

RĀMĀNUJA AND THE NĀLĀYIRAM

It was given to Ājavantār to lay down only the fundamentals of Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy and not to write an elaborate commentary on the *Vedānta-sūtra* as Saṅkara had done for Advaita. That great task was performed by Rāmānuja, the synoptic thinker and saint. Rāmānuja's father was a disciple of his brother-in-law, Tirumalai Nampi, Ājavantār's grand-son and disciple, who is said to have obtained from the Lord Himself the title of *Tātācārya*.¹ Rāmānujā is said to have been named as such by his maternal uncle, Tirumalai Nampi, who expected him to equal the great Lakṣmaṇa in his service and devotion to the Lord. The traditional date of Rāmānuja's birth is A.D. 1017,² and he is said to have lived for 120 years. According to one authority³ his long life was spread over the reigns of three Cōja kings Kulōttuṅka I (A.D. 1070-1118), Vikram Cōja (A.D. 1118-1135), and Kulōttuṅka II (A.D. 1123-1146).

Rāmānuja became the grand disciple of Ājavantār whom he did not see in person. He was taken to SrīRaṅgam from Kāñci by Periya Nampi at the behest of Ājavantār who was nearing his end, but he could see only the physical frame of Ājavantār lying in state. As he looked intently on the whole figure and scanned it up and down, he discovered to his

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1. The story is this: Tirumalai Nampi used to bring water for the *Tirūmañcanam* (bathing) of the Lord Srīnivāsa's image from the *Pāpanāsa-tīrtha* in the midst of the Tirumalai Hills. It is said that one day the Lord Himself relieved him of the arduous task in the guise of a youth, calling him 'Tātā' or grand-father.
 2. He was born in the year *Pīṅgala* which corresponds to A.D. 1017 *Vide Yatirajā Vāibhavam. 6.*
 3. Aiyengar, S.K.: *Srī Rāmānujacārya* (Natesan & Co., Madras) as quoted by Dāsgupta (*Vide: A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. III, p.104*).

surprise three of the fingers of the right palm of the sage remaining closed. He turned round to the assembly there and questioned them about the strange sight. But they replied that they had never marked that before. Rāmānuja reflected for a moment and thought that the sight had probably signified some unfulfilled ardent wish of the venerable saint. He asked the by-standers if they were aware of any specific wishes of the sage expressed to them at any time in the course of his religious talks with them. He got the reply from them that they were not particularly aware of such directly, but indirectly they knew that he wished very much to see three things perpetuated viz. (i) to convert people to the *prapatti* doctrine of Vaisnavism making them well versed in the works of the Ālvārs in general and the immortalization of the glory of Nammālvār in particular, (ii) to perpetuate the memory of Parācara, the author of the *Vaṅṅu-purāṇa*, and (iii) to write a commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra* to bring out the real Viśiṣṭādvaita sense contained in the *sūtras*. On hearing this, Rāmānuja promised to fulfil the three great tasks, provided he had the health, the grace of the Ācārya (Āḷvantār), and the Divine will. It is chronicled that no sooner did he make this promise than the three bent fingers of the sage opened out as if to say: "Aye". The whole assembly was witness to this miracle. In one voice they declared that the sage's grace was fully on him, the very power and glory would enter into him and he was the fit successor to him for the propagation of the Faith.

Āḷvantār died before Rāmānuja became Ācārya and the interval was filled up by Periya Nampi, Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Nampi and other disciples of the late master. One thing which facilitated Rāmānuja's advent to, and Ācāryaship at, Sri Raṅgam was his embracing the monastic life. The *san-nyāsa* order enabled him to dedicate himself wholly to the cause of religion and service to humanity. Rāmānuja spent two years studying the teachings of Āḷvantār from the specialists who had been trained by him. Six of Āḷvantār's disciples, as already mentioned, had become the spiritual teachers of Rāmānuja and imparted to him the teachings of

Ājavantār.⁴ While at Kāñci Rāmānuja became attached to Tirukkacci Nampi⁶ and learnt from him a few great truths communicated to him by Lord Varadarāja Himself. They were an answer to six doubts in Rāmānuja's mind. They were: "(i) I am the Supreme Truth, the way and the goal; (ii) the world of souls is different from Me and depends on Me as its source and sustenance; (iii) *Prapatti* is the only way to salvation; (iv) the liberation of My devotees, even though they fail to remember Me at the time of death, is sure to take place; (v) as soon as My devotees give up their bodies, they attain the Supreme Object; (vi) choose Periya Nampi for your Ācārya."⁵ Periya Nampi was Rāmānuja's principal Ācārya who initiated him⁷ in the *pañca-saṁskāra*

4. Vatuka Nampi, a disciple of Rāmānuja, refers to five teachers only. (Vide: *Rāmānuja Aṣṭottara śata nāma - stotram*, 10). He does not refer to Tirumalai Nampi, even though he refers to him later as the one under whom he studied *Rāmāyaṇa*. But Vedānta Desika, in his *Guruparamparā sāram* omits Tirukkacci Nampi among the five Ācāryas, even though he refers to him previously as one from whom he learnt six truths. Sri P.B. Annangarachāriya accepts the latter's view (vide. *Pūrvācāryaprabāvam - Rāmānuja*, pp. 23-24) (*Sri Rāmānujan* - 198 (Journal)). But Swami Rāma Krishnānanda accepts the former's view (Vide: *Life of Rāmānuja*, p.158).
5. He was a non-brahmin, belonging to the chetti caste and was the native of Pūviruntavalli near Madras. Even now Tirukkacci Nampi's shrines at Tirupati, Kāñci and Pūviruntavalli (his own native place) are managed by trustees belonging to the chetti community only.
6. *Yatirājavaibhavam*, 40.
7. It has been said that he initiated Rāmānuja in the name of his ācārya Ājavantār. It has been revealed by Periya Nampi himself that Ājavantār had placed his sacred feet on his (Periya Nampi's) head for the sake of Rāmānuja and attained Paramapada, as Rāma-chandra had done on Bharata's head when he went to the forest. So it may be said that Ājavantār is the direct ācārya to Rāmānuja and Periya Nampi is only the medium. This has been confirmed both by *Rāmānuca-nūrrantāti* (verse 21) and *Gītā-bhāṣya* (Vide: Invocatory verse and its commentary in Vedānta Desika's *Tātparyā-andrika*). In appreciation of Rāmānuja's concern for the salvation of others as evidenced by his revelation of the *Tirumantra* from the tops of the temple towers at Tirukkōṭṭiyūr made at the risk of hell for himself for disobeying his guru's injunction, the guru Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Nampi, forgetting all his anger against the

(fivefold Vaisnava rites) and into the esoteric meanings of *Dvaya Mantra* at Maturāntakam by a happy coincidence when both of them wanted to meet each other. The initiation was done under the holy *Vakula* tree near the shrine of Kōtanṭa Rāma, called the Lake Guard (*Ērikāṭṭa Perumāḷ*). After making eighteen times the journey from Sri Raṅgam to Tirukkōṭṭiyūr, Rāmānuja learnt from Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Nambi the hidden truths of *Tirumantra* and *Carāma-sloka*. He learnt from Periya nampi the three thousand verses of all the Ālvārs except Nammālvār and the meaning of the *Brahma-sūtras*.⁸ The compositions of Nammālvār and of Maturakavi were studied by him under Tiruvaṅkaṅkapp-erumāḷ Araiyar⁹. Then he acquired from Tirumālaiyāṅṭān the meaning of *Tiruvāymoli* and of the compositions of Tirumaṅkaiyālvār.¹⁰ The tradition, according to *Guruparamparā*, does not refer here to Maturakavi or Parakāḷa's works. When Rāmānuja happened to sojourn at Tirupati for a year in the house of Tirumalai Nampi (his own maternal uncle), he studied *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* under him and understood many esoteric lessons of the first of the *Itihāsas*.¹¹ Thus the great six who were the most intimate disciples of Āḷavantār, became the teachers of Rāmānuja and taught him many works in the way of traditional interpretation of the scriptures. Trained by each and all of them Yatirāja (the prince of the *sannyāsins*, now became, as it were, the second manifestation of Āḷavantār, for the great saint was present in six parts in his own six disciples. Now these six parts were made one in the frame of Rāmānuja. Thus equipped with the knowledge of spiritual truths and the *sādhanas* to *mukti* gained from the specialists, Rāmānuja

disciple for violation of his command, invested Rāmānuja with the title of 'Emperumāṅār' and taught him the creed of Vedānta, which came to be known to the world as 'Emperumāṅār Darśanam'.

8. *Yatirājavalbhavam*, 47.

9. *ibid.* 61.

10. *ibid.* 62.

11. There is an idol of Sri Rāma even now in the shrine of Tirumala Nampi inside the Govindarāja temple at Tirupati; this, it has been said, signifies that Rāmānuja studied *Rāmāyaṇam* at the feet of Tirumalai Nampi.

became qualified to enter on his mission of spreading the gospel of Viṣiṣṭādvaitic Vaiṣṇavism and to become a world teacher.

Rāmānuja's studentship was now complete; his spiritual greatness was ahead of his intellectual powers. He then began to teach his own disciples Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoḷi*. But a superhuman genius as he was, to the amazement of his disciples, often enough he began to give various new mystic interpretations. During that period, the *Tiruvāymoḷi* became very popular as a religious treatise and possibly the most important work of daily study and recitation among the Vaiṣṇavites. A representation was made to Rāmānuja through Tirukkurukaipirān Pillān, the son of his uncle, Tirumalai Nampi, to write a commentary to *Tiruvāymoḷi*. Rāmānuja charged Pillān himself to do the task with a view to creating an interest in the study of the sacred work of the great Ālvār. Tirukkurukaipirān Pillān, as a true disciple of Rāmānuja, undertook the rather difficult project and composed an authoritative gloss on the *Tiruvāymoḷi* as taught and expounded by his venerable master Rāmānuja. This commentary is known as *Ārayirap-paṭi* (Six Thousand) as it was completed in 6000 *granthas*.¹² His determination of the number of *paṭis* reflects his devotion to Lord Viṣṇu whose story is told in 6000 *granthas* in the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*. This commentary is the earliest and, in some respects, the best commentary on the hymns of Nammālvār. It was the model on which many compositions were later written, particularly in the *maṅḍipravāḷa* or Sanskrit-Tamil mixed style. Thus Rāmānuja fulfilled his first vow in the preparation of Nammālvār's name and glory.¹³

Rāmānuja is said to have fulfilled his second vow of perpetuating Parācara's name by giving it to the elder son of his friend and follower, Kūrattālvān, and directed him to compose a commentary on the *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma*. Parācara Paṭṭar completed the sacred task in compliance with his

12. According to a principle of Grammar 32 *granthas* or letters omitting the consonants make one *paṭi*.

13. *Yatirājavaibhavam*, 84.

masters's instructions and the commentary is known as *Bhagavadguṇadarpaṇa*.¹⁴ Rāmānuja fulfilled his third vow by his *magnum opus*, the immortal *Sri Bhāṣya*¹⁵, which is an authoritative exposition of the Vyāsa's *Brahma-sūtra* as *Sariraka Sāstra* in the true sense of the term. He is said to have gone as far as Kaṣmīr in order to copy the *Vṛtti* or commentary of Bōdhāyaṇa which interpreted the *Brahma-sūtra* in the Viśiṣṭādvaita mode. It is said that Kūrattālvān assisted Rāmānuja in his writing of *Sri Bhāṣya*. In this way the dream of Ālavantār to formulate Viśiṣṭādvaitic Vaiṣṇavism became an accomplished fact. But the *Guruparamparā-prapāvam* of Piṇṇalakiya Perumāḷ Jīyar gives a different account of Ālavantār's wishes viz., (i) Gratefulness to Vyāsa and Parācara for the help they rendered to the cause of Vaiṣṇavism; (ii) Deep love for Nammālvār; and (iii) Writing a commentary on Vyāsa's *sūtras* in the light of Viśiṣṭādvaita.¹⁶ The third wish of Ālavantār was fulfilled by Rāmānuja by writing the *Sri Bhāṣya*, *Vedānta-sāra*, *Vedānta-dīpika* and *Bhagavad-gītā-bhāṣya*.¹⁷ The elder son of Kūrattālvān was named Parācara Paṭṭar by Rāmānuja and thus the second wish was fulfilled. Siṟiya Gōvindaṇ-perumāḷ, younger brother of Empār, had a son born to him and he was named Parāṅkuṣa Nampī and thus the third was fulfilled.¹⁸ There is some discrepancy, no doubt, in this source regarding the order in which the wishes are mentioned and are stated to have been fulfilled. Besides, here is a reference to the commentary on *Tiruvāymoḷi*.

The works of Rāmānuja are as valuable as his life, and they were the fulfilment of his promise, as observed above, to carry out the message of Ālavantār to systematise the whole teaching of Viśiṣṭādvaita in its metaphysical, moral and mystical aspects. His reputation was mainly due to the systematisation of the contributions of the earlier writers to his system and his own invaluable contribution to the cardinal

14. *ibid.* 80.

15. *ibid.* 72.

16. G.P.P. p. 104.

17. *ibid.* p. 140.

18. *ibid.* p. 145, cf. Uttama Nampī's *Lakṣmī-kāvya*

doctrines of the system. He is known as the author of seven works viz., *Vedānta-saṅgraha*, *Srī Bhāṣya*, *Vedānta-dīpa*, *Vedānta-sāra*, *Nitya*, *Bhagavadgītā-bhāṣya* and *Gadyatraya*. Of these, the earliest one was the *Vedārtha-saṅgraha* which is in the form of lectures delivered by him in front of the Lord Śrīnivāsa, the presiding deity of the Tirumalai Hills. This is an elaborate essay on the teachings of the principal *Upaniṣads*, in which he analyses the defects of the systems of Saṅkara, Bhāskara and Yādavaprakāsa and harmonises the apparently conflicting texts of the *Upaniṣads* by his foundational principles of *satīra-sarīri* relation. His *magnum opus*, the immortal *Srī Bhāṣya*, is an authoritative exposition of *Vedānta-sūtras*. In this work the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy is expounded. It is less intellectual and more emotional than the philosophy of Saṅkara. While Saṅkara taught idealism, Rāmānuja is an advocate of realism. While the former is for a pantheistic neuter Brahman, the latter advocates a personal deity possessed of all auspicious attributes and capable of granting salvation to devotees in reward for their devotion. The individuality of the *jīva* is preserved in the Rāmānuja's system even after *mokṣa* while it is lost in Brahman according to Advaita. The *Vedānta-dīpa* is a brief commentary on the *Brahma-sūtras*. In the introductory verse, after prayer (*maṅgala-sloka*), Rāmānuja states that following the path shown by the preceptors, he is illumining the subject matter of the *Vedānta* as it is available in the words used in the *Brahma-sūtras*. This approach perhaps suggested to the author the title *Vedānta-dīpa* for this work. The scope and nature of the Viśiṣṭādvaita system are given at the outset in a highly illuminating passage. The *Vedānta-sāra* is also a concise commentary on the *Brahma-sūtras*. After the invocatory song, the author states that he is presenting the quintessence of *Vedānta*, through the Grace of the Supreme Person. After explaining the meaning of the first *sūtra*, Rāmānuja gives a brief survey of the Viśiṣṭādvaita system by citing the relevant *sūtras* and *upaniṣadic* authorities in the proper context. In another prose work called *Nitya* Rāmānuja elaborates the ideal of the daily life of a true *paramaikāntin* and lays the procedure for worshipping the Lord.

The *Gadyatraya* and the *Bhagavadgītā-bhāṣya* deserve separate treatment since they contain the quintessence of *prapatti*, the most important dogma of Vaiṣṇavism. The former is a work in prose which consists of three divisions or independent pieces called *Saraṅgati-gadya* or *Prthu-gadya*, *Sri Raṅga-gadya* and *Vaikunṭha-gadya*. The first mentioned work begins with the self-surrender made to Lakṣmī who is considered to be the mother of all, the refuge for the destitutes. The author then makes the offering of the self at the Feet of the Lord. He addresses the Lord in such of those epithets which speak of this glory as the only refuge for the individual selves. In the *Sri Raṅga-gadya*, Rāmānuja requests the Lord of Sri Raṅga to enable him to serve Him for all times. He takes refuge under the Lord. The *Vaikunṭha-gadya* is a rapturous outpouring on the transcendental beauty and bliss of Vaikunṭha. The author directs every individual to surrender himself to the Lord. Having done that, he has to constantly think and ponder over it in order to better his own future. He shall pray to the Lord in Vaikunṭha and shall attend on Him. He shall mediate with the Lord's Feet placed on his head and live in peace. The five limbs of the act of self-surrender, the greatness of the Lord and the need to acquire the spirit of self-surrender and all other matters are dealt with in this *Gadyatraya*.

The *Bhagavadgītā-bhāṣya* is a development of the *Gītārtha-saṅgraha* of Ālavantār and explains the building up of *bhakti* and constructs a ladder as it were from the world of *prakṛti* to the realm of *Puruṣottama*. Rāmānuja opens his commentary with a reference to his concept of duty. Brahman has no defects and is an ocean of merits. He is the Lord of Lakṣmī. He is beyond the reach of speech and mind. He is Nārāyaṇa. He is the creator of all. He descends to the world and being worshipped by the peoples rewards them with the fourfold results. Under the pretext of relieving the earth of its undue burden, He comes down and becomes visible to the mortal eyes. His acts are captivating to the minds of all people, high and low. He makes many people very pious. Under the pretext of inducing Arjuna to fight, He taught the course of devotion as the means for obtaining the highest pur-

suit in life. This course is dealt with in the *Vedānta* and is to be developed through knowledge and acts. Devotees of God have their minds fixed on Him, could not live without Him, and they talk to each other about the qualities and delightful deeds of God of which they had personal experience.¹⁹ The *Bhagavad-gīta* is an authoritative text on self-surrender. All these great works are ever-enduring monuments of Rāmānuja's synthetic genius.

While learning the significant meanings of the composition of the Āivārs, Rāmānuja is said to have suggested better and different interpretations improving upon those of Tirumālaiyāṅṭān. He is said to have averred that Yāmuna's interpretation was the same as that which was given by him. Tirumālaiyāṅṭān could not get reconciled at this, as he was a direct disciple of Yāmuna, from whom he learnt the interpretation of Nammālvār's compositions. Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Nampi, who came to mediate between the two, agreed with Rāmānuja's interpretation and recognized it to be that which was offered by Yāmuna.²⁰ For instance, there is a passage in the *Nalayiram* in which Nammālvār treats himself as a beloved of the Lord (Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki) and conveys a message to Him through the stark to the effect that she is pining out of love for Him. The Lord is referred to as Vāmana and the word '*kaḷvan*' (thief) is used in the text. Tirumālaiyāṅṭān interpreted this word as '*vañcakan*' (cheat) meaning thereby that Vāmana deceived Bali by assuming a huge form and measuring everything as though belonging to Him. Rāmānuja did not approve of the sense of cheat for the word but explained it as meaning one who thought of doing one thing but did something else.²¹

The first decad of the second centum is devoted to an appeal to the Lord for refuge. There is the element of bridal mysticism in this. Yāmuna states that the devotee who is a beloved to the Lord has languished losing all her usual lustre

19. Bh. G. 10: 9.

20. G.P. pp. 124, 125.

21. *Iṭu* on TVM, 1.4: 3.

and cannot also cry aloud. The Ālvār Nāyaki asks how long He would be teasing her, treating her as though she were His enemy and hoping to get delight at the destruction of such an enemy. Rāmānuja says that even enemies would show their compassion on those who are distressed. There is no enmity, really speaking, between the devotee and the Lord. The Lord is more cruel to the devotee than He would be to His enemy.²² While interpreting a verse²³ Yāmuna explained that He produced in the devotee the knowledge of his relation to Him at a time when he was not wise and later produced for him a body which would destroy that knowledge. Rāmānuja, hearing this interpretation, refers to the verses which precede and follow this and declares that they refer to the feeling of delight that the devotee has for the kind things he has received from God and so this verse cannot be interpreted in the context to mean grief and disappointment which the devotee is said to be experiencing. The better interpretation must therefore, says Rāmānuja, be that the Lord had shown His affection by providing His devotee with the spirit of service even when he was not grown wise. In the case of the verse, TVM. 3.3: 6, Yāmuna interprets that if the word '*namah*' is uttered with reference to the Lord of Vēṅkaṭam, all the deeds done with the help of the body would get destroyed. Rāmānuja remarked that the deeds already done and those which are likely to be done in the future would also get destroyed.²⁴ While interpreting the phrase '*pukaḷum poru-paṭai*' in the verse, TVM. 8.9: 3, Yāmuna says that the divine weapons of the Lord would sing His praise. Rāmānuja interprets it that the enemies too would praise the Lord Who has the weapons with Him. The last line of the verse, TVM. 9.5: 10, according to Yāmuna's interpretation, means that the devotee feels despondent unable to join the Lord, and intending to die wishes the country to become happy and flourishing. But Rāmānuja, interpreting it in a different way, says that the devotee wishes that the country is to be spared the torments

22. *ibid.* 2.1.

23. *ibid.* on TVM. 2.3: 3.

24. *cf.* T.Pv. 5. (last line).

which he was made to endure.²⁵ While interpreting the hymn, TVM. 1.2, Yāmuna took this as dealing with the doctrine of self-surrender. Tirumālaiyāntān taught this to Rāmānuja who, after writing out the *Sri Bhāṣya*, interprets this as conveying the doctrine of devotion. How far could this interpretation become acceptable has been discussed in the previous chapter. Again with reference to TVM. 3.7, Rāmānuja lays stress on the need to be in contact with the devotees of God and remarks that this has been dealt with in the hymn under reference. Śaṭṛughna is stated by Rāmānuja to have put into practice the contents of TVM. 3.7. and TVM. 8.10. Moreover, Rāmānuja is said to have witnessed the recitation of a hymn in *Tiruvāymoḷi* with gesticulations by Tiruvarāṅkap-perumāḷ Araiyaṛ,²⁶ and enjoyed it keenly.

That Rāmānuja was much influenced by the compositions of the Ālvārs and that his way of life was shaped by the teachings of the Ālvārs are amply borne out by the copious references which are contained in the *Rāmānuca-nūṛṇṇantāḷi*. Nammālvār's compositions played a significant role in enabling Rāmānuja to build the religious system of Vaiṣṇavism. They sing the greatness of the innumerable auspicious qualities of Viṣṇu. Rāmānuja therefore bowed to the feet of this Ālvār and lived a glorious life through his dependence on this Ālvār.²⁷ Nammālvār's compositions represented to him prosperity of this world and of Vaikunṭha, parents and the Lord, nay everything for him.²⁸ Rāmānuja demonstrated through his teachings that this is the Truth.²⁹ He would be constantly thinking of Nāthamuni who set the *Tiruvāymoḷi* to music.³⁰ He enshrined that *Tamil Veda* in the temple of his devotion which means that he treasured it very

25. For similar references see *Iṭu* on 2.3: 1; 2.5: 1; 2.9: 8; 2.10: 4; 5.1: 9; 5.2: 6; 6.1: 10; 7.2: 10; 7.9: 1; 9.4: 3 etc.

26. *Iṭu* on TVM 5.2. For further similar instances vide *Iṭu* on TVM. 8.7: 3; 9.7: 5; 9.8: 1.

27. R.N. 1.

28. *Śtotraratna*, 5.

29. R.N. 19.

30. *ibid.* 20.

highly and his devotion assumed a definite and refined shape by this composition.³¹ The compositions of Nammālvār challenged, countered and suppressed the preachings of the six schools of thought. Rāmānuja understood this significant contribution made by the *Tiruvāymoḷi*.³² The *Vedas* and the compositions of Parāṅkuṣa flourished through the work of Rāmānuja.³³ Rāmānuja's contribution to the propagation of the importance of *Tiruvāymoḷi* is poetically described by Amutaṅār. The venerable saint's presence is felt wherever the *jñānis* perform their *yōga*, wherever the musical notes of *Tiruvāymoḷi* are heard, and wherever the Lord with Lakṣmī in his chest takes His abode.³⁴

Amutaṅār speaks then of Rāmānuja's indebtedness to Tirumaṅkaiyālvār. Rāmānuja did not even care to think of people who were not devoted to the Lord at Srī Raṅgam and was ever devoted to the feet of Tirumaṅkaiyālvār,³⁵ who composed hymns in praise of the Lord at Tirukkannamaṅkai.³⁶ He acquired his strong skill in disputation by his deep study and realization of what this Ālvār taught in his musical compositions. This must be a reference to his *Pera-tirumoḷi*. This Ālvār is referred to as learned in arts which may include *sāstras* also.³⁷

Rāmānuja cherished the composition of Poykaiyār who lit a lamp for dispelling ignorance in the world;³⁸ and of Pūtattār for dispelling the internal darkness.³⁹ He was ever praising the feet of Pēyālvār who was an eminent Tamil scholar and who visualized the Lord with Lakṣmī.⁴⁰ He was

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31. *ibid.* 29.
 32. *ibid.* 46.
 33. *ibid.* 54.
 34. *ibid.* 60.
 35. *ibid.* 2.
 36. *ibid.* 17.
 37. *ibid.* 88.
 38. *ibid.* 8.
 39. *ibid.* 9.
 40. *ibid.* 10.

even bowing to the feet of Tiruppāṇālvār⁴¹ and had his heart occupied by the feet of Tirumaḷicaiyālvār.⁴² He does not have liking for anything but the feet of Toṅṅaraṭip-poṭiyālvār, who offered garlands to the Lord Raṅganātha and composed two poems which are equal to *Vedas*.⁴³ He praises the feet of the elders who sing the hymns of Kulacēkarālvār.⁴⁴ The mind of the saint fixes in the feet of Periyālvār who offered benediction (*maṅgalāsāsana*) to the Lord on account of his undying immense whirlpool of love.⁴⁵ Rāmānuja lives and is ever dependent upon the grace of Āṅṅāḷ who offered the garland to Lord Raṅganātha after wearing it herself.⁴⁶

It is said that Rāmānuja recited *Pallāṅṅu* the hymn of Periyālvār when he went to offer his services to Raṅganātha, Śrīnivāsa, Varadarāja and Selvap-piḷḷai at Śrī Raṅgam,⁴⁷ Tirumalai,⁴⁸ Kāñci⁴⁹ and Tirunārāyaṇapuram⁵⁰ respectively. He is said to have taught the *Nālayiram* to Aruḷāḷap-perumāḷ Emperumāṅṅār who was Yajñamūrti, an Advaitin, and who assumed this name after he became a Vaiṣṇavite and disciple of Rāmānuja bearing this name.⁵¹

Anantālvāṅ, one of the disciples of Rāmānuja, speaks of him as ever cherishing the *Tamil Veda* composed by Nammālvār.⁵² Parācara Paṭṭar speaks of Nammālvār as the mother who delivered the 'Thousand verses' and Rāmānuja was the foster-mother who gave milk to them, which shows

41. *ibid.* 11.

42. *ibid.* 12.

43. *ibid.* 13.

44. *ibid.* 14.

45. *ibid.* 15.

46. *ibid.* 16.

47. G.P. p. 114.

48. *ibid.* p. 134.

49. *ibid.* p. 131.

50. *ibid.* p. 163.

51. *ibid.* 129.

52. Vide: A verse beginning with words 'Ēyṅṅa peruṅkīrti' composed by him in praise of Rāmānuja.

that Rāmānuja was responsible for the propagation of *Tiruvāymoli*⁵³. It is also said that what Nammālvār composed was cherished in the heart by Rāmānuja.⁵⁴

Rāmānuja composed '*taniyans*' for the compositions of some Ālvārs. In the verse composed for Kulacēkarālvār's *Perumāḷ-tirumoli*, he addresses a parrot to come near him to take the nectar which he would be offering to it. The nectar is uttering the name of Kulacekarālvār, the powerful king of the Cēras, attractive to damsels, who would sing the praise of the Lord at Śrī Raṅgam.⁵⁵ Evidently he means that the parrot could easily repeat the word '*raṅga*' as it is generally found to do so and with ease repeat also the word '*kulacēkarar*'. This may be taken to be a reference to the verse in praise of this Ālvār according to which there is the loud announcement of undertaking pilgrimage to Śrī Raṅgam made daily in his city.⁵⁶ To the *Periya-tirumoli* of Tirumaṅkaiālvār Rāmānuja composed a '*taniyan*'⁵⁷ which wishes a long life for the Ālvār who was the god of Death for others who were opponents of the Ālvār in spiritual matters and political matters as well. The Ālvār who removed the evil effects of the *Kali* age shall live long. He who was the king of Kuraiyalūr the region which he ruled over, may live long. May the Ālvār live long who obtained initiation in the sacred *mantra* from the Lord Himself on the point of his sword at Him to deprive the latter of His possessions.⁵⁸ His place is called Tirumaṅkai and so he is referred to as the ruler of that place. May the big and shining weapon of the person who was pure live long with him. In the '*taniyan*' for the Nammālvār's *Periya-tiruvantāti*⁵⁹ Rāmānuja addresses

53. Vide Paṭṭar's '*taniyan*' beginning with the words '*Vāṅ tikalum*'.

54. Vide his '*taniyan*' beginning with the words '*tilatamulakukkana*'

55. This verse begins with the words '*Innamutam ūttukēn*'.

56. This refers to the Sanskrit verse beginning with the words '*ghuṣyate yasya nagare*'. This is a verse in praise of Kulacēkarar recited at the beginning of *Mukundamāla*, a lyrical poem composed by Kulacēkarar in praise of Viṣṇu.

57. It begins with the words '*Vāli parakālan*'.

58. For this incident vide G.P. p. 50.

59. This begins with the words '*munturṇa neṅcē*'.

his mind which generally goes in advance at the object that is sought to be obtained, to utter the name of Nammālvār. He asks it to take interest in him to represent to the Ālvār his miserable condition and bless him, after bowing to the Ālvār. The mind shall freely praise the Ālvār who is the lord of Kurukūr which is encircled with groves of sandalwood trees having the flow of honey and has nearby the river Tāmaparāni.

The four thousand verses of the Ālvārs deal in the main with the exploits of Viṣṇu in His divine descent (*avatāra*) and with the *arcā* form enshrined in the temples. Much of the matter which has philosophical significance is contained mostly in the compositions of Nammālvār. On the whole, all the verses, with some notable exceptions, are addressed directly to the deities concerned. The *Sri-Bhāṣya*, the *Vedānta-sāra*, and the *Vedānta-dīpa* which deal with materials which bear philosophical import do not appear to have been much influenced by the compositions of the Ālvārs. The *Gītā-bhāṣya* and the *Gadyatraya*, the latter in particular, bear ample testimony to the influence of the *Nālayīram*. Rāmānuja addresses God, in the *Saraṅgati-gadya*⁶⁰ as mother, father, relation, as preceptor, learning, wealth and everything else. This has the influence of the passage of Nammālvār which states that the Lord is the father and mother of the world and also for him.⁶¹ In the *Sri-Bhāṣya*, Rāmānuja explains the meaning of the words 'existent' and 'non-existent'. 'Existence' means that the thing which is said to exist has name and form while 'non-existence' when applied to it implies its subtle status and does not mean its non-existence.⁶² This shows the influence of Nammālvār's verse⁶³ which means that God is in subtle form when He is said not to exist, and to exist in the gross form. God is referred to

60. S.G. 174.

61. TVM. 1. 10: 6; cf *ibid.* 2.3: 2 where God is equated with life; 2 6: 10 with time also and 5.7: 7. There is a passage in the *Sri-Vaikuntha-gadya* similar to this. Vide p. 180.

62. S.B. 2.1: 18.

63. TVM. 1.1: 9.

by Rāmānuja to possess features which are distinct from those of everything else.⁶⁴ Nammālvār influenced Rāmānuja here though his description of God as being different from soul and matter⁶⁵ In his *Bhagavad-gītā-bhāṣya* Rāmānuja's reference to God as the form of knowledge and bliss⁶⁶ points to its indebtedness to the composition of Nammālvār.⁶⁷ God is of the nature of knowledge and His nature is immeasurable or could not be gauged.⁶⁸ The same sense is conveyed by a passage from *Periya-tirumōli*.⁶⁹ Tirumaṅkaiyālvār refers to God as 'Sāmiyappan'⁷⁰ which means that God is protector and this could perhaps have influenced Rāmānuja's idea of God as bent only on protecting the world.⁷¹ Rāmānuja's reference to Nīḷa as the consort of Viṣṇu⁷² bears the influence of the *Nālayīram* which mentions Nappinnaip-pirāṭṭi who is identified with Nīḷa.⁷³

Āṇṭāḷ describes how she worshipped the Lord at Tirumālirūncōlai. She offered butter and a preparation of rice cooked with jaggery in a hundred big vessels each⁷⁴. On realizing the significance of this verse Rāmānuja went to Tirumālirūncōlai and made the offerings to the Deity as Āṇṭāḷ described and then visited Srivillip-puttūr to worship Āṇṭāḷ. Āṇṭāḷ was much pleased with the way in which Rāmānuja carried out what she wrote, and conferred on him the name 'Nam Kōil Appan' which means that she treated Rāmānuja as her elder-brother residing at Kōḷḷ (Sri Raṅgam). He behaved thus like her elder-brother in fulfilling her

64. S.G. p. 174.

65. TVM. 1.2: 4.

66. Bh. G.B. P.1 (Introduction).

67. TVM. 10.10: 10; 1.1: 2; 9.2: 3; 10.10: 10.

68. Bh. G.B. p.1 (Introduction).

69. Peri. Tm. 3.8: 1.

70. ibid. 2.2: 7.

71. Benedictory verse in the S.B.

72. S.G. p. 174.

73. T.Pv. 20.

74. Nac. Tm. 9: 6.

cherished desire.⁷⁵ Rāmānuja was so much fascinated by a verse of Āṇṭāḷ's *Tiruppāvai*⁷⁶ that he came to be called 'Tiruppāvai Jīyar'.⁷⁷

Āndhra-pūrṇa (Vaṭuka Nampi), one of the disciples of Rāmānuja, refers to his preceptor as one who knew the essence of the two *Vedāntas*,⁷⁸ one of them being based on the *Upaniṣads* and the other on Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymolī*. This shows that not only was the composition of Nammālvār treated as one of the two *Vedāntas*, but Rāmānuja was proficient in both, though he did not write himself any treatise on the compositions of Nammālvār. From other references in the other works of Vaṭuka Nampi, it is found that during the period of Rāmānuja, a festival was conducted at Srī Raṅgam for the compositions of Nammālvār. This had to be given up owing to external pressure when Rāmānuja was away from Srī Raṅgam to escape persecution at the hands of Kulōttuṅka. On his return to Srī Raṅgam he revived this festival by installing the idol of Nammālvār.⁷⁹ The festival was conducted for twenty days and was called *Adhyayana festival*.⁸⁰ He then admitted after approval *Rāmānucanūṛṇantati* composed in his honour by Tiruvaraṅkattamutaṅār as part of the Four Thousand verses of the Ālvārs. Then he installed the idols of other Ālvārs and Āṇṭāḷ in the temple at Srī Raṅgam.⁸¹

Such was Rāmānuja's interest in the *Nalayiram* and its propagation that he came to be placed on an equal footing with the Ālvārs. Hence his name is mentioned along with the names of Ālvārs in a '*taniyan*' which begins with the

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75. G.P. p.167; Āndhra-pūrṇa's *Rāmānuja Aṣṭōttraśatanāma stotra*, 26; *Yatirājavaibhavam*, 106. Āṇṭāḷ is therefore referred to *Perumputtūr māmunikkup-pinnāṇāl* (Appillai's '*Vālit-tirunāmam*', 12).
76. T.Pv. 18.
77. Owing to intense interest in the poem he came to be known by convention as Tiruppāvai Jīyar.
78. *Rāmānuja Aṣṭōttraśatanāmaśtotra*, 6.
79. *Yatirājavaibhavam*, 104.
80. *ibid.* 105.
81. *ibid.* 106.

words *bhutam sarasca*'.⁸² Vedānta Desika aptly included in his *Pirapania-cāram*, a verse in praise of this synoptic philosopher mentioning the *Rāmānuca-nūṣṣantāti* of Amutaṅār.⁸³ In another verse too, the name of the saint occurs along with those of other Āḷvārs.⁸⁴ He is really 'uṭaiyavar' or the owner of the two worlds and this truth expresses the Srīvaiṣṇava loyalty to the great ācārya and their living faith in him as the preceptor that holds the keys of earth and heaven. In brief "he was not merely the representative of his age but a philosopher for all time who combined in himself the profundity of a thinker and the humility of a saint. With his magnetic personality, encyclopaedic knowledge and brilliant powers of exposition, he summed up in his long life all that was good in the known past, namely, the heart of Buddha, the head of Saṅkara and the apostolic fervour of the Semitic religions. Even after ten centuries of his passing away, the dynamic influence of *bhakti* that was created in his lifetime is not only not exhausted, but is ever on the increase."⁸⁵

82. The Sanskrit verse was composed by Parācara Paṭṭar. It is recited before the recitation of any part of *Nalāyiram* is undertaken.

83. T.P. 380.

84. *ibid.* 383.

85. *The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita*, p. 519.