

A brief life history of Raghavendra tIrtha (rAyaru)

DurvAdidhvAntaravaye vaishhNavIndIvarIndave
Sri rAghavendragurave namo.atyantadayALuve

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ಶ್ರೀ ರಾಘವೇಂದ್ರಗುರವೇ ನಮೋಽತ್ಯಂತದಯಾಳವೇ

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Introduction:

Sri rAghavendra tIrtha or “rAyaru”, as he is affectionately called by his devotees, is without doubt one of the great personalities seen by humanity, perhaps the most popular and most well known saint from India. His devotees run into millions and are spread all over the world. They cut across religion, caste, creed, color and continent. Even to this date, more than 3 centuries after he entered the Brindavana alive, his devotees are experiencing his grace and can provide personal testimony to his extraordinary powers. He grants the desires of supplicants without hesitation, which is why he has been called the Kalpatharu (the divine tree that grants all wishes) and kAmadhenu (the celestial cow that grants all desires) of Kaliyuga. There are very few people who have not benefited from his benevolence. One haridAsa says “dhareyoLu gurugaLa more iDalArada narEre pApigaLella! (those who cannot or do not seek refuge in guru are truly sinners)”.

Impressive as the above facts are, they still highlight only one aspect of his multi-faceted personality. He was also one of the greatest scholars from the Madhva school of vedanta, who gave us literary gems that shine with scholastic brilliance even today. That is why he is called “madhva matAmbOdhi chandra” (the Moon arising out of the ocean called madhva shAstra).

He was also the pontiff of a major mAdhva maTha for 50 years. He was a very great veena exponent, coming from a family of eminent musicians.

How could one human attain such eminence and inspire such adoration? The answer to this lies in the secret behind his birth. It is popular belief, based on

testimonials from aparOxa gyAnis, that he is the incarnation of a celestial called Sankukarna. The prior incarnations of this celestial were PrahlAda, bAhlika and vyAsa tIrtha. The story of prahlAda is very well known but not many people know that he had an Avesha of Vayu in him. Acharya Madhva himself testifies to this in the MahAbhArata tAtparya nirNaya (“hiraNyakaShipoh putrah prahlAdo bhagavatpriyah, vAyunA cha samAviShTo mahAbala samanvitah” ..MBTN 11.8).

MadhvamatAmbudhi somaguru, sadvaishnava paripAla guru (Predecessors and lineage):

Acharya Madhva is the fountainhead for all mAdhva maThas. One line of succession that followed him consisted of Sri padmanAbha tIrtha, Sri narahari tIrtha, Sri mAdhava tIrtha, Sri akshObya tIrtha, Sri jayatIrtha (also known as tIkAkruptpAdaru) and Sri vidyAdhirAjaru. Later, the lineage split into two branches – one headed by Sri kavIndra tIrtha and another by Sri rAjendra tIrtha. Sri kavIndra tIrtha was succeeded by Sri vAgIsha tIrtha and Sri rAmachandra tIrtha. Once again, the lineage split into two branches – one headed by Sri vibhudEndra tIrtha and another headed by Sri vidyAnidhi tIrtha (Sri uttarAdi maTha).

Sri vibhudEndra tIrtha was a very great saint and scholar with many disciples including Shri SripAdarAjA. He was followed by Sri jItAmitra tIrtha, Sri raghunandana tIrtha, Sri surEndra tIrtha, shri VijayIndra tIrtha, shri SudhIndra tIrtha and Sri Raghavendra tIrtha. After Rayaru’s advent, vibhudEndra maTha became Sri rAghavEndra swAmigala maTha or rAyara maTha.

ThimmaNNana suta rAghavendra (Birth and early years)

The fall of the Vijayanagar kingdom had an adverse effect on many scholars who depended on royal patronage. Most of them moved south with their families, finding refuge with southern kings and chieftains. One such scholar was Thimmanna Bhatta, grandson of Krishnabhatta, who had tutored King Krishnadevaraya on the veena. Thimmanna belonged to the gautama gOtra and was married to GopikAmba. Initially, this couple had 2 children – GururAja and VenkATamba. Later in 1595, by the grace of Lord Venkateshwara, a third child was born to this couple. They named him VenkaTanAtha (some books refer to him as Venkanna bhatta).

VenkaTanAtha's brilliance was obvious even in his childhood. For example, he is supposed to have questioned his father as to how an object like 'Om' could capture the infinite greatness of god. His father did not live long enough to see the greatness of his son, he passed away when VenkaTanAtha was still at a very young age. VenkaTanAtha's brother took care of his upbringing. The initial portion of his education was under his brother-in-law Sri LakshmiInarasimhAchArya of Madurai.

**kaNDa kaNDa kaDege tirugi benDadeno konege
(Married Life - utter, dire poverty haunts venkaTanAtha)**

Upon returning from Madurai, VenkaTanAtha's marriage was arranged with Saraswathi, a very virtuous lady from a good family. Saraswathi proved to be the ideal wife for VenkaTanAtha, and the couple had a son whom they named LakshmiInArAyaNa.

VenkaTanAtha was a skilled musician and a good scholar, but he never demanded any money for his services and accepted whatever was offered to him. Since this happened very rarely, he had little or no means to support his family and had to endure a life of utter, dire poverty. A description of the hardships faced by him will melt anybody's heart. If other families observed EkAdashi twice a month, VenkaTanAtha's family did that several times in a week. His poverty was so stark that he could not afford a drop of oil to take an oil-bath on a festival day like dIpAvali. His family did not see new clothes for years. In spite of all this, he never lost his equanimity or wavered in his faith towards the Lord. He continued his self-study, and free teachings, determined to live by whatever came to him unsought and unasked. His wife proved to be an ideal partner to him. She too never complained and managed with whatever the Lord sent their way.

**Gandhava tegeyane Raghavendra, agni sUktadim Raghavendra
(Playing with fire - disrespecting a true hari bhakta)**

VenkaTanAtha once attended a wedding. The hosts thought that he had come for the free food and wanted him to earn his meal. They asked him to grind sandalwood and generate the paste, to which he readily agreed. Out of habit, he started reciting vedic sUktas while grinding. Soon, the task was done and the paste was handed over to the Brahmins attending the function. When they applied the paste to their bodies, they experienced a strong

burning sensation. On further enquiry it was found that unknowingly VenkaTanAtha had recited agni sUkta while grinding the paste. The Brahmins immediately understood that the VenkaTanAtha was a divine personality and his recitation of agni sUkta had invoked the presence of agni in the paste. The host begged VenkaTanAtha for forgiveness and asked him to counter-act this burning with varuna sUkta. When this was done the burning subsided.

The point to note is that he did not deliberately do this out of anger or sorrow at the host's disgusting behavior. He took everything with equanimity and did what came naturally to him – pray to the Lord through vedic hymns. It was His antaryAmi which made him recite agni sUkta because it was Divine will that the world should know about his greatness.

**Parimala pandita Raghavendra, bhAshyakAra guru Raghavendra
(MahAbhAshyAchArya VenkatanAtha)**

VenkaTanAtha's dire straits worsened even further when thieves stole whatever little he had in terms of vessels, clothes. After this, he decided to seek refuge under Sri sudhIndra tIrtha. Even though maintaining his family was the pretext for moving, his main objective was to continue his education under Sri sudhIndra tIrtha

VenkaTanAtha went to Kumbhakonam, the seat of learning at the time. There he studied dvaita vEdanta, advanced works on grammar and other shastras under sudhIndra tIrtha. He used to stay awake past midnight to write his own comments and notes on the lessons that had been done. He developed extraordinary mastery over grammar. He engaged in debate and defeated several scholars of opposing doctrines; one of them was Venkatesvara dIkshita, a famous scholar of the Tanjore court in 1620. Pleased with his knowledge and mastery over grammar, sudhIndra tIrtha conferred on him the title of "MahAbhAshyAchArya".

VenkaTanAtha also wrote Prameya navamAlika, a commentary on Anu-madhva Vijaya, a short work by Sri Narayana PanditAcharya, the author of Sumadhva Vijaya. (This was the only work that RAyaru authored in his pUrvAshrama).

SanyAsi Agalu Raghavendra, shAradeyAgneyu Raghavendra (Becomes sanyAsi after vidyA lakshmi requests him)

Sri sudhIndra tIrtha was on the lookout for a suitable successor to carry on the glorious tradition of his maTha. The more he saw of VenkaTanAtha, the greater was his conviction that he was the right successor. One day, he received an indication in his dream that VenkaTanAtha would be the most ideal successor. He was overjoyed and immediately acted upon this. He communicated his desire to VenkaTanAtha. VenkaTanAtha did not want to disobey his guru's injunction, but also did not want to abandon his duties as a householder. He told sudhIndra tIrtha that he could not take up this responsibility as he had a young wife and a son who had yet to undergo Upanayanam. SudhIndra tIrtha was disappointed but not disheartened as he knew ultimately Divine will would prevail and VenkaTanAtha would accede to his request.

That night VenkaTanAtha had a very strange dream. Vidya Lakshmi Herself appeared before him and told him, "After feasting on the intellectual treats provided by Sri MadhvAchArya, jaya tIrtha, vyAsa tIrtha, vAdirAja and others, I am once again starving. The light of tattvavAda created by your beloved Sri madAchArya will be extinguished by the darkness of other philosophies. To prevent this from happening, noble souls like you should shed their material bondage and dedicate themselves to the cause of Hari and vAyu. This is both your duty and your destiny. You are a great soul, destined to provide solace and succor to millions of needy people. Accept sudhIndra tIrtha's request and take up sanyAsa. You are Sri Hari's beloved devotee and this is what He expects from you". VenkaTanAtha woke up with a start and saw the world differently. His dilemmas resolved, he was sure of what he needed to do.

The next day morning he rushed to sudhIndra tIrtha and communicated the events of the previous night to him. SudhIndra tIrtha was ecstatic with the turn of events and overjoyed he was getting a great personality as his successor. He immediately ordered VenkaTanAtha to perform the upanayana of his son. This was done within a short span, under sudhIndra tIrtha's supervision. Respecting saraswathi's feelings, sudhIndra tIrtha arranged for VenkatanAtha's ordination as an ascetic in Tanjore, in the court of King RaghunAtha.

VijayIndra karAbjottha sudhIndra varaputrakah

(Initiation into sanyAsa and ascension as pIThAdhipati):

The ordination took place on durmati nAma samvatsara Phalguna Shukla dvitiya (the second day of the bright half of PAlguNa mAsa in the Hindu year durmati), corresponding to 1621 AD. Sudhindra tIrtha initiated VenkatanAtha into sanyAsa and gave him the Ashrama nAma of Raghavendra. This name had been indicated to him by Moola Rama devaru in a dream.

The name ‘Raghavendra’ chosen by Moola rAma devaru was a very apt choice for RAYaru. Primarily, it indicates Lord Rama as indra of the Raghu kula. Next, it connotes Hanumanta (‘raghAva yasya indrah sah rAghavendra’, Raghavendra is the one whose indra or lord is Raghava. This signifies Anjaneya). It also means ‘one who destroys sins and bestows desired things’ – a very appropriate name for RAYaru! In one song Sri GopAla dAsaru describes the name as such – “Ra” destroys mountains of sins, “gha” provides deep rooted devotion, “Ven” gives speedy liberation from the cycle of life and death and “dra” blesses one with vision of the Lord who is celebrated in all shrutis.

Saraswathi could not bear the pangs of separation from her husband. She jumped into a well and committed suicide. Because of the grave nature of her sin, she became a ghost. She went to the maTha to have darshan of the new yati. With his divine perception, RAYaru sensed saraswati’s presence. His heart full of mercy, he sprinkled water from his kamanDala on her. The power of his penance was such that her prArabda karma ended and she became eligible for moksha or liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. This was her reward for a lifetime of dedicated and selfless service to a noble soul..

Around 1623 sudhIndra tIrtha shed his mortal coils at AnEgondi. Rayaru made arrangements for a brindavan there and performed the final ceremony of his guru with due pomp and glory.

Before giving sanyAsa to Sri Venkatanatha, Sri sudhIndra tIrtha had given sanyAsa to a person called Sri YAdavendra. He was on tour when Sri sudhIndra tIrtha passed away but came back to pay his respects. He declined Rayaru’s offer to become the Pontiff and went away on tour.

Ratna-hAra bharadinda Raghavendra, agniyoLiTTaru Raghavendra

(Saves people suffering from famine in Tanjore):

Around 1642, the people of Tanjore were in dire straits. The kingdom was impoverished due to attacks from neighbours and failure of successive monsoons, leading to widespread famine. The ruler of Tanjore, VijayarAghava nAyaka, sought refuge at the feet of Rayaru and begged him to visit Tanjore and stay there. RAYaru agreed and stayed in Tanjore for 12 years. He spent the resources of the maTha freely in feeding hundreds of thousands of starving people. He also organized special yagyas to reduce the influence of famine. His presence brought fortune and rains back to the kingdom. In due course of time, the kingdom returned to its original state of prosperity. To celebrate this happy event, the king organized a special yagya under the stewardship of RAYaru. He offered Lord rAma a very costly necklace studded with precious stones and gems. RAYaru took it with a smile and threw it into the agni kunDa (sacrificial fire). The king was totally taken aback to see this. RAYaru smiled and sprinkled water from his kamanDala on the fire and prayed to Lord ParashurAma. To the great astonishment of everybody present, the necklace rose out of the fire, even more resplendent than before, shining with a diving sparkle. Later, RAYaru explained to the king that a necklace already worn by humans was not fit to adorn Lord rAma's neck, and thus had to undergo purification through fire.

Rathavanerida rAghavendra

(Pilgrimages, debates and universal acclaim):

A few years after becoming the pontiff, he set out on a long pilgrimage that took him to several places in South India and parts of MaharAshtra. In his initial tour, he started going East and south. He visited Tanjore, ParipUrNadevanagar, KamalAlaya, Kaveri delta on the Bay of Bengal, Champakeshwara, Rameshwara, Alagiri, Anantashayana, Janardhana, Tirunelveli, Madurai.

Neelakanta Dikshita the prime minister of the kingdom of Madurai was impressed by the lucid yet powerful style with which RAYaru debated and the depth of his knowledge. He was swept off his feet when he saw Bhatta Sangraha (Rayaru's treatise on BhAtta mImAmsa). He had the work placed on the royal elephant and taken around the town on a ceremonial procession.

From Madurai, Rayaru moved on to Srirangam, Namakallu, Vellore, Vishnumangala (where Trivikrama PanditAchArya debated with AchArya Madhva), Subramanya and reached Udupi.

Rayaru stayed in Udupi till 1663, attracted by the divine icon of Lord Krishna and influence of Acharya Madhva. He completed several important works like Tantra dIpika, nyAya muktAvali, Parimala and chandrika prakAsha and submitted them to Lord Krishna, through bhArati-ramaNa mukhyaprAna. He completed 10 discourses on Chandrika. As a momento of his stay in Udupi, he had a golden icon of Udupi Krishna made, which remains in the maTha to this day.

From Udupi he went to Nanjangudu, Srirangapattana, RamanAthapura, Chitradurga, Gadag,, Hubli, Sirasangi, Kitturu, Pandharpur, Kolhapur. He started on his return journey passing through Bijapur, Aluru, Manvi, Advani, Shrishaila, Tirupati, Kanchi, AruNachala, VruddhAchala, Sri MushNa before finally reaching Kumbhakona.

Wherever he went, his agenda was simple – visiting local shrines, spreading the message of Acharya Madhva, defeating scholars of opposing doctrines, converting deserving people to dvaita, continuing to write commentaries and notes, teaching shAstras to enthusiastic students, and encouraging local scholars. Some of the major opponents that he faced in debates and won over were Sri Neelakanta Dikshita, Veerabhadra and Bhairava Bhatta (two scholars in the court of Sri Venkatapathi Raya in Vellore, Sesha (another formidable scholar in Pandharpur) and so on. Practically every king and chieftain who was in power in South and Western India, came under his influence, prostrated before him and offered lands to the MaTha.

**Agamyah mahima loke rAghavendro mahAyashah:
(Miracles performed by Rayaru):**

Rayaru's life history is replete with instances where he had to use his extraordinary spiritual powers to establish dharma and / or help someone who had come to him as their last resort. This continued after he entered the brindavana, and is happening even today. There are hundreds of thousands of devotees who can point out many instances in their own lives when they prayed to Rayaru and got help. In the interest of brevity, we are outlining only the major miracles performed by him.

- Rayaru caused timely rains and also made the foodgrains in the Tanjore King's granary multiply in order to help the residents of Tanjore who were tormented by famine for 12 years.
- Rayaru threw the necklace offered by the King of Tanjore into the fire for purification and using his spiritual powers had it rise from the fire, shining with greater sparkle.
- He saved a fallen brahmin on the banks of the Tamraparni river by sprinkling sanctified water from a conch. When some people doubted this, he showed them the power of sanctified water
- He blessed a devotee called Venkanna to attain moksha by having him jump into a sacred fire in Chitradurga. People questioning this could hear bells from the aerial craft that was taking Venkanna to Vaikunta.
- He revived the son of the Desai who had fallen into a vessel containing mango pulp.
- He revived one of his disciples who died on the verge of his nuptials by striking his forehead against the upper threshold.
- He made a onake (a piece of dead wood, used to pound grain in a pestle) sprout leaves in order to prove the efficacy of veda mantras and reprimand the Desai of Shirasingi.
- When a disciple's wife delivered a baby on the way to Pandharapur and was suffering due to excessive heat and thirst, he created a small stream by striking the ground with his danda and created shade by holding up a small piece of cloth.
- He saved a brahmin dying due to thirst by creating a small source of water.
- KanakadAsaru was reborn as an outcaste. Rayaru met him, accepted the sesame seeds given by him with devotion, and had them used in preparing the naivedya to Lord Rama. He also blessed KanakadAsaru and emancipated him.
- A chance meeting with Rayaru brought wealth and the Diwan's position to unlettered, cowherd Venkanna.
- Rayaru revived the son of the Nawab of Savanaru, who had died of snake-bite by chanting the Garuda mantra.
- A washerman was able to speak in chaste sanskrit while carrying Rayaru's discarded clothes.
- A fistful of mud handed by Rayaru given to his devotee drove away evil spirits and blessed him with fortune and a good wife.
- A group of vile people who wanted to ridicule Rayaru's power to revive the dead, asked their friend to be dead and asked Rayaru to revive him.

When Rayaru said that their friend's life-span was over and hence could not be revived, they made fun of him. But they discovered that their friend was really dead!

- Three famous astrologers predicted rAyaru's lifespan as 100, 300 and 700. This was later explained by Rayaru as the lifespans of his body, his tenure in the brindavana and the influence of his granthas.
- When Siddi Masood Khan, the nawab of Adoni, tried to test the powers of Rayaru by offering liquor and meat to Lord Rama as naivedaya, Rayaru converted them into flowers and fruits.
- Rayaru came out of the brindavana to talk to Sir Thomas Munroe

In the interest of brevity only a few of the above are covered in depth in the following sections.

MAvina rasadoLu Raghavendra, ADuva magu bILe Raghavendra (Power to reverse untimely death):

The desai of kIriTagiri invited Rayaru to perform pooja in his house. The Desai's son fell into the large vessel containing seekaraNe (a thick form of mango juice) and died. When the Desai and his wife came to know about it, they were totally devastated. RAYaru sensed the tragedy and asked the grief stricken couple to bring the dead boy before him. He saw that the boy had suffered apa-mrutyu (untimely death) and could be revived. He sprinkled water from his kamanDala and revived the boy. The joy of the ecstatic parents knew no bounds.

RAYaru performed many such miracles in his life. He revived a disciple who had suffered untimely death on the eve of his nuptials by striking his forehead against the upper threshold.

On his way to Hubli, RAYaru was approached by the Nawab (Muslim king) of SavaNur. The Nawab had heard of his powers and wanted him to revive his young son who had died from a poisonous snakebite and been buried in a tomb close by. RAYaru realized that this too was a case of untimely death. He had the boy dug up, and revived him by chanting the Garuda mantra. The Nawab was beside himself with joy. He prostrated before RAYaru with deep devotion and offered several villages to the maTha.

PatitoddhAriye pAvanakAriye, kara mugiveno doreye (Blesses KanakadAsaru reborn):

Rayaru was camping in a small Hanuman temple near Manvi for his chAturmAsya. One morning he saw an outcaste standing near the Garuda pillar of the temple and beckoned to him to come near. He asked him “What are you doing here?” The man replied “I have come here as ordered by you. Now, it is up to you to elevate my condition as you did the last time”. RAYaru laughed and told him “All right. Bring something for the naivedya tomorrow and then you can go on your way”. The man happily went away and came back the next day with a handful of sesame seeds (sAsuve kALu). He offered this great devotion to RAYaru at a distance and begged RAYaru to bless him. RAYaru ordered the maTha cook to take the sesame and use it as part of the naivedya. Normally sesame is avoided during chAturmAsya. However, RAYaru accepted it because it is used in Yagya and it was given by this special person, who was none other than kanakadAsaru! It seems that Sri VyAsa tIrtha had ordered kanakadAsaru to take one more birth and meet him during his rAghavEndra incarnation. KanakadAsaru agreed and accordingly took birth as a low caste person. After RAYaru and other learned scholars took the naivedya offered to the Lord, KanakadAsaru discarded his body and went to his heavenly abode.

ShApAnugraha shaktonyo rAghavendra na vidyate (mantrAkshate turns black)

Sri ShrInivasAchArya from Bidarahalli met RAYaru during his chAturmAsya in Manvi and showed him his works. Even though he was a householder, he had spent his entire lifetime writing glosses and commentaries on dvaita works. RAYaru examined his works and was filled with admiration for his dedication and the quality of the work produced. He blessed him and conferred on him the honorary title of tIrtha, reserved only for ascetics. Such was the power of Rayaru’s blessing that even today he is known only as Bidarahalli SrInivAsa tIrtha.

During lunch that day, Sri ShrInivasAchArya did not partake the food served to him because it contained sesame, which was against the rules of chAturmAsya in his maTha. RAYaru ordered a separate dish to be prepared for him. That night RAYaru offered him phala-mantrAkshate as usual. When Sri ShrInivasAchArya reached home and examined the mantrAkshate, it was black like sesame. He immediately realized that he had committed a great sin by slighting RAYaru. He immediately rushed back and begged Rayaru’s

forgiveness. The kind hearted RAYaru forgave him and invited him to lunch. This time he took the food without any protest!

**RAjarAjAyate riktah
(Cowherd becomes Divan):**

Venkanna was an illiterate orphan who made a living by tending to cows in the village of kandAti, which was under the kingdom of Adoni. He had heard of the greatness of RAYaru and was ecstatic when the retinue of RAYaru passed close by. He ran and prostrated before Rayaru's palanquin. RAYaru looked at him and inquired about his antecedents. Venkanna explained his plight and stood with utmost devotion and humility. RAYaru took pity on the boy and gave him some mantrAkshate (consecrated rice) and told him "When you are in real distress and need my help, put this on your head and think of me". The palanquin moved on. Venkanna tied the holy rice into a bundle and always carried it with him.

One day, Venkanna was forced into a major life and death predicament. He was handed a scroll by the Nawab of Adoni-Siddi mAsood Khan, and asked to read it. Poor Venkanna was in trouble since he was illiterate. He could not refuse a direct order of the Nawab since that would mean immediate death, nor could he tell the truth that he was illiterate because the Nawab would not believe him. Caught in this deadly trap, he suddenly remembered Rayaru's words and took out the consecrated rice and put it on his head. With this mind full of devotion towards RAYaru and his lips secretly muttering "rAghavEndra, rAghavEndra", he boldly opened the scroll. Lo behold, the characters on the scroll began to make sense and he could read! It was actually a piece of good news, informing the Nawab that his army had scored a victory in battle. The Nawab was overjoyed to hear the good news and wanted to reward Venkanna. Venkanna asked for a good job in the Nawab's administration and got it. Through hard work and diligence, he worked his way up the ranks and in a short time became the Nawab's trusted divan. Thus a chance encounter with RAYaru transformed Venkanna's entire life into a bed of roses!

**TIrtha proxisi Raghavendra, taTTeli phalapushpa Raghavendra
(Nawab of Adoni gets a glimpse of Rayaru's greatness)**

Rayaru returned to KumbhakoNa and stayed there for a few years, but decided to move out to a more suitable place. He made arrangements for the

proper worship of Sri VijayIndra tIrtha's brindAvana and went to Adoni. Venkanna was overjoyed to hear of RAYaru's advent and went to meet him. He invited RAYaru to stay in his house for a while.

The Nawab of Adoni had heard of RAYaru from Venkanna and had also heard about the honor and acclaim he had received in Bijapur. However, he did not accept any authority other than Allah and his devotees, and wanted to test RAYaru. He secretly had meat and liquor placed on silver plates but totally covered with silken clothes. He accompanied Venkanna to RAYaru's pUja and offered his covered plates as naivedya for mUla rAma. RAYaru saw through his trick and sprinkled water from his kamanDala on the plates. When the clothes were removed, they revealed plates full of fresh fruits and flowers! The Nawab instantly realized the greatness of RAYaru, and the great sin he had committed by testing this divine personality. He immediately prostrated before RAYaru and with tears in his eyes begged his forgiveness. The kind and ever merciful RAYaru forgave him gladly.

After the Nawab went back to his palace he wanted to make amends for his sin. So he sent Venkanna to RAYaru to offer some villages. RAYaru initially refused but finally succumbed to Venkanna's insistence and asked for the village of manchAle on the banks of the tungabhadra. Venkanna was surprised since that was barren land, yielding no crops or revenue. He tried to talk RAYaru into accepting more fertile land, but RAYaru would not accept any other alternative. Venkanna went back to the Nawab and made immediate arrangements for ManchAle to be gifted to RAYaru.

On an auspicious day and time, RAYaru entered the village of ManchAle. He went to the temple of ManchAlamma and sought her blessings. He also had an icon of Lord Venkateshwara consecrated in ManchAle.

Two – two – two to enter brindAvana

One day, RAYaru was sitting outside under a tree, conducting shAstra pATha for his disciples. He suddenly stood up, looked up at the sky and folded his hands in reverence. Within a moment, a fragrant tulsi garland fell around RAYaru's neck. When his disciples pressed him for an explanation, he told them "I just saw Krishna Dvaipayana going in a heavenly chariot to vaikunTha. I asked him when my turn would come and he held up his Index and middle finger three times. He finally blessed me by throwing this mAla on me". The disciples were greatly intrigued by this and wanted to know the

significance of this two-two-two. RAyaru smiled and told them “It means that I have 2 years, 2 months and 2 days left before entering the brindAvana!”. It was Soumya samvatsara, Jyesta Shukla Pournami that day. The disciples added the balance to this and concluded that Rayaru’s final day would be Virodhikruth Samvatsara, Shravana krishna paksha dwitiya (second day in the dark half of the moon, in the Hindu year Virodhikruth).

**DhareyoddhArake merevaru gurgalu vara mantrAlayadalli:
(The greatness of ManchAle / MantrAlaya):**

prahlAda had performed a large yagna in that spot, sanctifying it forever. MantrAlayAmbika or manchAlamma was his kula devata. In dvApara yuga, arjuna had to fight with anusAlva in connection with the ashvamedha yAga. By accident, anusAlva’s chariot was positioned over the yagya kunda used by PrahlAda, making him invincible. When arjuna moved his chariot back on Krishna’s instructions, anusAlva also moved, losing the battle.

Venkanna had a beautiful garbha-guDi (sanctum sanctorum) and a brindAvana built for RAyaru. But RAyaru did not want to use that and asked him to reserve it for a future personality. He then took Venkanna to a remote spot and showed him a black rock. He wanted his brindAvana to be built using that rock since Lord Rama had rested on it for a while.

RAyaru chose a worthy person from his disciples and gave him sanyAsa with the AshramanAma of Sri YogIndra tIrtha. He instructed everybody to accord Sri YogIndra tIrtha the same respect that they had accorded him so far.

On the chosen day chosen (Virodhikruth Samvatsara Shravana krishna paksha dwitiya - 1671 A.D.), thousands of people had congregated in manchAle to see this rare event of a person entering a brindAvana alive. Only person (Sri VAdirAja tIrtha) had done this before.

RAyaru completed his regular morning activities of bath, japa, dhyana and discourse to his disciples. After bathing once again he completed the puja of ShrI Rama and other icons of the samsthan. He blessed the entire gathering with tIrtha, prasada and phalamantrakshata. Later he sat in padmAsana and gave them his final parting soul-stirring speech.

**Raghavendra VagdevatAsaridamum vimallkarotu:
(The last speech of rAyaru)**

"Hereafter I will disappear from your sight. The Lord who sent me to you has Himself ordered me to return to Him today. I have completed His task. Everyone has to obey His orders - coming here and returning when He calls us back. You need not feel sad that I am leaving you. The moola granthas, sarva moola and their commentaries will be your guiding light. Never give up their study under a worthy master. The Lord has blessed us with this priceless life just to study them. The shastras have an answer for all our mundane problems. Follow the shastras and listen to the words of the enlightened. Put into practice as much as you can whatever you learn. The shastraic way of life is the royal road to peace, prosperity and happiness.

The search for knowledge is never easy. As the Upanishads say it is like walking on the razor's edge. But for those who have strong faith and put in sustained effort and have the blessings of Shri Hari and guru this is not difficult. Always keep away from people who merely perform miracles without following the shastras and yet call themselves God or guru. I have performed miracles, and so have great persons like ShriMadAchArya. These are based on yoga siddhi and the shastras. There is no fraud or trickery at all. These miracles were performed only to show the greatness of God and the wonderful powers that one can attain with His grace. Right knowledge (jnana) is greater than any miracle. Without this no real miracle can take place. Any miracle performed without this right knowledge is only witchcraft. No good will come to those who perform such miracles and also those who believe in them.

The Lord is full of auspicious qualities and absolutely faultless. There is no virtue that does not exist in Him. He is the Lord of RamA, Brahma and all other devathas at all times and in all ways. His form is beyond prakrithi (nature). His body is made up of jnana and ananda. He is omnipresent and omniscient. All the jivas are subservient to Him. Mahalaksmi who is ever liberated is His consort. All jivas (souls) are not equal. There is gradation amongst them and they are of three types. Whatever state they attain finally is in keeping with their intrinsic nature. The sattvik souls attain moksha which is a state of eternal bliss.. The tamasic souls attain eternal hell where there is all pervading darkness. This is a state of eternal sorrow. The rajasic souls keep rotating in samsara always, experiencing both happiness and sorrow. The shastras declare such a three fold classification and gradation of

souls. It can be seen everywhere in this world. There are several schools of philosophy which go against these tenets and declare that there is no God, no dharma, this world is false; there is nothing but void; the jivas and Brahma are the same; there is no three fold classification or gradation, all the jivas are equal to Brahma, the Vedas are not true, Brahma is nirguna (attribute less), nirakara (formless). None of these philosophies are correct. The world that we see is real; this world has a master; he is neither nirguna nor nirakara. The shastras declare Him to be nirguna and nirakara because He is devoid of the three qualities of sattva, rajas, and tamas (unlike us). For the suffering soul His grace is the only means to attain salvation which is eternal bliss. Those who forsake Him will never be truly happy.

Without right living, right thinking will never come. Right living is performing one's ordained duties according to one's station in life without hankering after the fruits of the actions and on the other hand offering all one's activities to the Lord. This is real sadachara (right living). This is real karma yoga. Another facet of right living is performing right rituals and observing fasts. Fasting on ekadashi and krishnashtami is compulsory for everyone. Both men and women belonging to all walks of life have to observe this. Those who give up this will always have the doors of the Lord's home closed. This is what the shastras declare. Observance of chaturmasya vrata is another compulsory mode of worship. Along with this vishnupanchaka and other vaishnava vratas can be performed according to one's capacity. The main goal of all such vratas is to earn His grace and love.

One should always be careful never to harm or hurt another. Philosophical thought is very necessary for the soul's growth. Without philosophical thought we can not arrive at the right conclusions. But let there be no personal enmity. Social work done for the good of worthy people should also be considered as the Lord's worship. In short our life itself is a worship. Every action is a puja. This life is precious. Every second of our life is precious. Not even a second that has gone will come back. Listening to the right shastras and always remembering Him is the highest duty. Without this life becomes meaningless. Have devotion to the Lord. This devotion should never be blind faith. Accepting the Lord's supremacy wholeheartedly is true devotion. Blind faith is not devotion. It is only stupidity. We should have devotion not only for the Lord but also for all other deities and preceptors in keeping with their status.

In short having devotion to those above us, goodwill amongst those who are our equals and having affection for those who are below us are the excellent values of life. Anybody who approaches you should not go heavy at heart or empty handed. Spirituality can never exist without social grace. And social life without spirituality is no life at all. Spirituality never denies any virtue. But always remember that the Lord is the home of all values. The world does not exist for our sole pleasure and enjoyment. The thought that we are here for the good of the world is real spirituality.

While incorporating right thinking and right values in our life we should also make it a habit to give up wrong values and wrong thinking. If we do not fight against them it amounts to approving them. But such disapproval should never turn to cruelty. It should be within the limits of justice. The outstanding feature of this should be love for truth and not personal hatred.

This is our philosophy. This is ShrImadAchArya's philosophy. This is the philosophy all the shastras proclaim. This is the philosophy that kings and sages like Janaka and Sanaka believed and followed. The Lord's devotees like Dhruva and Prahlada incorporated this philosophy in their lives. Those who believe and live by this philosophy will never come to any harm is the assurance of the Lord. Being God's devotees you should honour and respect His devotees. Help as much as you can those who seek your aid. But always remember your duties. Offer all your actions to the Lord and never hanker after temporal gains. All actions performed with a selfish motive is like milk turned sour. There can be no higher motive than the motive to please God and the motive of earning jnana (right knowledge). But giving up all actions and following unworthy methods is like taking poison which will destroy us completely.

It was ShrImadAchArya who preached this wonderful philosophy. The same vAyu who manifested as Hanumantha to serve Lord ShrI Rama and as Bhimasena to serve Lord ShrI Krishna also manifested as ShrImadAchArya and preached this philosophy. This was his service to Lord ShrI VEdavyAsa. His life, like his works was philosophy itself.

Now I take leave of you. Though I will not be with you in person my presence will be in my works and in my brindavan. You can serve me best by listening to, studying, preserving and propagating my works. My blessings to you."

He revealed to them the essence of dvaita philosophy, a philosophy that he believed in passionately and had preached and lived by all his life. As they listened to his speech they realized once again that he was a true gyAni, a yogi, a scholar and a radiant monk possessing a soft and compassionate heart. Fear of displeasing him was the only reason why they held back their tears.

Brindavana govindanu gurugaLa vrundAvanadoLagindu (RAYaru enters brindavana)

After this RAYaru began reciting the pranava mantra. In a very short time he was lost in meditation. He reached the highest point in mediation. His face was serene. He was shining with a rare brilliance.

At one stage the japamala in the master's hand became still. Venkanna and other disciples who understood this sign started arranging the slabs around him. They arranged the slabs up to his head and then as per his earlier instructions they placed a copper box containing one thousand two hundred LakshmiArAyaNa shaligramas that had been specially brought from Gandaki river. Then they placed the covering slab over it and filled it with earth. They poured twelve thousand varahas (abhisheka) over the brindavan that they had built. A grand feast was hosted to commemorate this glorious event.

SAkshI haya syOtra hi

AppanAchArya was RAYaru's beloved disciple. Most of the sanskrit hymns that we chant today in honor of RAYaru – rAghavEndra stOtra, mangaLAshTaka, gadya, danDaka etc – are his compositions. On the day RAYaru was entering the brindavana, he was on the other side of the tungabhadra river. Since the river was in full spate he could not come back in time. As he ran towards manchAle his mind was filled with thoughts of his beloved guru and he instantaneously composed the famous rAghavEndra stotra (“Sri pUrNabOdha guru tIrtha payobdhi pAra ...”). When he reached the river it was in full spate but he did not care and rushed headlong. The power of his devotion was so great that the river parted for him and he reached manchAle quickly. But even this was too late. Just as he came in front of the brindavana, the last slab had been laid and his beloved guru had vanished from his sight forever. Tears started to gush from his eyes and his voice choked. The stotra had reached its final stanza “ kirtir digvijita

vibhutihirahatula ..” but he could not continue further. Suddenly, a voice rang out from the brinuhAvana "sAkshi haya syOtra hi" (meaning that Lord hayagrIva is the witness to the statements made by appanAchArya in his stOtra, and that He would make them all come true). Even today, anybody reciting this stotra with full faith and devotion is bound to get the grace of RAyaru.

RaghavendrAdvilasati phalito madhva sidhhAnta shAkhi (The literary gems of RAyaru)

When going through Rayaru’s glorious life-history and reading about his miracles, it is natural to forget one very important point – that it was Vidya Lakshmi who convinced VenkatanAtha to become an ascetic. This was a point that Rayaru never forgot. But where was the time to do this? He toiled throughout his life managing his multifarious responsibilities - as the Head of a major maTha, as the preceptor of a large band of disciples whom he personally trained, as an advisor to kings and as the preceptor who took care of his devotees wherever they were. To add to this, he would constantly go on tours. In spite of this, he still produced a very large volume of high quality literary works. It is said that he did this by managing with just a few hours of sleep, toiling late into the night and work working on his manuscripts. His works are literary gems that shine with scholastic brilliance even today. That is why he is called “madhva matAmbOdhi chandra” (the Moon arising out of the ocean called madhva shAstra).

His works are characterized by remarkable clarity of thought, simplicity of expression and compactness. He demonstrates a profound learning in different shAstras, a clear and simple style and a very lucid way of presenting even the most technical points. This is reason behind the universal popularity of his works. A quick thumbnail sketch of his works is provided

Independent works:

| Work | Notes |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| RamachArtiramanjari | A short work highlighting the major aspects of Rama avatAra. |
| KrishnachArtiramanjari | A short work highlighting the major aspects of Krishna avatAra. |
| GitArthasangraha or gIta Vivrutti | More popularly known as gIta-vivrutti, a lucid original commentary on the gIta |

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|---|---|
| Upanishad khanDArtha | Lucid expositions on 9 out of 10 Upanishads commented upon by MadhvAchArya (except aitareya Upanishad). He was about to write one for the aitareya, as well, but he wanted to give the honor to his disciple, Smrutimuktavali KrishnAchArya, who had already completed the work. So he wrote a gloss on only the mantra part of the Upanishad – aitareya mantrarthasangraha |
| TantradIpikA | A learned Vivrutti on the Brahma Sutras, explaining earlier works like nyAyasudha, chandrika etc. |
| Tattvamanjari | A detailed exposition of the AnubhAshya of MadhvAchArya |
| PrAtah sankalpa gadya | A very inspiring prose to recited in the morning as a resolution to perform the day's activities. |
| Sarva samarpaNa gadya | A very inspiring prose to recited in the night to submit the day's activities to the Lord. Goes along with PrAtah sankalpa gadya. |
| NadI tAratamya stotra | |
| BhAtta sangraha | Bhattasangraha : Commentary on the MimAmsa Sutras of Jaimini following the Bhatta school. One of the very few works written by Dvaitins on other systems of thought |
| NyAyamuktAvalI | Brief exposition of the adhikaraNashariiras of the Brahma-Sutra |
| MantrArthamanjari | A commentary on the first 3 Adhyayas (40 Suktas) of the Rig vEda, the same ones covered by MadhvAchArya's Rg Bhasya |
| Vedatraya vivrutti | Commentaries on all three vedas |
| PurushasUktAdi pancha sUkta vyAkhyA | Commentaries (short glosses) Purusasukta, Gharma, Samudra, Pavamana, Hiranyagarbha and Ambhrni sUktas. Some of these are not available and there is only an oral tradition that he wrote these. |
| “indu yenage govinda” | a soul stirring kannada song |

Commentaries and glosses on works by othes:

| | |
|---|--|
| Mahabharata tAtparya NirNaya bhAva sangraha | a short summary of the Mahabharata tAtparya nirNaya by madhvAchArya. RAYaru has captured the essence of each adhyAya in one verse. |
| PrameyadIpikA vyAkhyA | Commentary on madhvAchArya's gIta BhAshya |
| GIta tAtparya Tika vivaraNa | Commentary on jayatIrtha's commentary on Acharya Madhva's gIta tAtparya |
| Tattva prakAshA BhAvadIpikA | Exposition on TatvaprakAshika, JayatIrtha's commentary on the viShNu-tattva-vinirNaya |
| NyAyasudhA- parimaLa | It is one of the most popular commentaries on Nyayasudha of ShrI JayatIrtha. It is because of this that RAYaru is called |

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| | ParimalAchArya |
| Tippani on dasha prakaraNa-s | Glosses on six out of the ten Prakaranas of madhvAchArya, omitting the four already commented upon by VyAsa tIrtha |
| VAdAvali vyAkhyA | Commentary on VAdavali of ShrI JayatIrtha |
| Chandrika PrakASha | Commentary on the tAtparya chandrikA of VyAsa tIrtha |
| Tarka tAnDava vyAkhyA | Commentary on TarkatAnDava of ShrI VyAsa tIrtha |
| VAdAvali vyAkhyA | Commentary on PramANa padhdhati of ShrI JayatIrtha |
| Anumadhva vijaya vyAkhyA | Not available. Supposed to be a commentary on aNumadhvavijaya of ShrI NarayanapanditAchArya |
| NyAyadIpikA | Not available. Supposed to be a commentary on madhvAchArya's gIta tAtparya |

Sri Vadindra tIrtha and GuruguNa stavana:

Sri Vadindra tIrtha was the fifth pontiff of RAYara maTha after RAYaru. He was a very great scholar and devotee of RAYaru. He composed a work of 36 verses in honor of RAYaru called 'guru guNa stavana'. When he recited this in front of the moola brindAvana as part of his submission to RAYaru, the entire brindAvana shook as if to indicate RAYaru was nodding in approval of what had been written. Incidentally, the brindAvana that we see next to that of RAYaru in Mantralaya is that of Sri Vadindra tIrtha. This was the brindAvana that Diwan Venkanna had originally organized for RAYaru.

RAYaru and haridAsas:

RAYaru did not compose many devaranAmas or train haridAsas. But his presence in Mantralaya acted as a catalyst for bhakti and haridAsa movement to flourish in the surrounding areas. All the major haridAsas who came after him were mainly from those areas. It became a tradition for every haridAsa to visit mantrAlaya and render service to rAYaru. We can see compositions of great haridAsas like vijaydAsaru, gOpAladAsaru, jagannAtha dAsaru etc lavishing their respect and affection for rAYaru.

Sri Vijaya dAsaru is respected and adored as one of the greatest haridAsas this land has seen. He visited Mantralaya several times and is supposed to have conversed with RAYaru personally. Some of his songs reveal divine insights that ordinary people would never get. In one song (“noDide gurugaLa noDide ..”), he talks of seeing Lord Narasimha, Rama, VedavyAsa and Krishna on the four sides of the brindAvana, all the gurus from Acharya Madhva down to his own guru present within the brindAvana, and Lord LakshminArayana in the form of a discus (chakra) granting the desires of devotees.

Sri Gopala dAsaru was the disciple of Sri Vijaya dAsaru. He has also composed several songs in RAYaru’s honor and has revealed some very secret aspects about RAYaru’s previous incarnations. He too was blessed by RAYaru in several ways.

Sri jagannAtha dAsaru was the disciple of Gopala dAsaru. When he was suffering from a stomach ailment for slighting Sri Vijaya dAsaru, it was RAYaru who guided him on what he needed to do and thus saved his life. Amongst the major haridAsas, he has composed the maximum number of songs on RAYaru. When he went to Mantralaya to submit his magnum opus harikathAmrutasAra, rAYaru is supposed to have come out of the brindAvana and blessed him. This incident has been captured in a famous devaranAma “yeddu barutAre noDe ...”. He is supposed to have had conversations with RAYaru very frequently. When this fact became public and several people started pestering him with requests, RAYaru had to put an end to it, devastating him totally. He poured out his anguish in front of RAYaru in another song (“yAke mUkanAdyo guruve ..”), melting RAYaru’s heart. From then on, RAYaru appeared only in his dreams.

Other great devotees of RAYaru were Sri Krishna avadhUtaru, Sri KrishnArya (ibrahimpurada appAvaru), anantAdrIsha dAsaru and so on.

Final words:

While describing Sri JayatIrtha's nyAya sudha, Rayaru says "Every word and letter is full of many meanings, but I am not going to write them all down to avoid bloating this document". We too have a similar dilemma - every action of his is worthy of being contemplated on at depth, but that would expand this document beyond manageable limits. So, with a heavy heart, let us conclude with the last shloka from guruguNa stavana which summarizes the contributions of some great yatis, culminating in Rayaru.

yyAsena vuypta bIjah, shrutibhuvi bhagavatpAda
labdhAmkurashrIh
pratnairIShatprabhinnoyani jayamuninA samyagudbhinna shAkhah
mounInIshavyAsarAjAdutita kisalaya puShpitoyamjayIndrA
dadya shrI rAghavendrAdvilasati phalito madhvasiddhAntashAkhl

In the fertile land of Shruti, VedavyAsa planted the seeds of madhva siddhAnta (in the form of brahma sUtra). It sprouted in the form of Bhashya from Acharya Madhva. These developed further in the form of commentaries by the earliest disciples (Sri PadmanAbha tIrtha and so on). It grew many thick branches in the form of commentaries by Sri Jaya tIrtha. Fresh leaves grew on these branches in the form of the vyAsa-traya works by Sri vyAsa tIrtha. It developed flowers in the form of the works by Sri VijayIndra tIrtha. Finally, it developed juicy fruits in the form of Parimala and other works by Rayaru. The tree of madhva siddhAnta is really very attractive with fruits.

In other words, madhva siddhAnta or tattvavAda came to fruition with Rayaru.

ShrImat sadguru rAghavendra yatirAt kuryAddhruvam mangaLam
MadhvAntargata shrI krishNArpanamastu