



RAMANUJA DARSHANAM

(Philosophy of Ramanuja)

श्रीमते रामानुजाय नमः



Sri Ramanuja in Thirunarayanapuram

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Ramanuja Darshanam

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About the Cover image

The cover of this issue presents the image of Sri Ramanuja, as he is present in *thiru-Narayana-puram*, also known as *mElukOte* (the western fort). This place is in present day Karnataka, near Mysore. It was here that Sri Ramanuja fled to escape harassment from the Chola kings of his time. He lived here for 20 years. He discovered an ancient image of the Lord, and built a temple for Him. The most beautiful Lord present in that temple is called "Thiru Narayanan", and the procession deity of the Lord is called "*chella-p-iLLai*" (The most loved son). Our elders teach us that this procession deity of the Lord came to Sri Ramanuja when he called out "*vArAy chella-p-iLLai*" (Please come! My dear son!). It is in *mElukOte* that we can find an unbroken administrative and religious system exactly as set up by Sri Ramanuja. The idol of Sri Ramanuja is called "*thamar ugandha thirumEni*" - "The holy idol that is most dear to devotees". Indeed, the beauty of Sri Ramanuja here is incomparable.

EDITORIAL

Mohan Sagar

Our thanks to all of you who provided feedback regarding the first issue of Ramanuja Darshanam. Your positive words and helpful suggestions are providing all of us with the incentive to improve on this magazine with every issue that we release.

We are intending to include make some improvements beginning with this quarter's issue. You will notice that while every effort is being made to use simple English in our presentations, words that are not in English will be italicized from this issue forward. And, rather than translating a commonly used Tamizh or Sanskrit word the first time it is used in every article, the word will be located in a growing glossary of terms that will be located at the end of each issue. We hope that these changes will make the articles in Ramanuja Darshanam easier in terms or readability and content.

We are blessed to announce that this second issue of the magazine is going to be precedent-setting, as it is focused on the renowned Acharya who inspires each and every issue, Bhagavad Sri Ramanuja, whose thirunakshattiram falls on May 6, 2003. In and along with our regular features, this issue will provide you with more details on Sri Ramanuja's remarkable life, his visionary social contributions, and the sacred temple at Thiru Narayanapuram that he held especially dear to his heart. It also includes articles on some of the Acharyas and Azhvars who had deep influence on his life and teachings, including the noted Alavandar and Sri Nammazhvar, the only one among the 10 Tamizh mystics who is included in the Acharya Paramparai.

Once again, we hope that you find this magazine to be a useful and practical resource for learning about the wisdom of Ramanuja SampradAyam. We continue to welcome your comments, questions, and feedback at our e-mail address: Vedics@yahoo.com. Also, to learn more about Sri Ramanuja and his Vision please visit our web site at www.vedics.net.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

During the annual festival for Sri Ramanuja's birth anniversary at Sriperumbudur, on one of days, Sri Ramanuja adorns a white robe, instead of the usual saffron robe for ascetics. Why is it so? Please think about this. We will provide an explanation in the next issue.

RAMANUJA'S DOCTRINE OF SERVICE

Mohan Sagar

Among thinkers and scholars, particularly those here in West, *Sri Ramanuja* has been recognized for his monumental philosophical ideals, which completely and accurately summarize the essence of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* into an integrated message on the nature of God, the nature of the souls, and the nature of this world. To his followers, the *Sri Vaishnavas*, Sri Ramanuja is seen as a beacon light in a long lineage of teachers, who irrefutably proved how the Eternal Truths of these mystical revelations are the very same truths that were revealed to us in the lucid and heartfelt devotional renderings of the *Azhvars*. But, there is one other great message that would be beneficial for all of us to learn, and this can be drawn from Sri Ramanuja's remarkable life of service and humanitarianism, which can lead us only further into understanding what this Great Soul had in mind for all his disciples and devotees.

What I am about to share is the message that I was inspired to try and learn from my mentors and teachers. As always, I am indebted to HH Sri Tridandi Sriman Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Svami for his inspiration, and seek his forgiveness, as well as the forgiveness of all other devotees, for any errors or misinterpretations in this article.

Each one of us is born at a certain place, at a certain time; to certain people that we call our parents, and share life with those we call our siblings, our friends, our spouses, and or co-workers. For those of us who hail from *Vedic* heritage, we are born into a particular family belonging to a particular caste, and each one of us has obligations and limitations associated with this. Each one of us has followed a specific path leading to a specific career, and is earning suitable salaries based on this path. Each one of us has hopes and dreams, interests, hobbies, and talents. And all of these things, which can only be gifts from God, make us unique as individuals. But, if we are concerned only with these, the things that make us unique also keep us separated from one another.

Going one step deeper though, we find that as human beings, we all share similar emotions. We all need to love and receive love in return. We all need friendship and support. We all have times when we need to cry, to sing, to rejoice, to be in our own thoughts. We all need to know that we make a difference in this world and in each other's lives. These human values are universal in nature and take us to a place where we can begin to connect with each other.

But, for those of us who have been blessed to have connection to Sri Ramanuja through an *Acharya*, this level of human connection goes one step deeper into an awareness of our connection to *Sriman Narayana*. For we come to learn that each and every soul, from the one that occupies the body of the smallest ant to the one that is now known as *Chathurmukha Brahma* (The four-headed god who is responsible for creating the Universe) is in its essential nature, its *svarUpam* as it is known in Sanskrit, a simple receptacle to the Lord's Grace, and a humble instrument to His Good. This nature of *sEshatvam*, servitude, is not only limited to the soul, but is indeed the nature of matter, as well. Consequently, the Lord is likened to the Soul of the Universe, with all the myriad of souls, the bodies in which they reside, and the matter that are their material possessions, being likened to His Body, dependent wholly upon Him and serving as Instruments to His Good. It only stands to reason then that when we seek to love and serve God, we must be willing and able to serve what is His, namely His Body, this Universe.

When we go beyond the things that separate us, when we know that each and every one of us exists solely because of the Grace of *Sriman Narayana*, and when we know that all living beings are in their True Nature *ThirumAl adimai*, servants to *Sriman Narayana*, we can begin to operate from this mood of serving the world as a means of expressing love and servitude to Him, nurturing and caring for each other such that we can serve Him better. This ideal of individual beings working together in a mood of serving a Higher Good, is expressed in Sanskrit as *samAnAdhikAranya* (the concept of dynamic dependents), and is revealed in *sAstra* to be the mechanism behind how this Universe works.

If one can operate from such a place, from a spirit of appreciation for our interdependence centered on *Sriman Narayana's* Love and Grace, our life, indeed, our very existence, begins to take on a more refined purpose, as it becomes centered on improving ourselves and providing others with the opportunity to improve themselves, such that we can serve Him together. Our relationships with the people in our lives, the obligations of our job, our dreams, ambitions, and talents when seen outside of their usual mundane significance, become gifts to be appreciated and nurtured, as they have been provided to us by Him solely out of His Unconditional Love. And each and every gift, each and every moment in our life, is provided such that it serves as an opportunity to serve Him and All That is His.

For those of us seeking to live a Vedic life, this dedication to service will make us see caste as not being a state of high or low, but rather a post in

life that *Sriman Narayana* has placed us such that we can best serve His Good.

In time, service itself become its own reward, as it becomes a means of ever-constant way of expressing gratitude to *Sriman Narayana* for all that He has blessed us with.

While all of this seems to be an ideal that is yet to be achieved by all of us, we should be aware of the fact that Bhagavad Sri Ramanuja, being one who understood the truths of the *Vedas*, was the very embodiment of these principles. Recognizing that he was to be the greatest example of what he wished to share, Ramanuja broke free of the traditional bonds of *sanyAsa Ashram*, which up until that time had required aloofness and detachment, to a life of being the "Supreme Servant". Long before the conditions of society allowed, and centuries before even such great souls like Mahatma Gandhi had even envisioned the idea, Ramanuja brought people from all castes and backgrounds, even those from the lowest strata of society, under the message that has been so well-summed up by HH Sri Chinna Jeeyar Svami as, "Serve All Living Beings as Service to God". Sri Ramanuja ensured that each person and each community that sought to live the Sri Vaishnava way was provided with the opportunity to serve the Lord in His Temples, in their homes, and in the festivals and rituals that were geared towards expressing our love for Him. Despite his erudition and the austerities required of him by his caste and position as leader of a faith, Sri Ramanuja freely moved about with all of his people, caring for their welfare, making sure that each was treated fairly and was provided with the opportunity to utilize his/her talents for the good of the Sri Vaishnava community.

Sri Ramanuja made certain that all of the 74 disciples that he had selected to promote His Vision, the *simhAsanadhipathis* or *Acharya purushas*, had this message of universal servitude and fellowship imbibed in their hearts. And, it is because of this that we are blessed to know it to this day. All that it requires for us to begin on this path is to aspire to live in way that reveres that Very Great Soul, *Bhagavad Sri Ramanuja*, who brought this message to all of us.

DO YOU KNOW?

That Thiru Narayanapuram (Melkote) has a renowned Sanskrit Research Institute? This institute (called Academy of Sanskrit Research) has in its possession numerous priceless palm leaf manuscripts in Sanskrit pertaining to every field of philosophy.

PRAYER

We Can Pray; We Should Pray; Will We Pray?

Sri U.Ve. Velukkudi Krishnan

*Sri nidhim nidhim apAram arthinAm arthithArtha paridAna dlkshitam
sarva bhUta suhrdam dayAnidhim dEvarAjam adhirAjam AsrayE*

(Let my salutations be to Lord *DevarAja* - King of the gods, *Sriman Narayana* - whose unparalleled wealth is *PerundEoi thayar* - the Supreme Goddess and Mother, who Himself is the wealth of all the wanting souls, who has resolved to grant all the needs of His *bhaktas*, who is the well wisher of one and all and who is a Treasure of Mercy).

Svami *KurattazhvAn's* invocatory verse of *Sri Varadaraja stavam* (the Hymn to the Lord Who is the Bestower of Boons) has a lot to convey to us. It is all the more important in these days of unrest. We need to pray together and individually for the safety and well being of all our fellow citizens on Mother Earth. *Sri Vaishnavism* and all the vedas accept that the whole universe is the divine body of *Sriman Narayana*. All the residents of this earth, cutting across countries, language, sex, community, caste, religion and above all whether they are humans or flora or fauna, belong to one group - Servants to the Supreme Lord. One attribute that is common to all of us is *sEshatva* - absolute unconditional servitude to our Lord. This *jlvatma's* (soul) first and foremost identification is this *sEshatva* (quality of servitude). Svami *Ramanuja* defines *sEshatvam* as *paragata atisaya AdAna iccha* (a servant who always wants to add glory to his Master. So let us try to add glory to the Lord).

But, alas! Adding glory to Him would be impossible; how can we bring Glory to the One Who is the Ultimate Glory? He is proclaimed as "*avikArAya suddhAya nityAya paRamatmanE, sadaika rUpa rUpaya vishnavE sarva jishnavE*" (one whose inherent nature, attributes and divine body is unchanged). Consequently, we fail in our attempt to add any glory to Him as He is already full with it.

This leads to a paradoxical problem. While He is Perfect, no service can ever add to His Glory. However, if we do not seek to serve him and glorify Him, it would be against our True Nature to be His *sEsha*.

Our preceptors have showed us the way to wriggle out of this problem and retain our *sEshatvam*. Because, He is the very soul of all the sentient and non-sentient beings in this Universe. Since these beings are not

perfect in their nature, we can add to their glory by selflessly serving them. Therefore, Service to our fellow beings becomes a means to serving and glorifying God, and would be in accordance with our True Nature as His *sEsha*.

There is a popularly held misconception that service should be limited to other devotees, other *Sri Vaishnavas*. But, as the Lord is the Inner Spirit and Master of all living beings, we cannot and should not limit ourselves only to them. Let us pack up these ideas and focus on serving everyone who is in need. Let us seek to serve the world as a whole.

Now, this leads to the question of the best way to serve. We can monetarily or physically help those in times of need. However, we can often encounter so many road blocks while implementing this. Each of us has access to only a few people that we whom we can help in times of need. Go ahead and do your might. But how do we serve all living beings at large? Seek the help of someone who is close to all of them. That unique personality is none other than *Sriman Narayana*. Whether others agree to His Lordship or not, we agree to their servanthood. So let us look upon *Sriman Narayana* to help everyone. He is the one who can and who should give a helping hand.

This is why Svami *Koorathazhvan* calls upon us to collectively pray to Him as He is the "sarva bhUta suhrt" (common well wisher). Prayer is nothing but a call, a representation, and a plea - not only for me but for Him, for His well being. His well being would mean the well being of this Universe. So *bhaktas*, let us resolve from today to pray together for the well being of our Lord and humanity. This fetches many fruits in one throw. I retain my *sEshatva*; I have prayed for Him, I have prayed for everyone. And this prayer itself becomes a form of "*dyAnam*" (concentration and meditation).

Svami *Ramanuja* says that the first step to salvation is *jlvAtma paRamatma jnAnam* (knowledge about self and the Lord). But mere knowledge would make one grope in the darkness of *samsAra*, drowning one in often times painful and seemingly unanswerable questions. We need to focus this *jnAnam* on *PaRamatma* which transforms to *dyAnam* - meditation.

Meditation is often seen to be only in the form of *mantra japa* (repetitive chanting of mantras), *vigraha puja* (offering prayer to the Deity) etc. However, this kind of codified approach to meditation often makes one rigid and egotistical. One needs to refine mediation with love and affection (*snEham*). Sri *Ramanuja* says "*dyAna arcana pranAmadibhi:*

atyartha priya: tat prApti phala." (the Lord is pleased with meditation, pUja and surrender; His pleasure is the means to salvation). He also defines bhakti as "*snEha pUrvam anu dyAnam bhakti:*" (meditation with love is known as *bhakti*).

Svami Nammazhwar says "*eNNilum varum.*" (first centum tenth decade of ThiruvAymozhi). The Lord is waiting in the aisle to come to our rescue, expecting us to simply to think about Him. A humble thought has the power to invoke Him.

I am sure you would all now appreciate the importance of dyAnam. Is it not just closing our eyes and thinking about our Lord. We need to do more. We must enjoy His Qualities, recollect His Divine actions during incarnations for our well being, plead for His Well Being (*mangalasanam / pallandu pallandu un sevadi sevai tirukkappu* - May good tidings come to you, Oh, Lord/Forever and ever may your Sacred Feet be Blessed) and in turn ensure the well being of everyone. *PeriyAzhvar* pleaded for the safety of His lotus feet, which serves as the very soul of all devotees.

So make it a daily practice to establish an undisturbed stream of focused thoughts on *Sriman Narayana*. Pray to Him. Do not plead for any mean fruit. Request for the well being of everyone. All the other wealth would automatically be granted. Once in a while, make this jointly in a *satsang*, then the energy gets multiplied and you start feeling the synergy.

We can pray. We should pray. Will we pray?

SarvE janA: sukhinO bhavantu. Samasta san mangalAni santu.
(May good come to all living beings. May good tidings come to the whole Universe)

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

In the last issue, we raised the question "Why do we not feel about the Lord the same way as the Azhvars did?" The reason for that is their total love for the Lord, which came about as a result of the Lord's uninitiated grace towards them. The Lord blessed them with blemish less knowledge. That is why they are who they are, and are known as "*mayarvu aRa madhinalam aruLa-p-perRRavargal*" (*those who were blessed with blemishless, unforgettable knowledge*). Svami Nammazhvar starts the thiruvaymozhi with the statement "Oh mind! Go worship and surrender to the One who granted the blemishless knowledge".

IN FOCUS – THIRUNARAYANAPURAM

Svami Ramanuja's favorite Place

Anand Srinivasan

Presiding Deity:

Sri Yoga Narasimha (hill top), Sri ThiruNarayana (*Moolavar*), Sri Yadugiri Naachiyaar (Divine Consort), Chelva Pillai (*Sampath KuMAran*) (Processional Deity) and *Yatiraja* (Sri Ramanujacharya –*Tamar uganda Tirumeni* (The image that is dear to the devotees).

Salient Aspects of the Place and Temple:

ThiruNarayanapuram is also called *Yadavadri*, *Yadushaila*, and *Melukote*. It is located in the present Mysore/Karnataka district. This small town's hub of activity is its temple. This *Sri Vaishnava abhimAna sthalam* was the place where Ramanuja resided after he and his disciples were exiled from Srirangam by the local fanatical chieftains. Of all of the places where he resided, *ThiruNarayanapuram* was particularly dear to his heart; so much so, that he stated that he would place his very spirit in the processional image that bears an exact likeness to him, and instructed all of his disciples to make an effort to reside here.

ThiruNarayanapuram is a place where people glorify *Sri Ramanuja* as the King of Ascetics, the King of Philosophers, the King the Vedas awaited, and the Father of the divine child *Sampath KumAran* (Chelva Pillai-the dear darling child). Despite its appearance as a sleepy little town, the temple and town is home for many learned *Acharya Purushas* and *Vedic Pandits*.

Sri Vaishnava tradition with Sri Ramanuja as its central focus and most important acharya, explains the important relationship of this Great Soul with his beloved child, Sri Chelva Pillai. It is understood that *Sriman Narayana* is the Only Being in this Universe that is Truly Independent, i.e., His Actions and His Will is not limited by the bounds of karma, as it is with every other soul. But, since His Very Nature is Love and Compassion, He is under the sway of those who love him, and to Great Souls like Sri Ramanuja, He becomes like their own child, much in the same way in which He allowed Himself to become Nandagopa's and Yashoda's Beloved Son, Krishna. Sri Ramanuja is the father to Chelva Pillai, caring for Him, nurturing Him, as well as instructing Him on the merciful attitude He should maintain when He is approached by all souls.

Establishment of the Temple:

The auspicious *Thai Punarvasu* (the Makara month) when Sri Ramanuja found His TiruNarayana from the Hills in Yadavadri is celebrated with much enthusiasm. All the temple festivities to this date are carried out by the local Mahans in the same manner as Sri Ramanuja established more than 900 years ago. In 1098-99 Sri Ramanuja reached this town at the age of 82 and uncovered TiruNarayana who was hidden, buried in the Yadavadri Hills. A temple was built and the Lord worshipped by the *pAncharAtra* tradition. As Sri Ramanuja was in search for a processional deity for the temple festivities, He was instructed by the Lord to go north (Delhi) and bring Him back from the Delhi Sultan's daughter Bibi. Sri Ramanuja resided in Melkote for 12 years, establishing and administering temple worship method according to the Sri Vaishnava tradition.

People:

Many scholars and people from different faiths surrendered to Sri Ramanuja under the Hoysala reign of King Vishnuvardhana. The *Mandyam*, *HebbAr*, *Hemmige*, and *MelnAttar* communities are some of the many Sri Vaishnava groups that have originated from here.

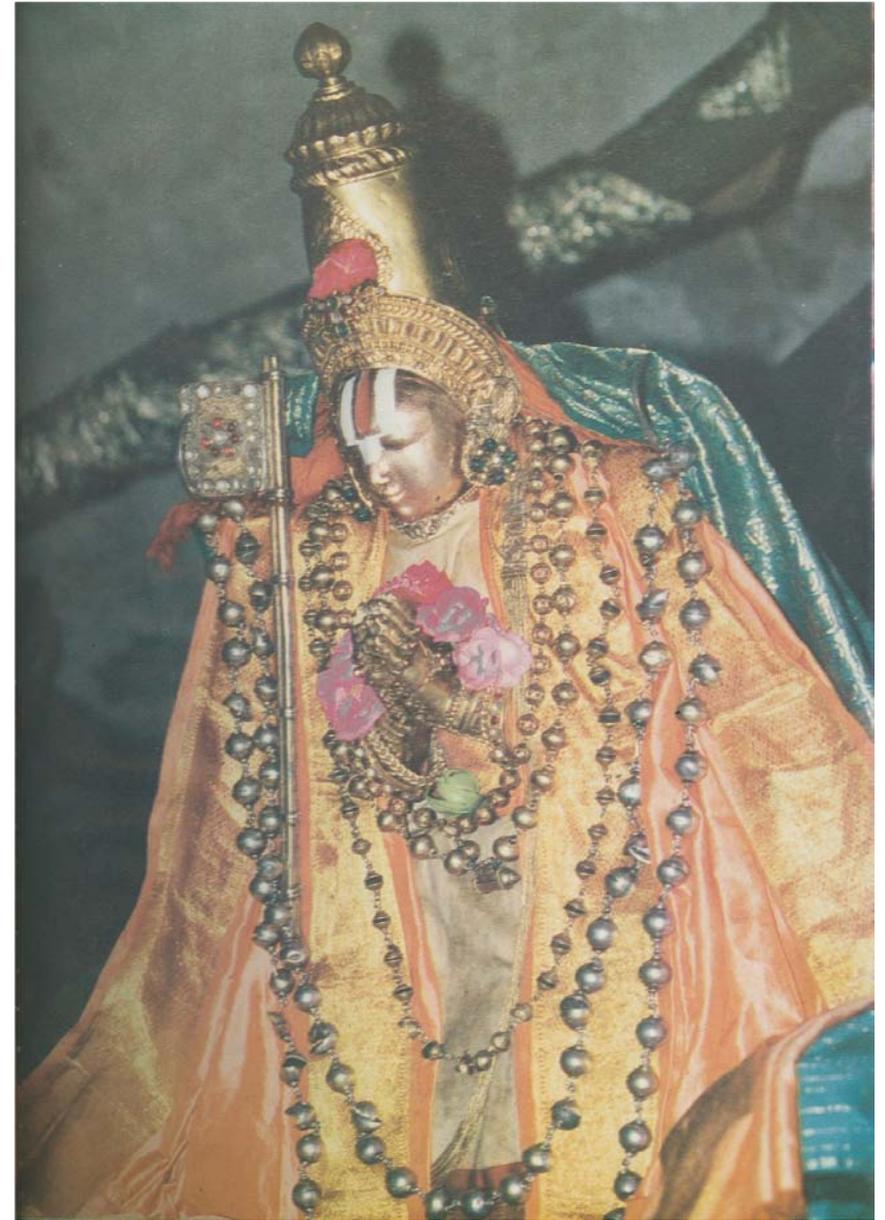
Although their spoken language is the Sanskrit based *Kannada*, more importance is given to the *Dravida Vedas*, the 4000 Divine outpourings of the *Azhvars*, than to the Sanskrit Vedas.

Tradition and Festivals:

In accordance with the Sri Vaishnava tradition where the Acharya is given equal or more importance than the Lord, the bhagavathas of this special divine place give extraordinary importance to Sri Ramanuja and His Darling Child. The daily worship is done first at the shrine of Sri Ramanuja and subsequently to the main presiding deities.

Although there are no *azhvar pasurams* sung in direct reference to *Thirunarayanapuram*, Sri Ramanuja dedicated the 4.1.1 verse of Sri Nammazhvar's *Thiruvaimozhi* to ThiruNarayana.

The two main festivals held at this sacred place are the famous *Vairamudi* festival (The Festival of the Diamond Crown) and Sri Ramanuja Tirunakshattiram (Sri Ramanuja's Appearance Day) festival. The former is held in the Tamil/Solar month *Panguni* on the star *Pushyam* where Chelva Pillai also called Yatiraja Sampath KuMARA majestically adorns



Svami Ramanuja at Melkote

the sparkling, resplendent diamond-studded crown. The latter is held during the month of *Chittirai*, during the *TiruvAdirai* star. Both these are 10-day-long festivals where the town sees tens of thousands of devotees to enjoy the Divine Form of the Lord ThiruNarayana and His Father, Yatiraja Sri Ramanuja.

GREAT SAINTS AND TEACHERS

TA Varadhan

To tell us about the great concern that the Lord has for all of us, our elders liken his uninitiated grace to water (just as water is essential for all life, and just as water brings comfort and coolness to the body, the Lord's grace is essential for everything, and brings comfort and coolness to the soul). They compare Sri Nammazhvar, the leader of all devotees, to the rain bearing clouds that absorb the water, waiting to pour it on the lands where people need water. The mountains gather all the rains produced by the clouds and accumulate it into streams so that the water can reach people wherever they are. *Svami nAthamuni* is that mountain. The streams of water are the two teachers who followed Svami Nathamuni - *uyya-k-koNdAr* and *maNakkAl nambi*. The small streams join together and form a boundless river abundant with the source of life - water. Such a big river is Svami *ALavandar*. The river flows, and the water may not be useful if all the water flows to the ocean. So, we make channels from the river and divert the water to a lake where we can have the water whenever we need it. Such channels are the five teachers who succeeded Svami AlavandhAr. They channeled the teachings and blessings arising from the grace of the Lord, given to them by the clouds that are Svami Nammazhvar, accumulated into streams that are Svami Uyyakondar and Manakkal Nambi by the mountain that is Svami Nathamuni, joined together into an abundant flowing river that is Svami Alavandar, channelized by the five teachers following Svami Alavandar that are

- (i) Svami periya nambi
- (ii) Svami periya thirumalai nambi
- (iii) Svami thiru-k-kOshtiyUr nambi
- (iv) Svami thiru-aranga-p-perumAL arayar and
- (v) Svami thirumAlai ANdAn.

The lake that holds all this water for us is our dear Ramanuja. And the gates that allow the water to reach everyone in the area are the 74 great leaders that Svami Ramanuja appointed for that purpose.

The next three months are very auspicious for us. The next few pages provide a very brief summary about Svami Nammazhvar and Svami Nathamuni, whose appearance days fall in the april-june timeframe. Svami Ramanuja's appearance day also falls in this timeframe, and we have this jumbo issue to provide more material about Him.

Svami Nammazhvar:

It will not be an exaggeration if one said that if Svami Nammazhvar were not there, there would be no way for salvation for us. This Azhvar is called "*prapanna jana kUtasthAr*" - the emperor of all the devotees of the Lord. He is the one who makes us understand the Lord's grace. He is the one who, out of his concern for our welfare, provided the revealed scriptures that are the Nalayira divya prabhandham to Sriman Nathamuni. And, He is the one who shows us the essence of our faith - sing about the great qualities of the Lord, and serve ALL of his devotees.

This Azhvar was born in a place called thiru-k-kurugUr. This is presently called Azhvar thirunagari, and is about 20 kilometers from the town of *Thirunelveli* in deep South of the state of *TamizhAdu*, in South India. He was born to a family of devout devotees of the Lord. It is said that he was born under the blessings of the beautiful Lord at the temple of *thiru-k-kuRungudi*, whose name is Sri Vaishnava Nambi! The parents named their child as "*parAnkuSan*" and "*SaTakOpan*". The child *mARan* was very unique. He did not drink milk, cry or do the things that a child does. So, on the 12th day after his birth, his parents took him to the temple at *Azhvar thirunagari* (where one can worship the beautiful, wonderful Lord - *AdinAthAn* - literally meaning the "source of everything" in tamizh), where the child received the Lord's blessings. The parents also started calling the child as 'mARan' (one who is opposite to others, tamizh word). They also placed the child on a *thottil* (pram) under the sacred tamarind tree in the temple (the tree was none other than the Great Holy snake - *anantAzhvAn*, which is the bed for the Lord when He sleeps, the throne for the Lord when He sits, the umbrella for the Lord when He walks, the footwear for the Lord when He stands, the light on the way wherever the Lord goes, the sacred robes for the Lord, and everything that the Lord needs), and dedicated the child as the property of all, and as the cherished belonging of the whole society. It is said that, at this time, the Lord sent His chief of staff - *sEnai mudhanmaiyAr* (*Sri VisvaksEna*), and performed initiation of the child - by providing the most supreme knowledge necessary for a soul. This is a prime example of the Lord's uninitiated grace. This is why the Azhvares are known as "*mayarou aRa madhi nalam aruLa-p-peRRavargAL*" - the ones who were blessed with unblemished knowledge that they can never tire of, or forget.

The child *mARan* did not speak anything, eat anything, or even move from the place under the holy tree. On his 16th birthday, another great Azhvar - *madhura-kavi-Azhvar* (the Azhvar who sings sweet songs!), came to *mARan*, and in their ensuing conversation, it became apparent

to everyone that the child mARan was a blessed soul, blessed for the purpose of giving all the world the revealed scriptures that the Lord's chief of staff revealed to him. At this time, the Lord, who has out of His own concern for His people made many places on this earth (the holy cities - the divya desams, of which there are 106 on this earth) as His abode in different forms, revealed Himself in all the glory and splendour and beauty in *Each* one of those forms to MARan under the holy tree. The Lord of Srirangam ordained him as "OUR" Azhvar - "nam Azhvar" (The Lord's special "OUR" is visible in the name of the Lord of Srirangam - "nam perumAL" - our perumAL. Then He gave the name "OUR" Azhvar to Nammazhvar. He also gave the "OUR" honour to two other teachers - *nam jlyar* and *nampiLLai*, who adorn the great lineage of teachers described in the Jan 2003 issue). Nammazhvar is the ONLY person to whom the Lord came in ALL his forms from the holy places.

Nammazhvar then took the revealed knowledge that He had been blessed with, and provided it to us in the form of four great prabhandhaas (poem forms in tamil) - Thiruvaimozhi, *thiru-viruththam*, *thiru-Asiriyam* and *periya thiruvandhAdhi*. These four scriptures given to us by the Azhvar are commonly understood to be the essence of the Sanskrit form of the revelations - the four Vedas - namely *sAma vEda*, *rg vEda*, *yajur vEda* and *atharva vEda*. The Azhvar spent all his living days on earth in the thought of the Lord and His qualities. Many devotees gathered around him, and together they celebrated the great qualities of the Lord. To the devotees, Nammazhvar revealed in a verse in Thiruvaymozhi, the fact that the whole world will be saved, and the sins of the world will be demolished, by the birth of a great teacher. This teacher is none other than our dear Ramanuja.

When we go to a Vaishnava temple today, after worship, the priest normally places a conical object on the devotee's head. People generally accept this blessing with great veneration. That is for due reason. This object - called "*SatAri*" or "*Sri SaTakOpan*" - represents Nammazhvar. Just as Nammazhvar spent every moment of his existence under the feet of the Lord, thinking about His qualities and serving Him, the *SatAri* also spends every moment of its time under the feet of the Lord of the temple. The *SatAri* is the representation of none other than Svami Nammazhvar. When our head comes into contact with the *SatAri*, it is believed that we get blessed by this greatest of devotees of the Lord, and the blessing he gives us is basically the good sense of mind so that we can become pure devotees of the Lord.

Svami Nammazhvar was born in the tamizh month of *vaikAsi*, in the star of *visAgam*. It falls on June 12th this year.

Svami Nathamuni:

Svami Nathamuni was born to a family of devout devotees in a place known as "*veera Narayana puram*" (present day *kAttu-mannAr-kOvil*, in tamizhnAdu in South India). There is a great temple at this place, and his father did service at the temple. His father's name was *Isvara bhattAzhvar*. His parents named him as Sri Ranganatha. In due course of time, Sri Nathamuni became accomplished in *yOga*, and became to be known as Sri Ranganathamuni, or Nathamuni.

When he became a middle aged man, he, along with his father (*Isvara bhattAzhvar*) and son (*Isvaramuni*) went to a pilgrimage to North India, and visited Ayodhya, Mathura, *sALagRama* (*muktinAth*, in present day Nepal), and started to live on the banks of *yamuna* in a place called *Sri gOvardhanapura* (present day *gOvardhana*, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, in North India). There, they performed service to the Lord of the temple (*yamunai-th-thuraivan*, the Lord of the banks of *yamuna*). One night, the Lord of their hometown, *kAttumannAr*, appeared in Nathamuni's dream, and called them back to *veera Narayanapuram*. After taking leave from *yamunai-th-thuraivan*, they went back to *veera Narayanapuram*, and resumed their services at the temple.

One day, while Sri Nathamuni was performing service at the temple, a group of devotees came to the temple. They were singing the sweetest songs that he had ever heard. The songs started with the word "*ArAvamudhE*" (tamizh - Oh! the one who is the limitless sweet nectar!), and the songs contained the most delectable meanings. Nathamuni asked the people what they were singing. He listened to the last song which contained the words "*Or AyiraththuL ip-p-paththum*" (tamizh - these 10 among the 1000), and enquired them about the remaining 990 songs. The devotees replied that they knew these 10 songs that were taught to them by their forefathers, and that is all they knew. In the last song, there were also the words "*kurukUr saTakOpan*" (tamizh - *saTakOpan* from *kurukUr*). So, he went to *thiru-k-kurukUr* and enquired. (This is the same town that we saw in the previous pages - *Azhvar thirunagari*, or *thiru-k-kurukUr*, where Nammazhvar was born). A devotee who was the descendant of Svami *madhura-kavi-Azhvar*, named *Sri parAnkusa dAsa*, told Sri Nathamuni that these 10 divine poems were from something called the *thiruvAimozhi*. That, and other divine poems were lost many years ago. All that he could give Sri Nathamuni was 11 poems that formed a collection known as



Svami Nammazhvar at Kanchipuram

“kaNNi-nun-siRu-th-thAmbu”. Sri parAnkusa dAsa also had heard that if one repeated it 12,000 times in front of the image of Nammazhvar, with devotion to Nammazhvar, that person would be blessed by Nammazhvar.

Sri Nathamuni duly did so, and Nammazhvar appeared before him, and enquired what was it that he wanted? Sri Nathamuni expressed his desire to know about thiruvAymozhi and other divine poems. Svami Nammazhvar blessed Sri Nathamuni not only with the thiruvAymozhi, but also with the other divine poems that make up the divine 4000, the three great secret teachings (*rahasya traya*), the meanings of the revelations that form the divine 4000 and the ashtAnga yOga teachings. Sri Nathamuni spent a few years at Azhvar thirunagari, doing service at the temple of Lord AdinAtha, and practicing the teachings that Svami Nammazhvar had taught him.

Again, the Lord of veera Narayanapuram (kAttu mannAr) appeared in his dreams and commanded him to get back to his hometown! {The Lord, it seems, cannot bear to be separated from His devotees!}. After reaching veera Narayanapuram, Sriman Nathamuni took two great disciples - *mElai agaththu Azhvar* (the devotee who lives on the west street house!), and *keezhai agaththu Azhvar* (the devotee who lives on the east street house!), and taught them to method of preaching the divine 4000 with the use of song, music and dance. To this day, this practice continues in many great temples in TamizhAdu. Sri Nathamuni also taught the ashtAnga yOga rahasya to a devotee called thiru-k-kurugai-kAvalappan, and the divine 4000 and its meanings to a teacher called Uyyakondar. He further commanded them to teach these to his grandson - *Sri yAmunAchArya*, another great teacher that adorns our lineage of teachers. Sri Nathamuni lived till the age of 93 on this earth, and went on the abode of the Lord.

His appearance day is the tamizh month of Ani, in the star of anushAm. It falls on July 10, 2003.

Kulasekara Azhvar:

This Azhvar was born to the king of the *chEra* country (the present day state of Kerala, adjacent to tamizhAdu in South India), in a place called “*kolli nagar*”. On seeing the immense beauty and radiance of the child, his father named him “*kulasEkara*” (the one who will be the gem of the lineage). In due time, the young prince learned all methods of war, the duties of being a king and other good deeds. He won other kingdoms in

war, and became a great prince. His father, coronated him as the emperor and went to the forests to pursue spirituality.

King Kulasekara ruled his kingdom in the most appropriate manner. It is said that his rule was so god and just, that people compared it to the rule of Lord Rama in Ayodhya. In due course, the king Kulasekara brought learned people from all over, and enquired about the real truth. Slowly, he learned that the Lord Sriman Narayana is the root cause of everything, and the highest purpose in life is to perform service to Him and His devotees. The Lord also blessed Kulasekara with the knowledge and mindset of being a true devotee. The king Kulasekara visited many holy places, and spent his time listening to the great qualities of the Lord as told by the great epics Ramayana, Mahabharatha and Srimad bhAgavatham. He took special liking to Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, and the Lord of *thiru-viththuva-k-kOdu* (in present day Kerala).

One day, when he was listening to a lecture on Ramayana by a great pandit, the king became very very involved (as usual; it was his normal habit to be so moved by the Lord, as to worry about His well-being, just like another Azhvar - PeriyAzhvar had done). The pandit was narrating the part where the army of demons, on the command of the demoness Surpanaka (whose nose Lakshmana had cut as she was trying to harm Rama and Sita) assembled to fight Rama. There were 14000 demons of the biggest variety, and on this side, there was just Rama and Lakshmana. On hearing this, king Kulasekara immediately got up, and commanded his commander in chiefs to get his army. He was going to go with his army to help Rama fight these 14000 demons! On seeing this, the smart pandit, immediately said "the great Rama, single-handedly defeated the 14000 strong demon army and retired safely to the cottage where sIta was present". Only then did king Kulasekara become calm. From that day onwards, all pandits who were narrating the story of Ramayana to king Kulasekara made it a habit to narrate some things very fast so that king Kulasekara would start with his army to help Rama!

As he was learning and listening to these holy scriptures and concepts, king Kulasekara came to understand the special place that the holy town of SriRangam holds for devotees. He yearned to go there, live there, and perform service the Lord of SriRangam - Lord Ranganatha. It is said that every morning, Kulasekara will start for SriRangam, abandoning his duties as the king. On seeing this, his ministers, and prominent people in his kingdom will bring some devotees to the path in which the king was starting to go. On seeing this, the king would invite the devotees to his palace, and serve them all day (as he had learnt that the greatest duty of

a devotee is to serve other devotees of the Lord, and naturally he had affection for other devotees). This practice continued for years and years.

At his palace, all the devotees had free reign. They could go from any room, and could be present everywhere. On seeing such free reign for the devotees, some of his ministers became jealous, and hatched a plot to make the king hate the devotees. On the appearance day of Rama (Sri Rama Navami), the ministers stole a very valuable necklace on the idol of Lord Rama. When the king looked at the idol, and saw the necklace missing, he asked his ministers where it was. The feigned ignorance, and suggested that it is only the devotees who have free access all over the palace, and that it should be one of them who had stolen the necklace. On hearing this, king Kulasekara asserted that there was no way that the devotees would do such a thing. To prove that, he had his ministers bring him a pot containing a poisonous serpent. The king declared that he will put his hand into the pot, and that if the devotees had stolen the necklace, the serpent would bite him. Miraculously, the serpent did not bite the king, and everyone was convinced that the devotees had not stolen the necklace. On seeing this, the ministers confessed to the king, and apologized for their mistake, and brought the necklace to the king. The king became disgusted with this incident, and generally felt that his duties of being a king were coming in the way of his desire to serve the Lord and His devotees. So, he coronated his son as the emperor, and left on a pilgrimage of holy places, with his final destination being Srirangam. At every holy place he went, he became overcome by the beauty of the Lord at that holy place, and he composed a divine poem compilation called "*perumAL thirumozhi*".

At Srirangam, he performed service at the temple. He built the corridor around the temple that to this day is called "*kulasEkan thiru-suRRu*" (the Kulasekara passage). The first step just outside the sanctum sanctorum in the temple of Lord SrinivAsa in thirumalai is called "*Kulasekara-p-padi*" (the step of Kulasekara). The beautiful stOtra in Sanskrit - *mukunda mAla* (pearl of poems on Lord Mukunda) is also attributed to this Azhvar.

His appearance day is in the tamizh month of mAsi, the star of punarpUsam. It fell on March 13, 2003

MADHURAKAVI AZHVAR

The Saint Who worshipped only His Teacher and not the Lord
Rama Priya Ramanuja Dasyai

The ascent of the star *Chittirai* in the month that is also known as *Chittarai* (which falls between mid-April and mid-May) is the *thirunakshatram* of *Sri Madhurakavi Azhvar*, who is included among the "10+2" Tamizh mystics whose works are contained in the *Nalayira divya prabhandam*. However, unlike the others, who composed dozens of mystical hymns on *Sriman Narayana* and His wondrous qualities, *Madhurakavi Azhvar* composed just 10 pAsurams, and all of them were directed not towards God, but to his *Acharya*, *Nammazhvar*, the most enigmatic but perhaps greatest among all of the 10 Azhvars.

Although hailing from the South, *Madhurakavi* spent a good deal of his life touring the divya dEsams in the Northern parts of India. On one occasion, while he was worshipping *Sri Rama* at *Ayodhya*, he saw a brilliant light just above the southern horizon that seemed to be beckoning back to the Southern India. *MadhUrakavi* followed the light to the small temple town of *ThirukurugUr*. There *Madhurakavi* saw a saintly young man sitting in deep meditation under the shade of a large tree that was contained within the courtyard of the temple. This young man was called by the local townspeople as *MARan*, but he would soon be later known as *SatakOpan* or *Nammazhvar*.

From conversations with local residents, *Madhurakavi* came to understand that this young man had been under the shade of this tree all his life, in deep mystical contemplation of the Divine. He never ate, walked, or slept, or even spoke. It would appear as if he were there waiting for someone who would have the right qualifications, aptitude and attitude to awaken him from his trance such that he could begin to share the secrets of his mystical experience.

Madhurakavi approached *Nammazhvar* respectfully with a complex question that he hoped would be just the right one to awaken the great soul from his trance. He asked, "*sethathin vayaril siriAdhu pirandhAl, yethai thinru, yenge valurum* (if a living being is born into a dead body, what does it eat, and where does it live)?" Hearing this deeply estoteric question, *Nammazhvar* opened his eyes and replied, "*athai thinru, angE valarum* (it lives there, and eats that)".

This simple yet perplexing conversation refers to the nature of the soul, which at birth finds itself in a lifeless thing, the body, which is made of

the same five basic elements (earth, air, water, fire, and ether) that the make up the world that it lives in. For the duration of its life, the soul lives within the body, and partakes of the materials of this world of which its body is made. Consequently, "it lives there and eats that".

Overwhelmed by this simple, succinct response to what had a many-layered question, *Madhurakavi* knew at that moment that he had found his *Acharya*, his True Spiritual Teacher, and a true devotee of *Sriman Narayana*. As what would serve as a paradigm for the egalitarian nature that *Sri Ramanuja* would later propagate, *Madhurakavi* set aside the fact that he was born into a Brahmin community while *Nammazhvar* belonged to the *Sudra* community, and simply and wholeheartedly dedicated himself to learning from and serving him. So much was *Madhurakavi's* devotion to *Nammazhvar*, that he composed a set of 10 pAsurams, which came to be included among the Sacred Collection of 4000, to describe his feelings.

This set of 10 verses is called "*kanninun siruthAmbu*", "the Short-Knotted String, in reference to the short string (which is seen as a metaphor for Pure Divine Love) which *Yashoda* used to capture her playful son, *Sri Krishna*. *Madhurakavi* uses the example of this thread to describe that while it is used by *Nammazhvar* in much the same way to hold *Sri Krishna* in his heart, *Madhurakavi's* short-knotted thread of devotion will be used only towards holding *Sri Nammazhvar*. So, while all of the other *Azhvars'* mystical experiences have the Supreme Lord as the center of devotion, *Madhurakavi's* divine experience places his Teacher alone as the center of everything. *Nammazhvar* is seen by *Madhurakavi* to be the mother, father, friend, teacher, and even God. In one verse, *Madhurakavi* says, "*nAvinAl naviRRu inbam yElthinEn, mEvinnEn, avan ponnadi meymmaiye, devumaRRariyeEn kurugUr nambi, pAvin innisai padith thirivanE*" (My mouth is filled with the nectar of reciting the holy name of my *kurugUr nambi* (the leader of *ThirukurugUr*). I know refuge only at His Divine Feet; I know of no other God. I will spend my days singing the sweet songs that he sings (*Nammazhvar's ThiruvAymozhi*).

Madhurakavi's experience of seeing a devotee of God as being his everything, even being over and above God Himself has been likened to the relationship that *Sri Rama's* youngest brother, *Sathrugna*, the twin brother of *Lakshmana*, shared with *Bharata*. For while *Lakshmana* became a virtual shadow and servant to God incarnate *Sri Rama*, *Sathrugna* found his purpose in serving the *Sri Rama's* brother and regent, *Sri Bharata*.

This experience also serves as the precedent for the concept of "*AchArya abhimAnam*", reverence and service to the *AchArya*. It is this relationship

that is of utmost importance in *Sri Vaishnava* practice, as it is only through our teacher alone that we share the connection to *Ramanuja* and to *Sriman Narayana*. So, while it may be difficult to experience God directly as we are unable to fully know Him, the AchArya is in and of himself the very personification of the Lord's Mercy and Compassion, always available to provide us with his care, solace, and guidance. So service to the AchArya becomes more important than serving the Lord Himself, and in a sense, becomes our only means to God-realization.

THE NATURE OF SOUL

As taught by Nammazhvar, Alavandar and Ramanuja

Dr M Rangachari

There are systems of philosophy which center on the notion that an individual treat his/her body, all the things that he/she experiences, including material things like mountains, seas, rivers, trees, structures, etc., which is known as *prakriti* in Sanskrit; as well as the people in his/her life - friends, relatives, co-workers - indeed all of the myriad of people that he/she interacts with, as being false, a mere mirage. Such a view is intended to show the lack of permanency of these entities. These systems go one step further in suggesting that the emotions, joy, sorrow, fear, hope, that are created for the individual during his/her interaction with all of these through his/her senses, are to be taken as illusory, as well. Needless to say, such an approach gives great discomfort to all of us, as it requires great psychological and emotional effort to be able to disregard all that we have come to know and cherish.

This discomfort is further compounded by the notion in these philosophies that the individual strive to see that his/her soul (*Atma*), which he/she can neither see nor experience, as the only true entity, and that this same *Atma* should be seen as being the same one that encompasses all other living beings as the *Paramatma* (*Supreme Soul or Reality*) All this is forced on the system with a requirement to literally interpret only two vedic aphorisms: '*aham brahmAsmi*' (I am the Supreme Soul), and '*tat tvam asi*' (That thou art).

Needless to say, this position and the personal discipline that is required to maintain it would be contradistinctive to our very nature, and indeed, in practical application, would prove to be futile.

Contrary to this approach, however, the philosophy advocated by the

Azhvars, whose revelations have been verified by our *Acharyas* to be a pure and complete reflection of what is contained in Vedic thought, do not at all convey the idea of an illusory *prakriti*. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the *Tamizh* word for body is "*mei*", which is also a synonym for the word truth. Because of this, Thirumoolar, a *Tamizh* Saivite philosopher, had to borrow a Sanskrit word: "*kAyam*", for body, when he said "*kAyamE idhu poyyada*" (This body is impermanent), since "*meyyidu poyyada*" (Truth is impermanent) would be an oxymoron.

The *Azhvars* considered *prakriti*, of which the body is made, as real. They also adhered to the theory that the soul, called "*uyir*" in *Tamizh*, and "*Atma*" in Sanskrit, is just as real. What differentiated *Atma* from *prakriti* is that while the body is wears with time, the *Atma*, the soul, does not perish, as *Bhagavan Sri Krishna* says in *Sri mad Bhagavad Gita* (2-24):

*"achchEdhyOyam adAhyOyam aklEdhyO ashOshya Eva cha |
nithya: sarvagatha: sthANu: achalOyam sanAthana: | |"*

{It cannot be cleft; It cannot be burnt; It cannot be wetted and it cannot be dried. It is eternal, all-pervading, stable, immovable and primeval.}

Svami *Nammazhvar* expands upon this in *thiruvAymozhi* 5.1.6:

"puRam aRa katti-k-koNdu iruvalvinayAr kumaikkum muRai muRai Akkai pugal"

{The soul enters again and again and decays in the material body which is the place in which the two things, *puNya* and *pApa* embrace completely}

From this, we learn that the soul is provided with a new body in each birth, based on the complex array of *puNyam* (good deeds) and *pApam* (sins) that it has accrued in previous lives. The *Azhvars* go one step further in suggesting that the Lord will cut this cycle of births thorough His own efforts, as Svami *Nammazhvar* says in *ThiruvAymozhi* 9.3.8:

"inRi-p-pOga iruvinayum keduththu, onRi Akkai pugAmai uyya-k-koLvAN"
(The Lord, who destroys the two types of karmAs - *puNya* and *pApa* such that the soul does not enter a body again).

Thus, the *Azhvars* consider both the body and the soul of an individual to be maintained by the Lord. This point is taken one step further in the *Azhvars'* hymns to show that in actuality, God is intimately connected to both of these, just as the soul is to the body. An example of where this concept is brought out is *Nammazhvar's ThiruvAymozhi* 10.7.8:

"thirumAlirun sOlai malaiyE thiru-p-pArkadalE en thalaiyE
thirumAL vaikundhamE thaN thiruvEngadamE enadhu udalE
arumAmAyaththu enadhu uyirE manamE vAkkE karumamE
oru mA nodiyum piriyan en oozhi mudhalvan oruvanE"

(The Lord, who is the source of everything, does not separate even for a microsecond from my head (as He does not separate Himself from the holy temples at *thirumAlirun sOlai* and *thiru-p-pArkadal*); He does not separate from my body (just as he does not separate from *Sri vaikuNTam* and *Thirumalai*); He does not separate from my AtmA (which is now joined with the prakriti that is so difficult to cross), nor my mind, nor my speech, nor any one of my actions)

What sets apart the Azhvans hymns from other philosophies is the understanding that both the soul and the body belong to the Lord, and hence their reality as independent entities, as well as their connection to each other cannot be regarded as being temporal or illusory.

As to the nature of the soul itself, most philosophical systems begin with the recognition of its immortality, and its qualities of having true knowledge (*jnAnam*) and bliss (*Anandam*). But the other schools fail to clearly describe what *jnAnam* is, and why there is an *Anandam* associated with a the soul in its true nature. The *Azhvans* provide an added explanation that in addition to these capabilities, the soul has as its inherent nature *sEshatvam* or *adimai* as it is known in *Tamizh*, servitude towards the Lord. Since He never leaves the soul, the soul's knowledge and bliss rest in its eternal relationship as *sEshatvam* to the Lord. This is made clear through such words as "*adiyen uLLAn udal uLLAn*" (*thiruvAymozhi* 8-8-2, He is present inside *adiyen* (the soul that serves); He is present inside the body). The presence of the second word *udal uLLAn* in the above phrase shows that *adiyen uLLAn* applies to the soul and indicates its quality of being capable of *sEshatva*. Consequently, the essential nature of the soul, for which it applies its knowledge and from which it derives bliss, and for which the body is provided as an instrument for its use, is in being a humble servant to the Lord, ready and willing to do His bidding for His Pleasure.

The lineage of teachers of the Ramanuja tradition, having immersed themselves in the Azhvans' mystical experience, drew from and elaborated upon this lucid view on the nature of the soul and body, and as a result, created a synthesized and non-contradictory understanding of these profound concepts.

One of these *AchAryas*, *Sri YAmunAchArya*, known as *Alavandar* in *Tamizh*, revealed the his connection to the *Azhvans* in his great Sanskrit

work, *stOtraratra*, the Hymn Jewel, which is regarded as the primary work of study and recitation for followers of Ramanuja. While he elaborated upon the nature of the soul as being separate from the body and mind in the *SiddhitrAya*, his *stOtraratra* seems to be reserved for an almost direct translation of the concepts of *sEshatvam* from the *Azhvar prabhandham*, for the benefit of those were not exposed to these beautiful and practical ideas found in the *Tamizh* works, because of their notion that Sanskrit was the language that could be used to validate scriptural text. For example, in the *sLOka*:

"na dEham na praNAN na cha sukham asEshAbhilashitam, na cha AtmAnam
nAnyat kimapi tava sEshatva vibhavaAt | bahirbUtham nAtha kshaNam api
sahE yA tu sathadhA, vinAsam tat satyam madhu madhana vignyApanam
idam | |" yAmunAchArya asserts *tat satyam!* (This is the truth!), his body and mind and soul will shatter into hundreds of pieces if he ever desired non-servitude (*asEsha abhilashitham*).

The message of the Azhvans was communicated to *yAmunAchArya* through the disciples of *Sriman Nathamuni* (his grandfather) who was attracted by the ten specific verses of *Nammazhvar's thiruvAymozhi*, beginning with "*AravamudhE*". These 10 *pAsurams* provide virtually entire philosophy of Sri Vaishnavam in a nutshell, which was later preached by *yAmunAchArya* and later *AchAryAs*. One of the *pAsurams* has the phrase, "*piriyA adimai ennai koNdAi*" (*thiruvAymozhi* 5-8-7; Oh the Lord who took me in complete, uninterrupted, unseparated servitude).

Since the greatness of Sri Vaishnavism rests on the fact that every *AchArya* throughout history did not contradict the *AchAryas* that preceded him, it would be safe to assume that *Sri Ramanuja* wanted the *seshatvam* as the essential quality of the soul to be confirmed by *yAmunAchArya* before bringing them out directly in his works. Sadly, however, *Sri Yamunacharya* would leave this world a short time before *Sri Ramanuja* would ever have the opportunity to meet him. However, it would also be safe to presume that given his level of erudition, *Sri Ramanuja* would have easily drawn these concepts from *stOtraratra*.

In an effort to confirm the concept of *sEshatvam*, however, *Sri Ramanuja* sent his scribe, closest disciple and friend, *Sri kUrattAzhvAn* to the renowned *thiru-k-kOshtiyUr nambi*, a direct disciple of *Svami Alavandar*, whom *Sri Ramanuja* knew would provide the confirmation that he needed. After serving this great soul, *KUrattAzhvAn* was blessed to receive only one phrase "*adiyen uLLAn udal uLLAn*" (see above). *KUrattAzhvAn* realized that this one quote summed up the notion that

seshatva of the soul to the Lord is indicated as an extension to knowledge and enjoyment as part of the soul's essential nature. The use of "adiyEn uLLAn" (He is inside this one who serves Him) instead of "en-uLLAn" (He is inside me) further clarified the aspect.

This confirmation allowed Sri Ramanuja, or *emperumAnar* as he is reverently called in view of his concern for the common man, to bring out this aspect of the soul in his *gIta bhAshya*. In his commentary on the sLOka:

“chaturvidha BhajanthE mAm janA: sukruthinOrjunA |
ArthO jignAsu: arthArthI jnAni bharatharShabha | |”
{Four types of men of good deeds worship Me, O, Arjuna. These are the distressed, the seekers after knowledge, the wealth-seekers and the men of knowledge}.

In his explanation of each of the above categories, for the category of men of knowledge(jnAni), Ramanuja uses the following states, "*bhagavat sEshataikarasa Atma svarUpa vit*" (one who has realized that only the taste of servitude (sEshataikarasa) to the Lord is his nature)

This aspect was elaborated further by *Sri Ramanuja's* immediate successor, *Sri parAsara bhattar* in his paradigmatic *ashtasLOki*, which was the first work in Sanskrit to expose the ideas of the *Azhvars* in interpreting the three sacred mantras. AcharyAs later to him such as *Sri Nanjlyar*, *Sri Nampillai* and *Sri Pillai LOkAchArya* have brought out this aspect of seshatva of the soul more explicitly and forcefully.

Knowledge is required to realize the need for deliverance. Enjoyment is realized by the state which the soul attains when it achieves after moksha is granted by the Lord out of His Boundless and Unconditional Grace. Complete servitude, or seshatva is relevant for the soul all the time. An individual should strive to be bereft of even traces of ahamkAra (ego) and the mamakAra (possesiveness), which the *Azhvars* insist impede the soul from truly experience the Lord.

Thirumangai Azhvar states this beautifully in *periya thirumozhi 2.1-2* "*ugandavai tammai maNmisai mEvi AdkoNdu pOi visumbEra vaikkum endhai*"- My Master Who goes to earth, gets servitude of those whom He desires and goes along with them raising them to His abode.

Through the years of the development of *Sri Vaishnava*, the nature of the soul as being a humble receptacle to the Lord's Grace and instrument to His Good, has remained a constant thread, from the earliest expressions

of the *Azhvars*, to the ten *pasurams* discovered by *Nathamunigal*, to *Alavandar's stOtraratanam*, to *Sri Ramanuja* in his *Bhagavad Gita BhAshya*, and to the present day. It behooves us as devotees of *Ramanuja* to pray that we will be blessed to be freed from the bondage of our own false egos, such that we too can revel in the bliss of our true nature as *ThirumAl adimai*, loving servants to the Supreme Lord.

DIVINE PLACES – TIRUMALA

Napinnai NC

Presiding Deity:

Srinivasa, also known by names *Venkateshwara*, *Balaji*, Lord of Seven Hills (seven hills represent the body of the *AdisEsha* and the seven peaks being his seven hoods) - is in the standing posture facing East. The lower right hand of the idol is in *abhaya hasta* pose, pointing to His lotus feet as the only refuge to the devotees, and the lower left hand is in *kaTi hasta* (resting on His thigh), and showing that the ocean of birth and death (*samsArasAgara*) is only knee deep for those who have sought His feet. The procession deity is called *kalyANa Venkateshwara* and *MalAyappar*. The Lord bears *Sri Mahalakshmi* on His right chest and *Sri Padmavati* on left chest. There is no separate shrine for the Divine Consort on the hills.

Temple Legend:

According to the legend, Lord *Vishnu* (The Pervader of the Universe, *Sriman Narayana*) came down to earth in search of His Eternal Consort, *Sri Mahalakshmi*. *Tirumala* was originally the place of *Adi Varaha Svami* (the fourth of the ten major incarnations of the Lord) and the Lord settled here by entering an ant hill under the tamarind tree, situated on the southern bank of *Svami puShkariNi* (The Temple Tank), on the auspicious day under the star *ShravaNa (tiruvONam)* with the permission of *Varaha Svami*. References to *Venakatachalam*, as it is also known, are found in several *PurAnas*. To mark this occasion, *Brahma* celebrated a nine-day festival every year and hence the festival later came to be known as *brahmOtsavam*.

Salient Aspects:

vimAnam (the name of the tower above the presiding deity's sanctum): *Ananda vimAna nilayam*
thirtham (the name of the holy tank whose water is used for various purposes in the temple): *AkASa ganga*. There are several *thirthams* and the

most sacred one is *Svami puShkariNi*, where people immerse themselves before entering the temple.

Tirumala is called flower (*puShpa*) house (*maNdapa*) as it houses Indian Nedler (*bakulah/magizham*), Bignonia (*patala*), Alexandrian Laurel (*punnaga/punnai*), Champak (*champakah/shenbagam*) and other flower bearing fragrant trees. The shrine has three enclosures (*prakArams*) and the flag pole (*dwajastambha*) is in the outermost one. There are several shrines in these *prakArams* and many *mandapams*.

Divine Outpourings on the Lord:

Tirumala Hills is the second holy place that has been sung by 9 *Azhvars* and *Andal* (the exceptions are *Thondaradipodi Azhvar* and *Madhurakavi Azhvar*) with a total of 202 verses. *Sri Ramanuja* extols this Lord in the form of a prayer for the successful completion of the commentary on Vedanta Sutras in his *Sri bhAShya*. The glorious and magnificent *Sri Venkatesha Suprabhatam* was composed by *Sri Prativadi Bhayankaram Anna*, one of the eight disciples of *Srimanavala Mamunigal*. *Sri Annamayya*, senior and contemporary of *Sri Purandara Vittala*, has composed many songs (*krti*) praising Lord *Srinivasa*.

Great Teachers and Saints:

Thirumalai Nambi (maternal uncle and one of the five Acharyas of *Sri Ramanuja*) lived here by performing *tlrtha* services to the Lord and was the first resident of *Tirumala*. He taught *Sri Ramanuja*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* from the perspective of *Visistadvaita*. *Sri Ramanuja* visited this shrine and systematized the temple worship. *Sri Manavala Mamunigal* had also visited this shrine many times. Some important shrines and statues are listed below -

- (i) Sri Varadaraja Svami
- (ii) Sri varaha Svami
- (iii) Sri yoga narasimha Svami
- (iv) Sri Ranganatha
- (v) Sri Garuda (*anjali* pose with his wings spread ready to fly)
- (vi) Sri Anchaneya Svami
- (vii) Sri Vakula devi
- (viii) Sri Vishvaksena
- (ix) Sri Ramanuja (right & left hand in *vyAkhyAna* & *varada* pose)
- (x) Krishna devaraya
- (xi) door-keepers (*dwArapAlakAs* - *Jaya* and *Vijaya*)

Other Important Facts:

- (i) *Nam Perumal* (Lord *Ranganatha* of *Srirangam*) sojourned here when *Malik Kafur* attacked *Srirangam* temple.
- (ii) *Sri Ramanuja* was the back bone to retain *Tirumala* as *Sri Vaishnava* temple. *Tondaiman* was a great devotee of the Lord and it is recorded in inscriptions that he built the *temple*, *mandapams*, *gopurams* and many others. Also Kings of *Pallava*, *Chola*, *Pandya* and *Vijayanagar* made rich offerings (gold, diamond, gems) to the temple.
- (iii) *Thirumalai AnantAzhvAn*, a disciple of *Sri Ramanuja*, was ordained by the *AchArya* to do flower service to the Lord. As a part of garden maintenance, *Sri AnantAzhvAn* (assisted by his pregnant wife) was digging a field. The Lord observed that his wife was getting very tired, so He came in the form of a young man, offering to help her. *Sri AnantAzhvAn* did not like any intrusion and so he hit the Lord on His chin with his spade. The lad disappeared. Later, when *Sri AnantAzhvAn* went into the temple, he found that His chin was bleeding. He asked for Lord's forgiveness and applied camphor balm (*paccai kaRpUram*) and the Lord ever sports it in remembrance of *Sri AnantAzhvAn*.
- (iv) *Sri Adivan Satakopa Yatindra MahadEsika Jeeyar* (first pontiff of *Ahobila mutt*) constructed the first steps to *Tirumala* in the 13th century.
- (v) The *brahmOtsavam* is celebrated on a grand scale for nine days in September, attracting pilgrims from all over the world. The most significant festivals are *garudOtsavam* and *rathOtsavam*. The daily worship starts at 3.am with *Suprabhata* seva (awakening the Lord) and closes at 1.am with *EkAnta* seva (putting the Lord to sleep).
- (vi) This is the world's richest temple with annual income crossing over 300 crores. On ordinary days, the Lord wears gold crown and on special occasions diamond crown. The golden dhoti (*pItAmbaram*) is the heaviest of all His costumes, weighing about 40kg.

How to get there:

Tirumala hills (roughly 2800 ft above the sea level, 100 sq miles in area) are 18 kilometers northwest of *Tirupati*, situated in *Chitoor* district of *Andra Pradesh*. Bus services from *Tirupati* to *Tirumala* are very frequent (every two minutes) and affordable. *Tirupati* is well connected by railways, road and air. *Tirupati* is 10 kilometers from *Renigunta* Railway station and about 150 kilometres (via *Kalahasti*) from *Chennai*.

Q & A: CASTE SYSTEM

Mukundan Pattangi

The truth about *Varna* (Occupation) and *JAti* (Caste)

Question: What is VEDICS view on Caste system? Is it true that the Vedic religion divides people based on birth?

Answer: Popular misconceptions say that the Vedic religion encourages division of human beings based on one's birth. As a result, some people have been kept backward and uneducated while others have abused this misconceptions and misinformation for personal gains. Much of this misconception can be attributed to the use of the words 'Varna' and 'JAti' interchangeably. A closer analysis will reveal just how wrong these misconceptions are.

Question: What is *Varna*?

Answer: The root word for *Varna* is 'Vri' which means one's occupation. The *Varna* system was hence originally based on division of labor. Those whose duties were to protect the men, animals and properties were called as 'Kshatriyas', the warriors. Those who had skills in teaching and scholarly thought were 'Brahmins' and so on.

The *Varna* system was solely based on the attitude of an individual and his/her propensity for performing certain duties. The source of these identified in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita as being the gunas, or inner qualities, that were the result of the karmas of each individual from previous lives. Those who had more of *Sattva guna* were Brahmins, those who had *Rajasic Guna* were *Kshatriyas* and so on.

Question: Is that just your opinion or there is any proof for this?

Answer: To quote from Lord Krishna's words in Chapter 4, Verse 13 of *Sri mad Bhagavad Gita*:

*catur-varnyam maya srstam guna-karma-vibhagasah
tasya kartaram api mam viddhy akartaram avyayam*

The Lord says that according to the three modes of material nature and the work associated with them, He created the four divisions of human society.

Question: Are there any examples of great scholars who were not born in Brahmin families?

Answer: We have instances from *purAnas* of many who were not born from *Brahmin* parents actually teaching Brahmins and Kshatriyas. For example, Sri Vedavyasa was the one who actually compiled 4 Vedas. But he was not born to *Brahmin* parents

At first, the people had more or less a right to choose over their *Varna* based on their *karmas* and their interests. However, over time, fathers began to expect their sons to take over the duties of their specific calling. Due to the continual aspect of the son taking over father's duties in the society, the 'work associated' became a matter of birth and in later days, became identified as a birth right.

Question: And what is *jAti*?

Answer: The root for *jAti* is 'jan', which means birth. It might have happened that due to a continual devolution of one's father's duty to his son over many years, *Varna* became confused with *jAti* and we know where we are now.

Instead of having four divisions of labors, we now have several dozen *jAtis*, each competing with one another for special rights, and each blaming the other for the problems of society. So, even though two *jAtis* may actually belong to one *varna*, they may see each other as being two different castes. It is this which has led to the degradation of the *varna* system and a general disrespect for the Vedas.

While it may not be possible to move completely away from the equating of *varna* and *jAti*, we must recognize that when our *pUrvacharyas* referred to *Varna*, they literally meant two things:

1. One's attitude (*Sattvic, Rajasic* and *Tamasa Gunas*)
2. The duties the individual held in the society.

What is important to recognize that, in line with Vedic teachings, our *pUrvacharyas* refused to acknowledge one *Varna* as being greater than another, or one being lower than another. All people, irrespective of their *Varna* are equal in their ability to do Good for this world, and in their ability to obtain salvation through surrender to the Lotus Feet of *Sriman Narayana*.

In many of the *Sri Vaishnava* works such as *Sri Vachana Bhushanam*, it is clearly emphasized that a *Sri Vaishnava*, irrespective of race, caste, or gender should be revered and respected as '*ThirumAl adiyAr*' (a servant of the Lord of *Lakshmi*)

Consequently, while we must respect and perform the duties and obligations of our specific *varna*, we must not divide ourselves by *jAti*. We are all one family bound together by *Sriman Narayana* and His Unconditional Love for each and every one of us.

Question: In recent years are there examples of Non-Brahmin born Scholars who in turn had Brahmin born students? (Your previous example of Veda Vyasa is very old, thousands of years ago)

Answer: 4000 Years ago: *Swami Satagopan (Nammazhvar)* was born into a family belonging to 4th *Varna, Sudra*. Despite this, he is regarded to be the greatest among the 10 *Azhvars* and is also the most important *AchArya* of our lineage of teachers, who revealed the essence of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* to all of us.

Most of the *Azhvars* (Approx dates: 10000 BC to 600 AD) are not born in *Brahmin* families, but we keep their idols in the temple and homes and worship them. This clearly shows that in *Sri Vaishnava* tradition, caste is irrelevant; being a devotee of the Lord is what matters. (Any living being is equally qualified to be His devotee)

Question: Are there any examples in the last few hundred years?

Answer: Yes, there are many examples in *Sri Vaishnava Acharyas*. The noted scholar *Sri Pillailokacharya* lived in *Srirangam* throughout his life and was a strong believer, preacher & propagator in equality of various *varnas* in the eyes of God. One of his foremost disciples was a *Harijan*, called *vilAncolaippiLLai*, who became very learned and, in his turn, had many *Brahmins* as his disciples. In the eyes of the Lord all are same and everyone has been given this blessed birth. This is an opportunity to fall in love with God, and realize our true purpose of life, irrespective of race, caste, or gender.

MORAL STORY

Mukundan Pattangi

The Four Wives

A rich merchant lived his entire life with four wives. The merchant was a good man, and although he did his best to take care of all four of his wives, his level of affection for each wife was different. For the first wife, who was his favorite, the merchant expressed his love by adorning her with fine clothing and treating her to exquisite delicacies. He took great care of her and gave her nothing but the best.

While his first wife remained his favorite, the merchant was also very much in love with his second wife. So much so, in fact that the merchant lived in constant fear that someone was going to steal her away. So, he made sure to guard her. But, since he was so proud of the fact that she was his, he would take every opportunity to show her off to his friends. The merchant felt a great deal of trust and confidence in his third wife, as she was very considerate and patient. So, the merchant chose her to be his confidante. Whenever there was a problem, the merchant would turn to her. And in return, this wife would always be there to help him and support him, even in the most difficult of times.

Now, as to the fourth wife, the merchant hardly took any notice at all. While she was loyal and loved him dearly, she was silent and humble when compared to the other three.

At the end of a long and successful life, the merchant, knowing that his death was fast approaching, contemplated on his life. He thought to himself, "I have lived virtually my entire life under the care of four wives. How can I go into the Great Beyond on my own? I will be so lonely. I know, perhaps I can take my wives with me. I will ask them."

So, the merchant called all of his wives to his bedside. He said to his first wife, "I loved you most, took great care of you, and showered you with jewels, clothing, and rich foods. Now that I'm dying, will you follow me and keep me company?" "No way!" the first wife replied. The words hit the merchant like a sharp knife.

The merchant then spoke to his second wife, "I have loved you so much all my life. You have been my pride and joy, and I have felt pained just at the very thought of ever losing you. Won't you stay with me in this journey into the afterlife?" "No!" the second wife replied without even a hint of compassion in her voice, "My life is far too good to give up now."

In fact, I was even thinking about re-marrying when you die." At this, the merchant's heart sank.

But, not willing to give up, the merchant turned to his third wife and said, "I always turned to you for help and you've always been there for me. Now I need your help again. When I die, will you follow me and keep me company?" The third wife had a little more compassion than the other two, but she too did not wish to join. "I am sorry, My Dear", she said, "the best I can do to help you is to arrange for a proper burial." The pain that the merchant now felt was far too much to bear, and merchant cried in disillusionment.

But, then, the merchant heard a soft, affectionate, voice calling out, "Do not fear, My Love. I am here with you now, and will be with you wherever you are, forever." The man turned in the direction of the voice and saw his fourth wife, the one whom he had hardly noticed, and the one whom he hardly cared for or about, the one who now appeared before him, pale and exhausted after years of being completely ignored. Realizing his great mistake, the man embraced the fourth wife and said, "My Wife, you are with me? After all these years of caring for you the least, after all these years of wasting away all my love on the others, you are here? Dear God, why was I not wiser in the past, why did I not take care of this woman the way I should have? And why should I only know now, when it is far too late, how precious she truly is?"

The Moral of the Story

The merchant represents each and every one of us.

The first wife is our body, which we pamper and shower with whatever it desires. But, despite our utmost love for it, we cannot take it with us when we leave this world. The second wife is our wealth and material possessions, which go to someone else when we die. The third wife represents all our family and friends. While they can provide us with all the support and help that we need while we are in this life, they can do nothing for us when we leave this world. The fourth wife is our soul, the only thing that is with us eternally, in this life, the next life, or the Great Beyond.

Let us not end our lives like the merchant, realizing only too late that he had been ignoring his soul while wasting his life away on things that are only temporary. Caring for and nurturing the spirit should begin now, at this moment, not at the end of our lives. For this is Life's True Purpose.

THE GREAT CONVERSATION

Sri P B Rajahamsam Svami

Among the *Acharyas* that form the succession of teachers that followed and preceded Bhagavad Sri Ramanuja, the one listed as his immediate successor is the noble Sri ParAsara Bhattar, whose holy appearance day takes place on the ascendance of the star *anusha* in the month on Ani (this year, this appearance day will be taking place on June 13, 2003). Sri Bhattar Svami was one of two twin sons of Sri Ramanuja's scribe and closest disciple, Sri KurattAzhvAn, and his wife, AndAl AmmAl. It is believed that the birth of these boys was due directly to the blessings of Sri Ranganatha, since their birth came about only after the couple had received and partaken of the Lord's evening *prasadam*, which is known as *aravaNai prasAdam*.

Even from an early age, the two boys were afforded high status among the community of devotees. So much so, that they were treated as the adopted sons of Sri Ranganatha and Sri RanganAyaki Themselves. Under the orders of the Divine Couple, the boys were brought to the sanctum sanctorum every evening, and placed in *thuli* (a cradle that is made by tying a sari to two pillars to form a cradle), such that they could be gently lulled to sleep under the watchful eye of Their Eternal Parents.

When Sri KurattAzhvAn left this world, Sri Parasara Bhattar inherited the title of *Sri RangEsa purOhitha*, chief priest to Sri Ranganatha Himself (a title that has continued to be passed down through the descendants of Sri Parasara Bhattar to this very day), and it is through these mystical connections to the Lord, in which he served them as a son would his own parents, that Sri Parasara Bhattar Svami brought out the beauty of the Lord and Srirangam, and His Eternal Consort, Sri RanganAyaki, through his profound philosophical and devotional works.

Among the many works of Sri Parasara Bhattar, the following stand out as being the most well known:

- (i) *Bhagavad guNa DarpaNam* - literally, "the mirror that shows the qualities of the Lord". This is a commentary on Sri Vishnu Sahasranamam.
- (ii) *aShta sLOki* (the eight verse sLOka) - concise exposition on the meanings of the three great mantras
- (iii) Sri Ranganatha stotram - a sanskrit work consisting of the glories of the Lord of Srirangam

(iv) *Sri Ranga rAja sthavam* - a sanskrit work that wonderfully describes Srirangam, the Lord of Srirangam - *nam perumaL* (Our Lord!), His qualities, and the wonderful philosophy of Ramanuja and the Azhvans

(v) *Sri guNa ratna kOsham* (a compendium of the qualities of the Divine Consort) - a Sanskrit work that enunciates the great qualities of Sri - Lakshmi.

(vi) Various *thirumanjana kattiyams* - these are extemporaneous compilations composed during the Divine bathing ceremony (*thirumanjanam* - in tamizh, literally the Holy Bath) for the Lord of Srirangam. Usually these compositions describe the infinite beauty of the Lord and His countless auspicious qualities.

The *kattiyams* stand over and above these works because of their soul-stirring poetry in describing the beauty of *Sriman Narayana*. It is said that while Sri Namperumal is generally very restless, racing about His Temple town and nearby communities to see His people, even He cannot resist the opportunity to enjoy the poetry of Sri Parasara Bhattar's extemporaneous hymns that are dedicated to Him, and thus, stands perfectly still when they are recited. To this day, the descendants of Sri Parasara Bhattar are given sole right to chanting the *kattiyams* that he composed to Sri Namperumal Himself, between the time that the Lord is bathed using water from small pots (*vattil thirumanjanam* in tamizh) and the time that He receives His conclusionary bathing in water from a sieve containing that produces a shower of 1000 streams, known in Sanskrit as *sahasrArtha thirumanjanam*.

The significance of the sacred bathing ceremony is that is used by the Lord as a *vyAjam* (a pretext) to bring His Grace to all devotees. The vestments that the Lord is bathed in are drenched by the waters that are purified by the recitation of sacred hymns and by the touch of the Namperumal's *thirumEni* (sacred body). This sacred water, *thirtham*, is distributed to the devotees by directly squeezing it from the vestment into the devotee's impatient hands. This water removes the sins of the devotees that have accrued since time immemorial. Thus, at that moment, the devoted become direct receptacles to Sriman Narayana's Grace. The Lord, His *abhaya hastham* (the right hand that is the refuge that removes fear from the devotees) and all of His divine presences is for the good of the individual soul, He assures the *jIva* that He is the refuge and the redemption. The Supreme Lord has nothing to achieve for Himself by His own Self. His existence is only to protect his devotees - the divine form, divine weapons, divine abode - are all only for the benefit of the individual souls.

It is little wonder, then, how upon seeing this beautiful scene, the Handsome Lord in this very mood of Mercy and Grace, surrounded by his devotees took Sri Bhattar Svami to states of spiritual joy such the would sing out with the poetic Sanskrit praises (known as *kavi* in Sanskrit). Indeed, this occurred on several occasions, and led to the creation of 27 *thirumanjana kattiyams*. Over time, the *kattiyams* were incorporated into the *thirumanjanam* ceremonies, with specific *kattiyams* assigned to specific holy days when appropriate.

Each *kattiyam* begins with a Sanskrit *sLOka*, then a brief introduction (*avathArikai*) about the *kattiyam* is presented; after that *Bhattar* describes the Lord in his *kattiyam* by quoting verses from the *Sruthis*, the *divya prabhandham* and the *stOtrAs* of great teachers. What is most amazing to observe is that despite their having been composed extemporaneously, Sri Parasara Bhattar was easily able to validate each and every *kattiyam* with the appropriate *praamaNam* (scriptural evidence).

While virtually a lifetime of study could be devoted to the subtleties of the *kattiyams* and their descriptions of *Sriman Narayana*, this article is intended to offer just a taste of the full range of wisdom and poetry that is contained in what followers of Sri Ramanuja consider to be one of the most significant *kattiyams*, "*Tvam mE, aham mE*" (You belong to me, I belong to myself). The full *kattiyam* is as follows:

*Tvam mE aham mE kuthasthath, thadApi kutaha idam vEdamUla pRamaNath.
yEthatcha anAdi sidhdhAth anubhava vibhavath sOpi sAkrOsha Eva,
kvAkrOsha kasya gItAdishu mama viditha kOtra sAkshi sudhI syAth hantha
toad pakshapAdi cha ithi nrukalahE mrugyamadhyasthavat tvam.*

The origin of this *kattiyam* takes us to Sri Parasara Bhattar's feeling on one occasion that Namperumal was like a person seeking a judge, a referee, who would validate His Position that all Souls, indeed, this entire Universe were His Alone. According to ancient code, when there was no clear-cut indication of ownership, a person could declare that he was the rightful owner of a property by bathing in sacred waters, wearing a garland of *thulasi* (sacred basil), and proclaiming in a public assembly that what he said was truth. This exact style of dress is what Sri Ranganatha wore on that day, and this is how he continues to appear when receiving the *kattiyam* today.

Sri Bhattar Svami thus describes Namperumal as one who was in such a state, wearing wet clothes, searching for a judge or referee to appear to take concur to this attempt to validate His Word. Our Lord (*emperumAn*) is *satya sankalpa* (one whose vows always become the truth); yet His Garb

and the thulasi garland that adorned Him, made him appear in Bhattar's mystical enjoyment of Him as though He needed to defend His ownership of all souls.

So, Bhattar, as any good judge or lawyer would, begins to question the Lord, in an effort to obtain "testimony" from Him that the sEsa-sEsi relationship (owner-owned) that he proclaims exists between Himself and the Universe, and which is the hallmark of Sri Ramanuja's philosophical position, is valid.

In a delightfully lucid manner, Sri Parasara Bhattar engages in a brilliant conversation that perhaps each and every soul should share with God:

- GOD *tvam mE* - "you are mine" - our Lord (*emperumAn*) calls the *jIva* and conveys to him that "you belong to Me".
- JIVA *aham mE* - "I belong to myself" - The soul, which regards itself as an independent being (*svatantran*) disagrees with *emperumAn*, and asserts its independence by saying "I belong to myself"
- GOD *kutha: tat* - "How is that" - On hearing the statement of the *jIva*, *emperumAn* questions him as to how he regards himself as independent.
- JIVA *tad api kutah* - "How is what YOU say" - The soul now returns the question by questioning the Lord's claim. It now wants to know how the Lord's claim is valid!
- GOD *idam vEda mUla pRamaNath* - "It is so because the vEdAs, which is the evidence, says so" - The Lord conveys to the soul that, on the basis of the Vedas which is regarded as *mUla pRamaNam* (primary evidence), He declares that the soul belongs to Him. Those having some familiarity with Sanskrit may enjoy reading some of the passages from the Vedas are appropriate to be quoted here - "*patim visvasyAthmEsvaram*" - from the purusha sUktha, a part of the Rg vEda; "*EkO ha vai Narayana eVa AsIth*" - from the Upanishads.

JIVA "*Etat cha anAdi sidhdhAth anubhava vibhavAth*" - That is because of the timeless philosophy, but this is based on experience - The soul argues with the Lord that the evidence presented by the Lord is only unwritten text whose source is unknown, but that his evidence (i.e. the soul's) is based on his own experience.

GOD "*sOpi sAkrOsha Eva*" - But that is repudiated - The Lord denies the words of soul and says "though you have enjoyed independence for a long time, you cannot claim it as your right, and the fact is that you actually belong to Me". Even though a tenant may enjoy a house for a long time, he cannot claim ownership to the house; similarly though the soul has enjoyed the independence, he cannot claim it as his right.

JIVA "*kvAkrOsha kasya*" - Where and by whom is it repudiated? - The soul now questions the Lord as to how He objects to the soul's ownership of itself, and asks "Where and by whom is it repudiated".

GOD "*gItAdishu mama viditha:*" - It is said by Me in the *bhagavad gIta*. The Lord replies to the question of the soul that He Himself says that in the *bhagavad gIta*. He quotes *bhagavad gIta* as evidence as it is a renowned text; moreover it was a teaching to Arjuna. Arjuna is a representative of all the souls, and hence the Lord apparently thought it might help to quote from the *bhagavad gIta* to this questioning soul.

JIVA "*hantha tvath pakshapAthi sa*" - well, they are biased and partial to You - The stubborn soul disapproves of all the statements of the Lord, and is unwilling to accept the learned people of wisdom as the witness, and says "Well, then he (man of wisdom) is partial to You". The soul has in his mind the verses from the *bhagavad gIta*, where the Lord declares that the people of wisdom (*jnAni*) are dear to Him. *jnAni tu*

Atmaiva mE matham", "*priyO hi jnAni... aham sa ca mama priya*" – by quoting the relationship between the Lord and the people of wisdom (as asserted by the Lord Himself!), the soul argues that the referees/witnesses quoted by the Lord (i.e. the people of wisdom) are close to the Lord Himself, and hence partial to the Lord.

JIVA "*kO atra sAkshi?*" – Who is the witness to that? – the soul is not ready to accept the statement of the Lord, and he now questions the veracity of the evidence that the Lord quotes! He is not convinced by the answers given by the Lord, and now asks for a witness to prove the ownership - "Who is the witness".

GOD "*sudhl syAth*" - People of wisdom are the witnesses – the Lord tells the soul that His ownership of the soul is accepted by the people of wisdom, and that they are the witness.

GOD "*iti nrulahE mrgyamadhyastha*" – finally, the Lord becomes fed up with this debate of the jIva, finds no other option other than to swear to His ownership, and takes an oath by wearing wet clothes and the thulasi garland.

The essential message to be gained by this Divine Conversation is that that the individual soul's True Nature lies in realizing its utmost subservience and dependence upon the Supreme Lord, *Sriman Narayana*. While our false ego prevents us from knowing this, the Lord in His Infinite Mercy and Grace is making all efforts to prove this to us. The Supreme Lord is devoid of all blemishes. He is one whose very Nature is of countless auspicious qualities. He is our Ultimate Benefactor. Therefore, by simply placing our trust in knowing that we are His, we can find our protection and redemption assured by Him, and with Him.

WEBSITE IN FOCUS

Harini Raghavan

In this issue the website reviewed is www.Ramanuja.org. This web page, dedicated to Sri Vaishnavism, is first of its kind to have come up on the internet. The site is named after Sri Ramanuja, one of the most important teachers and propagators of Sri Vaishnavism. Quoting from the website "These pages attempt to present a glimpse into a few sides of this religion -- its vibrant [temple culture](#), the philosophical love poetry of the [Azhvar saints](#), the [Vedanta discourses](#) of the Upanishadic sages, the penetrating insight of the acharyas -- all culminating in the grand philosophy of *Visishtadvaita*."

The poetry section of the website presents a wonderful and varied collection. It contains the diving outpourings (all the 4000 hymns) of the mystic saints in downloadable format. They are present in English with transliteration. Apart from this it also carries many *stotras* composed by Sri Vedanta Desika, the *Vishnu Sahasranama Stotra* (1008 names of Lord Vishnu) and the *Purusha Suktam* (hymn of creation).

The azhvar and the temple sections of the web site carry beautiful pictures of the Azhvares and the presiding deities of the temples respectively. They are a feast to the eyes. Some of the temples have brief write-ups talking about the salient features of the temple.

Summary of a couple of works of Sri Ramanuja are presented. They are the *Vedarthasangraha* (summary of the meaning of Vedas) by Svami Adidevananda and the *Sri Bhashya* (Ramanuja's Commentary on the Brahma-Sutras establishing the philosophy of Vedanta) by S.S Raghavachar. They form a good read as an introduction to these two great works.

The highlight of this website is the Bhakti list archives. Bhakti list is an email list which focuses on discussion of the philosophy, religion and history of Sri Vaishnavism. The archives host a vast repository of information discussing the various aspects of the Sri Vaishnavite philosophy. It presents views of different subscribers who answer the multitude of questions posed. It forms a good forum for discussion through the electronic medium in this modern age.

In summary it can be said that Ramanuja.org serves as a good introduction to Visistadvaita Vedanta (philosophy of Sri Vaishnavism). Please do go through this website to get a flavor for the philosophy.

CALENDAR - SECOND QUARTER 2003

April 2003

<i>Date</i>	<i>Lunar Calendar</i>	<i>Star</i>	<i>Event</i>
04/01/03	Panguni 18	Utthrattathi	Sarva Amavasai
04/02/03	Panguni 19	Revathi	Ugadhi, Telugu New Year
04/10/03	Panguni 27	Punarvasu	Sri Rama Navami (except at Sri rangam)
04/13/03	Panguni 30	Magam	Sarva Ekadasi
04/14/03	Chithirai 1	Pooram	Tamil New Year
04/16/03	Chithirai 3	Chithirai	Chithra Purnami, Thiruvallikkeni Parthasarathy Utsavam Starts
04/18/03	Chithirai 5	Vishakam	Thiruvallikkeni Parthasarathy Garuda Sevai
04/22/03	Chithirai 9	Pooradam	Thiruvallikkeni Parthasarathy Thiruther
04/27/03	Chithirai 14	Poorattadhi	Sarva Ekadasi

May 2003

<i>Date</i>	<i>Lunar Calendar</i>	<i>Star</i>	<i>Event</i>
05/04/03	Chithirai 21	Rohini	BalaRama Jayanthi
05/06/03	Chithirai 23	Thiruvadirai	Sri Ramanujar Thirunakshatram
05/07/03	Chithirai 24	Punarvasu	Mudaliyandan Thirunakshatram
05/10/03	Chithirai 27	Magam	Sri rangam Sri Rama Navami
05/11/03	Chithirai 28	Pooram	Vasavi Jayanthi
05/13/03	Chithirai 30	Hastham	Kanchi Varadar Utsavam Starts
05/14/03	Chithirai 31	Chithirai	Madhurakavi Azhvar, Thirumalai AnandAzhvar

05/15/03	Vaikasi 1	Svathi	Narasimha Jayanthi, Kanchi Varadar Garuda Sevai
05/19/03	Vaikasi 5	Pooradam	Kanchi Varadar Thiruther
05/26/03	Vaikasi 12	Utthirattadhi	Sarva Ekadasi
05/30/03	Vaikasi 16	Karthikai	Sarva Amavasai

June 2003

<i>Date</i>	<i>Lunar Calendar</i>	<i>Star</i>	<i>Event</i>
06/12/03	Vaikasi 29	Vishakam	Nammazhvar Thirunakshatram
06/13/03	Vaikasi 30	Anusham	Sri Parasara Bhattar Thirunakshatram
06/14/03	Vaikasi 31	Kettai	Purnami
06/25/03	Ani 11	Bharani	Sarva Ekadasi
06/29/03	Ani 15	Mrugaseersham	Amavasai

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.

VEDICS QUIZ

Mukundan Pattangi

- Which of the following is **not** a name for Sri Ramanuja?

(a) Ilayazwar	(b) Yathiraja
(c) Emperumanar	(d) Periya Jeeyar
- As per Visistadvaita (Sri Ramanuja Philosophy) Moksha (salvation) is open to:

(a) Vedic Scholars	(b) Men only
(c) Sanyasis	(d) All beings

3. Sri Ramanuja is considered an incarnation of?

(a) Lord Sriman Narayana	(b) AdisEsha
(c) Garuda	(d) VisvaksEna
4. Who is the reincarnation (punar avathara) of Sri Ramanuja??

(a) Mudaliyandan	(b) Embar
(c) Varavaramuni	(d) Parasara Bhattar
5. Who is NOT the Acharya of Sri Ramanuja?

(a) Periya Nambi	(b) Thiru-k-kOshtiyUr Nambi
(c) Periya Thirumala Nambi	(d) Embar
6. Who taught Sri Ramanuja the special meanings of Sri Ramayana)?

(a) Periya Thirumalai Nambi	(b) Thiruvaranga Perumal Arayar
(c) Alavandar	(d) Thiru-k-kOshtiyUr Nambi
7. Who gave Sri Ramanuja the name Emperumanar?

(a) Thiru-k-kOshtiyUr Nambi	(b) Yadavaprakasa
(c) Koorattazhvan	(d) Alavandar
8. Through whom Lord Varadaraja clarified the six doubts of Sri Ramanuja?

(a) Thirukkachi Nambi	(b) Koorathazhvan
(c) Mudaliyandan	(d) Embar
9. Which one of the following is **not** one of the six doubts?

(a) Is anthima smarana needed (is remembrance of Lord at the last breath essential for Moksha)?
(b) Who is para-thatva (Supreme God)?
(c) Are Azhvars Nithya Suris (celestial body living in Sri Vaikuntam)?
(d) What is the appropriate mean to be adopted for Moksha?
10. Whose relationship will "ensure" Moksha (liberation from samsara)?

(a) Sriman Narayana	(b) Acharya
(c) BhAgavatha	(d) Sri Ramanuja

ANSWERS TO LAST ISSUE'S QUIZ

Mukundan Pattangi

1. Why do we go to the Temple?
Seek Boons from HIM **Re-Kindle Our Relationship with HIM**
Meet people Good Food (Prasadam)
2. Why should we practice Vegetarianism?
Healthy Inexpensive
Delicious **Minimal Suffering to other beings**
3. How many divya dEsams are there in this Bhooloka?
102 105 108 **106**
4. Who authored Rig Veda?
GOD VEDA VYASA
MANU **NO-One**
5. What is the significance of applying Thiruman to our body?
Indicates Devotion To Follow Tradition
Looks cool **Indicates Servitude to GOD**
6. What is Atma (Chith)?
Object Having Consciousness Heart
Human Living Thing
7. What does not contribute to one's Karma?
Thought (Mana) Speech (Vaak)
Actions (Kaaya) **Dedications to Lord (Kainkaryam)**
8. What unique message does Ramayana teach us?
Total Surrender (Sharanagathi) Service to Humanity
Importance of Friends Good over Evil
9. Four Vedas could not explain Him. But _____ did
Shastras Puranas
Upanishad **Azhvars**
10. What is the purpose of Life?
Seek Knowledge Eat Drink & Enjoy Life
Moksha Help Others

GLOSSARY

Words	Pronunciation	Meaning
acharyas	aachaaryaas	Spiritual teachers
adiyars	adiyaars	Devotees
adiyen	adiyEn	Your servant
aishwaryam	aishwaryam	Wealth
ananda	aananda	bliss
avatar	avataar	Incarnations
azhvar	aazhvaar	Mystic saints
bhagavathas	bhAgavathaas	Devotees
bhaktas	bhaktaas	devotees
dasi/dasan	daasi / daasan	Servant in feminine and masculine gender
divya desh	divya dEsham	One of 108 Sacred Temples that the Sri Vaishnavas revere
divya-prabhandham	divya-prabhandham	Divine verses
emperuman	emperumaan	The Lord
emperumanar	emperumanaar	Ramanuja
gopuram	gOpuram	Tower
gurukulam	gurukulam	School
jeevatma	jeevaatmaa	Individual soul
jnana	jnAna	Knowledge
krupa	krupa	Mercy
mantra	mantraa	Hymn
matham	matham	Ascetic orders
moksha	mOkshaa	Salvation
nachiyar	nAchchiyaar	Goddess
nithya aradhanam	nithya aaraadhanam	Daily rites
nithya vibhuti	nithya vibhUti	The Supreme Abode
nithyasuris	nithyasUrIs	The eternally-free souls who reside with the Lord
paramapadam	paramapadam	Highest abode
paramatma	paramaatmaa	Supreme soul
parampara	parampara	Lineage

pasuram	paasuram	Song
perumal	perumaaL	The Lord
poorvacharyas	poorvoachaaryaas	Spiritual Teachers of the past and present
prakaranams	prakaraNams	Parts
prapaththi	prapaththi	Surrender
rahasyatrayam	rahasyatrayam	The three Great Secret Mantras
sampradayam	sampradaayam	Tradition
sannyasis	sannyasis	Ascetics
sastras	saastraas	Code of conduct
seshatva	sEshatva	The quality of being in Servitude
sloka	sLOkaa	Verse
sri vaikuntam	Sri VaikuNTam	The abode of the Supreme Lord, where all souls are in a state of permanent bliss serving the Lord
sriman narayana	Sriman nArAyaNaa	The supreme lord
stotra	stOtra	Poem in praise of <x>
svami	svami	Literally, one who is the owner. Generally used as a mark of respect as in Svami Ramanuja
svapuram	svapuram	Nature
theertham	theertham	Holy water
thiru malai	thiru-maalai	Divine garland
thiru thuzhai, thulasi	thiru-th-thuzhaai, thuLasi	Basil leaves
thirunakshatiram	thirunakshattiram	Birth anniversaries
thiruvaimozhi	thiruvaimozhi	The collection of songs given by Svami Nammazhvar
utsava	utsava	procession
vatsalya	vaatsalya	Parental love
vigraham	vigraham	Idol
visistadvaita	visistadvaita	Qualified monism
vyakhyanam	vyaakhyaanam	Commentary



Swami Ramanuja @ Sri perumbudUr during the grand festival



Swami Ramanuja @ Melkote during the grand festival



Live discourses on the Tele-bridge

Wednesdays 9:30pm CST: Bhagavad Gita - English
HH. Tridandi Srimannarayana Chinna Ramanuja Jeeyar Svami

1st Sunday 11AM CST: Srimad Bhagavad - Telugu
Sri U.Ve. Satuluri Gopala Krishnamacharyulu

1st Sunday and 4th Sunday 7:45pm CST:
Sri Vachana Bhooshanam - Tamil
HH Vanamamalai Ramanuja Jeeyar Svami

2nd Saturday 9AM CST: Siria ThiruMadal - Tamil
Sri U.Ve. Venkatakrisnan Svami

2nd Sunday 9AM CST: Ramayana Tanislokam - Tamil
Sri U.Ve. Velukkudi Krishnan Svami

3rd Saturday: 9AM CST: Athimanusha Sthavam- Tamil
Sri U.Ve Elayavilli S Bhoovarahan Svami

3rd Sunday 11 AM CST: Srimad Bhagavatam - Telugu
Sri U.Ve. Satuluri Gopala Krishnamacharyulu

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

Sundays: 6 PM CST:
Sri VPS Varadan Svami Thiruppavai Acharya Param- Tamil

Sat 2PM CST:
Dhivya Prabhandam and Stotra patam santhai:



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