

SKY writing

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JAGADGURU ŚRĪ RĀMĀNUJĀCĀRYA (1017 A.D.-1137 A.D.)

Caitra Śukla Pañcamī, Śaka 939-Māgha Śukla Daśamī, Śaka 1059

LIFE SKETCH

Name	Rāmānuja
Father's Name	Keśava Bhaṭṭa, Śrīmad Asurī Sarvakratu Keśava Dikṣita
Mother's Name	Kāntimati
Birthdate	1017 A.D.
Sex	Male
Caste	Brāhmaṇa
Place	Sriperumbudur (South West of Madras, India)
Marital Status	Married
Lifespan	120 Years

ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES

Home

Keśavācārya had a vision of Pārthasārathī (Lord Kṛṣṇa) in a dream. Pārthasārathī told him that He would be born as his son. That child was named Rāmānuja (younger brother of Lord Rāma). He was regarded as an incarnation of Lakṣmaṇa.

Both parents were religious. His mother was the granddaughter of Yāmunācārya, the saint and philosopher. Rāmānuja married Rakṣākambal, a beautiful girl, at the age of sixteen. During that same period, his father died after a month of severe illness. Rāmānuja moved with his mother and wife to Kāñcīpuram.

Education

Rāmānuja went to Kāñcī (Kañchipuram) to study with Yādavaprakāśa, a renowned scholar of Advaita (non-dualism). As Rāmānuja was a brilliant student he became the favorite and chief disciple of this teacher. However, Rāmānuja was full of devotion with an attitude of service to God, so he could not agree completely with the doctrine of non-dualism as enunciated by his rigid Advaitin teacher. Therefore, in interpretation of the scriptures they grew apart.

Yādavaprakāśa realised that Rāmānuja was a staunch devotee of Dvaita (dualism) and was afraid that he would establish that doctrine. One day, the teacher flared with anger, scolded him and told him to go home and open his own school.

For the rest of his life, Rāmānuja loved all holy men irrespective of their caste and learned from all of them.

Caste

The Brāhmaṇas were not ready to hear new ideas and philosophy. There was a widespread hypocrisy in living and teaching. Śūdras were not treated well. The caste system was rigid and appalling.

Other Events

His teacher was jealous of him. A murder attempt was made on his life by the teacher. With the help of his cousin Govinda, a hunter and the hunter's wife, he escaped the plot. Later that same teacher became his follower.

He came in touch with Śrī Kāñcīpūrṇa, a Śūdrā, a devotee of Lord Varadarāja, who was a great influence on his life and work.

He was poisoned by the high priest of the Śrī Raṅganātha temple of Śrīraṅgam. Again, he survived and later the priest was pardoned and blessed.

REACTION

Rāmānuja left Yādavaprakāśa and started discussing the **Śāstras** with his students at his own place.

Śrī Yāmunācārya sent his disciple Mahāpūrṇa to bring Rāmānuja to his Ashram at Śrīraṅgam, so that Rāmānuja could join their group. But before they arrived, Yāmunācārya passed away.

When the body was laid for viewing, Rāmānuja saw that three fingers of the right hand were folded and clenched. He asked the disciples about it and learned that Yāmunācārya's fingers were not that way during his life.

After hearing this, Rāmānuja loudly declared:

I will always remain in the fold of Vaiṣṇavism and promote and protect it.

As soon as he made this vow, one of the fingers became straight. Then he said:

*I shall write the **Śrī Bhāṣya** for the well-being of the people.*

A second finger straightened. He vowed once more:

*I shall name a learned Vaiṣṇava after Muni Pārāśara who wrote **Viṣṇu Purāṇa**.*

The remaining finger became straight. All were amazed to witness this. And Rāmānuja fulfilled all three promises.

PRACTICES

Rāmānuja was initiated by Mahāpūrṇa, a disciple of Śrī Yāmunācārya, at Madurantakam. They were in front of the Viṣṇu temple, on the bank of the lake, under the Bakula tree.

A seal was stamped on each arm – the discus on his right arm and the conch on his left. The eight-syllable Vaiṣṇava mantra was uttered in his right ear.

Mahāpūrṇa also initiated Rakṣākambal, the wife of Rāmānuja.

Rāmānuja studied the **Tamil Prabandhas** (the sacred compositions of the Āḷvārs). Under the guidance of Mahāpūrṇa, he learned the 4000 verses (**Divya Prabandha**) and studied the **Nyāsatattva**, **Āṅgīrthasangraha**, **Siddhitya**, **Vyāsa Sutra** and the **Pancarātrāgama**.

He took Sannyāsa after sending his wife to her father. He was called Yatirāja (king among ascetics). He accepted Tridaṇḍa (the triple staff) of Sannyāsin, a symbol of the mind, body and speech kept under control.

He went to Goṣṭhipūra to study the Vaiṣṇava mantra with Goṣṭhipūrṇa, a Vaiṣṇava practitioner and a scholar, at the advice of his teacher, Mahāpūrṇa.

Rāmānuja was refused eighteen times by this teacher.

Rāmānuja succeeded at last to receive his grace.

Goṣṭhipūrṇa gave him the eight-syllabled mantra with the instruction:

Whoever hears this mantra will, after death, attain liberation and go to Vaikunṭha (heaven).

Therefore, do not give it to anyone else.

Then a time came when Rāmānuja with his two disciples, Dasarathi and Kuresa, left for Śrīraṅgam. While passing the Viṣṇu temple at Goṣṭhipūra, Rāmānuja had the strange feeling to share the mantra.

He invited all the people to come – men, women, and children. He went to the top of the temple tower and in a resounding voice told the gathering that if they wanted to be liberated from the afflictions of this world, they should chant the mantra, "Om Namō Nārāyaṇāya," three times with him.

All the people chanted loudly with Rāmānuja.

Then Rāmānuja went back to his teacher and told him what he had done. Goṣṭhipūrṇa was angry at his disobedience, but Rāmānuja's intention to save others from suffering, pleased the saint.

TEACHING

Rāmānuja taught his disciples **Sahasragiti**, the 1000 hymns of **Tamil Prabandha** of Nammalvar. He traveled and preached, gaining many followers – 700 ascetics, 12,000 monks and 300 nuns. He established many centers in different parts of the country.

The three major works that explain his teachings are:

Śrībhāṣya, a commentary on the **Brahma Sūtras**
Āṅgīrthāṣya, a commentary on the **Bhagavadgītā**
Vedārthasaṅgraha, an interpretation of the **Upaniṣads**

He founded the School of Vedānta known as Viśiṣṭa Advaita (Qualified Non-dualism). This refers to the nature of the godhead (Īśvara) in its relation to the individual self (Jīva) and the universe (Jagata).

FINAL MESSAGE

Śrī Rāmānuja is known to have lived 120 years, and some suggest that he lived 140 years or more.

He spent 60 years at Śrīraṅgam. Then one day he told his disciple to bring some skilled sculptors to him. He ordered the artisans to make a stone image of him. The statue was completed in three days. It was properly installed.

He then expressed his intention to leave this world and gave a long final message. The essence of the message was:



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he who knows himself is enlightened.**

Tao Te Ching

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Īśvara (Lord, God) is the supreme Being. Individual souls are His parts.

God is the soul of the universe, the visible world is His body.

Living in the service of God is the ideal.

Bhakti (devotion, love) and Prapatti (self-surrender) are the means of Videha Mukti (liberation after death).

Devote a portion of the day for contemplation.

Read the sacred writings of the Ācāryas.

Keep the company of like-minded seekers of self-surrender to God.

Study the Śrībhāṣya and teach it to others.

Throw all your burdens on God or your own Guru.

Submerge in the meditation of your mantra.

Remove all your egoism.

With his head in the lap of Govinda, his feet on Andhrapūrṇa (his personal attendant), his eyes gazing at the wooden sandals of his Guru placed before him, Rāmānuja entered into Mahāsamādhi. It was noon on Saturday, the 10th day of the bright half of the month of Māgha, 1059 of the Śaka era.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Rāmānuja was born into a religious family. He married a wife that was beautiful but difficult to live with. He lost his father while he was still in his teens. He was very bright, emotional, full of love and humility. He escaped several attempts made on his life. He developed some

extraordinary powers. He traveled to spread the message of love and surrender to God and inspired millions of people. He was blessed with bright, devoted disciples. He lived a long life. He wrote commentaries on *Prasthānatrayī* (*Upaniṣad*, *Brahmasūtra* and *Bhagavadgītā*) and some other works. He founded the school of Viśiṣṭādvaita.

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