

Sri Ramanuja's contribution to the glory of Thiruvengadam

Thirumalai Ananthanpillai Srinivasan- Kanchipuram

srimadhE raamaanujaaya nama:

The glory of Thirumalai in its present state of splendour as a great Vaishnavite. Divyadesam is due to the singular and gigantic efforts of the great savant Bhagavan Ramanujar as will be seen from the brief summary penned below.

Sri Ramanuja while formulating the doctrines of Vishistadvaita in his memorable work. "Sri Bashyam" invokes the blessings of Lord Srinivasa only in his Mangalasloka (Benedictory song usually composed at the outset before commencing any literary work) vide his Srisukthi (Holy saying) "akhila bhuvana.....brahmani SrinivasE!". His lectures on Vaishnavism, the first of its kind contained in his famous work "vEdarththa sangraHam" were delivered before Lord Srinivasa. This gives us a glimpse of the reverence Ramanuja had towards the Lord of the Seven Hills. This is learnt from



the contemporary literature available. Ramanuja visited Thirumalai thrice. But his services to the Lord began even before his visit. Sri Ramanuja was greatly influenced by the teachings of Nammazhvar known as Sadagopan. Sri Ramanuja while delivering his lectures on Thiruvaimozhi (a memorable and immortal work of Nammazhvar) in Srirangam desired whether anybody in the audience was prepared to go to Thirumalai to do Pushpakainkaryam to Lord Srinivasa as cherished by Nammazhvar in the stanza expanded on that day. A journey and stay at Thirumalai in those days were unthinkable in view of its hazardous character and risks involved. One disciple in the audience (Anandazhvar) stood up and volunteered to go immediately in spite of the risks involved to fulfill the Acharya's desire. Ramanuja appreciated him for the boldness and blessed him. With the blessings of the Acharya Anandazhvar came to Thirumalai, created a

garden and a lake as a prelude. He spent his lifetime in the pushpa kainkaryam of the Lord. (More details about this Acharya can be seen in the homepage created at <http://ananthazhvan.freeservers.com>) exclusively for the purpose. Thus it will be seen Ramanuja's services to the Lord began even before his visit to Thirumalai.

Sometime after his first trip a very disturbed situation arose at Thirumalai. It grew in magnitude day by day. A virtual quarrel arose between Saivites claiming the Lord is a Saivite deity and Vaishnavites repudiating it and claiming the Lord to be Vishnu. It went up to the ruler who could not resolve the dispute. In these circumstances Ramanuja had to undertake a journey to resolve the dispute. Ramanuja met all the arguments of Saivite scholars quoting from scriptures and Agamic literature. When they persisted

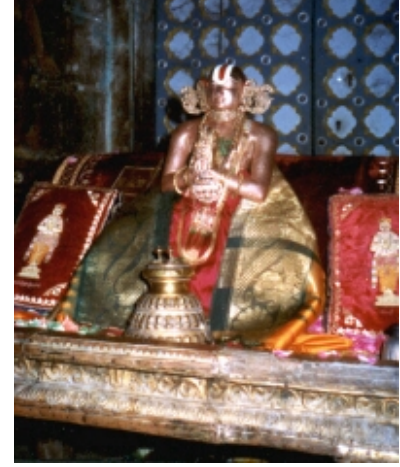


endlessly Ramanuja proposed that the symptoms like Trisul etc representing Saivite symbols, Chakra and Conch representing Vaishnavite symbols be placed before the Lord, sanctum sanctorum be closed and sealed and guarded till next morning. Whichever symbol the Lord takes shall be taken as final verdict. This proposal was universally accepted as it serves as direct proof of the Lord's wish. Accordingly when the temple doors were opened the next day the Lord was found taking Chakra and

Conch in his hands and appeared as Vishnu. After the dispute was finally resolved in the manner described above Ramanuja effected several reforms to put the issue on a firm footing. He installed appropriate images around the Vimana in accordance with Agamic principles to preserve its sanctity and protect it from evil. He inducted Vaishnavite priests to do Aradhana according to Vaikanasa Agamic trait. He introduced recitation of Azhvars' Prabhandams as an integral part of various rituals conducted throughout the year. While effecting the reforms he took care to preserve the old traditional mode of worship maintaining there are no contradiction in that form to Vaishnavite thought. Above all, Ramanuja established a Mutt and installed a Sanyasin (now called Peddy Jeeyangarlu meaning Senior Pontiff) to supervise that the rituals as ordained above are observed scrupulously. Thus he laid the foundation stone for permanent performance and supervising of rituals in accordance with the Vaishnavite character. Even to this day we find they are conducted accordingly by the efficient administration of TTD (an

autonomous body in charge of the Temple) amidst accuse pressure by the ever increasing abnormal pressure of pilgrims for darshan.

At the fag end of Ramanuja's life when he was around 70-80 years a very disturbing situation developed in Tamil Nadu when a Chola King began destruction of Vishnu Temples. He threw Lord Govindaraja from Nataraja Temple of Chidamabaram into the sea and persecuted Vaishnavites. Even Ramanuja had to flee in disguise from Tamil Nadu to Melkote in Mysore. Vaishnavites who fled from Chidambaram took the Utsava idol of Govindaraja stealthily and brought it to Thirupati where Govindaraja found safe shelter.



Ramanuja in his sojourn to Thirupati learnt about it. With the help of the ruler of the place, Ramanuja installed Govindaraja in the Temple at Tirupati, constructed, a subshrine for Andal in the side of Govindaraja taking into account her ardent devotion to the Lord here. He brought about 40 Vaishnavite families and settled them there. Gradually idol of Azhvars and Acharyas were installed in the subshrines within and around Govindaraja Temple. The Temple at present is one of the grandest Vaishnaavite centre celebrating the festivals of Azhvars and Acharyas in typical Vaishnavite tradition.

This short description gives an idea of the magnitude of Ramanuja's role in shaping Thirumalai and Thirupati to the present stature. More details about Ramanuja's activities can be learnt from books like Thirumalai-ozhugu, Ithihasamala and Life History of Ramanuja written by very many scholars.

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