

Thirunarayanapuram (Melkote) - Ramanuja's favorite place

- Anand Ramanuja Dasan

Thiruna:ra:yanapura, also called Ya:dava:dri, Yadusaila, and Me:lkote, is located in Mysore District of the state of Karna:taka. This small town's hub of activity is its temple, which is dedicated to the Lord Sri Thiruna:ra:yana, His Consort Sri: Yadugiri Na:yaki, and a very special form of Sri Ra:ma:nuja, which He himself approved to be installed there. A separate temple to Sri Yo:ga Narasimha is located on a hill overlooking the small town. Although this holy place has been mentioned in the Pura:nas, it really came to formal existence with the coming of our great a:charya Swamy Sri: Ra:ma:nuja. This town was the place where Sri Ra:ma:nuja resided for 12 years after he and his disciples were exiled from Sri Rangam by local fanatical chieftains.

Of all of the places where Sri Ra:ma:nuja visited and resided, Melukote was particularly dear to his heart; so much so, that he stated that he would place his very spirit in the processional image that bears an exact likeness to him, and instructed all of his disciples to make an effort to reside here. In His last message before leaving this earth, he instructed his devotees to live in Me:lukote for some period of time in their lives, even if it were to be in a small little house.



To this day, Me:lkote is a place where people glorify Sri: Ra:ma:nuja as the King of Ascetics, the King of Philosophers, the King the Ve:das Awaited, and the Father of the divine child Sampath Kumaran (Chelva Pillai-the Dear Darling Child, the name of the processional deity in this temple). Our Ve:dic history explains the important relationship of the Great Soul Sri: Ra:ma:naja with the Lord here, Whom he experienced as his Beloved Child, Sri Sampath Kuma:ra.

Sri Sampath Kuma:ra, the Processional Deity of the Lord, had been taken away by a sulta:n as a present to his daughter in Delhi. Sri Ra:ma:nuja, under the guidance and protection from local tribal people, travelled northward to Delhi, entered the princess' room along with the Sultan and, to prove that it belonged to the people of Melkote:, addressed the Deity as his Own Darling Son. The Processional Image, Sampath Kuma:ra walked and jumped onto his lap when he called out to Him, thus proving Himself to be like a Son to Ra:ma:nuja.

This incident has a deep meaning for all of us. It is understood that Sriman Na:ra:yana is the Only

Being in this Universe that is Truly Independent, i.e., His Actions and His Will are not limited by the bounds of karma, as in the case of all of us. But, since His Very Nature is Love and Compassion, He is under the sway of those who love Him; and to Great Souls like Sri Ra:ma:nuja, He becomes like their own child, much in the same way in which He allowed Himself to become Nandago:pa and Yaso:da's Beloved Son, Krishna. Therefore, Sri Ra:ma:nuja is the father to Sampath Kuma:ra, caring for Him, nurturing Him, as well as instructing Him on the merciful attitude He should maintain when He is approached by all souls. It is this same attitude of Love and Compassion that Ra:ma:nuja himself showed to all the people .

Me:lkote was the temple where Sri Ra:ma:nuja began his strong administrative reform. He paid much attention to the social aspect of the human community, and on bringing quality and happiness to each and every human life, as was originally ordained in the Ve:das. Making the temple the central focus of all activity, he included people irrespective of caste/gender/background/economical status, etc in temple activities. Local people were given specific tasks with income that was accountable. He set up neighborhoods in and around the temple for all. He also made arrangements to provide water and other resources for them. Small-scale industries that served the local people and temples were set up to make



families economically sound. Elaborate festivals were organized and he strongly encouraged the participation of the entire community. This included assignment of different temple duties to different people and communities. All the temple festivities to this date are carried out by the local dwellers in the same manner as Sri Ramanuja established more than 900 years ago. Sri Ra:ma:nuja used the success of Me:lkote to enact similar reforms in all other temple towns including Tirumala, Ka:nchipu:ram and Sri: Rangam.

Special attention was paid to the tribal people who had helped Sri Ramanuja bring back Sampath Kuma:ra from Delhi. Sri Ramanuja gave them a special place in the temple activities, and named them Tiru-kulatta:rs (the people who belong to the family of Goddess Sri Maha Lakshmi). Even to this date these people have special privileges in the temple festivities.

Along with the temple, the deities that Sri Ra:ma:nuja's own peruma:ls that he worshipped can be seen in this town, along with ancient manuscripts, one of which contains Ra:ma:nuja's own signature.

Some of Sri: Ra:ma:nuja's most inspiring contributions were made during his stay at Me:lko:te, and it continues to remain a favorite temple to all his followers.

Jaya Ra:ma:nuja Ya:dava:dri Sringe: