

FESTIVITIES OF THE MONTH

Murali Krishna Ramanuja Dasa

The month of March brings the birth anniversary of another great *A:lwa:r* saint, *Sri Kulase:khara* and that of *Sri Ra:ma* on March 30. However, *Sri Ra:machandra* set a condition to His Birthday, that it should be placed second to the Appearance Day of His Dynasty's Patron Deity, *Sri Rangana:ttha*, which is coming on March 22.



Sri Kulase:khara A:lwa:r Thiru nakshathram - February 7

In the *Kolli* city of *Kerala* state, *Sri Kulase:khara* was born during the beginning of *Kali yuga*. His birth star being '*Punarvasu*', same as that of his chosen deity, *Sri Ra:ma*. He learnt the *Sa:sthras* as appropriate for his age and was coronated as King of *Kerala* by his father. Along with his fame for efficiently administering the country, *Sri Kulase:khara* was also revered for his immense devotion to Lord *Sri:manna:ra:yana*. He used to spend time in learning about the Lord, listening to the stories of Lord's *avatha:ra:s* and serving the Lord's devotees.

Throughout his life, *Kulase:khara* held a deep desire to visit *Sri:rangam*, the residence of Lord *Rangana:ttha*. Each day he used to start his procession to *Sri:rangam*, but somehow his journey would always be stopped by the arrival of devotees, whom *Sri Kulase:khara* felt honoured to serve. And, each day, he would make the commitment to go be postponed to the next day, only to have the sudden arrival of another set of devotees, whom he felt obligated to serve.

The arrival of the devotees just at the time when the king was to embark on

the trip was arranged for by the king's ministers, who despised *Kulase:khara*'s obsessive love for the Lord, and his staunch support of the *Sri Vaishnava* community. Once, the ministers devised a plan to rid the king's fetishes once and for all, by falsely accusing a visiting devotee of stealing. King *Kulase:khara* brushed aside the accusation and boldly proclaimed that no one should dare to say that a devotee could ever even think of

committing a wrong-doing. To prove this proclamation, the king put his hand in a pot which contained a venomous snake, and stated that if the accused devotee did such a misdeed, the snake would bite him. To the astonishment of everyone, the snake just slid away without doing any harm.

Although *Kulase:khara* had deep love for the Lord in all His Myriad Forms, the One that was dearest to his heart was the form of *Sri Ra:machandra*. In fact, every incident of *Ra:ma:yana* would deeply engross him in spiritual rapture. Once, after hearing about *Si:tha*'s abduction, *Kulase:khara* called forth all his military, ordering them to proceed to *Sri Lanka* such that they could serve *Sri: Ra:ma* defeat the armies of *Ra:vana*. After many years of ruling over his kingdom, no longer could he bear separation from His Lord, *Kulase:khara* coronated his son as king, and immediately proceeded to *Sri:rangam*, where he would spend the rest of his days in the Lord's service. He put forth the divine experiences in the form of a *Prabandham* called '*Peruma:l Thirumozhi*', in which he described his Love for *Ra:ma* as a father

for a child. In one of the most moving verses of this *Prabandham*, *Kulase:khara* expresses how he wished to be reborn as the threshold stone in the Lord's Sanctum, so that he could forever relish the Lord in all His Beauty and Splendor continuously, without ceasing, as well as enjoy the dust of the devotee's feet who render service to Him. To honor this wish of the *A:lwa:r*, the threshold stone at the sanctum sanctorum of Lord *Venkate:swara* in *Thirumala* is called '*Kulase:khara Padl*'. Let us sing the glory of this devout soul with the following *slo:kas*:

kumbhe: punarvasau ja:tham
ke:rAle: cho:la pattane:|
kausthubha:msam dhara:dhi:sam
kulase:kharam a:sraye: ||

ghushyathe: yasya nagare:
ranga ya:thra: dine: dine:|
tha:maham sirasa: vande:,
ra:ja:nam kulase:kharam ||

Sri:vathsa chihna misra - **Feb 10th 2004**

Sri:vathsa chihna misra was one of the foremost disciples of Sri Ra:ma:nuja. Since he was born in a village called ku:ram near the city of Ka:nchipuram, in Tamilnadu, he came to be known as Ku:raththa:zhva:n or Ku:re:sa. He was from a well to do family and was great scholar in all sa:sthras. He was known for his kind-hearted nature and would take care of the poor and needy daily, with the support of his wife, who was named after Anda:l.

Over time, both he and his wife became disinterested with living a material life, and gave away all of their possessions to good devotees, such that they could dedicate their lives to the service of Sri: Ra:ma:nuja. Their devotion to him was unparallel and because of his scholarly knowledge, Sri: Ra:manuja would accept Ku:raththa:zhva:n as his confidant and scribe. The close friendship that developed

between these two great souls is what brought about the pinnacle work of Sri: Ra:ma:nuja, called "Sri: Bha:shyam".

On one particular rainy day in Sri:rangam, Sri: Ku:raththa:zhva:n found it impossible to go out and seek alms for his daily food in accordance with tradition. So, he and his wife spent the entire day without any food or water. Anda:l could not bear the thought of her dear husband sleeping on an empty stomach, so when she heard the sounds of the temple drums in Sri: Ranganatha's temple sounding during the food offerings, she cried out, "Oh! "Sri: Ranganata:ttha, how can you accept pa:yasam, sweet rice, when your dearest devotee did not even have a morsel of food today?" The Presiding Deity of Srirangam answered the good lady's prayer, through His kind-hearted servants, who soon arrived at their doorstep with prasadam from the temple. Kuraththa:zhva:n immediately gave his wife two morsels of the prasadam first and in due course of time, the Lord blessed her with two sons. Ra:ma:nuja himself would name the twin boys Sri: Parasara Bhattar and Sri Veda Vya:sa Bhattar to fulfill a promise he once made to his own a:cha:rya that he would somehow honor these two great sages. These two sons would equal their father in their intellect and devotion, and one of them, Sri: Para:sara Bhattar, would go on to be appointed to serve as Chief among the Vaishnavas when Sri: Ra:ma:nuja left this world.

But, Ku:raththa:zhva:n's greatest service to his teacher would occur when a local fanatical king ordered all of the teachers of the land to proclaim that the King's chosen deity, Siva, was supreme over all other gods, including Sri:man Na:ra:yana. Fearful for Ra:manuja's safety, Sri: Ku:raththa:zhva:n devised a plan in which he donned the robes of a sanya:si and appeared before the king disguised as Sri: Ra:ma:nuja. In the court Ku:raththa:zhva:n provided irrefutable evidence from Sa:sthra to show the

supremacy of Sri:man Na:ra:yana. But, rather than being convinced, the jealous king became outraged and immediately ordered that Kuraththa:zhva:n's eyes be removed. Kuraththa:zhva:n rather than being forced, blinded himself.

Sri: Ra:manuja, unable to bear his disciple's great sacrifice, requested him to pray to the Lord Varadara:ja of Ka:ncipu:ram such that his sight could be restored. The prayer that Sri: Kuraththa:zhva:n recited before Him is called Sri Varadara:ja Sthavam and is one of several beautiful stho:thrums that was composed by this great soul. In it, Sri: Kuraththa:zhva:n cries out to the Lord for a much greater vision than even physical sight, a Divine Sight for all souls such that they would know the joy of serving Him eternally. When Sri: Ra:ma:nuja read this devotional hymn, because he felt that now since the Lord was sure to grant Sri Kuraththa:zhva:n's prayer, he too would receive this most Blessed Gift, not because of his own qualifications, but because of his connection to his disciple, Sri Kuratta:zhva:n

Let us pay homage to this favorite disciple of Sri: Ra:manuja through the recitation of the following slo:kams:

Makare: hastha nakshathre:
sarpa ne:thra:msa sambhavam |
Sri:math ku:ra kula:dhi:sam
sri:vathsa:nkam upa:smahe: ||

Sri:vathsa chihna misre:bhyo:
nama ukthim adhi:mahe: |
Yadukthayas thrayi:kantthe:
ya:nthi mangala su:thratha:m ||

Jai Srimannarayana !

Sri Ra:ma Navami - March 30

As HH Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji teaches that, paying tribute to Lord Ra:ma is not just celebrating Sri Ra:ma Navami,

but by trying to inculcate atleast one of the Sri Ra:ma's kalya:na guna:s in our everyday life. When Va:Imi:ki asked Na:rada whether there was any person on this earth possessing a set of given sixteen qualities, Na:rada started singing about Lord Sri Ra:machandra's virtues. Even after counting more than sixty, he felt like going on and on. Na:rada had to apply a break to proceed to the rest of the story to make it concise. Taking Sri Ra:ma as an example, let us pick one quality and learn from HH Sri Swamiji's teachings as to how we too can practice it.

sakrude:va prapanna:ya,
thava:smi:thi cha ya:chathe:|
abhayam sarva bhū:the:bhyo:
dada:mi e:thath vratham mama ||

Sri Rangana:ttha - March 22

Sri Rangana:ttha at Sri:Rangam is the first among the archa (deity) ava:tharas (incarnations), the worshippable forms of the Lord. The Lord Himself incarnated in this form such that Bramha could worship Him at the time of Creation. Lord Sri Ra:ma used to worship Sri Rangana:tha everyday. Lord Sri:manna:ra:yana, out of his causeless mercy and love towards us, came in the form of a vigraha exactly in the same posture as He sleeps in the milky ocean, to liberate us, the suffering souls, from the bondages of karma and grant His abode to all of us. His efforts were on since time immemorial. Let us pray to the such Lord with the following slo:kam

sri: sthana:bharanam the:jaha,
sri:range:sayam a:sraye:|
chintha:manim ivo:dbha:ntam,
uthsange::nantha bho:ginaha ||

Jai Srimannarayana !