

ABOUT THE COMMENTARY

This edition contains an abridged English rendition of the Rāmāyaṇa-bhūṣaṇa of Śrī Govindarāja of the Rāmānuja-sampradāya. Since it is natural to wonder who wrote it and what it is about, a summary of its maṅgalācaraṇa with some additional information is presented here.

Śrī Govindarāja begins his commentary by offering his obeisances unto his spiritual master named Śaṭhakopa Deśika, and his predecessors who had appeared in the line of disciplic succession from Nātha Muni, Yāmunācārya and Rāmānujācārya. He then offers his respectful obeisances unto the sources of the Rāmāyaṇa: Vālmīki, Nārada and Lord Brahmā. Finally, he offers his obeisances unto Sītā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumān.

The commentator then states that in a dream, he was requested by many [Vaiṣṇava] scholars to present a comprehensive explanation of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa and hence his venture in this regard. Out of humility, he then states that the Rāmāyaṇa is a composition whose gravity as deep as the ocean and that his intelligence is no match to comprehend it fully. Yet, he is confident that Lord Rāma Himself will help him in this regard because He is the commentator's worshipable Deity.

Śrī Govindarāja then states that in his commentary, he will exhaustively point out how the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa does not (1) state anything useless, (2) state anything redundant, (3) commence any topic inappropriately, (4) contain internal contradictions [or contradictions with other scriptures], or (5) contain any defect in the construction of words, sentences or the book itself. He also

aims at bringing out the natural sense of the Rāmāyaṇa in his commentary.

He then states how he has undertaken the task of commenting on the Rāmāyaṇa. Following the path shown by his spiritual master, he has extracted the gemlike [scriptural] conclusions from the oceanlike teachings of his predecessor-ācāryas and fused them with remarks from other commentaries on the Rāmāyaṇa that resemble metallic fragments to produce his commentary, *Śrī Rāmāyaṇa-bhūṣaṇa*, “Ornaments for Śrī Rāmāyaṇa.”

The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa is divided into *kāṇḍas*, which Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to as *Cantos* in a room conversation on 12 April 1975 in Hyderabad. From the colophons to Śrī Govindarāja’s commentary on each of the the Rāmāyaṇa Cantos, we notice the very interesting names he gives to different portions of his commentary. Since the Rāmāyaṇa is considered to be a form of the Supreme Lord Rāmacandra Himself, he calls his Canto 1 commentary *Maṇi-mañjīra*, “Jewelled anklets [for His lotus feet],” Canto 2 commentary *Pītāmbara*, “Yellow cloth [to cover His legs],” Canto 3 commentary *Ratna-mekhalā*, “Jewelled belt [for His waist],” Canto 4 commentary *Muktāhāra*, “Pearl necklace [for His neck],” Canto 5 commentary *Śṛṅgāra-tilaka*, “Elegant Tilaka [for His forehead],” Canto 6 commentary *Ratna-kirīṭa*, “Gem-studded Crown [for His head],” and Canto 7 commentary *Maṇi-mukūṭa* “Jewelled Top-piece for the Crown [on His head].”

In the *maṅgalācaraṇa*, Śrī Govindarāja then states that he will bring out the very clear cardinal teachings of the Rāmāyaṇa, eighteen in number, that Śrī Rāmānuja received from one of his spiritual masters Śailapūrṇa and as it has been received through his disciplic succession. [These teachings are separately presented in this volume.]

The commentator then states that, as and when needed, he will present meanings of particular words, sentences or the non-explicit import of passages. In this edition, we have tried to incorporate the meaning of particular words and sentences into the Sanskrit-English equivalents and translation itself as much as possible. Otherwise, they appear in the section titled “Commentary.” It is well known among both academic and traditional scholars that Sanskrit commentaries become incomprehensible to the modern reader when translated literally, and so we have tried rendered it in an intelligible manner, taking care to include the commentator’s implicit points inside square brackets. Sometimes, for the sake of the scholarly devotee readers, we have left a number of quotations from authorities in the commentary untranslated at the end of each chapter under the heading *Quotations*. Technical explanations on Sanskrit grammar, etc., that appear in the commentary are generally left out. As a general principle, philosophical points made in the commentary that require too elaborate an explanation have also been set aside. We have also carefully endeavored to follow the example set by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura who produced an abridged Bengali rendition of a philosophical booklet entitled *Artha-pañcaka* by Śrī Pillai Lokācārya of the Rāmānuja-sampradāya. We estimate that the rendered portion covers more than 80% of the commentary. We have also presented footnotes in an attempt to further clarify the subject matter.

As far as the text of the commentary is concerned, we have consulted three printed editions of this commentary, as published by the Madhva Vilas Book Depot, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan and Parimal Publications. The Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan edition contains the following academic observation on Śrī Govindarāja and his commentary:

“Govindarāja is a famous commentator on the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa and stands supreme among the South Indian [Sanskrit] commentators [of the Rāmāyaṇa]. With his Vaiṣṇava approach to the text he has remained its authoritative exponent by upholding the qualities of Śrī-Nārāyaṇa and the main tenets of Śrī-Vaiṣṇavism. He is known for his profound learning in the various branches of Sanskrit literature. The colophons of his commentary reveal some information about his family and his preceptor, Śaṭhakopa Deśika. Govindarāja explicitly states that he was guided by the Guru, not only in regard to the commentary on the Rāmāyaṇa, but in spiritual pursuits also. In the benedictory verses prefixed to the commentary on the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, he alludes to his having heard repeatedly the inspired exposition of the epic by his teacher.

“Govindarāja’s commentary on Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa namely [Rāmāyaṇa] Bhūṣaṇa covers the entire text. It is in harmony with the main doctrine of Śrī-Vaiṣṇavism, particularly prapatti [surrender unto the Lord]. The whole poem is like a long discourse on prapatti. His references to Vedic rituals go to show that he was acquainted not merely with the theory but also with the practical aspects of Vedic ritualism.

“Thus, his commentary on the Rāmāyaṇa is a veritable treasure house of learning and scholarship. Its importance from the point of view of Vaiṣṇava faith is unique. In the course of the commentary, Govindarāja also points out the peculiarities of the language of the epic [Rāmāyaṇa] and the literary merits of the composition on which he comments. Hence, the commentary is very highly valuable from religious, philosophical, literary and linguistic points of view.”