Reflections on the King of Ascetics (*Yatirāja*): Rāmānuja in the Devotional Poetry of Vedānta Deśika

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The ocean of Śrīvaiṣṇava literature is vast and it is a humbling scholarly endeavor to realize that the more one works on it, the more there is to discover; thus, any conclusions that one reaches on the intellectual history of the tradition can only be tentative postulations which can and must be superseded by further research.¹ This being said, it has become increasingly clear that we are seeing a particularly fertile period between Rāmānuja (traditional dates: CE 1017–1137 CE) and Vedānta Deśika (traditional dates: CE 1268–1369 CE): a period when doctrinal ideas are emerging from a wide spectrum of genres—from devotional poetry and hagiographies to commentaries and *kāvya* literature. We see also that, for instance, when it comes to the issue of the salvational means—the *upāya* for *mokṣa*—and their definitions, there was in fact much variation and a spectrum of views, without one single overarching version. Thus, to take one example, even within what emerged as a consensus on the significance of *prapatti* as the more appropriate *upāya* for the Kali Yuga, as opposed to *bhakti*, matters were by no means settled in the immediate post-Rāmānuja period as to how to understand the qualifications (*aṅgas*) for *prapatti*, or who was qualified for it.²

1 In this essay, the transliteration of maṇipravāḷa passages is uneven in that I have adhered to the exact wording in the respective printed books, which is often not systematic, sometimes giving the *devanāgarī* letters and sometimes not. All translations are my own.

2 This has been suggested in the tradition particularly of the writings of Meghanādārisūri, a senior contemporary of Vedānta Deśika. Raghavan (1979), in his survey of Viśiṣṭādvaitic literature post-Rāmānuja, suggests that the principal work of Meghanādārisūri on *prapatti*, called the *Mumukṣūpāyaśaṅgraha*, is currently lost. I have been able to acquire a copy of a single printed Telugu manuscript with this title which, in the *Upodghātaḥ* section, points to at least one view of the author, cited as Meghanādārisūri, which is dramatically different from both the mainstream Vāṭakalai and Teṅkalai *ācāryas* on *prapatti*. The relevant sentence is: *asmin granthe dvitryaṁśavyatirikteṣu bahvaṁśeṣu śrīmadvedāntācāryapakṣyair upādeyārthā eva pratipādītā iti bhāti. taditareṣv artheṣv ayam anyatamaḥ sāmānyaviśeṣalakṣaṇalakṣitaprapattijñāne tadarthānuṣṭhāne ca traivarnikānām evādhikāraḥ na śūdrasya iti. śrīmadvedāntācāryaprañīteṣu grantheṣu sapramāṇaṁ prapatteḥ sarvādhikāratā yā samarthitā sā tatraiva*

With the wisdom of hindsight, therefore, one could say that it is not at all surprising that a tradition that grappled with such wide divergences would find some of them encapsulated and formalized in the Teṅkalai and Vāṭakalai *aṣṭādaśabhedas* by as late as the eighteenth century. The perception of Rāmānuja, as well as ideas regarding his role in the salvation of his community, correspondingly, also change with the other doctrinal divergences that emerge in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition after him. This topic forms the core of this paper.

Here, I hope to show that there are many points of convergence in the hagiographical understanding of Rāmānuja between what consolidated into the later Vāṭakalai and Teṅkalai *ācārya stotra* traditions. The primary texts of comparison here are the *Irāmānuja Nūrrantāti* (henceforth, *IN*) of Tiruvaraṅkattamutaṇār, one of the earliest hagiographical/*stotra* works we have at hand on Rāmānuja (see the next section for some tentative dating), and Vedānta Deśika's *Yatirājasaptati* (henceforth, *YS*). The paper suggests that we do not see any major doctrinal divergence between the views of Vedānta Deśika and those expressed by Tiruvaraṅkattamutaṇār. What we are therefore seeing is a consolidated viewpoint regarding Rāmānuja's stature in the tradition as a whole, which remains unchanged through the centuries. Further, I would suggest that both these works see Rāmānuja not simply as any other *ācārya* of the tradition, but unique in his special role as being central to the salvation of every Śrīvaiṣṇava. Nevertheless, there are definite variations of emphasis and hence of doctrinal inflection that can be traced and these, in turn, the paper suggests, feed into eventual soteriological differences in significant ways. Exploring these subtle inflections is also the purpose of this paper.

The paper begins with a brief examination of the motifs regarding Rāmānuja in the *IN*, contextualizing the poem within the history of earlier devotional poetry addressed to the *ācārya* within the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. It then proceeds to consider two of the main motifs of the poem relating to Rāmānuja's divinity before turning to the *YS* of Vedānta Deśika. It then discusses the dif-

draṣṭavyā. ("In this work, other than with regard to two or three sections, in many sections, only the meanings established by those who adhere to Vedānta Deśika's position have, it seems, been proven. In the case of meanings that differ, there is this one—that, with regard to the knowledge of *prapatti* characterized by general and special features, as well as in the accomplishment of the meaning of it, only those of the three *varṇas* are qualified, not the *śūdra*. In the texts authored by Vedānta Deśika the establishment of [the position that] all are qualified for *prapatti*, together with authoritative proofs, can be seen there [within those texts themselves].") I am currently in the process of having this text transcribed and will begin a study to determine whether something definitive can be said about its authorship.

ference in emphases of the two poems and concludes with some historical observations about what this might mean for Tenkalai and Vaṭakalai soteriological doctrine, post-Rāmānuja.

1 Amutaṇār's *Pirapantam* on Rāmānuja

The Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographical tradition places the author of the *IN*, Tiruvaraṅkattamutaṇār or Amutaṇār, as he is also referred to, within Rāmānuja's own lifetime. In the hagiography, the *Splendour of the Previous Ācāryas* (*Pūrvācārya Vaibhavam*), Prativāti Payaṅkaram Aṇṇaṅkarācāriyār (1955) states that he was either the father or the grandfather of Pillai Perumāḷ Aiyāṅkār, the author of the *Aṣṭaprabandham*, who was a disciple of Parāśara Bhaṭṭar. Since Bhaṭṭar is traditionally considered to date to the twelfth century, this would place Amutaṇār within Rāmānuja's own traditional dates of 1017–1137 CE. This is further consolidated by details given in the hagiography of Amutaṇār. In it, Amutaṇār is introduced as a recalcitrant employee of the Śrīraṅgam temple (*kōyil kottil uḷḷavar*) who first resists but later accepts Rāmānuja's chief disciple Kūrattālvāṇ as his own teacher and, rewarded for this by being made the administrative head of the temple (*srīkāryam*) by Rāmānuja, subsequently also composes the *IN*.³

The *IN* is an extensive poem of 108 verses composed in the *kalitturai viruttam* metre. In terms of its poetic type it falls within the “super-genre” called *pirapantam*. Zvelebil (1974, 193) has pointed out that the great variety of poetic forms that fall within this category have only this much in common: “the character of a connected narrative with strong elements of description.” Traditionally, *pirapantams* were listed as thirty-six in number but by the eighteenth century, when Beschi wrote his *Caturakarāti*, the number had increased to ninety-six.⁴ The *IN* faithfully follows the logic of the genre of *Nūrrantāti*, being a poem of technically one hundred verses (here we actually have eight, auspicious additional verses), in *veṇṇpā* and *kalliturai* metres in an *antāti* arrangement, where the last syllable or word of the preceding stanza is identical with the first syl-

3 Aṇṇaṅkarācāriyār (1955, 40): ... *irāmānuca nūrrantāti aruḷicceyta amutaṇār emperumāṇāruṭaiya niyamaṇattināl ālvāṇai aṭipañintu tiruntinavar*. A further Tamil work attributed to Amutaṇār is the *Tiruppatikkōvai*, a poem in Tamil of 40 verses in the *kōvai* genre of *pirapantam* literature that is considered to list the 108 sacred places of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas.

4 In effect the *pirapantam* emerged as the most prolific genre of poetic composition in pre-modern Tamil literature, outdoing the *tanippāṭal*, *bhakti* poetry and epic/narrative forms. On this see Zvelebil 1974, 194.

lable or word of the succeeding one. It models itself consciously on the poetry of the *ālvārs*, on the *Tiviyappirapaṇtam*, and its very specific model is the small work attributed to Maturakavi ālvār, the “*Knotted, Fine, Small Rope*” (*Kaṇṇinuṇ-ciruttāmpu*), since the latter is the first work of the *Tiviyappirapaṇtam* where the *ācārya* himself, rather than Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, becomes the object of veneration and worship.⁵ Hence, the *Kaṇṇinuṇ-ciruttāmpu* functions as a precursor to all subsequent hagiographical *stotras* on the *ācāryas* of the tradition. The opening verse of this very short poem of ten verses is:

Sweet it will be, my tongue will fill with nectar
in saying, “Nampi of South Kurukūr”
after nearing him through my Lord,⁶
the Great *Māyaṇ*, who allowed himself to be tied
by the knotted, fine, small rope.⁷

The verse sets the tone for the entire poem, where the poet seeks out Nammāl-vār, implicitly seen as the focus of direct devotion rather than Māyōṇ/Kṛṣṇa. In his introduction (*avatārikai*) to the text, Periyavāccāṇ Pillai (an older contemporary of Vedānta Deśika traditionally dated to the mid-thirteenth century) makes it clear that Maturakavi takes refuge with Nammāl-vār himself as the person who can most help him when it comes to reaching God, as the person who can bring about the experience of the Blessed One for him (*bhagavadanu-bhavasahakārī*) and who, due to helping him in various ways, is himself the object to be aimed at (*uddeśya*).⁸ There are three motifs in the poem: first, that Nammāl-vār himself is the direct object of refuge; second, that he has rid the

5 Tiruvārāṅkattamutaṇār (1999, 1): *nālāyirativyaprapantattil “kaṇṇinuṇ ciruttāpu” nammāl-vār viṣayamāka amaintatu pōla emperumāṇār viṣayamāka irāmāṇuca nūṟṇantāti eṇappaṭum ti-vyaprapantam amaintuḷḷatu.*

6 The commentators interpret the words “*eṇṇappaṇil naṇṇi*” in two different ways. They either take the “*il*” to be a negative suffix, thereby suggesting that the poet moves away from Māyaṇ towards Nammāl-vār, or they take it as an ablative suffix, thereby suggesting that he approaches Nammāl-vār through or via God.

7 Kuruṣṇasvāmi Aiyyaṅkār (1993, 31):
*kaṇṇinnuṇ-ciruttāmpināl kaṭṭuṇṇap
paṇṇiyaperumāyaṇ eṇṇappaṇil
naṇṇit teṅkurukūr nampiṇ eṇṇakkāl
aṇṇikkum amut ūrum eṇ nāvukkē.*

8 Kuruṣṇasvāmi Aiyyaṅkār (1993, 23): ... *prāptitacaiyil pakavatanupavasahakārikalāyūm, ippaṭi pahumukamāṇa upakāratālē sarvāvastaiyilum tatīyarē uttēcyarenṇu atyavacittu, tamakku vaiṣṇava viṣayikāratukkum muṇṇpē ajñātajñāpakamukattālē pakavatviṣayattilē mūṭṭiṇa mahō-pakāraḱararāṇa ālvār tammaiṇē parṇukirār.*

poet of his bad *karma*/sins, and finally, that he has rendered the Vedas into Tamil. As we proceed to look at the *IN* we will see that these three motifs as well as the religious assumptions and the contents of the *Kaṇṇinuṇṇiruttāmpu* both permeate and influence the poem.

The *IN* itself came to occupy a special place within quotidian Śrīvaiṣṇava religiosity. Its significance can be gauged from the fact that, though it is not composed by the *ālvārs*, it is one of the few anomalous works to be included within the corpus of the *Tiviyappirapantam* itself, as part of the concluding section of the *Iyarpā*,⁹ and hence also a part of the daily cycle of prayers—the *nityānusaṁdhānam*—for all Śrīvaiṣṇavas, both Teṅkalai and Vaṭakalai. A further name attributed to it, and included in Amutaṇār's traditional hagiography, is *Prapannagāyatrī*—in other words, that like the *Gayatrī* mantra recited by the twice-born male during the daily morning and evening prayers (*saṁdhyāvandanam*), the *IN* must also be a part of the daily prayer rituals of the one who has undertaken *prapatti* (*prapanna*).¹⁰ The hagiography of Amutaṇār points out that the decision to include the *IN* within the *Iyarpā* as well as the decision to make it part of the daily prayer cycle of Śrīvaiṣṇavas was taken by Uṭayavar (Rāmānuja) himself, as recorded in the chronicles of the Śrīraṅgam temple (*Kōyil Oḷuku*).¹¹

In this brief consideration of this poem, with its verses of simple and elegant beauty, I begin with two examples which show its debt both to the *Tiviyappirapantam* and to the *stotra* tradition of the *ācāryas* generally. In the first example, towards the latter part of the poem, we have the following verse (76) where there is the piling up of examples of all that which is precious and delectable, culminating in the assertion that only Rāmānuja can offer the devotee that which is most precious, which are his feet:

O Rāmānuja!
Enduring fame, expansive waters,
splendid Vēṅkaṭam with its golden summit,

9 The *Tiviyappirapantam* is traditionally divided into four books of which the *Iyarpā*, meaning, "short metres," forms the third book. For a detailed discussion of the possible rationale of the arrangement of the poetry into this four-fold division and their internal contents, see Hardy 1983, 247–256.

10 Tiruvaraṅkattamutaṇār (1999, 2).

11 Tiruvaraṅkattamutaṇār (1999, 2): *uṭaiyavar, nūrrantāṭiyai iyarpāvōṭē—mutalāyirattil kaṇṇinuṇṇiruttāmpaip pōlē cērttu sakala śrīvaiṣṇavarkaḷukkum prapannakāyatrīyāka nityānusanantēyam enṇum; inta amutaṇārukkum tiruppaṇi ceyvārukkum maṭamum tirumālīkai-kaḷilē atyāpaka śrīvaiṣṇavarkaḷukkum munṇē pahumāṇamum tiṭṭam ceytu aruḷiṇār. ivai (kōyiloluku) tarum ceytikaḷ.*

the land of Vaiṣṇa, the celebrated Milk Ocean—
 How much pleasure all these give you!
 That much pleasure your lotus feet also give me.
 Then, grant them, graciously.¹²

Not only does this verse immediately echo for us the opening line of Nammālvār's verse 68 of the *Periyatiruvantāti*, which begins, "mountains, the grove-ringed Ocean and the heavenly kingdom of Vaiṣṇa" (*kallum kaṇaikaṭalum vaikunta vā nāṭum*), but even while echoing the prior poem it is doing something entirely novel. In Nammālvār's verse the poet is talking about how Kṛṣṇa, the dark God, has entered his heart and will not be dislodged from it. Hence, all God's usual habitations—the sacred mountain, the Cosmic Ocean and even Vaiṣṇa itself appear abandoned. Here, in the *IN*, Amutaṇār seems to suggest that these places where Kṛṣṇa normally dwells are the very same places which are within Rāmānuja's reach—and give him pleasure. For him, in contrast, he would gladly forsake all these for Rāmānuja's feet.

Verse 92 of the *IN* turns to another ubiquitous theme in Śrīvaiṣṇava *prapatti stotras*: the unworthiness of the person seeking refuge. Here, in the first two lines Amutaṇār says, "I have not done the virtuous vows" (*puṇṇiyanōṇpu purintum ilēṇ*), and "I have not spoken the subtle, rare and sacred words" (*nuṇṇaruḷkēḷvi nuvaṇrum ilēṇ*). These lines resonate for us with the words of another verse of Nammālvār's: *Tiruvāymoli* 7.5.1 (*nōṛranōṇp illēṇ, nuṇṇariv ilēṇ*). We are further reminded of the poetry of another *ācārya* whose Sanskrit work was also heavily influenced by the *Tiviyappirapantam*—Āḷavāntār's *Stotraratna*, verse 22: *na dharmaniṣṭho'smi na cātmavedī, na bhaktimāṃs tvaccara-ṇāravinde*.

The *IN* thus consciously positions itself within this lineage of devotional poetry—showing us that it continues and builds upon doctrinal views regarding God and the *ācārya*, who are seen as mirror images of each other, just as the poetry of each previous *ācārya* becomes a template available for embedding, as a literary echo, within the work of a successor. Indeed, the *Kaṇṇinuṇṇiruttāmpu* itself becomes a direct source of further emulation in the *Maṇavāḷamāmuṇikaḷ Kaṇṇinuṇṇiruttāmpu*—a 13-verse poem (*circa* fourteenth-century) by the lat-

12 *IN*, verse 76:

*nīṇra vaṅkīrtiyum nīḷpuṇalum nīṇraivēṇkaṭap
 poṅkuṇṇaramum vaikunṭānāṭum kulaviyapārkaṭalum
 unṇaṇakk ettaṇai iṇpantarum un iṇaimalarttāḷ
 eṇ taṇukkum atu irāmānucā ivai iṇṇaruḷē.*

ter's disciple Kōyil Kantātai Aṇṇaṇ, which centres on Maṇavālamāmuṇi's feet as a refuge because he, in turn, had taken refuge with Nammālvār.

This brings me to one of the main motifs that appears again and again in the poem: the indirect identification of Rāmānuja with Māyōṇ/Māyavaṇ/Kaṇṇaṇ as the dark cloud who brings cool rain and alleviates suffering.

In this regard a few examples from the poem should suffice: “the dark cloud that is Rāmānuja” (*irāmānucaṇ eṇṇum kār*), in verse 24; in verse 25, “O Rāmānuja, benevolent as a dark cloud” (*kārēy karuṇai irāmānucā*); verse 27 speaks of Rāmānuja as that capacious rain cloud that enters the heart of the poet; verses 55 and 60 use the word *koṇṭal* for rain cloud, where Rāmānuja is likened to a cloud pouring out the rain of the Vedas (55), or a rain cloud endowed with good qualities (60); and verse 83 speaks of his generosity being like a dark rain cloud (*kār koṇṭa vaṇmai*), as does verse 104, likening him to a bountiful rain cloud (*ceḷuṇkoṇṭal*). Finally, verses 74 and 104 even suggest, through a kind of poetic hyperbole similar to that which will surface later in the *Ācāryahṛdayam* of Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷapperumāl Nāyaṇār,¹³ that Rāmānuja, the dark cloud who convinces everyone through cool reason, might even be more effective than Māyavaṇ with his fiery discus—or that even if one were shown Kaṇṇaṇ like a gooseberry in the palm of one's hand, one would want nothing other than Rāmānuja's greatness (*cīr*).¹⁴

13 The reference here is to *Ācāryahṛdayam*, *sūtras* 56 ff., where the *Tiviyappirapantam* is compared to a golden vessel and the Vedas to an earthen vessel.

14 IN, verse 74:

tērāmaraiyiṇ tīram eṇṇu māyavaṇ tīyavaraik
kūrāḷi koṇṭu kuraippatu koṇṭal aṇaiya vaṇmai
ērarkuṇatt em irāmānucaṇ avv eḷilmaraiyil
cērātavarai citaippatu appōtu oru cintai ceytē
 Māyavaṇ reduces with the sharp discus
 those who don't understand the path of the Vedas.
 My Rāmānuja of great qualities
 with the strength of a raincloud
 destroys those who don't accept the splendid Vedas
 merely through a thought.

Verse 104:

kaiyir kaṇiyennak kaṇṇaṇaik kāṭṭittarilum unṇaṇ
meyyir pīraṇkiya cīr aṇṇi vēṇṭilaṇ yāṇ nirayat
toyyil kīṭakkilum cōtīviṇ cērīlum ivv aruḷ nī
ceyyil tarippaṇ irāmānucā eṇ ceḷuṇkoṇṭalē
 Rāmānuja, my bounteous cloud!
 Even if one were to show Kaṇṇaṇ as a fruit in the hand
 other than the splendour emanating from your body

These multiple references to Rāmānuja as a dark, bountiful, compassionate and cooling rain cloud cannot but take us back again to the *Tiviyappirapantam* and, even prior to it, to the early history of Kṛṣṇa worship in the Tamil country. As Hardy in his magnum opus *Viraha Bhakti* has convincingly shown (1983, 149 ff.), the earliest references to the God Māyōṇ come to us from specific verses in the *Puranānūru* and *Pattuppāṭṭu*. The word itself, meaning “the dark complexioned one,” clearly is the Tamil equivalent of Kṛṣṇa and the references from the earliest poetry are to his dark colour, which is compared to the ocean. Hardy masterfully traces the images of Māyōṇ from these early references through the late *Caṅkam* poetry into the use of the *akattiṇai* by the *ālvārs*. The *IN* clearly situates itself with this lineage of poetic images and plays with the image of Rāmānuja as both Māyōṇ, as better than Māyōṇ, or in a crucial verse I shall come to later, as the incarnation of the weapons of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. There is no doubt that this invocation of Rāmānuja as Kṛṣṇa is meant to set the stage for the second ubiquitous motif in the poem—that Rāmānuja has cleansed the poet of his sins by giving him his feet as a refuge.

2 Rāmānuja as Saviour from Sin and Granter of the Ultimate Goal

As mentioned previously, the motif of the *ācārya* saving the disciple appears in the *Kaṇṇinunṇiciruttāmpu* already. The relevant verse is number 7, where Matarakavi ālvār says Nammālvār removed and destroyed his ancient, bad deeds (*paṇṭaivalviṇai pārriy aruḷiṇān*). It is this very claim that the *IN* makes with regard to Rāmānuja. Let me give a few salient examples for this motif in the poem: verse 4 states that Rāmānuja destroys karma, as in the lines, “After making me a substantive thing in this world, he [Rāmānuja] first cut at the root, age-old karma that secreted illusion ...” (*eṇṇaiṇ puvīyil oru poruḷākki maruḷ curanta munṇaiṇ paḷaviṇai vē aruttu*); verse 7 refers to Rāmānuja as he who enables the poet to cross over sin (*paḷiyaik kaṭattum irāmāṇucaṇ*); in verse 26 the poet reiterates that Rāmānuja has removed his true defects that are in the form of his terrible sins/karma (*eṇ cey viṇaiyām meyyikuṛram nīkki*); in verse 35 the poet asks how *karma* could ever shroud him after he has in his memory the lotus feet of Rāmānuja (*aruviṇai eṇṇai evvār iṇriy aṭarppatuvē*); verse 41 plays upon the idea of the accessibility of Rāmānuja by pointing out that even when Mādhava

I do not want.
Even if cast into the affliction of Hell,
or reach the Heaven of light,
this grace done by you sustains me.

is born on earth within each body, as the Inner Dweller, those who not recognize him are able to become his devotees when Rāmānuja incarnates and gives them true knowledge; in verse 45 the poet emphatically declares that there is no other greater desired object than Rāmānuja's feet, and that no one can make them attainable except the feet themselves (*pēr onṛu marṛ illai niṇ caraṇ anṛi, appēr alittark ārenṛum illai marṛaic caraṇ anṛi*), etc. In verse 66 the poet sets up an analogy that both compares and distinguishes between the generosity of God and Rāmānuja. Mādhava, he says, gives the supreme abode (*vāṇam*) to those who pine (*naipavar*) for him. But this same goal also becomes available to those who have committed grave sins, because these have been removed by Rāmānuja from their hearts (*valvinaiyēṇ maṇattil iṇam kaṭinta irāmānucan*). These verses build up to a crescendo in verses 71 ("my previous karma was removed due to your gracious conduct," *muṇ cey viṇai nī cey viṇayataṇāl pōntatu*) and 77 ("he burnt out my sins at their roots," *eṇ viṇaikalai vēr pariyaḱ kāyntaṇ*). In verse 94 the poet emphasizes the assurance that Rāmānuja grants right conduct, the wealth of service to God, and the ability to execute this.

In a brief digression it must be added that we cannot fully understand the theological developments on the Teṅkalai side, or the Tamil *stotra* tradition on the *ālvārs* and *ācāryas* in particular, without seeing very similar parallel developments on the Tamil Śaiva side. We are speaking of a shared religious and, most importantly, poetic landscape here where there was mutual influence and emulation. Hagiographical *pirapantams* were composed on the leading religious figures of both traditions. Thus, the *Irupā Irupaḱtu*, attributed to Aruṇaṇṭi Śivācāriyar (traditional dates: thirteenth century), who is considered one of the foremost disciples of Meykaṇṭar whose work *Civañāṇapōtam* (Śiva-jñānabodham) inaugurates the Tamil Śaiva *Siddhānta* canon, is a *pirapantam* poem of 12 verses whose resemblance to the *IN* is striking. The *Irupā Irupaḱtu* equates Meykaṇṭar with Śiva himself, his greatness as a guru being such that he can rid devotees of primal impurity (*mala*). Such parallels between poetic traditions must also be kept in mind when reflecting on the hagiographical traditions linked to Tamil devotional poetry, considered across the sectarian divides.

Careful reading of the poem shows that *IN* sets up a series of analogies: between Kaṇṇaṇ/Māyōṇ and Rāmānuja, and between the salvation promised by Kṛṣṇa in *Bhagavadgītā* 18.66, the *Caramaśloka*, according to which taking refuge with him would remove all sins of the devotee, and the descent of Rāmānuja in the *Kali Yuga*, which removes the sins of the poet. This analogy is by no means the only one and I do not wish, hereby, to simplify the poem, reducing it to this doctrinal message. Indeed, in other verses the poem suggests that taking refuge at the feet of the devotees of Rāmānuja is equally important,

or that Rāmānuja is not so much Māyōṇ as the incarnation of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa's weapons. But there is no doubt that many of its verses suggest that Rāmānuja is connected with the promise of the *Caramaśloka*; and it is this motif, with the direct analogies it draws between Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva, on the one hand, and Rāmānuja, on other, that is central to the hagiographical impulse of the poem.

But before I expand on what this means for the representation of Rāmānuja from the earliest hagiographical tradition on him, I would like to focus our attention on Vedānta Deśika's 70 verses on the King of Ascetics, the *Yatirājasaptati*, to see how it might converge or diverge in its representation of Rāmānuja.

3 The *Yatirājasaptati*

The *rs* is a poem of remarkable lyrical beauty consisting of a total of 74 verses. Of a very different aesthetic feel than the *IN*, the poem begins with ten verses on the *guruparamparā*, where the poet salutes his lineage of teachers, beginning with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa and concluding with Rāmānuja. It is carefully structured to hold in a dialectical unity the greatness of Rāmānuja, his divine incarnation, on the one hand, and the greatness of his works and his achievements, on the other. The poem moves in circles, again and again, around these two themes, with the additional theme of the greatness of his devotees inserted in some of these circular reflections. Vedānta Deśika tells us, at the very end of the poem why he has composed it (verse 73):

upaśamitakudṛṣṭiviplavānām upaniṣadām upacāradīpikeyam |
kabalitabhagavadvibhūtiyugmāṇ diśatu matiṃ yatirājasaptatir naḥ ||

May the *Yatirājasaptati*, the lamp that aids the Upaniṣads by which the distortions that are wrong views are extinguished, give us the knowledge that encompasses both the *vibhūti*s of the Blessed One.

Thus in this verse, which is a *phala-śruti*, Vedānta Deśika makes it clear that the poem is as much about Rāmānuja's feat in composing the *Śrībhāṣya*, thereby giving the right interpretation of the Upaniṣads, as it is about the greatness of Yatirāja himself. Indeed, Vedānta Deśika makes it clear that Rāmānuja's greatness lies in his composition of the work on Vedānta.

The poem's first ten verses create the context for the exaltation of Rāmānuja. This context is the lineage of teachers (*guruparamparā*) who preceded him and are listed in the first eight verses of the poem in the following order: Nārāyaṇa, Śrī-Lakṣmī, Viṣvaksena, Nammālvār, Puṇḍarikākṣa (Uyyaṅkoṇṭār),

Śrīrāmamiśra (Maṇakkāl Nampi), Yāmuna (Āḷavantār) and Mahāpūrṇa (Periya Nampi). In verse 11 Rāmānuja is addressed, for the first time, with the phrase “Lord of the Ascetics” (*patiṁ yatīnām*).

It is relevant that this is not the first time in the hagiographical literature that this epithet is used for him. Instead, as the modern commentator of the *YS* Vātūla Nīlameghācārya points out, the word is already used for him, as the title bestowed upon him by Lord Varadarāja at Kāñcīpuram when he took the vows of an ascetic, according to the hagiographical literature composed contemporaneous to the poem. Here the commentator references the *Yatirājabhairavam*, composed by Rāmānuja's immediate disciple Āndhra Pūrṇa (Vaṭuka Nampi) probably around the same time as the *IN*, where this episode is narrated.¹⁵

When we come to the poem's understanding of the divinity of Rāmānuja we find a wide spectrum of meanings. In verse 12, which agrees with verse 33 of the *IN*, Rāmānuja is seen as the coming together of all the five weapons of Murāri (*apṛthakpratipanna yanmayatvaiḥ vavṛdhe pañcabhair āyudhair murāreḥ*, 12cd). In the very next verse, 13, there is a playful simultaneous narration or *śleṣa* on the victorious activities of both Lord Kṛṣṇa and Rāmānuja, where the meanings converge in the word Rāmāvarajaḥ, referring both to Yatirāja as well as Kṛṣṇa himself as the younger brother of Balarāma, thus establishing identity between the two figures. Verse 27 lauds Rāmānuja as the aggregation of the threefold splendour (*saṁvalita-tridhāman*) of Agni (*śikhāvān*), the moon (*auṣadhiśaḥ*) and the sun (*tāpanaḥ*). In verse 32 Rāmānuja is seen as having the same capacity to offer protection to the world as Viṣvaksena, with the latter's cane staff transformed into his ascetic's rod.¹⁶ Verse 28 is particularly eloquent in describing and encapsulating all his nurturing and protecting qualities, which are compared to those present everywhere in nature itself—as the mountain from which originate all the streams of knowledge (*sakalavidyāvāhinījanmaśailaḥ*), the tree under which the weary traveller wandering in *saṁsāra* takes rest (*janipathaparivṛttiśrāntaviśrāntiśākhī*), the ris-

15 *YS* (2010, 20): *parigrhītaturyāśramasya śrīrāmānujasya bhagavatā śrīvaradarājena yatirāja iti nāma kṛtam iti guruparamparāprabhāve varṇyate. Yatirājabhairavam*, verse 50: *patnīṇ parityajya sa vitarāgaḥ śrīdevarājaṁ praṇipatya tasmāt | turyāśramaṁ svikṛtavān dadau sa devo 'pi tasmai yatirājanāma ||*. The use of the epithet *Yatirāja* was not the prerogative only of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas but of the hagiographical traditions of other sectarian groups as well, seeking to exult their ascetic religious founders, as for instance the Madhvas of Vyāsātīrtha. On this see Stoker 2016.

16 *YS*, verse 32cd:
*viśvaṁ trātuṁ viśayaniyatam vyañjitānugrahaḥ san
 viṣvakseno yatipatir abhūt vetrasāras tridaṇḍaḥ ||*

ing sun that keeps the illusionary darkness of those with distorted views at bay (*nikhilakumatimāyāśarvarībālasūryaḥ*) and the full moon that brings to high tide the ocean of the Vedas (*nigamajaladhivelāpūrṇacandraḥ*). Finally, in verse 63 Rāmānuja is Viṣṇu himself in his form (*mūrtiḥ*) as Dattātreyā, with his yellow-ochre robes (*pītavasaṇaḥ*) and protective ascetic rod.¹⁷

When we consider the range of figures that Rāmānuja is identified with in the *YS* we see that they converge overwhelmingly, with some exceptions, on Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. Thus, the references to him as Agni, the sun and the moon, as the yellow-robed ascetic God, and then, secondarily, as Viṣvaksena or the collective of the weapons of Viṣṇu, all draw upon images that have a long genealogy in Vedic, epic and Purāṇic literature on Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. If the *YS* echoes other Vaiṣṇavite devotional poetry at all, in addition to the *Tiviyappirapantam*, we would do well to consider the images of Viṣṇu presented in the *Paripāṭal*, in the context of the overall Vedicism of the early poetic work.¹⁸ Thus, despite the commonality between the *IN* and the *YS* in stressing Rāmānuja's divinity, his being elevated to a level above that of the other *ācāryas*, we see a subtle differentiation in the manner in which the *IN* foregrounds the significance of the *Bhagavadgītā* in contrast to the Vedic, epic and Purāṇic representations of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in the *YS*. This difference in inflection can also be understood if we consider the overwhelming importance that the *YS* attributes to Rāmānuja's establishment of the "right" kind of Vedānta.

17 *YS*, verse 63ab:

kāṣāyeṇa grhītapītavasanā daṇḍais tribhīr maṇḍitā

sā mūrtir muramardanasya jayati traīyyantasamrakṣiṇī ||

18 On this see Raman 2011, 661–662: "A brief comparison of the Tirumāl motifs of the *Paripāṭal* with those relating to Viṣṇu in the Vedic and immediate post-Vedic Brāhmaṇa and epic literature shows how thoroughly vedicized the Vaiṣṇavism of the text is. It would not be unreasonable to speculate that this Vaiṣṇavism of the *Paripāṭal* may be drawn from Sanskrit textual sources: the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas, the *Mahābhārata* (particularly the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Śāntiparvan*) and the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*. Here, one should draw attention to the following motifs which already appear in these sources: [...] the general description of Tirumāl clad in yellow garments, with the Goddess and the jewel Kaushtubha on his chest and, finally and, most importantly, the identification of Tirumāl with elements of the Vedic sacrifice in *Paripāṭal* 2.61–64. ... There is also the repeated insistence in the text that our only true source of knowledge for Tirumāl's appearance, his deeds, his prowess and his divine grace are the Vedas (called, variously, *marai*, *mutumolī* and *vāy-molī*), guarded and transmitted by the Brahmins (*antaṇar*)."

4 The Eyes of the Vedas: Rāmānuja's Vedānta¹⁹

There are allusions to Rāmānuja's "protection" of the Vedas, his defeat of those who hold other Vedāntic views as well as the significance of his establishment of the right interpretation of the Vedas in innumerable verses of the *YS*. Thus, Rāmānuja's words are a firmly established cage of logic to prevent the wanderings that are the Vedas (v. 14) and they also draw in the texts that are the Vedānta (v. 26).²⁰ They cause those who have touched the bed of the Ocean that is the rules of the Vedānta to rejoice, and have them establish the state of salvation.²¹ Rāmānuja, the poem states, is the *tridaṇḍa*-bearing ascetic who sits at the base of the tree of the Vedas, removing the fear of deceitful people from the minds of people (v. 22).²² Verse 31 captures in a lovely set of images the nature of Rāmānuja's works. They are wish-fulfilling trees for the imagination of debaters (*kathakajanamaniṣā-kalpanākālpavṛkṣāḥ*), oozing with the nectar of Hari's feet (*haripadamakarandasyandinaḥ*), possessing many branches (*anugatabahuśākhāḥ*) so that they can remove suffering/heat (*āpam unmulayanti*), and subduing (with their perfume) the stench of sins (*śamitaduritagandhāḥ*).

The repeated reference to the Vedic basis of Rāmānuja's teachings is stressed in several further phrases in verses 44, 47, 50, etc. In verse 57 Vedānta Deśika interestingly historicizes the tradition, accepting that even if Rāmānuja's doctrine (*mata*) is new (*navīnam*) and others might have come before (*prāk*), this does not matter. For Rāmānuja is within the lineage of those ancient commentators such as Ṭaṅka, Dramiḍa and Guhadeva, who were fearless (*nirātāṅkāḥ*) because of their unobscured vision (*nijamatitiraskāravigamāt*). This view of Rāmānuja's central role in the establishment of a new, Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta is the second central motif in the poem. Thus, even while we also have verses in the poem that, like in the *IN*, echo the sentiments of taking refuge at the feet of Rāmānuja, such as verses Verse 18, where those who take refuge at the feet of Yatipati become free of sin (*anaghā*) or Verse 20, where the feet are a

19 *YS*, verse 30: *śrutinayanasanābhiḥ śobhate lakṣmaṇoktiḥ*.

20 *YS*, verse 14:

abahuśrutasaṃbhavaṃ śrutināṃ jaratīnāṃ ayathāyathapracāram |
vinivartayituṃ yatīśvaroktir vidadhe tāḥ sthiraṇūtipaṇjarasthāḥ ||

Cf. verse 26a: *ākarṣaṇāni nigamāntasarasvatīnāṃ*

21 *YS*, verse 21:

śvasitāvadhūtāparavādivāibhavāḥ nigamāntanūtijaladhes talasprśaḥ |
pratipādayanti gatim āpavargikīm yatīsārvabhaumapadasātkṛtāsāyāḥ ||

22 *YS*, verse 22ab:

mūle niviśya mahatām nigamadrumāṇām
muṣṇan pratārakabhayaṃ dhṛtanaikadaṇḍaḥ |

refuge compared to medicine that stills the fluctuations of the mind (*calacit-tavṛttivinivartanaṣadhaṃ śaraṇaṃ yatīndracaraṇaṃ vṛṇīmahe*), it becomes clear that the framework of the poem does not allow for a predominant focus on the analogy between Rāmānuja and Kṛṣṇa nor that his feet themselves are the predominant *upāya* for *mokṣa*.

In summing up, we see a common emphasis in the representation of Rāmānuja in the two poems, the one composed in Tamil and the other in Sanskrit separated by centuries. This was a representation rooted in a strong hagiographical, *stotra* tradition parallel to that of the *guruparamparās* that emerge from the twelfth century onwards and the various commentaries with hagiographical elements on the *Tivīyappirapantam*. It reaffirmed Rāmānuja's divine descent, similar to the divine descent of the *ālvārs*. It was less uniformly codified, though, as to in what or in whom to locate Rāmānuja's divinity—in Kṛṣṇa himself, in Viṣvaksena or Dattātreyā, in Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa or his weapons. It is also equally clear that from early on the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition was united in seeing Rāmānuja as central to the salvific process, and in considering that, for those who were his disciples, taking refuge in Rāmānuja would accelerate the path to Vaikuṇṭha and the state of servitude (*kaiṅkarya*) to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. Nevertheless, the frequent references to Rāmānuja as destroying one's sins, a reference directly calqued on the central promise of the *Caramaśloka*, is not absent but does not function as the fulcrum of the *YS* as it does in the *IN*.

Here, we would do well to recollect Vedānta Deśika's poetic tribute to other figures of the *guruparamparā* in the *kāvya* style, such as his references to Nammālvār in the *Pādukāśahasram*, the *mahākāvya* of 1008 stanzas that centres around the *Rāmāyaṇa* episode where Bharata takes the sandals of Rāma on his head and has these reign as the symbol of Rāma's presence, in the latter's absence. Playing in certain verses on the double meaning of the *pādukās*—one as the divine sandals and one as Nammālvār himself being the sandals, adorning the feet of God as his ideal devotee—allows the poet to speak of Nammālvār's subordination (*śeṣatva*) as well as his greatness in giving us the Tamil Vedas.²³ Similar to the treatment of Rāmānuja in the *YS*, the *Pādukāśahasram* section on Nammālvār is careful to place him within the context of the entire *guruparamparā* tradition as someone who performs an extraordinary function in establishing the doctrinal foundations of the school, rather than as a unique figure who towers entirely above all the others of the lineage. Such a perspective, which even while lauding the achievement of each respective *ācārya* also

23 For a brief analysis of the relevant verses (22–29) of the *Pādukāśahasram*, see Hardy 1979, 64–67.

relativizes it within a historical understanding of the tradition, is very different from the affective framework of the *IN*, which dwells on the emotional resonance of a single figure.

5 Post-Prapatti

The *IN*'s greater emphasis on Rāmānuja in his role as the *ācārya* significant for salvation anticipates Teṅkalai doctrinal development, as we see it evolving in the works of Piḷḷai Lokācārya (traditional dates: CE 1264–1327) and in the commentaries on his works. In his works attention had decisively shifted to a soteriological path that was considered even more appropriate than *prapatti* for the seeker of salvation—both in terms of being easier as well as the most appropriate expression of the humility of the soul. This new salvific means was “love for the *ācārya*”—*ācāryābhimāna*.

In her thorough study of the writings of Maṇavālamāmuṇi in the immediate post-Vedānta Deśika period, Mumme (1988) demonstrates the consolidation of the doctrine of *ācāryābhimāna* as the preferred form of salvation in his commentaries on Piḷḷai Lōkācārya's works. Summarily put, the doctrine of *ācāryābhimāna* mirrors, in a mimetic fashion, the reasons why *prapatti* was favoured above *bhaktiyoga* in the immediate post-Rāmānuja stage of doctrinal formation. *Ācāryābhimāna* is not simply for the person incapable of *prapatti*; it is also “not only a separate means, but the superior or ultimate means (*caramopāya*), given the ultimate limits of the soul's nature and destiny” (p. 243). The pragmatics of it meant a total surrender of all one's own responsibility for doing anything for salvation by relying on the *ācārya* to do the needful. What, then, exactly was the *ācārya* to do? As the commentary of Piḷḷai Lōkam Ciyar on Piḷḷai Lokācārya's *Arthapañcakam* explains, this meant, in effect, that one surrendered all responsibility for performing *prapatti* to the *ācārya*, who out of great compassion and being a great devotee himself, does it for you in your stead and advises you on all your future conduct, so that the *prapatti* he does for you might prove efficacious.²⁴ Thus, as Mumme (1988, 226–227) puts it succinctly,

24 *Arthapañcakam*, Sūtra 9 commentary: “The person who does this *ācāryābhimāna* is incapable of doing anything else. With regard to him, reflecting on his lowliness and the happiness of the Lord if he were to obtain him, like a mother, who when her child falls ill, sees this as her own fault and gives it medicine, the *ācārya* is that greatly compassionate one (*paramadayālu*) and great devotee (*mahābhāgavata*) who can undertake the means of salvation for the soul. All that the souls has to do is to surrender to the love for him and,

The only means of salvation in practice today among the Teṅkalai is *ācāryābhimāna*—the love of the *ācārya*. As they see it, Rāmānuja has already done *prapatti* to the Lord for all future generations of his followers. Therefore, rather than surrendering to the Lord himself, one merely has to take refuge with an *ācārya* of his lineage. For the Vaṭakalai, the way of salvation is through the performance of *prapatti* to the Lord in the manner prescribed by the śāstras under the guidance of a qualified *ācārya*. Though the *ācārya* can perform *prapatti* specifically for a particular disciple, mere relationship with the *ācārya* is no substitute for the performance of *bharaṇyāsa* [understood in the broadest sense as the laying down of all one's agency] with it's *aṅgas*.

Hence, she also goes on to point out that there is a widely held belief among contemporary Teṅkalai Śrīvaiṣṇavas, not established in any of the writings of Piḷḷai Lōkācārya, Maṇavāḷamāmuṇi or Vedānta Deśika, that “Rāmānuja is the *ācārya* who has saved all future generations of Śrīvaiṣṇavas with his *prapatti* ...” There is a conspicuous textual exception to the absence of this doctrine in the writings of the major *ācāryas* of both traditions in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, though. This is the *Caramopāyanirṇaya* of Nāyaṇār Āccāṇ Piḷḷai (traditional dates: 1227–1327), the nephew and adopted son of Periyavāccāṇ Piḷḷai, a work that clearly endorses the view that taking refuge with Rāmānuja himself is central to salvation, thus making this a doctrinal position found well before contemporary belief. Mumme's arguments (1988, 87–89) for doubting that this could be the work of Nāyaṇār Āccāṇ Piḷḷai is not dissimilar to the controversy regarding Rāmānuja's authorship of the *Gadyatraya*, which I have addressed in some detail in my 2007 book: stylistically, she suggests it is different (too simple) compared to the same author's other doctrinal works and ideologically it is far too radical for its time, anticipating a doctrine of *ācāryābhimāna* centred on Rāmānuja which only came much later.

The detailed look I have taken at the *Caramopāyanirṇaya*, to be dealt with in another paper, shows a great deal of doctrinal convergence with the *IN*. Indeed, both works in their emotional appeal to Rāmānuja within a salvific framework

[as in the saying], “if you were to give me the certain prize, then we are meant to obtain it”, with regard to all his activities do and not do what he [the *ācārya*] commands.”

Arthapañcakam vyākhyāna, p. 68: *ācāryāpimāṇamāvatu ivayonṛukkum caktāṇaṇṛik-kēyiruppāṇ oruvaṇaṇṛik kurittu, ivanuṭaiya ilavaiyum, ivanaip perṛāl icuvaraṇuṇṛik uṇṭāṇa pṛ-tīyāiyum aṇusantittu staṇantaya prajaikkum vyātiyūṇṭāṇāl atu taṇ kuṛaiyāka niṇaitta auṣata sēvaiyaip paṇṇum mātāvaippōlē ivanukkāka tāṇ upāyānuṣṭāṇam paṇṇi rakṣikavalla paramatayāluvaṇa makāpākavataṇ apimāṇattilē oṭuṇki, vallaparicu varuvipparēl atu kāṇṭum enṛu collukirapaṭiyē sakalapravṛttinṛttikaḷaiyum avaṇiṭṭavalaḷakkākkukai.*

allow one to assume that Rāmānuja's salvific qualities, stretching to a point where they can extend over historical posterior time, had become accepted doctrine in at least one important strand of the tradition, even within (if not shortly after) his postulated dates. That Vedānta Deśika, for his part, was also not unaware of these views centred around Rāmānuja becomes clear from a particular passage of his major work on *prapatti*, the *Rahasyatrayasāram*. In Chapter 8 of the text, where he is discussing the different categories of those qualified for *prapatti* (*adhikārivibhāga*), Vedānta Deśika differentiates between the *uktiniṣṭhaṇ* person, whose *prapatti* is based upon the utterance taught to them by their *ācārya*, and the *ācāryaniṣṭhaṇ* person, whose *prapatti* is done for them by their *ācārya*. Regarding this second category of persons, he has this to say:

Among these [two categories], the *ācāryaniṣṭhaṇ* is himself included within the *ācārya*'s laying down of his burden (*bharasamarpaṇam*) with regard to him and his own For this *ācāryaniṣṭhaṇ*, according to the axiom of "how much more, then" (*kaumutika nyāya*), there can be no doubt as to the attainment of the fruit. Mutaliyāṇṭaṇ [Rāmānuja's nephew] taught the verse: like those creatures on the body of a lion that leaps from one mountain to another, when *Bhāṣyakāra* [Rāmānuja] jointly leaps [does *prapatti*], then, due to our bodily relationship with him [i.e. being related to him due to kinship ties], we too have been elevated [we get the same salvific benefits as he does].²⁵

Vedānta Deśika is fully aware that these words attributed to Mutaliyāṇṭaṇ are capable of being understood as implying that Rāmānuja's act of *prapatti* becomes the single soteriological event that saves all those who come after him in the community. Precisely to firmly reject such an understanding he adds, almost immediately, the following emphasis:

In the *Nyāsatilakam* [verse 21] we also said: "The blind man is able to move about led by the one with sight, O Lord of Śrīraṅgam; the cripple, placed within a boat, is taken across by a boatman; the children of a servant relish [royal] food though they don't know the king; thus will my compassion-

25 Vedānta Deśika (1980, 293–296): *ivarkaḷil ācāryaniṣṭhaṇ ācāryaṇuṭaiya ātmātmīyabharasamarpaṇattilē tāṇum antarbhūtaṇ. ... ācāryaniṣṭhaṇukku kaumutikanyāyattālē phalasiddhīyil sandeham illai. oru malayil niṇṇum oru malaiyilē tāvum sinhacarīratil jan-tukkaḷaippōlē bhāṣyakāra saṃyoga laṅghanam paṇṇa avarōtu uṇṭāna kuṭaltuvakattālē nāmum uttiṇṇar āvivōm eṇṇu mutaliyāṇṭaṇ aruḷicceyta pācūram.*

ate teacher help me to reach you.” The Lord of All will not relent to give the supreme goal without *prapatti* being done in some way, through some person.²⁶

The significant point here is that Deśika is citing poetry of his own to show that the *ācārya* is the helper, even up to a point where he can do the *prapatti* for you. What this means is that it is your current *ācārya* who can do this for you, and this is what the *Nyāsatilakam* verse elaborates. This does not mean that Rāmānuja’s *prapatti* at one historical moment absolves his entire community from henceforth doing it. Thus, Vedānta Deśika is concerned to subtly disagree with the statement of Mutaliyāṇṭān’s or at least differs in his interpretation from what it comes to mean later within the Teṅkalai tradition.

Ultimately, the doctrinal musings on Rāmānuja are central to a theme that lies at the heart of the tradition: the issue of how to reconfigure the nature of God’s and the religious canon’s own accessibility to the community of ordinary devotees. Succinctly put, the literature of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition has repeatedly reconfigured the motif of accessibility both to enable the incorporation of doctrinal change and to allow for canonical expansion. Thus, the central argument in the equation of the *Tiviyappirapantam* and the Vedas is one of the accessibility of Vedic revelation in a manner that overcomes linguistic, caste and gender boundaries. We see this elaborated in detail for the first time in Naṇḍiyar’s *Ārāyirappaṭi vyākhyānam* and then more radically reiterated in the *Ācāryahṛdayam* of Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷapperumāl Nāyaṇār. The *IN* is also drawing upon this theme of accessibility—suggesting that Rāmānuja’s feet provide the same refuge in the Kali Yuga that Kṛṣṇa’s did in the Dvāpara Yuga. While Vedānta Deśika is determined to pay homage to Rāmānuja’s significance within the tradition and sees him as occupying a summit of his own, he is also determined to place him within a framework that establishes the coherence of the school of Viśiṣṭādvaita as a whole. The differences between the two poems are reflective of the differences, broadly speaking, in the hermeneutical strategies between the Teṅkalai and Vaṭakalai literature, which Mumme (1988) again summarizes so well: the Teṅkalai literature, in general, leans towards hyperbole and dramatic intensity, drawing heavily upon popular idioms and metaphors and rooting itself in the Tamil, devotional poetry. In contrast, in Vedānta Deśika,

26 Vedānta Deśika (1980, 296–297): *andho’ nandhagrahaṇavaśago yāti raṅgeśa yadvat, paṇ-gur naukākuharanihito nīyate nāvikenā | bhuvikte bhogān aviditanṛpaḥ sevakaśyārbhakā-dih, tvatsaṇṇprāptau prabhavati tathā deśiko me dayāluḥ || eṇṇu nyāsatilakattilē conṇōm. Ētēṇu oru parkaramākavumām, ārēṇu oruvar anuṣṭikkavumām prapattikk allatu sarveśvaraṇ puruṣārtham koṭukka iraṅkāṇ eṇṇatāyirru.*

particularly, we see the need to balance rhetorical flourishes with scholastic precision. He wishes to be seen to be speaking for the coherence of the tradition as a whole, particularly in order that it withstand pan-Vedāntic scholastic scrutiny. For him, homage to Rāmānuja must not lead, through rhetorical excess, to a new and radical turn in the doctrine of *prapatti*, as it does in the Teṅkalai case.

The analysis of the *stotra* literature on Rāmānuja here, by no means exhaustive but rather exemplary of the formative phase of doctrine, also reinforces for us what has already been established for Rāmānuja's own writings, as in the case of the *Gadyatrāya*: that devotional poetry composed not just by the *ālvārs* but also the later *ācāryas* is as central as commentaries and independent works to the evolution of Śrīvaiṣṇava doctrine.

Finally, it is no mere coincidence that both the Vaṭakalai and Teṅkalai *nityā-nusaṃdhānam* texts begin with a pool of common single, independent verses (*taṇṇiyan*) of salutation to each figure in turn in one's *guruparaṃparā*, which Śrīvaiṣṇavas are encouraged to recite on a daily basis. Both contain Kūrattālvāṇ's *taṇṇiyan* that ends with the words *asmadguror bhagavato 'sya dayaikasindhoḥ, rāmānujasya caraṇau śaraṇam prapadye*. This convergence in Rāmānuja as the object of veneration speaks for his centrality—as the central gemstone in the necklace of the *guruparaṃparā*, as Vedānta Deśika says in his poem (verse 15): a pendant that holds together, gives structure to and makes resplendent not just the individual beads of the necklace but indeed, as the other *ācāryas* who are themselves likened to the beads of the necklace would say, adorning and forming the dazzling central gemstone of the entire tradition.

Abbreviations

IN *Irāmānuja Nūṛṇṇantāti* of Tiruvaraṅkattamutaṇār.

YS *Yatirājasaptati* of Vedānta Deśika.

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