



## Rameshwaram, the anchor of Indian Renaissance - 7

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### Swami Vivekananda on sages of India, and visits by Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa to Rameshwaram - 1

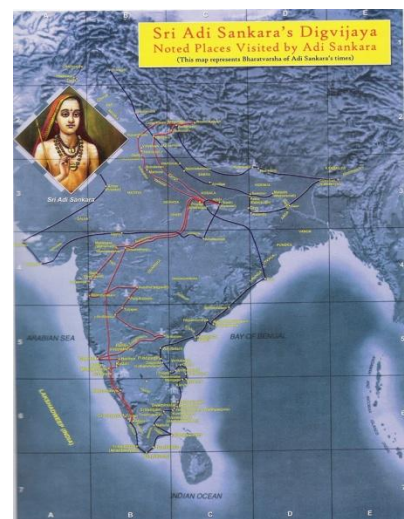
India is the land of sages. From the times when history is not even recorded to the present times, in nooks and corner of this punyabhumi, several persons realised very early in their life that the sole purpose of human life is to realise God and then help others to do so. This happened time and again. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, ‘The sages of India have been almost innumerable, for what has the Hindu nation been doing for thousands of years except producing sages?’



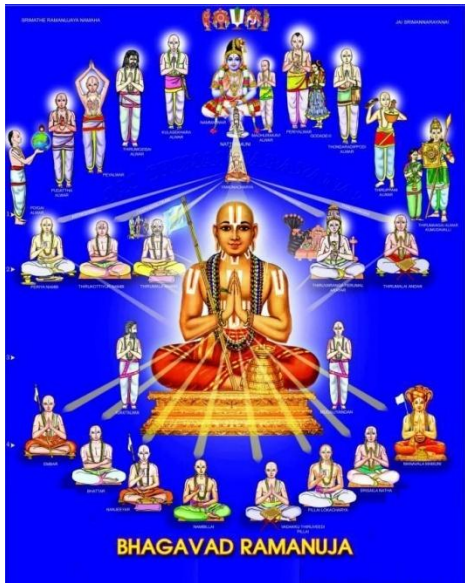
The earliest times when the Vedas and Upanishads were seen by the seer rishis, there is a peculiarity of this culture. That we do not even know the names of those seers and their lives, but we do have a long legacy of some mahavakyas, not utterances, sayings and writings, but the nuggets of truth seen and heard by the seers. It is thus called Shruti, the perpetual truths heard. On the other hand ‘to save noble people, to destroy evil, to reestablish Dharma,’ there were sages and great men appearing almost organically and reinterpreting as well as proclaiming the truths in the format suitable to their time and place. They are known by names and much is known about their lives as well. Whether it is Chaitanya, Kabir, Dadu, Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhwa, Nanak, Jnaneshwar, Ramdas, Mira, or innumerable others, there was never a shortage of sages. There are several paramparas of sages like Bhagvata, Vaishnavas, Alvar, Naynar, Sufi, Tirthkaras, etc. However, they all told Smriti or time bound truths which have to have a final sanction of the perennial truths of Vedas. Most of them are said to have done pilgrimages across India and during that process visited Rameshwaram.

Adi Shankara during his pilgrimage came to Rameshwaram. The Sankara mutt which is situated near Agni Theertham is in memory of his visit and it is famously said that Shankara joined four corners of India to make the spiritual map of it by establishing four maths. Sankara Madam, Rameswaram is a part of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. The tall tower in the Mutt has the statues of Sri Adi Sankara and his four disciples facing the sea. This statue is made up of white marble stone, 8.25 feet high and weighs about 3 tonnes.

There is mention found about Ramanuja’s visit to Rameshwaram in <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ramanuja>.



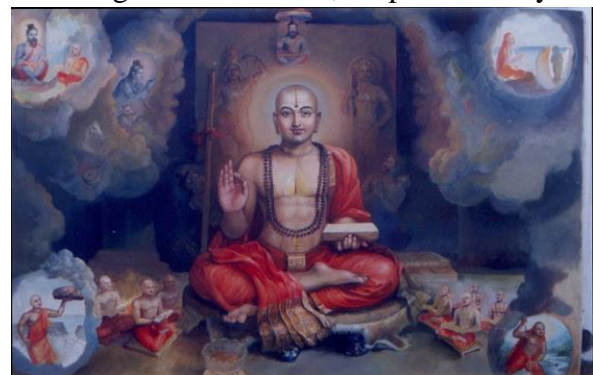
‘According to tradition, he was born in southern India, in what is now Tamil Nadu (formerly Madras) state. He showed early signs of theological acumen and was sent to Kanchi (Kanchipuram) for schooling, under the teacher Yadavaprakasha, who was a follower of the monistic (Advaita) system of the Vedanta of Shankara, the famous 8th-century philosopher. Ramanuja’s profoundly religious nature was soon at odds with a doctrine that offered no room for a personal god. After falling out with his teacher he had a vision of the god Vishnu and his consort Shri and instituted a daily worship ritual at the place where he beheld them.



He became a temple priest at the Varadaraja temple at Kanchi, where he began to expound the doctrine that the goal of those who aspire to final release (moksha) from transmigration is not the impersonal but rather brahman as identified with the personal god Vishnu. In Kanchi, as well as Shirangam, where he was to become associated with the Ranganatha temple, he developed the teaching that the worship of a personal god and the soul’s union with him is

an essential part of the doctrines of the Upanishads (speculative commentaries on the Vedas) on which the system of Vedanta is built; therefore, the teachings of the Vaishnavas and Bhagavatas (worshippers and ardent devotees of Vishnu) are not heterodox. In this he continued the teachings of Yamuna (Yamunacharya; 10th century), his predecessor at Shirangam, to whom he was related on his mother’s side. He set forth this doctrine in his three major commentaries. Like many Hindu thinkers, he made an extended pilgrimage, circumambulating India from Rameswaram (part of Adam’s Bridge), along the west coast to Badrinath, the source of the holy river Ganges, and returning along the east coast. Tradition has it that later he suffered from the zeal of King Kulottunga of the Chola dynasty, who adhered to the god Shiva, and withdrew to Mysore, in the west. There he converted numbers of Jains, as well as King Bittideva of the Hoysala dynasty; this led to the founding in 1099 of the town Milukote (Melcote, present Karnataka state) and the dedication of a temple to Shelva Pillai (Sanskrit, Sampatkumara, the name of a form of Vishnu). He returned after 20 years to Shirangam, where he organized the temple worship, and, reputedly, he founded 74 centres to disseminate his doctrine. After a life of 120 years, according to the tradition, he passed away in 1137.’

In the literature on Madhwacharya following is found about his pilgrimage in South India: ‘This would have come up during his early teens, 4/5 years after his Sannyasa in his Tenth year (1248 AD), and well before his departure for the first Badari tour (around 1258 AD). Sri C M Padmanabharachar computes that the Southern trip was completed well before 1255 AD, when he



was 17 years. HDSV says that he might have taken 2-3 years to complete the trip. This included a Chaturmasya stay in Rameswaram and possibly Sri Mushnam on the return trip and some period of stay in Sri Rangam.' (Historical Anecdotes: Madhwa)

‘Having taken ritual baths at the Tirthas in Ananthashayana, and also having taken bath at the great Tirtha called Kanyaka tirtha (Kanya Kumari), very soon Ananda Tirtha went to the bridge constructed by Rama (Dhanushkoti) to take his bath in the sea. Afterwards he offered his salutations to Sri Ramanatha or Vishnu, who is the immanent deity of the Linga (consecrated by Rama after his victory over Ravana in Rameswaram).

To be continued.....

