**Early life:**

Born in 916 A.D in Viranarayanpura, Yamuna had an impressive lineage. The great vishishtha advaita scholar, Nathamuni was his grandfather and Ishwara Bhat was his father. He had the gift of being an ‘eka-santha grahi’ or one who could learn by listening just once. As a child prodigy he had mastered all the Shastras under the guidance of Maha Bhashya Bhattar.

**Skills**:

In a town called Viranarayanpura in Tamil Nadu, a learned teacher called Maha Bhashya Bhattar would guide his students on various subjects. A scholar called Akkiyalwan from king’s court had the arrogance to challenge other intellectuals and collect money from them. When Maha Bhashya Bhattar received summons to pay the amount, he was very upset. Seeing the state of his guru, one of his students called Yamuna was incensed and tore the summons into pieces. The king heard about this and asked the boy to have a literary debate with Akkiyalwan. When the queen saw that this boy was only sixteen years old, she asked the king that he should give away half the kingdom to the boy, if he won the debate. If not, she would offer herself to wild dogs.

Akkiyalvan asked the boy to make three statements, which he offered to contradict. If he failed, then the boy would be declared the winner. Yamuna then stated: i) Your mother is not a barren woman; ii) The king is a righteous and powerful ruler; iii) The queen is a model of chastity. Akkiyalwan was bewildered as he could not counter any of the above statements and accepted his defeat.

The king then asked Yamuna to counter his own statements. Yamuna contradicted his own statements as follows: i) The Shastras say “Kaakaa Vanthya Kathali Vanthya”, which means that yielding one egg by the crow or one bunch of fruit by a banana plant, both are considered as Non-Yielders. That is a single tree can never form a grove. By that analogy, an only son is no son at all. So, Akkiyalvan's mother (who had only one offspring) was as good as barren in the eyes of the law; ii) The king cannot be called righteous as he had appointed an arrogant person to be his scholar in his court. That he had not dismissed him, revealed that the king was indeed powerless; iii) According to the Sruti texts, every woman is married first to Soma, then Gandharva and then Agni before marrying her earthly spouse. The queen was no exception and therefore could not be regarded as a model of chastity.

The queen was overjoyed with these arguments and hailed the boy as "Alavandar"- or “One who came to be a saviour.” The king sent Akkiyalwan out of the kingdom and gave half his kingdom to Yamuna to rule.

**Mannakal Nambi – Alavandar:**

However, after becoming a king, Alavandar had very less time left for spiritual pursuits. Meanwhile, Mannakal Nambi (Rama Misra), a very learned saint, wanted to install Alavandar as the spiritual successor to Nathamuni. He tried to reach Alavandar many times but was unsuccessful. To enter the palace, Manakkal Nambi supplied the palace cook with Alavandar’s favourite spinach. After many months, one day Mannakal Nambi stopped supplying the spinach. Missing his favourite green, Alavandar summoned for the supplier.

Mannakal Nambi finally got to meet Alavandar and told him that his grandfather Sri Nathamuni had passed on the ‘family wealth’ that needs to be handed over to Alavandar. Nambi then took Alavandar to the Sri Ranganatha Swamy temple at Srirangam. Upon seeing the Lord’s idol, Alavandar experienced a divine realisation and renounced his kingdom. He surrendered at the Lord’s feet and became a sanyasi. After being renamed as Yamunacharya, he was given the charge of Nathamuni’s school which also included the collected Divya Prabandha (the collection of verses by the Tamil Alwars or saints) by Mannakal Nambi. Some of the works that are attributed to Yamunacharya include the Chathusloki, a prayer devoted to Goddess Lakshmi, and Stotra Ratnam, a prayer devoted to Lord Narayana. Later he became a teacher to Sri Ramanujacharya, one of the greatest saints and expounder of the vishishtha advaita philosophy.

**Works of Yamunacharya-**

• Siddhitraya – This is a collection of three works, namely, Atma Siddhi, Iswara Siddhi, and Samvit Siddhi. These siddhis explore and explain the vishishth advaitic concept of soul, God and knowledge.

• Agama Pramanya – This work explains the validity of the Pancharatra Agamas- a central theme of Vedic traditions, where Bhakti is given a prominent place.

• Githartha Sangraha\_ The 32 verses are an excellent commentary of the Bhagavad Geeta, based on which Sri Ramanujacharya also based Gita Bhashya. It emphasises that Bhakti or devotion to God is the karma (selfless service) and jnana (realisation) are the saadhanaas.

• Stotra Ratna – This ‘Jewel of hymns’ is composed in praise of Sriman Narayana

• Chatushloki – This is a hymn in praise of Goddess Lakshmi

• Nityam

• Maaya Vaada Khandanam

**Alavandar – Ramanujar:**

Alavandhar comes back to srirangam and is worried about appointing the successor to lead the sampradhayam. He finds out about Ilayazhwar (Sri Ramanujar) who is studying under Yadhavaprakasan in kanchipuram. He visits kanchipuram and in the Dhevaperumal koil, in front of Kariyamanikka perumal sannidhi, he gives his divine kataksham towards Ilayazhwar who passes by at that time. Alavandhar goes to Dheva perumal and does a sharanagathi to Emperuman to make Ilayazhwar the next leader of the sampradhayam. Thus, alavandhar plants the seed to what is going to be a maha vriskham (great tree) i.e., emperumanar dharisanam. Alavandhar asks thirukkachi nambi to help ilayazhwar in his spiritual development.

In his last days Alavandar desired to meet Ramanujacharya. But due to his failing health, he attained the feet of the Lord before Ramanujacharya could reach him. When Ramanujacharya reached Srirangam where Alavandar spent his last days, he saw that Alavandar’s three fingers were folded, indicating that Ramanujacharya had to fulfil three of his wishes.

Ramanujacharya declared that he would –

1. Commemorate the name of Parasara on Earth by giving it to a person worthy to bear it.

2. Compose a commentary on Tiruvaymozhi – the magnum opus of the saint Nammaazhvaar.

3. Compose a commentary on Upanishads, Vedanta Sutras and Bhagavad Gita.

Alavandar’s bent fingers immediately opened and Swami Ramanujacharya went on to successfully fulfil his requests.