temple were most dear to Swami Ramanuja. It is to be noted that Thiru Narayanapuram features a most magnificent idol of Swami Ramanuja extolled as *thamar ugandha thirumEni* (one that brought joy to all those close to Swami Ramanuja). Swami Ramanuja, who arrived at Melkote at an advanced age of 88, spent twelve years here performing *nitya kainkaryam* (daily services) to thiru-nAraNan and Sri Vaishnavam, a fact that is, to this day, remembered with fondness and tears of joy by devotees. As per Sri Ramanuja's dictum, every Sri Vaishnava should spend at least a couple of years at Thiru Narayanapuram.

Sannidhis (sanctum sanctorums):

- (i) Paramapada nAtha(Azhvar sannidhis)
 - (ii) YogA Narasimha
 - (iii) Yadugiri Nachchiyar and Kalyani Nachchiyar
 - (iv) Anjaneya
 - (v) Chakkaraththu-Azhvar
 - (vi) Swami Ramanuja
 - (vii) Swami Pillai Lokacharya
 - (viii) Swami Desikan
 - (ix) Swami Manavala Mamunikal
- And other acharyas

Other Important Facts:

- (i) With the help of the King *biTTi dEva* (renamed Vishnuvardhana after he was brought into Sri Vaishnavam by Sri Ramanuja) of Hoysala Dynasty, Sri Ramanuja constructed the temple at Melkote and created the framework for Sri Vaishnavam to flourish and grow.
- (ii) The famous *vairamuDi* (diamond crown) *sEvai* (festival), celebrated around March-April every year, attracts thousands of devotees from all over India.

- (iii) Thiru Narayanapuram stands testimony to the true spirit of Sri Vaishnavam, as envisaged by Swami Ramanuja. In a spirit of cooperative service, even members of communities that are typically never allowed to function in temples (such as harijans), are given opportunity to perform specific services to the Lord. This practice, which was put in place by Swami Ramanuja, is a testament to his Catholicism of vision and compassion for all.
- (iv) MelkOTE also serves as a center of excellence for studies in Sri Vaishnavam as well as Divya Prabandham (divine verses) and Sanskrit Vedas/upanishads. Melkote also houses the well known Academy of Sanskrit Research run by Sri Lakshmi Tatachar.

Location: MELkOTE is located in Mandya district, Karnataka State in South India. It is about 30 kms from Pandavapura, 25 kms from Mandya and 160 kms from Bangalore (3 hours drive by road). It is at an altitude of about 900 meters above the sea level.

SARANAAGATI DEEPIKA THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO SURRENDER

Sri P.B. Rajahamsam Swami

Synopsis

SaraNAgati Deepika is a hymn composed in praise of Lord Deepa Prakash, enshrined at Tirutunga, Swami Vedanta Desikan's place of birth. Though Saranagati Deepika appears as an outpouring of praise (*stOtra*) composed on Lord Deepa Prakasha, it is not mere 'praise-poetry'; rather, it reveals the essential tenets of saranagati and the constituents there-in. The greatness of saranagati, attributes required of a person performing saranagati and the true nature (*swaroopam*) of the SaraNAgatA, are all revealed here. Most importantly, the supremacy of the Lord - the SaraNya, and His *kalyANa guNas* (auspicious qualities) are described in a manner only possible for a divinely inspired, exalted soul such as Swami Desikan. Saranagati Deepika is similar in content and form to other compositions of vEdantAchAryan (as Swami Desikan was fondly known), such as nyAsa DaSakam, nyAsa VimSati , nyAsa Tilakam, all of them poetic compositions emphasizing and describing the process of total surrender (*prapatti*) at the lotus feet of Sriman NArayana. Saranagati Deepika consists of 59 slokas , and the rest of the article provides a contemporary interpretation / understanding of the author on this topic.

The *Thaniyan* (invocatory verse in praise of Swami AlavandAr) of ALavandAr's stOtra ratnam gives a clear picture of the message conveyed by Swami yAmunar in the Stotra ratnam. The Thaniyan (*swAdayanniha sarvEshAm..*) indicates that Stotraratnam provides a clear, lucid elucidation of the essence of vEda and Vedanta. In a similar manner, the first sLOka of saranagati deepika conveys the essence of this wonderful composition. In the first verse itself, Swami Desikan conveys that this stotram will reveal the path of saranagati, as handed down to us by EmperumAnAr. Even though Swami Ramanuja bequeathed us a wealth of sAstric and vEdantic wisdom, his principal contributions lay in delineating the idea of total, unconditional surrender expounded in *divya prabandham* (Tamizh vEdas) as the essence of sAstric wisdom. The essential tenets of saranagati, as described by Swami Ramanuja, forms the focus of saranagati deepika.

Concepts of Saranagati expressed in SaraNAgati deepika:

- The third phrase of the first verse conveys the nature of the SaraNAgata - "Jivatma swaroopam". The *Naichyanusandanam* expected from the saraNAgata is outlined in this hymn of praise. Unconditional subservience to Lord Sriman Narayana is expressed by all the AzhvArs and Acharyas. Similarly, a prapanna (Sarangata) should follow the foot steps of AzhvArs and Acharyas. Nammazhvar has expressed this *naichya bhAvam* (state of subservience, inferiority) in his thiruvAimOzhi verse "NeesAnEn nilai Ondrum illai..."
- BhagavAn Sriman Narayana is brimming with *dayA* (compassion) towards us without any expectation of any obvious act or qualification from us to deserve this dayA from Him. The qualities of *SaraNya* (the redeemer) are described in the second verse. The two primary qualities of Lord Naryana that distinctly identify him as the goal of our saranagati are *kAruNyam* (kindness) and *sAmarthyam* (capability). Since it is He alone who possesses these two qualities, he is uniquely identified as the saraNya
- In the third verse, Swami Desikan surrenders unto the Lord Deepa prakAsar and His consort (mahA lakshmi), who, like the light and its flame, are inseparable. Lord and *piratti* (consort) are the lamp who alone can remove the darkness of ignorance that envelops the individual soul. Swami Desikan goes on to describe how just the mere emotional proximity of the saraNAgata pleases the lord and propels him to shower His overwhelming grace on His devotee. It may be instructive to re-collect the words of Swami piLLai

IOkAchAryAr (PL), a great contemporary of Swami Desikan, and the author of the famous srI vachana bhushaNa divya shAstram, where Swami PL, in sutram 381, dwells on our Lord's uninstituted grace in these terms:

“Enn ooraicchonnAi, en pEraicchonnAi, en aDiyArai nOkkinAi, avargaL viDAYai theerthAi, avarkalukkothunga nizhal kodduthAi enrAppOIE silavaththai yEriTTu maDimAngayiTTu”

meaning, our Lord, because of His overwhelming love for us, is constantly looking for reasons to redeem us with His grace, and turn us toward him, and in that effort, he is constantly striving to find any semblance of goodness, even negative attributes that can be termed as goodness.

Likewise, Swami Desikan dwells on the kindness of our Lord, and his ever-ready state to bless us, to accept us, to redeem us. The greatness and simplicity of saranagati is conveyed here, in terms that saranagati is the easiest way to perumAL's grace and attain *mOksha* (liberation)

- In the sixth verse, the qualities of our Lord, the SaraNya, are described. Only the best amongst the sentient (*PurushOtama*) can be the sole refuge and protector for the entire universe. Swami Desikan addresses Lord Deepa prakasar, who alone is qualified to claim that the entire universe as His body and that He pervades everything and controls everything. The vEdantic verse is to be recalled here “*Anthar bahischa thath sarvam vyApya narayaNa sthithah*” (The Lord Narayana pervades everything, inside and outside). Yet another feature of saranagati is described here, in that there is no time, place or qualificatory restriction for saranagati. A prapanna is free from all these restrictions and shall surrender unto the Lord for any desire and there is no restriction on the time, place or method of worship. Saranagati is restricted only in terms of the focus or the subject of the saranagati, i.e saranagati is valid only if directed towards the supreme lord Sriman Narayana. This sloka further enumerates that it is the Supreme Lord Narayana who alone can grant *mOksha* (*nirathishaya Anandam*, a state of ceaseless wonderment and bliss). Swami Desikan substantiates his statement by quoting verses from the Bhagavad Gita, where in the Lord himself declares ‘he who surrenders unto me alone attains me and such an individual is the sarvagnya’

- The seventh verse describes the relationship between the Sarangata and the SaraNya in terms of the Sareera Atma bhAvam. The entire universe, every species and all the demi-gods form the body of the Supreme Lord. Thus the dEvathAs (such as shiva, brahma, indra) represent his organs, manifested and controlled by this Supreme Lord. It is Sriman Narayana alone who can grant *mOksha* and hence, the SaraNagata has to surrender only unto him to gain eternal bliss.
- Swami dEsikan describes the six fundamental attributes of the Lord which form the substratum for the numerous, infinite auspicious qualities of the Lord. These qualities of the Lord (*gyAna-bala, Aishwarya-veerya, shakti-tEjas*) distinguish Him as Supreme Entity and second to none.
- In the ninth verse Swami Desikan conveys that the Lord is the foremost Acharyan and he is the Refuge for all those who long to attain *mOksha*. Swami Desikan goes on to stress how the Lord alone is the path (*upAyam*) as well as the goal, fruit (*upEyam*).
- Swami Desikan speaks about the qualities required of a prapanna. A prapanna should surrender unto the Lord and act as per the will of Lord, i.e., a prapanna should perform service (*kainkaryam*) at our Lord's feet, not for self-contentment but for the pleasure of Lord. In a manner similar to insentient objects, which perform per the will of the sentient, so too shall the prapanna exhibit himself as nothing but an insentient object at the hands of the Lord.
- Desikar describes as how a Saranagatan should lead his life, by the 12th verse Desikar conveys that Prapannan should regard Lord as everything for him and replace lord with all the worldly relations.
- In the 13th verse, Swami Desikan conveys the Supremacy of the Lord who is filled with *sattva guNa* alone and the store-house for all auspicious qualities. The sentient seeking salvation (*Mumukshu*) begets this *sattva guNa* as a consequence of the Lord's *krupA kaTAksham* (vision of grace), as indicated by the shAstra vAkya

“jAyamanam hi Purusham yam pashyeth madhusudhanah sAtvikaha sath vigneYaha sa vai mokshArtha chinthithaha”

'He, who is blessed by the kind, grace-filled vision of the lord, begets sAtvik qualities, sAtvic realization and a consequent cogitation directed towards liberation'

Here, the greatness of Saranagati is conveyed. Even though the Lord has shown different ways to attain Him. i.e., Karma yoga, GyAna yoga, Bhakthi yOga and finally Prapatti yOga, Saranagati is the easiest of all enumerated paths. When a prapanna surrenders unto the Lord's feet to attain salvation, the Lord is pleased by the very act of surrender and ignores all the innumerable misdeeds committed over innumerable lifetimes by the prapanna.

The prapanna should not construe that the Lord's grace is a consequence of his saranagati, when the very act itself stems from Lord's grace. It is this recognition of Lord's unconditional grace as the basis for liberation that is important.

- In the 25th sloka, the qualities expected of a Prapanna are discussed. The SaraNAgata / prappana should express his *Akinchanyam* (nothing to offer) and *ananya gatitvam* (no where to go).
- The 28th sLOka communicates that the SaraNAgatha should express his *ananyArhasEshatvam* (state of singular subservience, directed towards no one else) and *ananya sharaNatvam* (surrender to no one else). Swami Nammazhavar's Sri Sukthi from thiruvAimOzhi may be recalled here, "*Pukal ondru illA aDiyEn un aDikkeezh amarndu pukurndhEnE....*" (I have no where else to go, I seek refuge under your lotus-feet)
- In the 30th sloka, Swami dEsikan conveys that it is the AchAryan, who acts as the link between the SaraNAgatha and the SaraNya. An analogy that would be apt would be that the Acharyan is akin to a father, who is entrusting the care and welfare of his daughter to his son-in-law, who in this case would be the paramAtma.
- In Slokas 53 and 54, Swami Desikan's *mahA vishvAsam* (resolute faith) is exhibited. This MahA vishvAsam that the Lord will Protect those who surrender unto him forms one of the *angas* (constituent stage, component) of *prapatti* (surrender)

Swami Desikan submits to Lord Deepa-prakASha that his sins are infinite; in spite of which he is assured of liberation (*moksham*). Only because the Lord is pleased by saranagati and readily grants eternal bliss. A prapanna is assured of moksham because BhagavAn has

repeatedly assured us (as demonstrated during various episodes and events during Rama and krishNAvathAra) that once we surrender unto Him, it is His dharma, His duty, His responsibility, His business, to protect us.

In summary, Swami Desikan provides clear pointers on how a prapanna should lead his or her life. Practice of saranagati requires certain qualificatory stages / conditions. First and foremost, a prapanna shall approach an Acharyan and with the guidance of the Acharyan, he shall perform saranagati at Lord's feet.

While surrendering unto the Lord, the following *angas* (components) of Prapatti should be observed:

1. Anukoolasya sankalpaha - devoting oneself to Lord's service in thought, word and deed.
2. Pratikoolasya varjanam - Turning oneself away from any thing that is not related to Lord's service.
3. kArpaNyam - The aspirant exhibits his helplessness (inherent poverty to help himself) and believes that God is the only resort. Helplessness on part of the aspirant invokes God's mercy and secures redemption for him.
4. mahA vishvAsa - The firm conviction that SrIman Narayana is the only one who can give the aspirant moksham
5. gOptrutva varaNam - Actively seek the lord's protection, a sense of relentless prayer to be accepted and protected.

Thus, each anga has a finite role in molding a prapanna as a yOgin (one who brings into union, bearing) and saranagati as a formal method (yOga) for easy practice. Swami dEsikan concludes this uplifting composition by surrendering unto the feet of Lord Deepa prakASha, and asks for the Lord's forgiveness for innumerable sins committed from time immemorial. Thus, SaraNAgati Deepika is an ardent prayer at the feet of our Lord, a request for redemption, for eradication of the darkness called ignorance and for release from the bondage of samsARA (perpetual material association).

DID YOU KNOW?

Swami PiLLai LokAcharya is considered to be the incarnation of the Lord of Kanchipuram - Sri Varadaraja. Our elders teach us the above based on incidents in the life history of Sri PiLLai LOkAchArya.

1. Who is He, and why should we know about Him?

He is the Lord's Acharya (Swami Manavala Mamuni also known as VaraVara Muni), the only Acharya to have had the unique opportunity of delivering drAviDa vEda discourses before Lord Ranganatha and Samskrita vedanta discourses before Sri Ramanuja. Hence, Ubhayavedantacarya as per the Lord and Sri Ramanuja. He is the avatara of Adishesha and Swami Ramanuja. Srisailesa Daya Patram is the only taniyan recognised as a mantram (that which protects by invocation) because it is the slokam submitted by Lord Himself for his Acharya (mAmunikaL). Per our Lord's instructions, this thaniyan is to be recited at the beginning and conclusion of any divya prabandham recitation (akin to how the sacred Om is chanted at the beginning and ending for vEcis recitations)

2. What else did mamunikal teach us, did he write many works like other scholars?

No, mamunikal did not want to re-write the already existing works, as some others did. His focus was to teach us the importance of protecting and propagating works of other Acharyas. To this end, he has composed many wonderful stOtrams (in tamizh and Sanskrit) and insightful commentaries that lucidly explain the meanings of works by other Acharyas (pUrvAchAryas). He taught us to write new works only if the existing ones are inadequate or incomplete.

3. So who are these purvacharyas and what are their works?

Swami mAmunikaL has written down for us in UpadesaRaththinamAlai (URM) about all our AzhvArs and purvAchAryas. Here, he says,

"enthai thiruvAimozhippiLLai innaruLAI *
vantha upathEsamArkkaththai ssinthal seithu *
pinnavarum kaRka, upathEsamAi pEsukinREN *
manniya seer veNpAvil vaiththu (2) ... 1

He provides this advice so that, what he has learnt via the Guru Parampara does not get completely lost or changed in the future. This forms the basis for any basic education we seek as devotees of the Lord. All the Acharyas and works we need to know are listed in

URM. There are many more acharyas, but the ones listed here are the ones we definitely need to know about as Sri VaishNavas. All these acharyas and all their works support one another. All their messages are in unison and there is no ambiguity, no contradiction, and no opportunity for confusion.

4. What were Swami mAmunikaL's compositions, contributions?

Everything he did was directed toward establishing Ramanuja Darshanam. He added verses about Swami Ramanuja into the Daily Prayer (*ThiruAradhana Krama*) and wrote two lines that are still being chanted by every Sri Vaishnava who does daily prayers.

"Ramanujarya DivyAgnya VardhathAm abhivardhatAm"

(May we grow and succeed by following the instructions handed down to us Swami Ramanuja). He also had his disciple write Sri Venkatesa Suprabhatam and offered it to Lord Srinivasa at Thirumala. Even today this is being chanted during morning prayers at all Sri Vaishnava temples.

Most of his contributions were in the form of writing commentaries for existing works and teaching it to all those who were interested.

There are 18 works attributed to Sri Mamunigal:

Four in Sanskrit - Devaraja Mangalam, KanchidivyaEshastuti, YathirajaVimsati, and tAtparya dIpa - A commentary on Bhagawad Gita.

Three in Tamil - UpadesaRatnamalai, Thiruvaimozhi Noothandhandhi and Arthiprabhandham

Eleven in MaNipravALa (Mixture of Tamizh & Sanskrit words) - Commentaries on works of Pillai Lockacharya, Azhakiya Manavalapperumal Nayanar, Periyazhwar Thirumozhi and Ramanuja NooRRandhandhi. Four indices containing the sources of the Gnyanasara and Prameyasara of Arulalapperumal Emberumanar. One work is on the daily worship of the Lord (ThiruAradhana Kramam).

5. Did he have any other contributions to humanity?

His Other Main contributions were:

(i) Temple renovations, administration and management. (After Muslim invasions and political confusions in the south)

(ii) Spiritual leadership by contributions through commentaries and propagation of Azhvars & Purvacharyas Works, Compositions and guidance to the Sri Vaishnava community.

(iii) Making complex issues on the Philosophical doctrines (Mostly written and preserved in Sanskrit texts originally) made easy to understand and accessible to all interested devotees.

(iv) Following the footsteps of Ramanuja, Mamunigal rebuilt the temples and strengthened Sri Viashanava Sampradaya. Those days temples were centers for everything social and spiritual. Rebuilding and strengthening Temples, he re-built the society as a whole.

VEDICS' ACTIVITIES

TCA Venkatesan

Nithya aradhanam (daily temple ritual) kankaryam (services) supported by Vedics is continuing in divya desams at Thirunangur, Kanchipuram and other divya desams. Vedics is actively looking into new kankaryams at divyadesams at Kanchipuram, Azhvar Thirunagari, and Srivillipuththur. Vedics' efforts, oriented towards rehabilitation of neglected divya desams and temples, is motivated by two important criteria:

- These temples and divya desams are real links to our quest for experiencing divinity, and represent a logical extension of our desire to provide people in the US an opportunity to discover the immense wealth of our spiritual heritage.
- These divya desams and temples are sacred testaments to both the magnanimity of spiritual vision and depth of commitment of our Acharyas, many of whom sanctified these divya desams by their presence during their lifetimes. It is Vedics' belief that there cannot be a more compelling channel to perform kankaryam than temple kankaryams at divya desams.

Some specific activities that are ongoing are listed below:

- In April 2003, Vedics ran a pledge drive to collect funds for the *samprokshanam* (renovation and purification after renovation) kankaryam at Thirukkoodalur. A total of \$5000 was submitted to Sri ThirukkOshtiyur Madhavan Swami for this kankaryam on May 9, 2003.
- Vedics also donated the sum of \$2050 to a temple trustee at SriPerumbudur in the presence of Sri Velukkudi Krishnan Swami on

May 5, 2003 for Emberumanar thEr (temple car) renovation kankaryam.

- Vedics is currently organizing a pledge drive to collect funds (target: \$5000) for the Pandava Dhoothar Dvaja Sthambam renovation and samprokshanam kankaryam in Kanchipuram. Devotees are pouring forth and making their pledges and the target is being easily met. Select upanyasam CDs are being distributed to devotees who make donations of \$50 or more.
- Vedics has just commenced a drive to support kankaryams such as the Vahana Mandapam renovation in Thirupputkuzhi and the Raja Gopuram renovation at Thiruchithrakoodam.
- In Nov 2003, Vedics plans to introduce a few new classes on the tele-bridge for devotees. One will be a santhai class to teach devotees Thiruppallandu, Thiruppalliyezhucchi and Thiruppavai, essential components on *nithyAnusandhAnam* (daily observance) for every Sri Vaishnava. Another santhai class is also being planned to learn other *aruLiccheyal* (Azhvars outpourings) works, including kOyil thiruvAi mozhi.
- Vedics will also offer Sanskrit classes on the Vedics tele-bridge, to support the needs of devotees who wish to learn this essential language, often termed as 'dEva bhAsha'. Classes will be offered by Sri Dikshit Swami, a renowned Sanskrit scholar and a Sri Vaishnava priest currently stationed in Seattle.

Vedics continues to strive to be that framework to bring all interested devotees the wonderful vision and joy of the true spirit of Ramanuja sampradAyam. Please visit the Vedics website <http://www.vedics.net> to see additional details and further information related to the above and other kankaryams.

WEBSITE IN FOCUS

The website presented for this issue is www.vanamamalai.com. Vanamamalai is pronounced as *vaana-maa-malai*. Vanamamalai is one of the *Divya sthalams* (divine places) sung by the Azhvar saints. It is also one amongst the eight divine places where the Lord himself came to reside in the place (*swayam vyakta kshetram*). It is also famous for the great Vaishnavite mutt, the Vanamamalai mutt. The Vanamamalai mutt is one of the very prominent Sri Vaishnava mutts and is about 650 years old.

The mutt was established by Swami Manavala Mamuni through *ponnadikkAl jIyar* Swami, the first pontiff of the Vanamamalai jIyar lineage. PonnadikkAl jIyar Swami was considered the foremost amongst the eight most prominent disciples of Swami Manavala Mamuni. This site gives us good information on the temple as well as the mutt and is an important read for anyone who is interested in Sri Vaishnavism. It is being maintained by the devotees of the Vanamamalai mutt.

The site gives the different legends (sthala puraNam) behind the origin of the *thOthAdrinAth* temple in Vanamamalai. It hosts a beautiful photo gallery containing pictures of the temple deity in procession during festivals, beautiful pictures of the temple and the town of Nanguneri (another name for vanamamalai). There is a whole section devoted to the history behind the mutt as well as the biographical sketches of the different pontiffs who headed the mutt.

An interesting read on this site is the Sri Varamangai corner (named after the consort of the Lord of Vanamamalai). It hosts a bunch of literary works on Vanamamalai and Sri Vaishnavam.

There is a section which contains the calendar for the temple functions (*utsavams*) which is very useful for those who want to visit the temple.

Thus vanamamalai.com is a very good site to go to for those who want to learn about the Vanamamalai temple / mutt, as well for those who want to visit the temple.

VEDICS QUIZ

Mukundan Pattangi

- Which of the following are the works of Mamunigal?
 - Vyakhyanam on Purvacharyas works
 - Yathiraja Vimsathi
 - Upadesa Ratna Mala (URM)
 - Thiruvaimozhi Noottrandadi
- Which of the following represent Swami MaNavALa mAmunikaL's contributions we see on a daily basis ?
 - Added prayers to Sri Ramanuja as a part of daily prayer
 - Sri Venkatesa Suprabhatam
 - List of our AchAryas that we need to know about
 - Enjoy good prasadam

- What did the Lord offer to Mamunilal?
 - Took Mamunikal as his Acharya
 - Acharya Taninan
 - His Most prized possession
 - Included him as a part of daily prayers
- Why do we follow Mamunikal?
 - Indicates Devotion (b) Follow Tradition
 - (c) Lord's Acharya (d) He is Swami Ramanuja re-incarnated
- Which of the following uniquely characterize Mamunikal's message?
 - Preserve and Promote Purvacharyas works
 - Teach, write and preach only as per purvacharyas
 - Surrendering to Ramanuja will take you to LORD
 - Ramanuja is the Acharya for all initiated devotees
- What does not contribute to one's Karma? (From mAmunikaL's Explanations on Tatva-Traya)
 - Thought (Mana) (b) Speech (Vaak)
 - (c) Actions (Kaaya) (d) Dedications to Lord (Kainkaryam)
- Which is the most damaging to Sri VaishNavam? (From URM) Community Leaders who are:
 - AstikAs (Believers of LORD and HIS message)
 - nAstikas (NON-Believers of LORD and HIS message)
 - Astikas with incorrect messages
 - nAstikas acting like Astikas
- What are the primary pre-requisite to be a devotee, as taught by the lord?
 - Chant Acharya Tanian
 - spread Acharys's name and message
 - Write as many new works as you can
 - Eat drink and enjoy life.

CALENDAR - FOURTH QUARTER 2003

Oct 2003

Date	Lunar Calendar	Star	Event
10/01/03	Purattasi 14	Kettai	Thirumalai Garudasevai
10/04/03	Purattasi 17	Uttharadam	Sarasvati Puja
10/05/03	Purattasi 18	Thiruvonam	Vijaya Dasami Vedanta Desikar Thirunakshatram
10/06/03	Purattasi 19	Avittam	Sarva Ekadasi
10/17/03	Purattasi 30	Thiruvadhirai	
10/18/03	Aippasi 1	Punarvasu	
10/21/03	Aippasi 4	Magam	Sarva Ekadasi
10/24/03	Aippasi 7	Hastham	Deepavali
10/27/03	Aippasi 10	Visakhham	
10/29/03	Aippasi 12	Moolam	Manavala Mamunigal Thirunakshatram
10/30/03	Aippasi 13	Pooradam	Senai Mudaliyar

Nov 2003

Date	Lunar Calendar	Star	Event
11/01/03	Aippasi 15	Thiruvonam	Poygai Azhvar Thirunakshatram Pillai Lokacharyar Thirunakshatram
11/02/03	Aippasi 16	Avittam	Bhoothaththazhvar Thirunakshatram
11/03/03	Aippasi 17	Sadhayam	Peyazhvar Thirunakshatram
11/04/03	Aippasi 18	Poorattadhi	Sarva Ekadasi
11/13/03	Aippasi 27	Thiruvadhirai	
11/17/03	Karthigai 1	Magam	
11/20/03	Karthigai 4	Hastham	Sarva Ekadasi
11/23/03	Karthigai 7	Visakhham	

Dec 2003

Date	Lunar Calendar	Star	Event
12/04/03	Karthigai 18	Revathi	Kaisika Ekadasi
12/05/03	Karthigai 19	Ashvini	Kaisika Dvadasi
12/06/03	Karthigai 20	Bharani	Arulala Perumal Emperumanar
12/07/03	Karthigai 21	Karthigai	Thirumangai Azhvar Thirunakshatram Nampillai Thirunakshatram
12/08/03	Karthigai 22	Rohini	Thiruppanazhvar
12/10/03	Karthigai 24	Thiruvadhirai	
12/16/03	Margazhi 1	Pooram	
12/19/03	Margazhi 4	Svathi	Sarva Ekadasi
12/20/03	Margazhi 5	Visakhham	
12/22/03	Margazhi 7	Kettai	Thondaradippodi Azhvar Thirunakshatram
12/23/03	Margazhi 8	Moolam	Hanuman Jayanthi

NOTE

The festivals listed are based on the calendar that is followed in Thiruvallikkeni (Triplicane, Tamil Nadu). Festivals are shown based on the time in India, and as a result, may not necessarily represent the date the festival falls in the US and other countries. Please contact your Acharya or a temple priest to determine the exact date and time of a specific festival.

ANSWERS TO LAST ISSUE'S QUIZ

1-a; 2-a; 3-a; 4-b; 5-c; 6-b; 7-b; 8-a; 9-1; 10-a; 11-a



Live discourses on the Tele-bridge

Wednesdays 9:30PM CST (8:30pm after 1/15): Bhagavad Gita - English
HH. Tridandi Srimannarayana Chinna Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami

1st & last Sunday 7:45pm CST: Sri Vachana Bhooshanam - Tamil
HH Vanamamalai Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami

1st Sunday 10AM CST: Srimad Bhagavatam - Telugu
Sri U.Ve. Satuluri Gopala Krishnamacharyulu

3rd Saturday: 9AM CST: Acharya Hrudayam- Tamil
Sri U.Ve Elayavilli S Bhoovarahan Swami

2nd Saturday: 9AM CST: Siriya Thirumadal - Tamil
Sri. U.Ve. Venkatakrisnan Swami

3rd Saturday: 9AM CST: Acharya Hrudayam- Tamil
Sri U.Ve Elayavilli S Bhoovarahan Swami

3rd Sunday 10 AM CST: Srimad Bhagavatam - Telugu
Sri U.Ve. Satuluri Gopala Krishnamacharyulu

Last Saturday 10AM CST: Purpose of Life- Telugu
HH. Srimannarayana Chinna Ramanuja Jeeyar

Latest updates and more information visit: www.vedics.net
For more details, please e-mail: Ramanuja@yahoo.com



FALL IN LOVE WITH GOD

Pray with sincerity humility and gratitude for atleast 15 minutes a day.

RESTRICT FOOD CONSUMPTION
Eat anything only after offering it to God.

MEDITATION

Meditate on the beauty of God, atleast thrice a day,
atleast a minimum of 3 minutes each time. Chant Sri Vishnu
Sahasranamam (the 1000 Holy Names of Lord Vishnu) once a day.

RESPECT FOR ALL THAT IS HIS

Strive to lead a life in which you will never hurt
a fellow living being for any reason.

MONEY

Earn to live, educate, support and serve and not for
the sake of pursuing materialistic desires.

CHARITY

Donate however little it may be to noble causes.
Feeding the needy is the highest form of charity.

CONTENTMENT

Be happy and content that you are His. Thank your preceptors at least
once a day for blessing you with this awareness.

ABSOLUTE FAITH

Place complete trust in the supreme LORD. Do not go against His way.

SELF - CONTROL

Strive to live a life free from selfish desire and anger.

श्रीमते रामानुजाय नमः

Always adorn a peaceful smile; it will work on others and on you too