

Swami Desika Darsanam

(A peek into the collection of Swami Desikan's 28 stothras)



Original English Summaries of the Stothrams by

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Sri P. Srihari swamy, Editor (www.svdd.com)

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SrI:

SRI VEDANTHA DESIKAR DEVASTHANAM (SVDD) MYLAPORE, CHENNAI (INDIA)

A TEMPLE OF EMINENCE STEEPED IN TRADITION FOR SWAMI DESIKA

Sri Vedantha Desikar Devasthanam (SVDD), Mylapore, is among the premier Srivaishnava temples in Chennai, with a history of over three centuries. The presiding deity of the temple is Srinivasa. The Lord, along with His Consort Sri Alarmel Manga and Sri Vedantha Desika — an Acharya-par-excellence in the lineage of Srivaishnava Gurus — forever showers the devotees with His choicest of grace.

Swami Desika, as the Acharya is reverentially referred to, is considered to be an incarnation of Lord Venkatesa of Thirumala. No wonder it is, hence, that the genius that he was, authored over 120 works of varied nature espousing the cause of the Visishtadvaita philosophy.

In fact, it is for Swami Desika that the temple was constructed about 350 years ago. Lord Srinivasa was installed later. It is well known that Azhwars and Acharayas travelled throughout the country extolling the beauty and grace of Sriman Narayana. However, in the case of Mylapore, it would appear that the Lord and the Acharya Swami Desika switched roles as the Divya Dampathi (Lord Srinivasa and Alarmel Manga Thayar) perhaps willed to grace the abode of His most favourite devotee (Swami Desika) and relish his company.

Besides Perumal, Thayar and Swami Desika, the temple has Sannidhis for deities such as Lakshmi Narasimha, Rama, Lakshmi Hayagriva, Sudharsana/Yoga Narasimha, Andal, Garuda, Anjaneya, Sri Ramanuja, Azhwars and other Acharyas. There is a separate shrine for Peyazhwar whose Avathara Sthalam happens to be Mylapore.

The Pujas and rituals of the temple comply with Sri Pancharathra Aagamas, that is, the practice of Kumbham, Mandalam, Bimbham and Yaagam. Pancha Murthy form of idol worship is followed; the Murthys being Dhruva Bera (Moolavar), Kousthubha Bera, Uthsava Bera, Yaaga Bera and Sayana Bera.

Numerous festivals are celebrated in the temple round the year. Of these, the Brahmotsavam (10 days), Swami Desikan Avathara Uthsavam (10), Navarathri Uthsavam (10), Pavithra Uthsavam (7), Adhyayana Uthsavam (22), Panchami Theertha Uthsavam for Thayar (9), Peyazhwar Uthsavam (10), Andal Uthsavam (10), Kaliyan Uthsavam (10), Sri Bhashyakara Uthsavam (10), ThirupPaavadai Uthsavam, Lakshaarchana for Hayagriva are among the most prominent ones.

A number of illustrious Srivaishnava Acharyas have time and again visited and performed

Mangalaasaasanam here over generations and added value to the temple's hoary tradition and glory. This includes H.H. Jeeyars of Sri Ahobila Mutt, Andavan Asramam, Parakala Mutt, besides a galaxy of other great scholars.

It is believed that devotion and committed service of the Kainkaryaparas, conducting of the daily rituals and Uthsavams as laid down in the Aagama Saasthras, chanting of the Vedas, reciting of Divya Prabandham and Desika Prabandhams, worshipping by great sages and savants, etc. augment the Lord's aura and splendour, and accentuate the sanctity of a temple. It is a matter of pride and gratitude that SVDD is a shining example among such special temples.

Some of the pioneering activities of the Temple and its affiliated organisations are:

- **The Vedaparayana Sabha**, which was established in **1905**, has been in the unstinted service of the Temple and Bhagavathas/scholars for over a century now. It has been undertaking and sponsoring Thadheeyaradhana and Sambhavana for the annual Brahmotsavam and Swami Desika Vaarshika Uthsavam. The Sabha, an integral part of the Temple's activities, completed **100 years** of dedicated and distinguished service in March 2005 when a grand **Centenary Celebration**, commemorating the occasion and befitting the magnitude of the event, was held.
- **Sri Vaishnava Sripadham Kainkarya Association**, which was formed in **1946**, has been an exclusive group of Srivaishnavas engaged in the service of carrying the Lord during processions in all festivals of the Temple. This organisation has proved to be a role model for many a temple in this significant Kainkaryam.
- Popularising the Visishtaadvaita philosophy by conducting a number of **Vidwath Sadases and Upanyasams** thorough various endowment trusts all through the year. The annual ThirupPavai discourse, sponsored by The Vedaparayana Sabha, is a famous and prestigious event.
- Conducting **organised classes in the Vedas and Divya Prabandham** under the auspices of The Vedaparayana Sabha since 1996. Scores of children have emerged fully qualified under the scheme. Imparting of training in these disciplines was there even before, albeit, in the form of private classes.
- Creating awareness among children about **Swami Desika's hymns and Prabandhams by conducting competitions** in them during the Acharya's Vaarshika Uthsavam.
- Maintaining the temple's website www.svdd.com (launched in December 2006) which has emerged as one of the leading Srivaishnava portals with global viewership and participation.

By the grace of the Divya Dhampathi and our beloved Acharya, may these Kainkaryams continue for eternity!

-- Natteri P. Srihari (a) Lakshmi NarasimhAcharyar, Editor, www.svdd.com

Swami Desika Darsanam

(A peek into the 28 sthothrams composed by Swami Desika)



Swami Desikan - Kanchipuram

SWAMI DESIKA DARSANAM

NATTERI SRI P. SRIHARI (A) SRI LAKSHMINARASIMHACHARIAR, CHENNAI

INTRODUCTION

Sri Vedantha Desika, one of the premier Acharyas of our Sampradhaya, was born in the year 1268 A.D. at Thooppul, a part of Kancheepuram (about 75 kms from Chennai, India). He is considered as an incarnation of the Divine Bell (of the Lord of Thirumala), a fact well corroborated by his extra-ordinary, multi-faceted genius which manifested in the form of an astounding array of literary treasure.

Even scholars aver that it is impossible not to get awe-struck by the remarkable appeal his works make for, his mastery over the nuances of the language (whether Sanskrit or Tamil) and the sheer volume and range of his works. It is not often that quality and quantity go together but in our Acharya's case it would seem that they had but to compromise to forge an awesome combination.

Swami Desika is a veritable lion amongst poets and logicians (KaviTharkika Simham), a colossus in philosophy of Sri Vaishnavism and a prolific author. He has composed sthothras, philosophical play, morals, rahasya granthas, epics, astronomical treatise, etc., numbering over 120.

His sthothras are unique in form and substance. They are the outpourings of a pious and devoted heart in all its earnestness. Devotion is the nucleus of these works and humility, the hallmark. His commitment to the philosophy born out of an unassailable conviction is written all over them.

We should consider it as a matter of great privilege that we live in an era in which we have ample opportunity to familiarise, learn and study the master's great works. But, unfortunately, not too many of us have the time, awareness or the inclination for this as we are caught in the vicious cycle of mechanical worldly life.

In a humble endeavour and with a view to helping people break free from the mundaneness, we propose to initiate them into what we call Desika Darsanam - a peek into the collection of the Acharya's 28 sthothras. Those of us who are already conversant with them in varying degrees, can refresh and have our experience enriched.

The objective of the effort is to make people understand the greatness of Sri Desika through his sthothras. As such, we are not going, for now, into the commentary or translation of them. Instead, we shall deal with the significance, background, salient features, interesting anecdotes, and benediction (phala sruti) of each sthothra.

Each of these hymns is unique in its own way and capable of granting auspiciousness if recited. Did Pillai LokAcharyar not say in his Thaniyan that prosperity beckoned those who learned even a single work of Swami Desika? - சீரொன்று தூப்புல் திருவேங்கடமுடையான்---வானேறப்போமளவும் வாழ்வு. And, by the Acharya's grace, we shall try and learn as many as possible through this series.



SRI HAYAGRIVA STHOTHRAM

Sri Hayagriva Sthothram, which sings the praise of Lord Hayagriva and invokes his grace, is not only the first of Swami Desika's hymns but also a must for everyone. Hayagriva (Haya translates to horse and griva to neck, meaning the 'horse-necked') is considered as the 'God of Knowledge'.

Knowledge is the fulcrum of all virtues and it elevates the state of human mind. It is such a unique element that if once possessed, no external force can do any damage to it. So, it is perceived as the foremost among all wealth - others are subject to possible destruction. It is only in the fitness of things that our Acharya began his divine journey of hymn-singing with this sthothra.



Swami Desikan and Sri hayagrivar - Thiruvahindrapuram

Legend has it that when there was a severe crisis to the survival of Vedas, Lord Vishnu took the form of Hayagriva, and restored the treasure and gave them to Brahma. With face that of a horse and human body, this incarnation possesses four hands, the right hands sporting the chakra and sign of wisdom (Jnana Mudhra) and the left holding the conch and book. He is seated on the white lotus with a crystal-like complexion and is an embodiment of knowledge and Pranava (Om-kara) and an abode of unbridled compassion for His devotees.

The day of Hayagriva's incarnation is given as Aavani Sravanam (Thiruvonam). Little wonder that Desika, who shares the Star with his favourite deity, himself is an epitome of knowledge in all its resplendent radiance.

None less than Garuda, one who has Vedas as his soul (Vedaathma), initiated our Acharya into the Hayagriva-mantra on the Aushadha Giri (the Mountain of Medicine) in Thiruvahindrapuram, a place near Cuddalore (about 190 kms from Chennai). Sri Desika chanted the mantra repeatedly and no sooner than he perfected it, a pleased Hayagriva presented Himself before our Acharya and poured his grace on him.

Sri Desika worshipped Lord Hayagriva in his nitya aradhana (daily worship). That is why, an idol of Lord Hayagriva is also installed wherever Desika's is.

Sri Hayagriva Sthothram comprises 33 slokas (including the phala sruti), a majority of them being very simple and in flowing style. Some of the highlights of the work are as follows:

- In the famous opening Sloka (Jnaanaanandhamayam Devam), Swami Desika offers his salutation as he describes the attributes of the deity: "We worship the horse-necked Lord Hayagriva who is the very personification of knowledge and bliss, whose form is like an unblemished crystal and who is the source of all kinds of learning."
- "I surrender unto Lord Hayagriva whose solid form is absolutely pure and an epitome of knowledge, who has taken a vow to grant supreme knowledge (to His devotees), who is the very source of compassion and the refuge of all living beings." — Sloka No. 5 (Visudhdha Vignaana).
- In Sloka No. 7 (Dhaakshinya Ramya) Sri Hayagriva is referred as the benefactor of even Dhakshinamurthi (a form of Shiva), Saraswathi and Vyasa, reputed to be repositories of knowledge. They are what they are only because of the aura and power that Hayagriva has blessed them with, avers the author.
- Swami Desika's resolve to triumph over scholars of other ideologies and establish Sri Ramanuja's philosophy takes the form of a personal application to Lord Hayagriya, as he says, "O Lord, May You be seated on the throne — that is, the tip of my tongue — for, I am desirous of conquering the best of poets and logicians in philosophical debates presided over by profound scholars!" — Sloka No. 28 (Visesha Vith).
- The penultimate Sloka (Vyakhya Mudhraam) is the Dhyana Sloka in which Sri Desika contemplates the deity and describes the form, hue and posture of the 'God of Knowledge' and prays for His appearance, which the Lord was all too pleased to oblige to.

The phala sruti in the final verse says that those who recite Hayagriva Sthothram with devotion would be blessed with true knowledge and proficiency in speech and poesy. Offering cardamom garland to Hayagriva, especially on Thursdays, is considered very special. Children and others who seek academic excellence would do well to worship Lord Hayagriva and recite this Sthothra.

DASAVATHARA STHOTHRAM

Sriman Narayana, an ocean of compassion, took countless incarnations - "Avathaaraa: asankhyeyaa:" - in the universe, of which ten are considered very important. They, as we all know, are: Mathsya, Koorma, Varaha, Nrusimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Rama, Balarama, Krishna and Kalki (futuristic).

The twin objectives of these avatharas are establishing of Dharma and annihilation of evil forces. This was asserted by Bhagavan Himself in Gita (Parithraanaaya Sadhonaam . . . Sambhavaami Yuge Yuge).

Swami Desika composed Sri Dasavathara Sthothram at Dasavathara Sannidhi in Srirangam (near Kollidam, a tributary of river Kaveri) to offer his pranamams to the ten incarnations of the Lord. Incidentally, that Dasavathara Sannidhi was built by Thirumangai Azhwar and he stayed over there for a few years, add to the significance of the sthothra.

In this hymn, the author describes the Lord's great deeds as portrayed by Him in the ten manifestations. In fact, he credits the avatharas to Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam.

In an adroitly-conceived dual connotation (pun) in the first sloka, the poet nonpareil uses the word 'Ranga' to mean both Srirangam, the place, as well as the Stage (Ranga in Sanskrit and Arangam in Tamil mean 'stage'). The Acharya says that the Lord and His Consort - the Hero and the Heroine - use the universe, symbolised by Srirangam, as the stage to enact the play of the Ten Avatharas and that the devotees are the audience.

In another poetic beauty to be savoured, Swami Desika employs the word 'Pithaamahi' to great effect (Sloka No. 5 on Nrusimhavathara). He likens the pillar from which Lord Nrusimha emerged, to the paternal grandmother of all the Brahma Devas, as it gave birth to their father Vishnu (in the form of Nrusimha).

Further, he compares Balarama and Krishna's playfulness/pranks to sugar and milk (Sloka 9). While both are independently tasty, adding sugar to milk only heightens the sweetness. Likewise, the brothers' playfulness was plenty right from their young age and inseparable (a la sugar in the milk) and hence all the more enjoyable. A sweet-coated analogy, indeed!

These are only samples of the little nuggets of wisdom the work is interspersed with. Sri Desika quite aptly brings together the names of the ten avatharas in the penultimate sloka and declares that those who worship these incarnations make the world sacred.

The author seeks propitiousness to the world (Jaganmangalam) through the recitation of this sthothra. In the phala sruti, he says whoever even seeks to learn the sthothra will have Goddess Saraswati to ascend on his tongue; devotion will rule the mind, spotless the body will become and his fame will spread in ten directions.

SRI BHAGAVAD DHYANA SOPANAM

Swami Desika at his descriptive best. This surely will be the refrain when one gets to study Sri Bhagavath Dhyana Sopanam, which extols the beauty of Ranganatha, the Lord of Srirangam.

Perhaps, inspired by Thiruppaanaazhwar's prabandham Amalanaadhi Piran - this is a well-founded inferential reasoning - our Acharya set about composing his own Sanskrit version of Arangan's Thirumeni varnanam on similar lines. So we have this hymn Bhagavath Dhyana Sopanam, offering us a rewarding journey from the Lord's Thiruvadi to Thirumudi.

That Sri Desika has written a commentary by name Munivaahana Bhogam, on "Paadhadhi Kesamadhai Paadi thantha" Amalanaadhi Piran, is a matter of significance and a cinch for the aforesaid reasoning.

The sheer nature of the subject lends itself to descriptive treatment and who better than our great Acharya to take it to exquisite and exalted levels - literally and figuratively!

Sopanam means 'flight of steps'. Starting from the feet, the author takes the ardent devotee through the flight of steps in the form of various parts of the Lord's Sacred Body, in the ascending order. It may be noted that Thiruvadi in our Sampradaya is held as means (Upaayam) and one must, first up, catch hold of the same in order to invoke His grace.

After the customary prefatory sloka, verses 2 to 9 meditatively 'cover' His lotus feet, stunning ankles, wonderful thighs, attractive navel, famed chest (because of the presence of Lakshmi), imposing arms, smiling face and radiant crown in that order. The crescendo thus culminates in a 'face to face' with the Lord.

Sloka no. 2 offers a fascinating study of comparison between the metaphorical lotus (His feet) and an ordinary lotus. It shows that the Divine Lotus is conclusively superior on many counts. To name a few:-

Unlike its poor cousin, the Divine Lotus

- is the home to the fragrance of Vedas;
- is the flower worn on the head by Brahma Devas;
- is not an off-shoot of slush but born from the sacred Kaveri sand;
- is softer than even Piraatti's (lotus) hands.

Sloka No. 10 sums up His overall beauty, while 11 narrates the elegance of the Uthsavar - Namperumal.

A word-play (on Madhye - Centre) in the 11th sloka provides for an absorbing finishing touch prior to the phala sruti. Swami says, "Not only does He, along with His consorts, stay put in the

centre of Srirangam but also in the interior of my heart" - Madhye Rangam, Mama Cha Hridhaye Varthathe Saavarodha:

A couple of references can be drawn as pointers as to why Ranganatha, of all the Idols (Archa Moorthis), was a natural choice when Sri Desika contemplated adoring the Divine elegance.

Sri Andal and Thiruppaanaazhwar cannot help but exclaim in ecstasy at the breathtaking beauty of 'Arangan'.

In 'Ezhiludaiya Ammanaimeer' - Naachiyar Thirumozhi (11-2) - Andal addresses "O Bright Ladies!" and goes on "My sweet Lord Aranga has beautiful locks (of hair), beautiful lips, beautiful eyes, and a beautiful lotus on his navel." - beauty personified, in a nutshell.

And Thiruppaanaazhwar exclaims: "Neelameni Aiyo!" - "He wears a beautiful gem-set garland and a necklace of pearls on his dark frame... Aho, His matchless beauty has stolen my heart". - Amalanaadhi Piran (9).

In the phala sruti the great Acharya says that this hymn is a perfect prescription for those who wish to possess unswerving devotion to God and to attain the spiritual heights that great sages do.



SRI ABHITHISTHAVAM

Travails and tribulations of a distressed soul steeped in unswerving devotion to the Lord, found an expression in the form of Sri Abhithisthavam, a hymn of 29 slokas. Abhithi means fearlessness and Swami Desika prays for just that. His pleadings with Ranganatha did not go unanswered.

This hymn has a poignant historical background. It invokes the Divine grace to dispel the sense of horror and panic that engulfed South India in general and Srirangam in particular. This period may be described as one of the darkest in the annals of Indian history.

It was in the aftermath of the invasion in the year 1327 A.D. by Malik Kafur, the general of Alauddin Khilji. The unruly army chief attacked and plundered many religious centres across South India. Temples were demolished, many innocent people lost their lives even as houses were razed to the ground.

Threat to the Srirangam temple became imminent, anguishing and unnerving the devotees. They had little option but to move the idols to another place. A grieved Swami Desika did not want to live in Srirangam sans Namperumal and left the town. It was a forced departure for the specific purposes of saving Sudharsana Suri's 'Srutha Prakaasika' and his two sons. Few years later, he settled in Thirunarayanapuram (Melkote) and then moved to Sathyamangalam where he composed this sthothra.

In the meantime, the idol of Srirangam deity reached Tirupati by a circuitous route with the help of some devotees. Later, one Gopanna Raayaa, the chieftain of Jinji (Senji) brought the idol to his place and worshipped there for some time before reinstalling the same in Srirangam after normalcy was restored, in 1370-71.

Knowing this, Swami Desika was pleased that his devotion had fructified finally. He soon arrived in Srirangam and worshipped Namperumal in Serthi (with Ranganatha, the Moolavar) and basked in ecstasy. Thus the Supreme Lord lived up to His name(s). Bhaya Kruth, Bhaya Nasana: - The creator of fear and its destroyer too. - Vishnu Sahasranama Sthothram - 89.

In a tribute to the great deed by Gopanna Raayaa, Swami Desika composed a verse in Sanskrit (Aaneeya Neela), which one can see in an inscription even now in the Srirangam temple (Opposite to Kili Mantapam).

Coming back to Sri Abhithistavam, Sloka No. 26 establishes the supremacy (Para Thatva Nirnayam) of Sri Bhagavan in unequivocal terms. "Oh Lord, whomsoever you had decided to kill, cannot be saved by anyone - Brahma, Rudra, Indra, Yama. Similarly, whomsoever you had decided to protect, none of them can even touch him. That being the case, we ought to feel safe. Pray rid of the enemies without a trace from Srirangam and other shrines. This will be a great boon to us, Your devotees."

What an unassailable faith! Parallels to this can be drawn in Thvayi Rakshathi... (Sri

Kamasikashtakam - 8) and Thvayi Pravruthe... (Sri Ashta Bhujashtakam - 6).

முத்தி தரும் நகரேழில் முக்கியமாம் கச்சி தன்னில்

அத்திகிரி அருளாளர்க்கு அடைக்கலம் நான் புகுந்தேனே

- அடைக்கலப் பத்து (1)

There is an interesting pointer to the time of composition of this hymn, in Sloka No. 28. The author says that he had spent all his youth enjoying the delectable works of Sri Bhashyakara and that his hair had turned grey and asks the Lord what would he want at that old age. This indicates that Sri Desika was about sixty then.

He prays to Lord Ranganatha to bless him for the rest of his life, with a peaceful and harmonious environment amidst good hearted well-wishers, a place which is free of envy and hatred, one where there wouldn't be any trace of enemies.

In the phala sruti, Swami Desika makes a call to those who want to rid of all kinds of fear and become self-confident, to recite the hymn with faith and devotion. This he asserts, will not only provide the secure protection of Lord Ranganatha, but also fulfill all their wishes.



SRI DAYA SATHAKAM

'Prapadhye' for a perfect start. That is Sri Daya Sathakam for us. The word here means '(I surrender)'. It cannot get more personal and more emphatic than this. Personal because of the use of the first person and emphatic because of announcement of the action. A classic case of preaching and practice treading the same path. Can one ask for a better example of 'leading by example'!

In this sthothra, Swami Desika lays emphasis on Saranagathi (whole-hearted surrender) to the Lord and the other theme that stands out is the Lord's mercy.

The hallmark of this hymn is its astounding poetic excellence - be it structure, content, variety, versatility, style, language, eloquence, proportion, consistency or authenticity. It is divided into ten decads (a decad comprises 10 slokas). Each decad is set to a different meter and similarly each decad brings out a particular meaning associated with the divine attributes of Sri Venkatesa that blossom as His Daya.

Daya translates to compassion or mercy and Sathakam is a century of verses. In this hymn of 108 slokas, Swami Desika personifies Thiruveṅkaṭamudaiyan's compassion as a goddess (Daya Devi). That the author has structured the hymn as if he is talking to Daya Devi adds to the beauty of the work, which is a splendid study in the redemption of man by the Lord's mercy.

Though the Lord's virtues are innumerable, Sri Desika considers His Compassion for His devotees as the foremost. The reason is simple. More than any other virtue, His compassion is instrumental in the redemption of the devotee (jeevaathma). That our Acharya chose this virtue to compose a sathakam is further testimony to its importance.

After surrendering himself to Lord Srinivasa of Thirumala in the opening verse, Swami Desika pays tribute to the Acharya Parampara. Then he salutes the Azhwars, sages such as Parasara followed by Vishvaksena and Sri, Bhoomi and Neela Pirattis before setting out to describe in detail the greatness of His profound mercy.

In Sloka No. 30, the author calls himself the 'emperor of sins' and addresses Daya Devi as the 'monarch of all virtues'. "Knowing this well, you must redeem me by placing me at the feet of Lord Srinivasa", he pleads with Her. Humility of the highest order from a gem of an Acharya!

A dual connotation is brought out in Sloka No. 60 wherein a set of attributes has been aesthetically employed so as to fit both Daya Devi as well as one's Acharya.

The ninth decad is dedicated to the ten Avatharas. Here, Swami Desika sees Daya Devi through the incarnations and exclaims at the great deeds of the Avatharas as they were done by Her.

The hundredth sloka (Natha: Param) can be termed as the highlight of this hymn. The great Acharya seeks Daya Devi's Divine intervention so that Lord Srinivasa would bless him with the

experience that the residents of Parama Padham (Mukthas) enjoy there, at Thirumala itself.



Sri Padmavathi thayar - Thiruchanur

Revealing genuine modesty in another instance, our Acharya says that he is a child and unqualified to compose a hymn like this. But the Lord's playfulness has resulted in his elevation to the stature of 'VedanthAcharya'. It is really He who composed this hymn through him and that he is only an instrument like the Veena. (Can it take the credit for the melodious music that pours from it? Is it not the player that actually creates the melody?) - Sloka 104.

Umpteen such aesthetics (rasaanubhava) are there for the asking in this hymn, making it a sumptuous feast. A share of fill from this will do a world of good to our mind.

As for the phala sruti, those who recite this sthothra will have the absolute blessings of Lord Srinivasa and with that all the good fortunes.



SRI VARADARAJA PANCHASATH

Sri Varadaraja Panchasath is a hymn of 51 slokas that Swami Desika composed on the Lord of Hasthi Giri (in Kancheepuram), inarguably perhaps, his most favourite deity.

Having been born at Thooppul, a part of Sri Kanchi, our Acharya naturally had great admiration for Varadaraja, which is overwhelmingly evident in this sthothra. Elsewhere, while submitting himself at His feet, Sri Desika asserts that Kanchi is the foremost among the seven Mokshapuris (places of deliverance) - the others being Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya (Haridwar), Kasi, Avanthika (Ujjain) and Dwaraka.

Going a step further he declares that the likes of Kasi - the Holy Cities - are no match for Kanchi, the abode of the dark-hued Varada. "காசி முதலாகிய நன்னகரி எல்லாம் கார்மேனி அருளாளர் கச்சிக்கு ஒவ்வா (அம்ருதாஸ்வாதினி - 27)."

The Lord Varadaraja temple is situated on a hillock which, according to the legend, was the altar on which Brahma performed Aswamedha Yaga (horse-sacrifice), desiring to have a direct vision of the Lord.

At the end of the ritual, there appeared a luminous gleam like a radiant Sun from the altar even as Lord Varadaraja presented Himself in all His splendour in a Punya Koti Vimanam which resembled a golden hillock. Thus Brahma got his wish fulfilled and the place came to be known as Sathya Vrata Kshethra. Ever since, Brahma himself is said to be performing the annual Uthsavam to the Lord during the Tamil month of Vaikasi and hence it is called Brahmothsavam. The whole episode has been documented ever so beautifully and vividly by our Acharya, in his Tamil Prabandham 'Athigiri Maahaathmyam'.

It is interesting to note that Swami Desika, in Sloka No. 48 of Varadaraja Panchasath, narrates his experience of the nowhere-in-the-world kind of Brahmothsavam, like this. "Oh! My Lord! You ought to be seen, worshipped and enjoyed in the Vaisakha festival, everyday and with unwinking eyes; when You ride on the Horse, Garuda, Chariot, Palanquin, etc.; with Your indescribable charm and ever-increasing splendour."

The next verse is a defining one. Our Acharya, so much under the spell of Devadhiraja's ultimate charm which 'eludes mental grasp and verbal presentation', swears that not even the bliss of Sri Vaikunta interests him - "வைகுண்ட வாலே அபி ந மே அபிலாஷ"

Varada: means 'boon granter'. "வரம் ததாதி இதி வரத:" is the relevant Sanskrit root. Therefore, it is appropriate that the author refers to the Lord as 'Kalpa Sakhee' in the opening sloka and 'Kalpa Vruksha' in the concluding verse. A Kalpa Tree is considered as a desire-yielder which will fulfill all of one's wishes.

"Why didn't Azhwars devote more number of paasurams to such a prominent deity or why

didn't they make a more direct reference to Varadaraja than what they actually managed? Swami Desika presents a path-breaking solution to this largely incomprehensible issue. The counter put forth by our Acharya is "Even the Doyens among sages of unfailing intellect found themselves unequal to the task when they attempted to comprehend Your greatness. They were simply stunned by Your splendour and lay there dazed." He adds that "when such is the case, my temerity in composing a hymn on You deserves to be forgiven." - Sloka No. 2.

The depth of the author's humility soars in the next verse, as he submits that the sheer weight of his sins ties his tongue down. "But, the Lord's parental affection lifts the restraint and makes me vociferous (compose the hymn)."

Ekantha Sevai is a privileged vision of the Lord, enjoyed by those who render proximate service to Him, and a speciality of Varada. Swami Desika says that the blessed ones worship the Divine body during the Sevai in which the garlands, armour and ornaments are all removed, and he likens the Thirumeni to an emerald mountain. The anointment of Kasturi (musk) only accentuates the tinge of darkness and adds to the charm, he supplements. - Sloka No. 46.

In a work of many such animated descriptions, the author asserts in the phala sruti that, to whoever learns this hymn will the fruits of the 'Kalpa Tree' - read as The Lord residing at the peak of Hasthi Giri - be so easily accessible; and that he can pluck them with his hands, at will. Truly a phala sruti, more than in one sense.



SRI VAIRAGYA PANCHAKAM

Asceticism or being austere and indifferent to worldly desire (Vairagyam) is held as one of the three major qualities of a supreme Acharya in our Sampradaya. The others are knowledge (jnana) and perfect adherence to one's religious obligation (Anushtanam). The kind of asceticism exemplified by Swami Desika will hardly find a match and has been well documented in the form of Sri Vairagya Panchakam.

Originally this was not meant to be a sthothra. It all started when our Acharya received a message from Vidyaranya, an advaitin and a boyhood friend. He was, at that time, a court scholar and spiritual preceptor in the Vijayanagara kingdom.

It was in fact, a royal invitation, to adorn the court of Harihara and Bukka, the emperors. Vidyaranya, who came to know about the Uncha Vruthi way of life Swami Desika was so assiduously following and the dire straits he was in, apparently wanted to help him.

Consider the situation. Here was fortune presenting itself in the face even as Sri Desika was living in utter penury in Kanchi. He could have helped himself to court honour and a hefty bounty, which were there for the asking, if he wished so. Would anyone have the guts and gumption to turn down such a golden opportunity? No, not ordinary mortals, really.

But how did our great Acharya respond? He simply wrote and sent out a sloka to Vidyaranya, categorically declining the offer while making it absolutely clear that he was not a wee bit interested in worldly riches. He stressed that according to him, the real treasure was Lord Krishna Himself, who turned His friend Kuchela into a Kubera in a trice.

The matter could have stopped with that. But it was not to be. Vidyaranya was still not out of his sense of sympathy for his friend, and unwilling to let go the opportunity to providing him a lifeline, so to say. He wrote to Swami Desika again, insisting him to reconsider the earlier decision and visit the emperors' court.

But Lord Varadaraja perhaps destined that the lone sloka blossomed into a beautiful little hymn. The result was that our Acharya stood firm and wrote (a further) five slokas reiterating his stance to close out the matter. Hence the hymn came to be known as Vairagya Panchakam.

Jnana and Anushtana are great, no doubt. But the rigorous self-denial and extreme abstinence observed by Swami Desika under the circumstances, call for outstanding courage and extreme commitment to one's principles. That's what makes our Acharya's Vairagya especially adorable and vaults it to a different altitude.

The author comes down heavily on the practice of praising petty kings and worthless masters for the sake of the stomach. He scorns at the wealth derived from such a shameful act and identifies as the real wealth the Lord who caused Arjuna to thrive, who lifted the Govardhana mountain, who is easily attained and who is worshipped by noble-minded people. - Sareera Pathanaavadhi...

சரீர பதநாவதி ப்ரபு நிஷேவணாபாதநாத்

அபிந்தந தநஞ்ஜய ப்ரசமதம் தநம் தந்தநம்!

தநஞ்ஜய விவர்தநம் தநமுதூட கோவர்தநம்

ஸுஸாதநம் அபாதநம் ஸுமநஸாம் ஸமாராதநம்!!

The above sloka offers a fascinating insight into the author's command over the language involving the crux of the issue i.e. wealth. The term 'Dhana(m)' has been employed - either as a full word or a part there of - in 11 different contexts as given below:

1. Abindhana - With water as food
2. Dhananjayam - The fire in the belly
3. Dhanam - Wealth
4. Dandhanam - A waste
5. Dhananjaya - Arjuna
6. Vivardhanam - Promoted the interests of
7. Dhanam - (The real) Wealth
8. Govardhanam - The great hill
9. Susaadhanam - A perfect tool (to achieve a thing)
10. Apaadhanam - Wealth that is indestructible
11. Samaaraadhanam - One that results in happiness

The *piece de resistance* of this sthothra is the classic climax. In a moving declaration, Swami Desika says, "There is no such thing as paternal property for me. Nor have I earned anything on my own. But I have the treasure (Lord Varadaraja) which was earned by my grandfather, on the summit of the Hasthi Giri".

நாஸ்திபித்ரார்ஜிதம்கிஞ்சித் நமயாகிஞ்சிதார்ஜிதம்

அஸ்தி மேஹஸ்திசைலாக்ரேவஸ்துபைதாமஹம்தனம்"

Here, the word 'Paithaamaham' (பைதாமஹம்) is used to denote paternal grandfather as well as Brahma. It was Brahma, who, through his Aswamedha Yaga, secured the presence of Varadaraja in the Hasthi Giri. As convention would have it, the inheritance of treasure from grandfather to grandson is natural.

True to the spirit of the work, there is no phala sruti mentioned as such. However one who recites this is sure to be richer in terms of 'Vairagya'.

SARANAGATHI DEEPIKA

Momentous hymn of 59 slokas extensively dealing with the importance of Prapathi. Singing the praise of Deepa Prakasa (Vilakkoli Emperuman), this sthothra has aptly been named by Swami Desika himself as Saranagathi Deepika. Just as the light from a lamp obliterates the darkness around, this sthothra is a virtual torch that wipes out the obscurity in our minds and shows us the Saranagathi way.



Saranagatha vathsalan - Sri Perarulala Perumal with nachimars, Kanchipuram

This is a perfect case of the subject and the object being made for each other and our Acharya, a master composer, is not one to miss out on that. The metaphorical treatment to the title in itself lends an aesthetic poetic touch. Here, the deepika (figurative lamp) is connected to Saranagathi while the Lord of the Light is waiting in all His compassion for the deliverance of the devotees.

The name of the Divyadesam is Thiru-Thanka (came to be known as Thooppul), a part of

Kancheepuram, which has the privilege of being the Avathara Sthalam (native place) of our great Acharya. So, this is a salutation by Swami Desika to the Lord next door, really.

The temple is situated close by the river Vegavathi. Mahalakshmi is known to have manifested from a pond here called 'Lakshmi Saras', assumed the name 'Maragathavalli' and secured the company of Lord Deepa Prakasa.

In the opening verse, the author says that though coming through his words in this hymn, the great tradition of Saranagathi has been handed down to us from none other than Sri Ramanuja through his intimate disciple and cook Madaippalli Aachaan. Hence it is called the 'Madaippalli Sampradayam'. An interesting parallel to this can be drawn in Swami Desika's Tamil Prabandham 'Paramapadha Sopaanam', also in the first verse.

".....எதிவரனார் மடைப்பள்ளி வந்த மணம் எங்கள் வார்த்தையுள் மன்னியதே!"

After narrating beautifully the manifestation of Piraatti in Sloka No. 4, the author, through the work, throws light on many a crucial issue entwining various aspects of Saranagathi, the means of deliverance. Enlisted below are some of the most important ones, with the sloka numbers in parentheses:

- Sriman Narayana, together with His Consort, being the principal entity; His supremacy to everyone else and everything else in the universe; He being the body and soul of everything. (6, 7);
- The importance of the six great primordial virtues (i.e.) Jnana, Bala, Aiswarya, Veerya, Sakthi and Tejas, which He alone possesses (8);
- His principal stature in the hierarchy of preceptors called Acharyas (9);
- He being everything for the noble soul - mother, father, brother, safe abode, friend and destination (12);
- All the six aspects of the Secret of His incarnations (17);
- His amazing quality called 'Affability' (Souseelyam) - mingling with even the lowliest of men/creature (like Guha, Sugriva, etc.), without any discrimination whatsoever (18);
- The types, salient features, different stages and methods of Bhakthi Yoga, meaning constant meditation and devotion to God (21 - 25);
- The superiority, and more importantly, practicability of Prapathi or Saranagathi (total surrender) as compared with Bhakthi (26);
- The five parts (angaas) of Prapathi and the parcel (angi), that is, submission of the burden (27)

- a. Avoiding what He dislikes
 - b. Always doing what He likes
 - c. Clear consciousness of one's destituteness or inability as regards anything
 - d. Absolute and unwavering faith in one's redeemability through Him
 - e. Saying one's decision to take His safe refuge for salvation
 - f. Transferring the burden by entrusting the responsibilities with Him
- The post-Prapathi services one must render to the Lord and His devotees (30, 31, 35);
 - The mode of exit of the soul from the body (37);
 - The route called Archiraadhi Maarga, through which He leads the prapanna to His abode. Escorts called 'Aathivaahikaas' help the soul through Fire, Day, Suklapaksha, Uththaraayana, Year, Wind, Sun, Moon, Lightning, Varuna, Indra and Brahma, to Sri Vaikunta (39);
 - The liberated souls (Mukthaas) attaining utmost equality with Him in terms of the bliss experienced therein (40);
 - The pitfalls of materialistic and sensual pleasures and the need to stay detached from them (56).

This classic work composed on Deepa Prakasa enlightening about the Lord's identity, His demeanor, the means of deliverance called Saranagathi, its supremacy, the post-Prapathi life of a prapanna, etc., is an essential lesson for everyone. Reciting this will no doubt destroy the dense darkness of ignorance in the minds of the people and bestow them with the feet of the Lord.



SRI VEGASETHU STHOTHRAM

Sri Vegasethu Sthothram is a hymn of 10 slokas composed by Swami Desika on Yathokthakaari, the Lord of Thiru Vehka in Kancheepuram. An intriguing episode forms the basis for the historical backdrop to this shrine, while the bigger picture is related to the manifestation of Lord Varadaraja of the Hasthigiri.

When Brahma began his Aswamedha Yaga in the Hasthigiri, invoking the Lord's vision, all was not well between him and his prime consort Saraswathi. So he chose to proceed with the yaga with his other consorts, lead by Savithri. This further infuriated Saraswathi who sought to get her revenge on Brahma by disrupting the holy deed. She assumed the form of a violent river and flowed at a ferocious speed - hence called Vegavathi - towards the altar of the yaga.

The surrounding area got inundated and ravaged even as Vegavathi, in all her fury, approached the sacred place. This made Brahma nonplussed. He took refuge in Lord Vishnu, who manifested in a reclining posture and positioned Himself as a virtual dam (sethu) across the river and stopped Vegavathi in her tracks. This enabled Brahma duly complete his sacrifice and paved the way for Lord Varadaraja's emergence. That is how the Lord in Thiru Vehka got His name Vegasethu. Since He acceded to the request of Brahma and saved his yaga, the Lord here came to be known as "Yathokthakaari", meaning "He Who complied with the directives of His devotee".

The Divine protocol prescribes that one should follow the Rule of the Supreme God as laid down in the holy scriptures such as the Sruti (Vedas), Smruti (Sasthras), etc. However there are times, as the one narrated above, when the Lord seeks to show that He relishes switching ends and abiding by the directives of His devotees. These instances bring to the fore the Lord's quality called "saulabhya" (easy accessibility).

Another such fascinating episode, involving Thirumazhisai Azhwar, reaffirms the Lord's above nature and name. Pallavaraya, the then King of Kanchi, was enraged at the refusal of Kanikannan (கணிகண்ணன்) a disciple of the Azhwar, to sing his praise. He banished the erring poet from his kingdom. The Azhwar, who was staying in Thiru Vehka and rendering kankaryams to the Lord, also decided to leave the town along with his disciple.

What's more, he did not want even the Lord to stay there. So he ordered the Lord to roll up His bed (Aadhishesan) and leave the town, which the Lord complied with at once. The town was doomed and untoward happenings ensued.

The king repented for his folly, came rushing the next day to the Azhwar who was then staying with the Lord at Orikkai (ஓரிக்கை - ஓர் இரவு இருக்கை) on the outskirts of the town. He profusely apologised to the Azhwar and pleaded with him to come back to his place. Then Thirumazhisai Azhwar asked the Lord to spread His bed as before, which again, the Lord complied with. He thus justified His name "Yathokthakaari" (Yatha Uktha Kaari), which in Tamil

means “ சொன்ன வண்ணம் செய்த பெருமாள்”.

The relevant paasuram (not part of the Divya Prabandham) composed by Thirumazhisai Azhwar, addressing the reclining Lord, is as follows:

கணிகண்ணன் போகின்றான் காமருபூங் கச்சி
மணிவண்ணா நீ கிடக்க வேண்டா - துணிவுடைய
செந்நாப் புலவனும் போகின்றேன் நீயுமுன்தன்
பைந்நாகப் பாய் சுருட்டிக்கொள்

The Azhwar promptly rephrased the verse when cancelling his earlier directive:

கணிகண்ணன் போக்கொழிந்தான் காமருபூங் கச்சி
மணிவண்ணா நீ கிடக்க வேண்டும் - துணிவுடைய
செந்நாப் புலவனும் போக்கொழிந்தேன் நீயுமுன்தன்
பைந்நாகப் பாய் விரித்துக்கொள்

In a highlight of this hymn, Swami Desika has incorporated both the above episodes in Sloka No. 5 (Chathuraanana). He says that the Lord who earlier saved Brahma's yaga and complied with the commands of His devotees (Bhakthimathaam), even now bestows all propitiousness on His devotees. In a subtle reference to the Azhwar episode, the author employs the word "Bhakthimathaam" to denote devotees, since Thirumazhisai Azhwar is known as "Bhakthisaara" in Sanskrit.

In the first sloka, Sri Desika describes the Lord of Thiru Vehka and the Hasthigiri as one and the same effulgent form, which incarnated on its own and is the means and end of all human endeavours.

Calling the Lord, "Kanchee-Bhagam" (the good fortune of Kanchi) in the ninth verse, our Acharya concludes the hymn with the phala sruti that Lord Yathokthakaari would comply with all the demands of those who recite this sthothra with devotion, as He has done in the past.



ASHTABHUJA ASHTAKAM

'A strikingly' different Lord, what with His eight arms and a matching number of 'weapons', is the addressee of this hymn by Swami Desika. While the familiar form of Archa murthy of Lord Vishnu is the one having four arms, this deity Ashtabhuja (Moolavar) assumed eight, all for the sake of His ardent devotees, to whose succour he jumps to in their times of distress. This nature of the Lord has well been brought out by the author in the final verse.

The eight arms, besides the conventional five weapons - the discus, conch, sword, mace and bow - also carry arrow, spear and a lotus. Our Acharya, says that His anxiety in saving those surrendering souls led to His doubling up His arms. The Uthsavar, however, presents Himself with the customary four arms.

This Divyadesam is also situated near the Hasthigiri (Kancheepuram) and the emergence of Lord Ashtabhuja, again, has its bearings in the episode involving the Aswamedha Yaga performed by Brahma. The legend has it that the Lord manifested to destroy the demons who were up to disrupting the sacrifice. He fulfilled that (destruction) with aplomb, carrying those weapons and saved the yaga.

'Ashtabhujam' refers to 'one with eight arms' and 'akaram' means the 'dwelling place'. That's how this Divyadesam derived its name Ashtabhujakaram. Ashtakam means a set of eight. This is a hymn of eight verses (followed by one each for phala sruti and signing off), and Swami Desika himself has named it as "Srimath Ashtabhuja Ashtakam" (Sloka No. 9).

Peyazhwar performs Mangalaasaasanam to this Lord as the victorious one "who carries eight weapons and who, in the yore, wielded His discus over a crocodile and saved an elephant" - Moonraam Thiruvantaaadhi (99).

Our Acharya, perhaps, taking a cue from the Azhwar, begins this hymn with a reference to this anecdote. In a self-deprecatative mode, he likens the five sensual organs (pancha indhriyas) which had subjected him to worldly pleasure, to crocodiles and surrenders to Lord Ashtabhuja with a plea to free him from the clapping of the crocodiles (senses) just as He came running in a tearing hurry to the rescue of Gajendra, the King of Elephants. Hence the Lord is also known as Gajendra Varada and Aadhi Kesava and so is the pond, which was the scene of the incident, called Gajendra Pushkarini.

Peyazhwar's "Chakkaraththaan Thaal Mudhale Nangatku-Charvu" (சக்கரத்தான் தாள் முதலே நங்கடக்குச் சார்வு) and Swami Desika's "Aaptham Sadhaam Ashtabhujam Prapadhye" (ஆப்தம் ஸதாம் அஷ்டபுஜம் ப்ரபத்யே) make for an interesting comparison, as both lay emphasis on Prapathi. While in the former, the Azhwar declares Lord Ashtabhuja as "our sole refuge", in the latter, the Acharya says, "I surrender to the Lord who is a well-wisher of pious people". That by pious people, he must have meant among others, Gajendra Azhwan and Peyazhwar himself, is a logical inference.

In the twin highlights of the hymn - the fifth and sixth slokas - Sri Desika, submits his destituteness and declares in no uncertain terms, that He and none else, can be the saviour under all circumstances.

"I would not consider anyone other than You as being capable of obviating my fear. When You are all compassion for me, where can the fear come from? Or, for that matter, who can save me when You are incensed?", he asks Lord Ashtabhuja in the first instance.

Expressing similar sentiments in the next sloka, Swami Desika places the entire responsibility of saving him on the Lord, the Consort of Lakshmi. He notes, "I being yours, it's incumbent upon You to provide me succour. My refuge, if you choose to save me, my efforts are meaningless. Conversely, if You decide to give me the cold shoulder, again, any amount of effort from me will not suffice. Either way, my efforts will be a total waste".

The use of the term 'Kamala Sahaya' to refer the Lord in the above sloka which emphasises the importance of Prapathi, is a master stroke by the composer (Thvadheka Thanthram ... - (I) belong to you). He appropriately invokes the help of 'Periya Piraatti' for rendering Purushakaaram (recommendation), so that the Lord would save him without ever the need for his own efforts, which he says, anyway amounts to nothing.

In the eighth sloka, as post-Prapathi prayer, our Acharya seeks from the Lord spotless and ceaseless kainkaryam under His lotus feet till such time he lived in this world.

The ninth sloka, the phala sruti, is invested with a tasty analogy. Thus says the author, "to those who have performed Prapathi and are on their way to Moksha, this sthothra would serve as delicious food carried by people on journey; for the would-be Prapannas though, it is an appetiser which would make them hungry for their surrender to Him; all in all, this hymn will ensure welfare for the whole world." Given the backdrop to the emergence of Lord Gajendra Varada, one can rest assured that He would come to the rescue in a trice.

Finally, as a concluding remark, 'Sri Venkatesa', the author, aptly seeks acceptance of the hymn of eight slokas (main part) by the Lord with eight arms.



KAMASIKA ASHTAKAM

This is a hymn on Lord Kamasika Nrusimha, whose shrine Thiru Velukkai is situated on the southern banks of the river Vegavathi, near the Hasthigiri. 'Kama' means 'own free will - Sankalpa' and 'asika' refers to 'one's sitting posture'.

The Tamil equivalent 'Velirukkai' (வேளிருக்கை) is an amalgam of 'Vel' (வேள்) and 'Irukkai' (இருக்கை), with the former meaning 'desire' and the latter 'the state of being seated'. The term 'Velirukkai' is said to have been corrupted into 'Velukkai' (வேளுக்கை).

Swami Desika commences the hymn Sri Kamasika Ashtakam stylistically, juxtaposing the words 'Uththaram' (உத்தரம்) and 'Dakshinam' (தகஷிணம்), which mean north (also top) and south respectively. He describes the Lord as one who, of His own desire, resides at the top of the Vedas as well as to the south of Vegavathi. Further more, he sings 'Glory be - Pallaandu' to the Lord, saying that the wonderful deity, who has the lion face, ever be victorious and unsurpassed.

In the second verse, he notes that the Lord Kamasika Nrusimha - who is the essence of the Thaapaneeya Upanishad - has the Sun, Moon and Agni as His three eyes, with the third on His forehead. He prays that the Lord, with those three eyes, should remove our three-fold afflictions called the thaapa-thraya. They are:

- Aadhi Aathmikam - the ailments that are associated with the body and the mind (such as headache, cold, anger, fear, etc.);
- Aadhi Bhoudhikam - the ones that are caused by other beings (such as animals, birds, men, etc.); and
- Aadhi Dhaivikam - the ones that are caused by divine/natural elements (such as fire, water, heat, wind, cold, etc.).

In the next sloka, our Acharya pays homage to the Lord here, who has His body up to the neck in His innate form and the head as that of a lion. Out of His liking for these parts near the Vegavathi, it would seem that He has forsaken the comfort of Sri Vaikunta, he wonders.

"I worship the three-eyed Lord, who out of sport, took the form of Nrusimha on the sand dunes of the river Vegavathi and also assumed a sitting posture with His legs crossed (Paryankaasanam). He alone is a relative to all living beings in the world", submits Sri Desika in Sloka No. 4.

The master poet in Swami Desika makes his presence strongly felt in his description of the Nrusimha Avathara (verses 6 & 7). He picks the majestically alluring 'Prithvee' scale (involving a type of meter) for matching impetus to the narration. Sublimeness reaches its summit as the author brings forth Nrusimha's contrasting dual disposition - *deceit* on the one hand (Kapata

Kesaree) while dealing with Hiranya and *compassion* on the other (Krupaa Kesaree) while blessing his son Prahlada. Kesaree, as many would know means lion referring to Nrusimha here. The underlying observation is that while His face looks vicious for the wicked enemies, His eyes always shower the nectar of grace on His devotees.



Adbhutha kesari - Sri Malolan, Sri Ahobila Matam

In a defining penultimate verse, Swami Desika asserts in no uncertain terms the Lord's stature of being the sole saviour of one and all. He says, "if You are out to protect someone, where is the need for other protectors? Similarly, if You are not going to protect, what is the use of other protectors? With this determination, I surrender to You, Nrusimha, the resident of the banks of Vegavathi."

The hymn concludes with the customary phala sruti in the ninth and final verse. The author says that one who recites this sthothra with faith and devotion even once, will get rid of all the mighty sins and get hold of all the desired things in life with the blessings of Kamasika Narahari.

most selflessly sacrificed his life for Your sake; You reciprocated for his gesture with blessing him with greater worlds and finally Moksha", is how he puts it in the seventh sloka, emphasising the greatness of Prapathi.

In a poetic masterpiece, our Acharya, a lion amongst his ilk, brings to the fore the most famed of Sri Rama's qualities - Abhaya Pradhaanam (offering fearlessness). Reminding the Lord of His vow to protect the surrendered souls, he tells Him that He cannot abandon him. Not only that, because, "Your words - No matter whether it is Vibheeshana or even Ravana, bring him, I'll protect him - are known the world over". In an underlying connotation, Swami Desika takes heart from the fact that since the Lord was prepared to save even Ravana, He would not let him down, even if he was a sinner. A moving piece of self-deprecation, indeed! (Sloka No. 8).

In the concluding sloka, a pleased author describes this as "a beautiful hymn blessed by Lord Rana Pungava". He says that this pure-hearted Venkatesa's Paramartha Sthuthi deserves to be recited daily by the Lord's devotees, who are devoid of blemishes like jealousy. The corollary is that those who recite this hymn with devotion will be good-natured.



SRI DEVANAYAKA PACHASATH

In Sri Devanayaka Panchasath, an exquisite hymn of 53 slokas, Swami Desika extols the greatness and beauty of Lord Devanatha of Thiruvaheendrapuram. The temple here is set in picturesque and tranquil surroundings what with the Aushadha Giri, a hillock abode of Lord Hayagriva, overseeing it in the front and River Garuda forming the rear.

The deity, an immense favourite and one close to the heart of our Acharya, is also known as Daasa Sathya or Adiyavarkku Meyyan (அடியவர்க்கு மெய்யன்), meaning one who is truthful to His devotees. There are umpteen references in which he addresses the Lord by this name. True to his self, Swami Desika (கலியனுரை குடிகொண்ட கருத்துடையோன்), follows the footsteps of Kaliyan who in his Periya Thirumozhi, refers the Lord as Adiyavarkku Meyyan.

"அடியவர்க்கு மெய்யனாகிய தெய்வநாயகனிடம் மெய்தகு வரைச்சாரல்..." (3-1-3).

In an enchanting invocation, the author seeks the protection of the Lord who has the eyes akin to the petals of a lotus; whose lotus feet glisten with the honey oozed from the garlands adorning the crowns of the gods who bow at His feet; and who is held in great veneration and worshipped by Brahma and Siva.

He then pays obeisance to the Acharya parampara, sages like Valmiki and Vyasa, before seeking the commendation of Piraatti in the fourth sloka. He pleads, "O Mother, dweller in the lotus, listen to my submission! Please make the Lord of gods, Your beloved, accept the prattles of this child!"

In the next sloka, Sri Desika stakes his right to compose the hymn, with a fitting analogy. "What if Your greatness is extolled by Upanishads. That wouldn't stop me from singing Your praise as I think I am also competent to do so in my own little way. Even as herds of cows drink larger amounts out of the Milky Ocean, new-born calves can also drink a little".

Further, the author notes that, the Lord has no option but to fulfil his wish of praising Him, for, it is only in His interest that He must do so in order to safeguard His name 'Daasa Sathya'.

Having established 'his right' and 'His duty', Swami Desika delves into the beauty of Lord Devanatha's Divine Body and comes up with eloquent, exhaustive and expansive narration through 30 slokas (from 16 to 45).

It is customary, while describing the Lord's elegance, to start from the feet and go upward till the crown (paadhadhi kesam). This is known as the Aarohana Krama (ascending order). The reason is not too far to seek. His feet are instrumental in invoking His grace. They are the mean-all and end-all of deliverance. Familiar examples of this order are ThirupPaanaazhwar's Amalanaadhi Piran and Sri Bhagavath Dhyana Sopanam, composed by Swami himself.

But here, our Acharya, struck by Lord Devanatha's stunning beauty and perhaps, in a state of

the resultant bliss, takes recourse to the Avarohana Krama (descending order), which is normally associated with description of humans. This reveals another dimension of Sri Desika's disposition as regards the Lord - Sahaja Bhaava - utmost familiarity which lessens the distance between the Lord and His devotee while shelving the concept of His supremacy, albeit temporarily. This is truly reflective of one of the great qualities of the Lord - Soulabhya (easy accessibility).

It is pertinent here to recall his own enunciation in the Tamil Prabandham 'Navamani Maalai' - "நின் வடிவழகு மறவாதார் பிறவாதாரே" (6), meaning those who do not forget Your beauty are sure to rid of further birth.

Starting from His crown, our Acharya describes the Divine beauty in the following order (No. of the 30 slokas in parentheses):

- Crown (16)
- Forelock (17)
- Face (18)
- Forehead (19)
- Oordhwapundra (Thiruman) (20)
- Ears (21)
- Ear stud called 'Makarika' (22)
- Eyebrows (23)
- Eyes (24)
- Eye glances (25)
- Nose (26)
- Lips (27)
- Neck (28)
- Hands (29)
- Sankha and Chakra (30)
- Abhaya Hastha (31)
- Chest (32)
- Vanamala (33)
- Mind (34)
- Waist (35)
- Navel (36)
- Girdle-belt (37)
- Thighs (38)
- Knees (39)
- Shanks (40)
- Feet (41)
- Toes (42)
- Nails (43)
- Feet (again) (44)
- Pollen of feet (45)

In the following slokas (46 and 47), Swami Desika brings out the infinite superiority of Prapathi (surrender) over Bhakthi (devotion), before surrendering his soul at the feet of the Lord. He reasons that more than Prahlada, herds of cattle (of the Gokula), Gajendra and Pareekshith put together, he deserves to be saved by Him, as his plight is more pathetic than theirs.

The author concludes this fascinating hymn, enlisting the greatness of the Lord. While reminding Him of His name - Daasa Sathya - he says that singing His praise makes himself the Speaker of Truth (Sathya Vaadhee) as is evident in this sthothra. So will be all those who recite Sri Devanayaka Panchasath.

SRI ACHYUTHA SATHAKAM

Sri Achyutha Sathakam is a unique hymn by Swami Desika, set in Praakruth, an unrefined variation of the Sanskrit language. The addressee of the sthothra is Lord Achyutha, another name for Devanatha of Thiruvaheendrapuram. 'Achyutha' means 'one who does not let slip', implying that He is one who does not let His devotees down. It is only apt that 'Daasa Sathya' or 'Adiyavarkku Meyyan' is called 'Achyutha' as He is one who would not give up His devotee as He is truthful to him.

A contextual reference can be drawn from Sri Desika's Tamil Prabandham 'Navamani Maalai' (நவமணி மாலை). Here, our Acharya most aesthetically conjures up situations wherein the Lord has donned the role of 'saviour' as he seeks His emphatic protection for himself:

'அஞ்சல் அஞ்சல் அஞ்சல்' என்று அளிக்கவேண்டும் அச்சுதா

அடியவர்க்கு மருள் இயக்கும் அடியவர்க்கு மெய்யனே! (8)

The use of 'Achyutha' and 'Adiyavarkku Meyyan' in one breath makes for enjoyable study while underlining the above point.

A sathakam as we have already seen (in Sri Daya Sathakam), denotes a century of slokas and the customary signing off in the final verse (101st) caps this hymn, a rare gem. This Sthothra confers on Lord Devanatha the distinction of the lone recipient of compositions (totalling nine) in three different languages by the great master, as provided in the following break-up.

- In Tamil (7): Mummanikkovai, Navamani Maalai, Pandhu, Kazhal, Ammaanai, Oosal, Esal (except the first two, others are obsolete now);
- In Sanskrit (1): Sri Devanayaka Panchasath;
- In Praakuth (1): Sri Achyutha Sathakam.

In the olden days, Praakruth found extensive usage in stage-plays. It was considered fit to be spoken by people from low rungs, women, illiterates, and court-jesters. The learned also used it when having to speak to these people. It is inferred that the tough grammar, pronunciation and the regal elegance of Sanskrit were out of the grasp of these people. They used the language in a haphazard manner which gradually paved the way for the 'Praakruth' dialect, which is essentially colloquial in tone and nature. There are ancient evidences to the effect that the language is fit only for women etc., but the fact that it acquired a grammar of its own gave it an identity of its own.

Possibly, the general impression that women were among its 'rightful' users, gave the author the idea to employ the same in this hymn in which he assumes the 'Nayika Bhava' (role of a woman) a la Nammazhwar and Thirumangai Azhwar, who have handled this in greater proportions in expressing their devotion to God.

The reason why Swami Desika chose Achyutha for expressing the Nayika Bhava in Praakruth

could be because he was so lost in the beauty of this very Lord (exemplified in Sri Devanayaka Panchasath) that when the idea of romance sparked, Achyutha was right there in the forefront of his mind. That there are similar instances (of Nayika Bhava) in Devanayaka Panchasath itself and Mummanikkovai strengthens this inference.

In this sthothra also, the author stamps his class throughout as only he can. Starting off the hymn with an animated call to the devotees to worship the Lord who has four names, i.e., Devanatha, Daasa Sathya, Achyutha and Sthira Jyothi, he makes an interesting submission marked by modesty, in the fourth sloka. He says, "Amidst the line-up of the great Vedas which extol your greatness in the assembly of Nithyas and Mukthas, let this simplistic hymn of mine be like the words of a jester; but just as kings take pleasure in the words and deeds of jesters, you should also accept and enjoy my rambling".

Further along the line Sri Desika explores the various attributes that conclusively establish His supremacy, indulges in his pet topic - Thirumeni varnanam, speaks about the greatness of those surrendering to Him, the bliss and extra-ordinary experience that await the surrendered souls in the Archiraadhi Marga and Sri Vaikunta, among other things. There is a spell of verses soaked in his patented and moving self-deprecation.

Since the language as it is spoken is unrefined, the hymn when recited is sweet to the ears and resembles the prattling of children. The tone and tenor of this dialect maybe lowly but it does not take away a wee bit of class and the content's richness from the hymn. On the contrary, Swami Desika combines his characteristic poise and panache in presenting through this sthothra, profound Vedic truths and principles of our philosophy. Indeed, a testimony to the author's versatility, if any is required.

Conspicuously there is no phala sruti as such for this sthothra. "May this sweet, beautiful and meritorious Achyutha Sathakam, composed by the 'Lion among poets and logicians' and the 'Acharya of Vedantha', Venkatesa, live resplendently in the hearts of noble devotees", says the author as he signs off in style. So, enjoying the beauty of the hymn can, in fact, be considered as the real benediction.



SRI MAHAAVEERA VAIBHAVAM

Sri Mahaveera Vaibhavam is another unique hymn composed by Swami Desika. Singing the greatness of Sri Rama - the hero warrior - the Lord enshrined in Thiruvaheendrapuram, along with Sita Piraatti, Ilaiya Perumal (Lakshmana) and Siriya Thiruvadi (Anjaneya), this sthothra is in prose form.

Characterised by sentences/phrases (ending) with epithets in admiration used as Vocatives, the hymn is full of tongue-twisters and jaw-breakers which match the majesty of the subject matter (Valour of Rama).

The hymn begins with a customary invocation, in which Sri Desika hails Rama as the Sun of Sri Vaikunta, whose lustre is enriched by a halo in the form of His Consort Sita, one that descended on the earth to dispel the inner darkness and fear of all devotees.

It is followed by 94 sentences/phrases that range from the simple and crisp to an astounding array of long-winding compounds and alliterations which make for breathtaking rhythm. For illustration, we have the two extremes: Single-word vocative 'Veera!' (வீர!) - (50) the shortest and 'Krathuhara Sikhari...' (கரதுரஹரி சிகரி) - (20) the longest, with about 30 words.

The author himself, in conclusion, states that the hymn is a tough-soft mixed style majesty. "Katora Sukumara Gumba Gambheeram" (கடோர ஸுகுமார கும்ப கம்பீரம்) - (97). This results in an exhilarating experience to the ones who recite and those who listen to it alike.

The latter of the above examples is an embodiment of compelling complexity in terms of phraseology and studded with cryptic references to several anecdotes.

The synopsis goes like this:

- Dhaksha's daughter Sathi was wife of Siva. Once there was a feud between Dhaksha and Siva. So, Dhaksha chose not to give the due offering to Siva during a Yaga performed by him. Unable to bear the disgrace to her husband, Sathi sacrificed her life. An infuriated Siva spoiled the Yaga.
- Once when Ravana was returning on board the Pushpaka Vimana of Kubera after conquering him, it stopped near Kailas, the abode of Siva. Nandhi, servant of Siva, who saw this mocked at this. An angry Ravana uprooted Kailas effortlessly and played like a ball. In another instance, Ravana defeated Indra in a battle, with the latter's 'Iravadh', the royal, rampant elephant rendering Ravana's body uneven and rough with scars - marks of bravery.
- Ravana himself was defeated by a thousand-armed Kartha Veeryaarjuna, who killed Sage Jamadhagni, father of Parasurama. The enraged son vowed to destroy the Kshathriya clan without a trace and fulfilled it by slaying kings of 21 generations,

including Kartha Veeryaarjuna and did his own filial rites from the pool of their blood.

- Recalling these incidents, the Swami Desika says, "Rama, You were returning to Ayodhya after Your marriage with Sita. It was then that Parasurama challenged You to tie the string to the Bow of Vishnu, which of course, You did with elan and deprived him of the fruits of his long and sustained penance."

From the above sequence - amazingly, all this in 30 words - it can be seen that the superiority of valour in the ascending order would read as follows: Dhaksha - Siva - Ravana - Kartha Veeryaarjuna - Parasurama - Rama.

This of course is one of many such references from Srimath Ramayana as the author encompasses in this sthothra all the significant events from the seven chapters of the epic.

The chronological break-up of these in terms of phrases is as follows: 1. Bala Kanda 1 to 20; 2. Ayodhya Kanda 21 to 27; 3. Aranya Kanda 28 to 41; 4. Kishkindha Kanda 42 to 46; 5. Sundara Kanda 47; 6. Yudhdha Kanda 48 to 76; 7. Uththara Kanda 77 to 94.

There is scope for inference that Swami Desika chose the prose mode for this sthothra not just because of absence of constraints on length and the resultant flexibility (no metrical adherence required). More importantly, because this is in the nature of story-telling though presented in the second person (addressing Rama Himself). This in itself is a novelty and an index of the master composer's resourcefulness as a creator.

As parting salutation, Swami Desika says, "My adoration to Rama, the head (father) of one household - the entire universe - that has Sita as mother, Brahma as son, Siva as grandson, so on and so forth".

In the final verse, the phala sruti, he makes a fervent call to wise men to "read this Mahaveera Vaibhavam composed by the lion among poets and logicians, which is like a medicine to the disease of the worldly existence and fear". From this it is evident that this is another sthothra that has been named by Swami Desika himself. However, it is also known as Raghuveera Gadhyam as it emphasises its special nature (Gadhyam means composition in prose order).



SRI GOPALA VIMSATHI

Sri Gopala Vimsathi is a sthothra that Swami Desika composed on Lord Rajagopala enshrined in Thiruvaheendrapuram. The hymn, as its name suggests (vimsathi means twenty), comprises 20 slokas with a phala sruti to go with that.

If Ramaavathara is quintessentially about Parathvam (supremacy) and symbolised by valour, the thriving theme of Krishnaavathara is Souseelya/Soulabhyam (easy accessibility) exemplified by Krishna's innumerable Leela.

While Sri Mahaveera Vaibhavam, a hymn on Rama is steeped in majesty, this sthothra on Krishna is soaked in artistry. The author's visualisation and presentation of Krishna's playfulness as a child and a cowherd youth offer spell-binding poetic charm. The author's adeptness is a stunning stand-out as he switches gears to bring forth Krishna's qualities as a supreme deity with devotional fervour oozing all over.

In an invocation that is as sweet as it is crisp, Swami Desika salutes "the glow that descended on the earth on Srijayanthi day, that is adorned by the Vyjayanthi garland, that is the heart-throb of cowherd damsels (of Gokula) and that treads on Brindavana".

The next sloka is considered to have its bearing in the Manthra Sasthra and is the highlight of the hymn. It describes the posture of baby Krishna. He is present on a beautiful lotus-shaped seat in the midst of a multi-coloured triangle. Saraswathi, the Goddess of Knowledge graces His lap. Even as Krishna lends a glance on Saraswathi, which is her source of knowledge, He keeps the conch (Paanchahanya) in His lotus-like mouth. The author hails the Lord who is the emperor of the Yadhavas, underlining His Souseelya.

Along the line, Swami Desika narrates Krishna's dance for butter, He being caught 'white-handed' by Yasodha, on stealing butter (5), a few of the Leelas He indulges in Gokula and Brindavana, He being bound to a mortar (Ural) and then relieving two persons of their curse of wooden existence, Raasa Kreedha, His decorations befitting one who dwells in the 'greens', His stealing of the garments of the damsels.

The sublime imagination, the choice of words, the style of narration which literally presents the reader with the Krishnaanubhava with the ambience in its entirety are the hallmarks of this superb work.

Some of these are provided below as samples:

- Krishna, with one leg bent and held aloft and the other entrenched on the ground (altering the posture vice-versa) dances as he asks for butter. His mother is churning the curd nearby and it appears that He dances to the beat of the churning with jingling ornaments on his chest also mingling with the rhythm. May I have the vision of the same, prays the author. Here, the dance for butter is delightfully described as 'Navaneetha Naatyam' - Sloka No. 4.

- (Krishna), The protector of the entire universe, in an assumed role of a cowherd-boy, has just inserted His arm into the narrow-necked butter pot when His mother enters. She is livid and tries to get hold of a rope to fasten Him. A scared Krishna can neither stay there nor run away and confronted with confusion, closes the eyes. The protector in need of protection for Himself... What an irony! - Sloka No. 5.
- The Gopikaas are bathing in the Yamuna river. Krishna steals their clothes and sits atop a branch of a Kurunda tree, sporting a mischievous smile. The damsels, overcome by shame, plead with Him, but, Krishna demands that they fold both their lotus(-like) hands in prayer, for Him to relent... typical of Him, the mischief maestro! - Sloka No. 20.

One sloka presents a picture of contrast in the hymn studded with descriptive delights. In a poignant expression of his wish, Swami Desika notes, "In my (last) journey to the other world, the images of Krishna, with the beautiful flute of His on His lip, with the peacock feathers embellishing the crown and the shades of the blue diamond that He is, should appear on my mind."

அதராஹித சாருவம்ச நாளா: மகுடாலம்பி மயூர பிஞ்சு மாலா:!

ஹரிநீல சிலா விபங்க நீலா: ப்ரதிபா: ஸந்து மம அந்திம ப்ரயானே!! (12)

The hymn concludes with a customary phala sruti. Accordingly, one who recites this sthothra composed by Venkatesa, the poet with an unswerving mind from the divinity, will have the vision of the Lord who is a connoisseur on the divine flute and is beloved by young girls.



SRI DEHALEESA STHUTHI

The birth place of Divya Prabandham and a sky-scraping Lord raising the 'wrong' leg and flaunting His 'dexterity' (with the Chakra and the Sankha interchanged). The setting could not have been more inspiring to Swami Desika. The result is Sri Dehaleesa Sthuthi, a delectable hymn of 28 slokas on Lord Thrivikrama, also called Dehaleesa, of ThirukKovalur. 'Dehalee' refers to a vestibule or verandah (இடைகழி, now known as ரேழி) and 'Eesa' means god.

"கோவலூர் மன்னும் இடைகழி எம்மாயவனை"

- (பெரிய திருமடல் - 66)

Thirumangai Azhwar, in his Periya Thirumadal, describes Him as "the wonder Lord who appeared in a vestibule in Kovalur."

ThirukKovalur is referred to in the hymn as 'Gopa Pura' and the river Pennar on whose banks it is located is mentioned as 'Panna'. The town is situated on the railway line between the Katpadi and Villupuram junctions and the temple, 3 kilometres from the station.

It is essential to learn/recite this sthuthra keeping a few anecdotes in mind. As opposed to the normal posture in which the Lord holds the Chakra in His right and the Conch in His left hand, the Emperuman here carries the Conch in His right and the Disc in His left, in deference to the wish of Sage Mrukandu. The legend goes like this: The sage observed a severe penance seeking direct vision of Lord Vishnu and a pleased Lord appeared before him and offered a boon. The sage responded by asking for the unique posture, which was granted. Not only that; Lord Thrivikrama here raises His right foot to measure the sky instead of the left.

ThirukKovalur is one of the five Krishnaaranya Kshethras, the others being ThirukKanna Puram, ThirukKanna Mangai, ThirukKannangudi and Aatrancarai (Kapisthalam). The Uthsavar here is known as Aayanaar or Kovalan/Gopalan.

Thus declares Kaliyan in his Periya Thirumozhi: "Here, at ThirukKovalur, stands the Lord who protected the cows in Gokulam by holding aloft Mount Govardhana against hailstorm and the one who tamed seven raging bulls,"

"குடையா வரையால் நிரைமுன் காத்த பெருமான் மருவாத

விடை தான் ஏழும் வென்றான் கோவல் நின்றான்"

- (பெரிய திருமொழி 6-10-5)

Swami Desika, in this sthuthra, frequently refers to the famous incident involving the three 'Mudhal Azhwargal' and the origination of Divya Prabandham. According to the tradition, it was Poigai Azhwar who first went to ThirukKovalur to worship the Lord on what turned out to be a rainy night. So he took shelter in the verandah of a small house and thinking that he would worship the Lord on the morrow, he lay down there. After some time, Bhuthath-Azhwar, with the rain intensifying, reached the same place and since there was just enough space for two to sit, they both sat there. Then entered Pey Azhwar, fully drenched, and the three could barely stand there. Amidst thunder and lightning and under pitch-dark condition, they felt that they were being pressed hard against as someone else was (apparently) trying to squeeze himself in.

They understood through their insight that the 'imposing' fourth person was none other than the Lord Himself. Their joy knew no bounds and they burst into rapturous verses on His greatness.

First, Poigai Azhwar sang his Mudhal Thiruvantaadhi, with the Sun as the lamp and then Boothath-Azhwar recited his Irandaam Thiruvantaadhi, with knowledge as the lamp, in quest of a vision of the Lord. The darkness having been wiped out completely, Pey Azhwar had a wonderful vision of the Lord and His consort on His frame, launched into his Moonraam Thiruvantaadhi, starting with "ThirukKanden, Ponmeni Kanden".

The sthothra starts with the author invoking the Lord thus. "May that Supreme Ruler of Gopa Pura be my saviour; He, who scaled all the worlds and conquered them, He, who is the root cause of the entire universe, and He, who bestows on His devotees all their wishes."

The sthothra is replete with references to various anecdotes as also narrative nuances. Some of the highlights are enlisted below with the sloka number in parentheses:

- Inter-changing of the Disc and the Conch by the Lord (5);
- Mudhal Azhwargal's vision of the Lord (6);
- Vamana 'gianting' into Thrivikrama (8);
- Miracle of fitting His massive frame into the small place (vestibule) already sheltering the Azhwars (9);
- Fame attained by Siva and Brahma, courtesy Thrivikrama (12);
- Emergence of the three Antaadhis (16);
- The Lord leading the three Azhwars to Sri Vaikunta (17);
- His benevolence to those who bear the mark of His Chakra and Sankha, by subjecting themselves to Pancha Samskara (27).

From the signature part in the final sloka meant for phala sruti, it is evident that this is another sthothra named by Swami Desika himself. He avers that the hymn, considering the nature of its addressee, is totally devoid of falsehood and those who recite this will be blessed with all the desired fruits.



SRI STHUTHI

In Sri Sthuthi, a regal hymn that is 'rich in content' in more than one sense, Swami Desika brings out the glory and grandeur of Sri, the Principal Consort of Lord Vishnu.

Comprising 25 slokas, not only does this hymn excel in literary aspect but also it has its roots in a very interesting anecdote in which the grace of Periya Piraatti turns a bachelor from 'rags to riches' in a trice. No wonder that this is amongst the most popular devotional works of our Sampradaya.

There was a poor bachelor Brahmana who was in need of money for his marriage. He approached Swami Desika and explained to him his plight and sought his help. But what could our Acharya do, as he himself was in dire straits, financially. But he wanted to help the groom-would-be, but how?

Sri Desika's own condition of penury did not come in the way of his fulfilling the young man's desire. For, he had the great and indestructible wealth of unmatched poetic skills and unflinching devotion. He set on composing Sri Sthuthi, addressing Periya Piraatti. Animated verses started pouring in like the rain and so were golden coins all over the place, like a magic. The bachelor could neither believe his eyes nor thank the Acharya enough as he was overwhelmed by ecstasy and astonishment. Swami Desika asked him to take them all and sent him off, wishing him well.

This incident exemplifies the highest degree of austerity to which our Acharya has been an epitome of. If he had wished he could have helped himself to material richness anytime during his life. That he spurned utilising a natural gift of his for his own benefit speaks volumes of his greatness.

A philosophy-defining hymn, Sri Sthuthi emphasises the doctrine of 'Union' of the Supreme Being (Lord Sriman Narayana and His Consort Sri Mahalakshmi). The state of their inseparability - physically and functionally - in terms of 'Lordship', 'all pervasiveness' is clearly highlighted by the author even as he establishes some of Her other prominent roles such as taking commendations on behalf of Prapannaas to the Lord, being the mean-all and end-all (of course together with the Lord) of all beings, etc.

Other important features of Piraatti as brought out in this hymn are: Reciting Her namaas also leading to deliverance, Her ideological unison with the Lord, Her grace propelling devotees to prosperity one way or the other, the indispensable nature of Her mercy, and so on.

This is the first of the series of hymns that our great Acharya has dedicated to the three Consorts. The others to follow are Bhu Sthuthi and Goda Sthuthi. Interestingly and importantly, the first verse of all the three sthothras culminates in the word 'Prapadhye'.

In the opening sloka of Sri Sthuthi, invoking the grace of the Goddess, the author submits, "Totally helpless, (I) surrender to You, Goddess Sri, whose unbounded glory is famous; who, a

personification of auspices Herself, vests the quality in other things; who adorns the bosom of Lord Vishnu - the conqueror of demon Madhu - by her naturally glowing halo, one who is saviour and boon-granter to Her devotees who seek prosperity, material or otherwise."

The author has ever so aptly chosen the 13th sloka, the central piece of the hymn, for a magnificent description of the coronation ceremony of Mahalakshmi originally delineated in

Vishnu Puranam. The import of the event and the narrative beauty combine to provide a stunning visual effect even while merely reading.

Swami Desika addresses the Goddess thus: "You emerged from the Milky Ocean along with the nectar when it was churned and ascended the throne, the lotus seat, in front of the Lord. Sensing that it was a great crowning moment, massive clouds like Pushkala and Avarthaka showered floral rains on You and the whole world, making it appear to have disappeared (look and vanished - delectable paradox, indeed!). The sacred bath was complemented by the celestial guardian-elephants like Iravatha and Pundareeka (the Ashta Dik-Gajaas) who poured sacred water from golden vessels. She was thus sworn in as the Empress."

Interpretative ingenuity of Sri Desika, on top of his philosophical conviction comes to the fore in Sloka No. 23. He wonders: "O Goddess! You are my mother and Lord Vasudeva is my father. So I have become the sole recipient of the filial affection of You both. Further, I have been submitted to You as a servant by my Acharyas. You present a smiling face to me, as if to ask 'what else you want from Me?'"

As phala sruti, the author declares in the final sloka that those who read this hymn composed by Venkatesa on the lotus-dweller (Mahalakshmi) with devotion, will rid of the evils of Kali and become emperors, blessed with the ultimate in auspices and prosperity.





Sri Perundevi thayar - Kanchipuram

SRI BHU STHUTHI

Swami Desika pays homage to Goddess Bhu Devi in Sri Bhu Sthuthi, a hymn of 33 slokas. She is the Consort of Lord Yajna Varaha, an incarnation which Sriman Narayana took. Once a demon by name Hiranyaaksha abducted the Earth and took her to the nether world (beneath the ocean). The Lord took the form of a Boar, fought with the demon and slayed him to rescue Mother Earth. This anecdote is extensively brought forth in this sthuthra, in eight slokas (from 14 to 21).

Our Acharya has composed the 'three Sthuthis' on the lines of the 'three Sukthas' - Sri, Bhu and Neela, another instance proving that he is a stickler for tradition. Just as Sri Sthuthi is an elaboration of the Sri Suktham, Bhu Sthuthi is an expansion of the Bhu Suktham.

In Bhu Sthuthi, Sri Desika delineates various qualities of Bhu Devi, of which the following are of special significance: Her glory, that is out of one's grasp to praise; the exalted greatness of the Lord in union with Her; the skill with which She nurtures the world; Her Naamaas that accentuate Her magnificence; the commendation to the Lord she undertakes on behalf of souls; being the means of one's worldly desires and beyond; the dual form taken by Her (The Lord's Consort and Mother Earth); being the subject matter of Yogic vision of sages; being the destroyer of penury and one taking the souls to the feet of the Lord.

Invoking the grace of the Goddess, the author submits in the opening sloka as: "Refugeless, I surrender to Bhu Devi, who is all-granting creeper called 'Kalpaka'; who is the ultimate limit of forbearance; who shows compassion very readily on Her devotees; who is, for the destitute, a virtual 'Kamadhenu' - the desire-yielding celestial cow; who is Consort of the Lord, who out of His free will, manifested as Boar; who is the Mother of the entire universe."

In the sixth sloka, delving on the Names of the Goddess while enlisting a few of them, thus says Sri Desika, "O Mother! You have umpteen names and each one is uniquely applicable to you and you alone. They individually extol your greatness in no uncertain terms. They include Sarvamsaha (all-forbearing), Avani (nurturer), Achala (steadfast is protecting), Viswambara (bearing all beings of the world), Vipula (immeasurable) and Vasundhara (affluent). They all directly refer to you while signifying your characteristics."

With a delectable metaphor-mixed dual connotation, the fact that Her union with Sriman Narayana enriches Him, is asserted in the next sloka. The Lord is a sandal tree that shines through hundreds of branches - the Vedas; wipes out the heat of worldly maladies; one on which flowers in the form of Devas right from Brahma bloom; one that offers cool shelter of compassion on devotees; one that provides fruits in the form of fulfilling the devotees' desires. O! Bhu Devi, this tree is best sustained by the association of the supporting creeper in You.

Emphasising in the tenth sloka the exalted status that the Lord has conferred on Bhu Devi, the author observes that He carries Sri Devi only on His chest whereas bears Bhu Devi on the

head in the form of the thousand-hooded Aadhi Sesha. This is indicative of His unifold love for Mahalakshmi and manifold love for Bhudevi, having enjoyed the latter's association in many ways. A logical and absorbing interpretation indeed!

Swami Desika's imagination explores and finds new vistas as he deals with the dual form of Bhudevi in Sloka No. 23. Employing dual connotation ever so astutely, he describes the Goddess in Her role as Consort of the Lord on the one hand and that of Planet Earth on the other. The same sets of words/phrases have been used through out the sloka for both, to stunning effect.

Consort of the Lord:

You possess shining cheeks;

and dense locks of hair;

are beautiful-looking;

with mountain-like (big) breasts;

sporting a bright pearl pendant;

are in the ripe middle-age of Your youth;

clad in an outfit replete with frills.

Planet Earth:

You are furnished with shining hills;

and dense, dark forests;

with breath-taking scenery all around;

with massive mountains resembling breasts

with flowing waterfalls and streams;

(the landscape) naturally dark in complexion;

sporting the ocean as the garment.

While studying the narration in consonance with the sloka, one is bound to have an extraordinary experience and a sense of amazement.

The penultimate verse, which in the form of a Dhyana sloka, has been set in the Saardhoola Vikreeditham, a majestic scale contrasting to the one employed through the hymn by the author which is the lilting Vasantha Lathika. Here, Sri Desika prays to Bhudevi to confer all the auspices on him for ever. This, one may rest assured that our Acharya has done keeping all Her devotees in mind.

The Vedas proclaim that Bhudevi, who is Consort of Vishnu, is the Goddess of the whole world (அஸ்யேசாநா ஜகதோ விஷ்ணுபத்நீ). She is the addressee of this sthuthra, which has been composed with devotion by Venkatesa. As phala sruti, the author says that one who recites this hymn with dedication and devotion will derive all that he desires with immediate and permanent effect.





Sri Andal - Srivilliputhur

SRI GODHA STHUTHI

Sri Godha - or Andal as She is familiarly known - assumes a unique status in our Sampradaya, a dual role in fact. She is Consort of the Lord on the one hand and the lone female Azhwar on the other. In Her former role, She combines the qualities of Bhu Devi and Neela Devi and hence considered as an incarnation of both. A matchless masterpiece in ThirupPavai and an aesthetic extravaganza soaked in devotion in Naachiyar Thirumozhi are Her contribution as an Azhwar. (173 verses in all).

Swami Desika sings in Sri Godha Sthuthi, the glory of Andal in 29 beautiful verses. Like ThirupPavai, Godha Sthuthi also has a special place in the Tamil month of Margazhi in which it is recited with verve and devotion in temples and homes alike.

Another invocation - third in succession - with 'surrender' as the theme, sets the hymn rolling, so to say. The author pleads with Godha for succour as he says: "I surrender to Godha as I have none else to take refuge in. She is the Kalpa creeper in the garden (called) Periyazhwar family, the one which charmingly entwines the sandal tree called (Lord) Rangaraja. She is the embodiment of forbearance, a hallmark of Bhu Devi and for sheer compassion, She is virtually Sri Devi."

In the next sloka, Sri Desika explains why he cannot refrain from composing this hymn, despite his limitations as a poet. In an expression of imaginative brilliance couched in subtle self-deprecation, he says: "O Godha! Your greatness is out of the grasp of even the Vedas. That being the case, I knew for sure that there was no question of my words getting the measure of the same and hence remained silent. But Your virtues would have none of it. They are hell bent on breaking my silence and making me speak out."

He promptly follows it up with a prayer to Godha to bless him with the power of poesy marked by lucidity and clarity of diction, in extolling Her glory.

The pun employed on the word 'Vishnu Chiththam' in the ninth sloka while recalling Andal's birth and drawing a parallel to Mahalakshmi's is quite delectable. Both are off-springs of "Vishnu Chiththa". Godha is the daughter of Periyazhwar, also known as Vishnu Chiththa and Mahalakshmi was born in the Milky Ocean which positions Vishnu as its heart (Vishnu Chiththam). He goes on: "Discernible scholars perceive You as sister of Periya Piraatti. You shower charming coolness through Your poetry, while Sri Devi does it through Her compassion. In beauty, You are akin to the Moon and as the Moon was born out of the Ocean a la Mahalakshmi, Yourself and Periya Piraatti are siblings."

In the next sloka, Sri Desika explains how Vishnu Chiththa became 'Periyazhwar'. Addressing Andal, he states, "The Lord is normally inclined to be pleased by a mere trace of admiration. Your father sang hundreds of verses - 473 to be precise - in His praise, yet He was not so much pleased as to confer on him the honorific 'Periyazhwar' (the Great Azhwar) until he presented Him with the garlands rendered fragrant by the contact of Your hair-locks." The

fact that no other Azhwar received the honour corroborates the view point that it is all because of Andal.

Our Acharya visualises the loving exchange of garlands by Lord Ranganatha and Andal during their marriage, in Sloka No. 21. He notes that here, as is the practice in the world in wedding functions, a section of connoisseur devotees present is of the view that the Lord is superior to Andal, another section sides with Andal and the rest favour them both equally. Their debate on the subject is echoing in all the three worlds.

Forbearance, Godha Piraatti's special quality, is highlighted with an apt analogy in Sloka No. 27. Swami Desika observes, "O Godha! You are my Mother. I commit lots of sins but still You protect me. It is perfectly in the fitness of things, for, the mother though bitten in the breast by a suckling infant, not only endures the pain but out of natural love, nourishes him also."

In the penultimate verse which serves as Dhyana sloka, the author succinctly captures the salient features of Andal. "May Godha Piraatti, daughter of Vishnu Chiththa, shining and dark-hued like a sapphire, holding a beautiful water lotus in Her hand, with a posture rendered bent by well-laden breasts, an ocean of compassion for Her devotees, one who captivated the Lord by offering Him the garland She wore on Her head, ever shine in our hearts."

And finally, the phala sruti, from which it is evident that this is yet another sthuthra named by Swami Desika himself. "A hymn of multifarious merits and magnificence, Godha Sthuthi originated from the fully-blossomed and mature devotion of Venkatesa. One who recites this will be blessed with eternal service at the lotus feet of Lord Ranganatha and Periya Piraatti and remain an object of great esteem to the Divya Dampathis", is how the benediction is assured by the author.



SRI NYASA DASAKAM

Whole-hearted and absolute self surrender, variously known as Saranagathi, Prapathi or (Bhara) Nyasam, is a cardinal principle of the Sri Sampradaya. This, and the doctrine of devotion (Bhakthi Yoga), are the only possible means to attain the supreme goal - the Moksha.

Although there are no differences in principle between the two and the desired end or objective of both is salvation, the two means are fraught with some functional differences which do really matter a lot. Suffice it to say that simplicity, feasibility, flexibility and fast realization of the goal are some of the inherent advantages of Saranagathi that make it an overwhelmingly superior option as compared to loving devotion to the Lord.

Our Acharyas have, through their great works, stressed the vita

lity and efficacy of Saranagathi in no uncertain terms. Swami Desika, ever a faithful follower of tradition, has strained every sinew to establish the fact in his own inimitable style through almost all his philosophical and devotional works.

Therefore, it is evident that one cannot over-emphasise the importance of surrender and our great Acharya has dedicated three hymns to exclusively bring out the nuances and features of the great tool. They are: Nyasa Dasakam, Nyasa Vimsathi and Nyasa Thilakam.

Sri Nyasa Dasakam, the sthothra under review, comprises 10 slokas as its name indicates. The addressee of the hymn is Lord Varadaraja. Swami Desika, after performing Prapathi to the Lord of the Hasthi Giri, came up with this masterpiece which succinctly explains the salient features of Saranagathi. The method of surrender, its five parts, prayer to be blessed with the Moksha, prayer seeking kainkarya till then, imploring the Lord's forbearance and forgiveness for his sins, are some of the highlights of this hymn.

The nature, content and import of the sthothra make it a 'must-recite daily' for every Sri Vaishnavite. That is the reason why it has been drafted into the Thiru Aradhana or the daily pooja procedure.

Enunciating the three vital parts of Prapathi in the opening sloka, Swami Desika thus says: "One who is in the know of things should submit at the Lord's feet: a) his self - called Swaropa Samarpanam; b) the burden of protecting him - called Bhara Samarpanam and c) the fruits of the protection - called Phala Samarpanam. It is important, as he performs Prapathi for Moksha, that he realises that all the above three are no longer his but are that of Lord Sriman Narayana, the Consort of Sri."

In the next sloka, the five components of Bhara Nyasam are spelt out as our Acharya undertakes to observe these. Addressing the Lord with Lakshmi and encompassing those, he says:

"I am placing the responsibility of protecting me on You as:

- I am helpless and looking for You to provide me succour - Kaarpanyam;
- I shall do things that will please You - Aanukoolya Sankalpam;
- I shall not do things that will displease You - Praathikoolya Varjanam;
- I have unswerving faith in You - Maha Viswaasam;
- I explicitly pray to You to protect me - Gopthruthva Varanam."

The third sloka deals with the three kinds of sacrifices one must perform while doing things prescribed in the scriptures, such as Prapathi. They are known as Karthruthva Thyaagam - disclaimer as to the doer of the work, Mamathaa Thyaagam - disclaimer as to the behalf of the work and Phala Thyaagam - disclaimer as to the benefits arising out of the work. This would mean that it is He who does the work on His behalf and for His own benefit.

Putting forth a poignant prayer in the fourth verse, Swami Desika states, "O! Consort of Sri, grantor of desired boons (Abhishta Varada!), I have surrendered to You; Please lead me to Your feet when I am done with this body (after death)".

Sins can broadly be classified into two - things done which ought not to have been done (sins of commission) and things omitted to be done which ought to have been done (sins of omission). Our Acharya seeks forgiveness against these from the Lord. Apt use of the vocative "Pranatharthi Hara" in this ninth sloka (given below) has to be savoured. The phrase means one who destroys the distress of His devotees.

அக்ருத்யாநாம் ச கரணம் க்ருத்யாநாம் வர்ஜநம் ச மே |

சுகமஸ்வ நிகிலம் தேவ ப்ரணதார்த்தி ஹர ப்ரபோ ||

There is no phala sruti as such for the hymn. Perhaps, because there cannot be anything greater than the Moksha which is the 'ultimate' that is sought through Prapathi. An interesting declaration by the author concludes this classic. Thus he announces: "Lord Varada Himself has, on His own accord, fulfilled my Bhara Nyasam with the five imperative components, at His feet. Hence I have become relieved of any concern/responsibility whatsoever, in this regard." A perfect finish to a path-showing hymn.



SRI NYASA VIMSATHI

The doctrine of surrender or Prapathi receives a more extensive exposure at the hands of Swami Desika in Sri Nyasa Vimsathi. That this is the only hymn the author has chosen to supplement with his own commentary in Sanskrit, catapults its significance to great heights.

Comprising 22 slokas, this forms the central piece of the triplet of hymns on the subject (collectively known as Nyasa Thrayee) by our great Acharya. This sthothra, by systematically and unequivocally establishing the imperativeness, efficacy and unfailing nature of the means, puts to rest any possible scepticism. Therefore every Prapanna (one who has performed Saranagathi) would do well to include this also in his/her daily recitation routine.

Some of the salient issues covered in Nyasa Vimsathi are: Qualities of a model preceptor; reasons why an Acharya is on par with God; requisite virtues of a disciple and duties of a guru; cardinal concepts a spiritual teacher needs to impart to his student; governing rules of Bhakthi and Prapathi; greatness of Prapathi; indispensable nature of unswerving loyalty (Mahaviswasam); Prapathi being a direct and independent means of salvation; how to conduct oneself after performing Prapathi, among other things.

Opening the hymn, Sri Desika prescribes the following 14 points as the ideal qualities a preceptor must possess for a disciple to take recourse to for spiritual elevation. Accordingly, a model Acharya should be:

- Well-founded in our exalted tradition
- Strong-minded and determined
- Of absolutely flawless nature
- Well-versed in Vedas and Vedanthas
- Full of devotion to the Lord
- Good-natured and magnanimous
- Committed to truth and devoid of deceit
- One who conducts himself in the manner prescribed in the scriptures
- Free from vices like boastfulness, jealousy, etc.
- Steadfast in his adherence to self-control
- One who can be a torch-bearer forever
- One who oozes compassion
- Committed to correcting an erring disciple
- A well-wisher of everyone

The requisite virtues (15) of a disciple are enlisted in the third sloka. And it is the duty of the Acharya to take under his tutelage one who fulfils these qualities, without any inhibition. Thus, a perfect disciple should be:

- Of noble thoughts
- One who mingles with devotees
- Honest and disciplined
- Deep-rooted in his quest for knowledge
- With an attitude to render service to the Acharya
- Free from self-conceit
- One with an innate sense of reverence to the Acharya
- One with a tendency to wait for the right time to get his doubts clarified by the Acharya
- With complete control over his senses
- Straight forward and of disciplined mind
- Free from envy and fault-finding
- One to take refuge at the feet of the Acharya
- With implicit faith in the scriptures and lessons taught by the Acharya
- Willing to subject himself to any test for assessment by the Acharya
- One with an eternal gratitude towards the Acharya for his invaluable help, which is impossible to pay back

In the fourth sloka Swami Desika delves into the cardinal concepts of our philosophy — well encapsulated in Moola Manthram, ted in Moola Manthram, Dhvayam and Charama Slokam — that the Acharya needs to imprint in the mind of the eligible disciple. They are a) Lord Narayana, in association with His Consort Lakshmi, is the sole form, cause of sustenance, effort and ultimate goal of everything in the universe; b) You ought not to consider anyone/ anything else as the goal to be attained; c) Do not reckon anyone else as the means of salvation (Upaya); d) Be aware that our worldly fear and its removal originate from Him only; e) Never ever breach His commandments that are spelt out in the scriptures.

Forwarding a logical and irrefutable argument for Prapathi Sasthra in the sixth sloka, Sri Desika says, "It is common knowledge that one approaches a person who is both generous as well as capable, to get what he wants. This has been established in the scriptures by sages. There is no dispute over that in any text of authority. That being the case even with ordinary persons, what can one say about Bhara Nyasa, a great means, when it is performed at the feet of none less than Sriman Narayana, who is all-powerful and an ocean of compassion! Thus, Bhara Nyasa assumes the proportion of a Bramha-Vidhya as affirmed in legends." Those who have been beneficiaries of the doctrine of surrender in the past as shown in the scriptures and who readily come to one's mind include Sugriva, Kakasura, Vibheeshana, Dhraupathi, Gajendra, Thrisanku.

Prescribing guidelines for post-Prapathi conduct, Swami Desika has the following to say in the 19th sloka. "Avoid doing rites that are means of material ends. But never give up Nithya Karmas (daily mandatory routines like Sandhya Vandhanam etc.) and Naimithika Karma (ordained in the scriptures like Pithru Tharpanam, that is, propitiation of the departed forefathers etc.). Do not commit offences of omission and commission and those against devotees of the Lord (Bhagavatha Apacharam). Do appropriate atonement when unknowingly committing an offence. Strive to enhance knowledge and devotion. Put up with pleasure and pain (results of Punya and Papa respectively) with equal ease. Aspire for things that would serve as tool for more determined service to the Lord. Wish for the prosperity of devotees of the Lord. All these prayers, noble as they are, ought to be submitted only at His feet."

Unusually, the penultimate verse stands for phala sruti, in which the author states that he has expatiated in this hymn, the doctrine of surrender which has been established in the scriptures and by the Lord in His own words, based on the great works of PoorvAcharyaas. This he has done for the benefit of learned men, in this world and beyond.

The final verse serves as icing on the cake for this great work. Here, the supreme Acharya recapitulates the essence of the hymn in an animated address to Lord Varadaraja. "I am bestowed with the blessing glance of my Acharya that would negate the ill-effects of the whirlpool of Samsara. I have cast off other means. Improper thoughts and conduct are far from my mind. I am rid of all doubts as regards the ultimate truth. O Varada! Saviour and of boundless compassion! I have chosen You as the means and end of Moksha and have laid down the responsibility at Your lotus feet and have thus become free from fear and burden." A telling statement from a totally relieved mind, indeed!

SRI NYASA THILAKAM

Complementing the other two in the 'Nyasa' series, Swami Desika's Nyasa Thilakam is not only the concluding hymn but also a conclusive one on the concept of Prapathi. Addressed to Lord Ranganatha and comprising 32 slokas, this sthothra is the most expansive of the three.

This hymn to Nyasa Vidhya, is similar to an auspicious mark (Thilakam) on the forehead which enhances the beauty of the face. That Swami Desika himself has so appropriately named the hymn could be seen from the phala sruti.

Studded with several beautiful, philosophy-defining verses (Thilakams within a Thilakam!), this sthothra brings to the fore the grammar and essence of Saranagathi in its pristine form. Such is the mastery and thoroughness of the author that a study of the sthothra, for sure, will leave no trace of doubt whatsoever in one's mind about the concept. If Swami Desika reserved a special treatment for Vimsathi with his own elaboration, his disciple-son Kumara VaradAcharya has conjured a commentary for Thilakam.

A classic invocation serves as a perfect prelude to a sumptuous feast that follows. Ever one steeped in the Sampradaya, Sri Desika commences the hymn on Periya Perumal, fittingly with an all-inclusive salutation to the Acharya Parampara, which the Lord Himself heads. The import and connotation of the sloka is so significant in the context of our tradition that it has been adopted as invocation while commencing rituals with Sankalpa. The all-important sloka is:

குருப்ய: தத்குருப்யச் ச நமோவாகம் அதீமஹே !

வ்ருணீமஹே ச தத்ராத்த்யௌ தம்பதீ ஜகதாம் பதீ !!

"We utter the word 'Nama:' and pray our obeisance to our Acharyas, and also their Acharyas. Further we reckon the foremost of them all, the Divine Couple, who are the head of the entire world, as the means of the goal (Upaya) as well as the goal (Upeya) itself." It is to be noted that Piraatti is always part of the Godhead along with Narayana and the words "dhampathee Jagathaampathee" read with "Vruneemahe" assumes great significance in that They are both Upaya and Upeya.

The salient features covered in this hymn include among others: Commendation undertaken by Piraatti on our behalf; Glory of Prapathi; Reason why even Prapannaas suffer in this world; Comparison of Bhakthi and Prapathi; Greatness of the Acharya's glance; The boon Sri Bhashyakara received from Lord Ranganatha and Prayer for eternal service at the Lord's feet in Sri Vaikunta.

Driving home the point that surrender is to be done once only, in the second sloka, Swami Desika states: "May the right hand of Lord Ranganatha which shows the Abhaya Mudhra (offering fearlessness, with fingers upside) protect me. It would appear that the gesture also dissuades Prapannas from performing Prapathi a second time". If done again, it will expose the absence of Maha Viswaasam.

PARAMARTHA STHUTHI

Paramartha (Parama + Artha) means the ultimate goal - the greatest thing one can aspire for - which is the Lord Himself and His kankaryam. A hymn of 10 slokas and one which Swami Desika himself named, Sri Paramartha Sthuthi sings the praise of the Lord enshrined in Thirup Putkuzhi, near Sri Kanchi.

According to the legend, this is where Jataayu, the king of vultures, laid his life down after fighting his heart out against Ravana as he abducted Sita. Sri Rama, greatly moved by the bird's gallantry and overcome by grief, took it upon Himself to do the bird's last rites here.

The name of the Divyadesam itself is known to have been derived from the aforesaid incident. 'Pul' (புள்) stands for bird and kuzhi (குழி) refers to grave, implying the place where the mortal remains of the valiant vulture were laid to rest. The holy pond of this temple 'Grudhra Saras' (Grudhra means vulture) too bears testimony to the anecdote, which our Acharya records in the invocation.

The presiding deity is Vijaya Raghava, meaning Rama - the conqueror. Interestingly, 'Poreru' (Hero of War) is how Kaliyan calls the Lord here, in his Periya Thirumadal - மரதகத்தைப் புட்குழி எம் போரேற்றை - (63). Swami Desika in this hymn, repeatedly addresses the Lord as Rana Pungava, Aahava Pungava, etc., - terms that pay tribute to Rama's valour and heroism, meaning "the supremo in battlefield". This is typical of our Acharya who is known to staunchly toe the Azhwars' and PoorvaAcharyas' line.

In the opening verse, the author personifies the Lord as the 'all-granting' Paarijaatha tree stationed at the bund of the Jataayu Pushkarini. He says that the speciality of the tree is that whether tall or short (regardless of highly or lowly people in respect of birth, virtues, knowledge, wealth, etc.), anyone can obtain its fruits. The only pre-requisite is that one must bow in order to get them. Through this articulate analogy, Swami Desika indicates that surrendering to Him (Saranaagathi) is the lone viable way with which one can achieve 'Moksha'. Read fruits as Moksha and bowing as surrendering.

His commitment to protecting those who surrender to Him finds a new dimension in the fifth sloka. Sri Desika says, "You have undertaken to perform the foremost of sacrifices - that of protecting Your devotees. Your Consort Lakshmi is the inseparable co-performer and your qualities, led by compassion, are the officiating priests. It is called the 'Aheena' Yaga which means blemishless and endless sacrifice. None but You can relentlessly keep doing such a sacrifice". 'Aheena' is a series of Soma Yaga that has to be performed over a long period of time and the author has appropriately chosen this to refer to the Lord's sacrifice that is eternal.

"One must spurn all the four Purushaartha (worldly aspirations) - Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha - when surrendering to you and dedicate the entire life for Your sake. Then only he obtains the benefits in this world and beyond. No better proof for this than Jataayu, who

It is emphasised in the seventh sloka that the Divine Couple (note 'both') of Srirangam are indeed our Masters. "They are seated on the classy cobra-couch smiling at each other at the sweet blabbering of words like 'Om, thath, sath' by their child Brahma on the Lord's navel lotus. It is as much a sport to relish for them as are creation, protection and destruction." The underlying philosophy here is that the Divya Dhampathees, though are notionally separate personalities, functionally they are single.

In the ninth sloka, our great Acharya submits to Lord Ranganatha that the favours He had done to him were innumerable and lists a few of them:

- Though trapped by crores of unrelenting Karmas, I have been made to obey Your orders.
- You have blessed me with human life enabling me to toe the path of Sasthras.
- You have made me unattracted by non-Vedic ideologies.
- I am totally unaffected by views of perverts.
- I have had the privilege of association with an Acharya like Kidambi Appullaaar, the great grandson of Kidambi (Madaippalli) Aachaan.

In conclusion, he says that the Lord has already fulfilled a majority of His duties towards him and that only minimal work is to be done (that of leading him after his time to Sri Vaikunta and initiate him into eternal service at His feet).

Various terminologies used as synonyms for Prapathi are mentioned by the author in the 16th sloka, saying that such a practice (of giving multiple names) has been in vogue, as experts in Meemamsa, Vedas, etc. would vouch for. The other names are Saranagathi, Prapadhanam, Thyagam, Athma Nikshepam and Nyasam.

What is the need for an Acharya in performing Prapathi and what is his position therein? These are well established in the 21st sloka. "A blind man walks with the help of one blessed with vision; a lame person seated in a boat is taken to the other shore of the river by the boatman. Favours meant for his servant by the king are enjoyed by other members of the servant's family without even knowing the king. Similarly, my Acharya so very kindly enables me to reach You as I am neither knowledgeable in the matter of Prapathi nor competent to pursue other means of salvation".

Connection with the lineage that has in it Sri Ramanuja is a matter of great self-esteem and pride. The 22nd sloka explains why it is so. "O! Lord Ranganatha! as Rama and Krishna, You gave re-assuring word to Vibheeshana and Arjuna regarding Prapathi and Moksha. Further, citing these instances, You roused confidence in Sri Bhashyakara and gave him a promise (that Prapathi is a sure means to reach You) when he composed the Gadhyams. Being aware of this and with the knowledge of my association with Sri Ramanuja, conceit has filled my mind. Pray!

bestow Your grace on me for ever!"



Sri Lakshmihayagrivar - SVDD

Sri Desika caps off the hymn with a captivating dual connotation with Thilakam as the pivotal word in the phala sruti. He says that those who adorn their face with this glittering, colourful Thilakam that has been made by poet Venkatesa, who learnt the art from Lord Ranganatha (the other meaning: those who chant this letter-filled (prolific) hymn emanated from the mouth of poet Venkatesa on the directive of Lord Ranganatha) will be blessed with eternal service at the couch of the reclining Lord in this world and beyond.

SRI SUDHARSANA ASHTAKAM

The Chakra or the Discus, reverentially referred as Sudharsana Azhwan, is the principal weapon amongst the five in the armoury of Lord Vishnu. The other four are the conch, sword, mace and bow. Adorning the right hand of the Lord, the Chakra is an embodiment of triumph and wisdom. Always in the alert-mode at the disposal of Lord Vishnu, Sudharsana is ever ready to fulfil the commands of his master, underlining the importance of service to the Lord.

In this lilting and majestic hymn set to the Dhruthi-Chandhas scale, Swami Desika hails the all-conquering Sudharsana and his conquests in eight slokas with the customary phala sruti to go with that. This is the first of the two stothras on Sudharsana, with Sri Shodasaayudha Sthothram being the other one which in fact glorifies his 16 weapons which he carries in as many hands.

Sudharsana Ashtakam, with words flowing in a cadence of metrical movement and the use of salutary vocatives accentuating the rhythm, resembles Sri Mahaveera Vaibhavam, except that the latter is a prose work. The lilt invests in the Ashtakam as much beauty as majesty and presents an enjoyable chanting and hearing experience. Beckoning of victory for Sudharsana at the end of each sloka "Jaya Jaya Sri Sudharsana! Jaya Jaya Sri Sudharsana!!" makes for special allure.

In his unique style, Swami Desika captures the radiance, smoothness, speed and conquests of the Chakra in this stothra which brings out numerous virtues of Sudharsana. Some of these are:

- Striking terror in the enemy ranks
- Being the subject of worship in the Veda called Sathapatha Brahmana
- Being an expert in saving his devotees
- Possessing the six natural and principal qualities (like the Lord) in plenty
- Being like the sun to the darkness of worldly miseries of his devotees
- Seated in great Yanthraa-design installed by devotees as prescribed in scriptures
- Being the quintessence of all entities of the world
- Destroying fear and disease from all quarters

The anecdote attributed to the birth of this stothra illustrates the compassion and concern our Acharya had for humanity. Once the inhabitants of ThirupPut Kuzhi, a Divyadesam near Kancheepuram, were bearing the brunt of a dreadful epidemic called 'Vaisuri'. The disease was spreading rampantly and heading towards unmanageable proportions when Swami Desika authored this hymn and relieved people of their misery.

According to another version, the sthothra was composed when our Acharya was residing in Thiruvaheendra Puram and this he did as invocation for victory before launching into philosophical debate with scholars of other schools. That he emerged victorious goes without saying. A parallel to this view can be drawn in Sri Desika's Tamil Prabandham 'Paramatha Bhangam' which is an outright condemnation of other religions (philosophies). In that, the first and final verses are dedicated to Sudharsana. He concludes the Prabandham saying that Sudharsana is none but manifestation of the radiance of Lord Ranganatha.

திகழ் அரவணை அரங்கர் தேசென்ன மன்னிய

திரி சுதரிசனர் செய்ய ஈரெண் புயங்களே!!

Whichever be the case, the phala sruti is all encompassing. "Those who read the hymn composed by Venkata Nayaka, are sure to have all their desire fulfilled however impossible they may appear, with the grace of Sudharsana." To say that they include good health and victory, might be stating the obvious, for the discerning.

Obvious it is too from our day-to-day experience that not only does he grant success but does it in quick time, quite in tune with his characteristics. Hardly surprising it is that Sudharsana is among the most sought-after deities these days and this Ashtakam counts as one of the most popular hymns.



Sri Sudarshana - Srirangam



SRI SHODASAAYUDHA STHOTHRAM

A powerful hymn dedicated to Sri Sudharsana, or to be more precise, his weapons, Sri Shodasaayudha Sthothram comprises 19 slokas. After the opening invocation, Swami Desika takes up the sixteen weapons of Sudharsana one by one in a sloka each and a general summing up and phala sruti conclude the sthothra.

Sudharsana is referred to as Ayudhesa and Hethiraja in this sthothra, meaning that he is the Lord of Weapons. Interestingly, the Chakra itself takes the pride of place amongst the sixteen as seen in the second sloka and is the first weapon on Sudharsana's right hand. Sri Desika says, "Lord Vishnu Himself assumes the form of a Chakra (Sudharsana) and He holds the great Chakra which keeps the whole world and the wheel of time under control. May the Discus provide protection to you all forever!"

Shodasa means sixteen and Ayudha, as we all know is device for use in attack. In a sense, the sthothra is not dissimilar to Sri Daya Sathakam. In both hymns, the attribute(s) of the Lord is/are hailed. While Compassion of Lord Srinivasa is the subject matter of the Sathakam, Swami Desika sings the glory of the sixteen weapons that adorn as many hands of Sudharsana. These weapons, the author says in the 18th sloka, Sudharsana uses to safeguard the whole world.

The sixteen weapons which the Azhwan carries — eight each on the right and the left — are as follows. On his right are: 1. Chakra, the Discus; 2. Parasu, the Axe; 3. Kuntha, the Spear; 4. Dhanda, the Baton; 5. Ankusa, the Goad; 6. Agni, the fire; 7. Nandhaka, the Sword; 8. Shakthi, the Dart. On his left are: 9. Sankha, the Conch; 10. Saarnga, the Bow; 11. Paasa, the Noose; 12. Seera, the Plough; 13. Vajra, the Thunderbolt; 14. Gadha, the Mace; 15. Musala, the Pestle and 16. Soola, the Trident.

Swami Desika invokes the grace of each of these weapons from Sloka Nos. 2 to 17, as given below.

- May the great Discus of the Lord who himself is in the form of Chakra protect you.
- May the divine Axe of the Lord of weapons, which gave birth to hundreds of axes, protect you.
- May the Spear of the Lord, which when raised even playfully, chases away demons like birds, protect you.
- May the Baton of the Lord punish your enemies.
- May the Goad of the Lord, which thwarts worldly ambitions, protect you.
- May the Sathavakthra Agni of the Lord of weapons consume all human sins as it does moths.
- May the Sword which is the embodiment of knowledge grant the vision of truth.

- May the Shakthi, which is the undiminishable power of action remove weakness in you.
- May the Conch of majestic form and sound, protect you.
- May the Bow aided with endless arrows and which is an embodiment of Saathvika Ahankara, protect you.
- May the Noose, a device for creation, snap your ties of Samsara.
- May the Plough confer on you victories in battles.
- May the Thunderbolt, declared by the Lord Himself in the Gita as "I am the Vajra among weapons", protect you.
- May the Mace, which is the embodiment of the thathva called Mahaan which is the force of destruction of the world, eradicate all your diseases.
- May the Pestle of Sudharsana which pounds other pestles to non-entities, destroy your ignorance.
- May the Trident, which is a natural weapon of Rudhra who discovered Sudharsana Manthra and expounded the same in the Ahirbudhnya Samhitha, confer on you good health.

The background of the birth of this sthuthra is the same as that of Sri Sudharsana Ashtakam, involving the incident at ThirupPut Kuzhi. The use of the second person in the hymn as the beneficiaries of Sri Sudharsana is an interesting pointer. This possibly implies that Swami Desika addressed the inhabitants of ThirupPut Kuzhi and this adds credence to the anecdote regarding epidemic eradication there.

We have seen in the Ashtakam that Swami Desika invoked the grace of Sudharsana and his weapons while composing Paramatha Bhangam. In the final verse (54) of the Tamil Prabandham also the author lists out the names of the weapons, in the same order (underlined).

திகிரி மழு உயர்குந்தம் தண்டு அங்குசம் பொறி-

சிதறு சதமுக அங்கி வாள் வேல் அமர்ந்ததும்

தெழி பணில சிலை கண்ணி சீரங்க செவ்விடி

தெழிய கதை முசலம் திகுலம் திகழ்ந்ததும்.....

திரி சுதரிசனர் செய்ய ஈரெண் புயங்களே!!"

Finally, the author rounds off the sthuthra saying, "it is for the well being of noble people that this hymn on the sixteen weapons of Sudharsana, the chief of all weapons, has been composed by Srimath Venkatanatha."

SRI GARUDA DHANDAKAM

Sri Garuda, variously known as Garuthmaan, Vainatheya, Suparna, etc., is the devout vehicle of Lord Vishnu. A Nithya Soori, he symbolises eternal and committed service to God by being ever ready and literally waiting in his wings for His call for a journey. Furthermore, he is an embodiment of the Vedas and reigns in the Lord's flag.

Swami Desika has authored two hymns on Garuda, namely, Sri Garuda Dhandakam and Sri Garuda Panchasath. The former, which under review here, is a unique sthothra in the sense that it is the only hymn composed by our Acharya in the Dhandaka format, which is as majestic as it is rhythmic.

The hymn Garuda Dhandakam is made up of the customary invocation, followed by the Dhandaka, a poetic prose which is split into four quarters for convenience sake, one sloka delineating the structure of the Dhandaka and concludes with the phala sruti.

As pointed out by Sri Desika himself in the penultimate sloka, the novelly-structured Dandaka has 36 Ganaas (groups) in each of its four quarters. A Ganaa is a combination of three syllables. That makes it 108 syllables per quarter.

A normal sloka consists of four quarters and the number of syllables per quarter should not exceed 26. This is called 'Chhandhas' or 'Vruththa'. When it exceeds the limit, it can be in the form of a Dhandaka. Here also, the number of Ganaas has to be in the multiples of three. For instance, a quarter of 27 syllables will have nine Ganaas, 30 syllables 10 Ganaas, and so on. The Dhandaka in this hymn is a fairly long one having 36 Ganaas per quarter, which is 108 syllables.

Of the 36 Ganaas in each quarter, the first two are "Na" (consisting of three short syllables each) and the rest 34 are "Ra" (consisting of one long, one short and another long syllable), resulting in a resplendent rhythm and a delectable listening experience. Overall, the enchanting Dhandaka consists of 432 syllables (4 x 108).

The birth of the hymn has its origin in an interesting anecdote. Once when Swami Desika was at Sri Kanchi, a snake-charmer challenged him to prove that he indeed was a "Sarva-thanthra Svathanthra". He let loose a deadly serpent on our Acharya, who chanted the Garuda Manthra and invoked his grace. There emerged Garuda from the sky and whisked away the serpent. The bemused and humbled snake-charmer realised his folly and surrendered to Swami Desika and pleaded with him to secure the snake as it was his only source of sustenance. Our Acharya, ever so merciful, pardoned him and composed the Dhandakam. Garuda came back as if by magic and dropped the snake and flew away.

In a crisp invocation, the composer salutes Garuda, "whose body is encircled by serpents like ornaments, who is subservient to the Lord of Vaikunta, who is a virtual Manthara mountain in churning out the nectar (essence) from the Vedas and who has wonderful wings."

Various characteristics of Garuda are brought forth in the Dhandaka, which include:

- Being hailed in the Vedas
- Being the vehicle of the Lord and the banner insignia of the Lord as well
- Being the Consort of Rudhra and Sukeerthi
- Having scars caused by the tip of the weapon Vajra, when he fought with Indra while taking away the nectar
- Adorning serpents as ornaments on his person and having them as food too
- Having five forms, as the presiding deities of the five elements
- Being an incarnation of Sankarshana, a Vyuha-form of Lord Vishnu
- His manthra granting the four main goals (Purusharthas) to those who chant it
- Blessing his devotees with true knowledge

As phala sruti, the author says, "Garuda Dhandaka, which is capable of securing multifarious rewards for those who chant it, was composed by an erudite Venkatesa, for the pleasure of the Lord". As is evident, this is another hymn named by our Acharya himself.





Sri Srinivasa Perumal on Garuda vahanam - Aani Garuda sevai, SVDD, Chennai

SRI GARUDA PANCHASATH

The glory of *Garuthmaan* has been extensively covered in *Sri Vishnu Thilakam*, *Sri Paancha Raathram*, *Sri Garuda Upanishad*, *Sri Maha Bharatham*, *Sri Garuda Puranam*, etc. but it is beyond the common man to be well-versed in legends such as these. That would have meant that only persons of erudite knowledge could have access to *Garuda-manthra* or his greatness. *Swami Desika*, an epitome of compassion and magnanimity, would not leave it at that.

Our *Acharya* — at the behest of *Garuda* himself as narrated below — composed *Sri Garuda Panchasath*, a powerful hymn of 52 verses capturing the greatness and exploits of *Vainatheya*. Very much like the *Garuda-manthra*, which consists of five letters, the sthothra comprises five parts called 'Varnakas', each dealing with a particular facet of the characteristics of *Suparna*, in detail. They are as follows:

1. *Para-Vyuha Varnaka* (slokas 1 to 8) describing *Garuda's* form in *Sri Vaikunta* and that in *Vyuha* with *Sankarshana*, a manifestation of the Lord Himself, assuming the form of *Garuda*;
2. *Amruthaaharana Varnaka* (9 to 25) dealing with the episode involving *Garuda* fetching nectar from *Deva Loka*;
3. *Naagadhamana Varnaka* (26 to 35) essaying *Garuda's* crushing of serpents in the bottom of the nether world (*Paathaala*);
4. *Parishkaara Varnaka* (36 to 45) extolling the serpents that adorn *Garuda's* person as ornaments;
5. *Adhbhutha Varnaka* (46 to 51) recounting the wondrous deeds of *Garuda*.

We have seen in *Hayagriva Sthothram* that it was *Garuda*, one who has *Vedas* as his soul (*Vedaathma*), initiated *Sri Desika* into the *Hayagriva-mantra* on the *Aushadha Giri* (the Mountain of Medicine) in *Thiruvahindrapuram*; that our *Acharya* chanted the mantra repeatedly and perfected it; that a pleased *Hayagriva* presented Himself before him and poured his grace on him.

The same night, after finishing his customary routines as laid down in *Sasthras*, *Sri Desika* kept meditating on the *Garuda-manthra*. In the wee hours of the next day, *Garuda* appeared in his dreams and said, "only four persons — *Sounaka*, *Bruhaspathi*, *Narada* and *Kasyapa* — have had my direct blessings and the boons of my manthra, the *Pancha Varnee*. Now that you have joined the great souls it would be nice if you can compose a hymn on me for the benefit of even the common man. *Swami Desika* immediately took the devout order to its logical conclusion by composing *Garuda Panchasath*.

The hymn begins with explaining the correct method of chanting the *Garuda-manthra*. Before enunciating the manthra and the chanting procedure, a word of caution would be in order. This is an austere manthra and has to be chanted only with proper initiation through an *Acharya*.

Otherwise not only will it not yield the desired results but also land the erring ones in trouble.

The manthra consists of five Aksharas (letters) — the Pranavam, the letters 'Pa' and Kshi' with 'Swaahaa' bringing up the rear. There are four forms in which it can be chanted and one has to go strictly by the way he has been taught. The four forms are:

1. The Pranavam + Pa + Kshi + Swaahaa
2. The Pranavam + Kshi + Pa + Swaahaa
3. Pa + Kshi + the Pranavam + Swaahaa
4. Kshi + Pa + the Pranavam + Swaahaa

The author's poetic brilliance is written all over the hymn and we shall enjoy glimpses of the same.

- In a masterful display of command of grammar, Sri Desika brings out all the seven cases in the singular form of the word 'Yatha' in the fourth sloka.
- The fifth sloka can be termed as the verse of number names as words denoting numbers from one to 10, and then hundred, thousand, lakh and crore are deftly incorporated while narrating the greatness of Garuda.
- The seventh sloka spells out the similarities between the Lord and Garuda in a fascinating manner.
- That the Lord had to appeal to the King of Birds not to harm His own bed Aadhi Sesa considering their ethnic enmity, has been portrayed in a poetic way in the 27th sloka.
- Sloka No. 36 deals with a plethora of serpents like Aadhi Sesa, Vaasuki, Dhaksha, Kaarkotaka, etc. and the positions they have taken on Garuda's person as ornaments.
- The author's versatility is brought to the fore as he has come up with about 25 different names for Garuda through the length of the hymn. Five among them which are most important and find reference in Samhithas are: Sathya, Suparna, Garuda, Thaarkshya and Vihakeswara.

As phala sruti, in the final verse, Swami Desika says, "Venkatesa, who is a veritable lion to the hordes of elephants in the form of poets and logicians, has composed this hymn in compliance with the directive of Vainatheya himself, in his praise. Those who recite this will be free from fear of serpents; will rid of mental afflictions and diseases; will have their wishes fulfilled even before expressing them; and why, will even become like Garuda himself in accomplishment."

SRI YATHIRAJA SAPTHATHI

The ultimate in Acharya Bhakthi has found an appropriate outlet in Sri Yathiraja Sapthathi, a landmark hymn, which caps off the matchless devotional works totalling 28 by Swami Desika. It is Sri Bhagavath Ramanuja who is referred here as Yathiraja (the King of Saints). Some of his other names are Sri Bhashyakara, Udaiyavar, Emperumaanaar, Yathipathi and Lakshmanamuni.

No amount of adulation can be too high for the great deeds of Sri Ramanuja, which included among others, founding and upholding our Sri Sampradaya in the form of Sri Visishtaadvaita philosophy, against all odds. It is he who showed us that the means and end for all souls is Sriman Narayana and established the route to salvation. One can never be able to fully pay back for this benevolence but can only make an attempt by singing the praise of the Acharya, as Swami Desika has succinctly put in the 'Sishya Kruthya Adhikaram' of Srimath Rahasya Thraya Saaram. "பொங்கு புகழ் சாற்றி வளர்ப்பதும் சற்றல்லவோ முன்னம் பெற்றதற்கே" - அதிகார ஸங்க்ரஹம் (38).

Yathiraja Sapthathi comprises 74 verses (Sapthathi means seventy), perhaps signifying the number of the Simhaasanaadhipathis Sri Ramanuja appointed to enable our Sampradaya thrive. In terms of number of verses, this hymn occupies the third spot after Daya Sathakam and Achyutha Sathakam, a pointer as to how much Sri Desika was captivated by the greatness of Yathiraja. The author has, as in Daya Sathakam, handled several metric scales in this great work. This is another hymn named by our Acharya himself as evidenced by the 73rd sloka.

On a Chiththirai-Thiruvaadhirai day, the Thiru Avathara day of Sri Ramanuja, Swami Desika was immersed in his experience of the great saint's virtues and (his idol's) beauty. The Sri Vaishnavites present there were a moved lot and prayed to our Swami to compose a hymn on Yathiraja so that all can savour the devotional fervour for ever. To their delight, Sri Desika readily obliged and came up with this master piece, also a perfect recipe for posterity. The incident has been recorded in the 71st sloka.

The hymn starts off with the first 10 slokas dedicated to the salutation of our Acharya Parampara, to which Sriman Narayana is the principal preceptor (Prathama Acharyan). The line-up in the descending order goes like this: The Lord, His Consort, Vishvaksena, Satakopa, Naathamunigal, UyyakKondaar, Manakkaal Nambi, Aala Vandhaar, Periya Nambi and Sri Ramanuja...

The 11th verse beautifully describes the form and virtues of Sri Ramanuja. "I pay homage to one who is wearing the sacred thread; who has vertical (Thiruman) marks on him; who is the fruit of the good deeds of all the three worlds; who carries a triple-staff (Thridhanda) in his hand; who is the leader of the surrendering congregation; who has a tuft of hair as his crown — that is the King of Ascetics."

உபவீதிநம் ஊர்த்வபுண்ட்ரவந்தம்

த்ரிஜகத் புண்யபலம் த்ரிதண்டஹஸ்தம்|



Bhagavad Ramanuja - Kanchipuram

சரணாகத ஸார்த்தவாஹமீடே

சிகயா சேகரிணம் பதிய்யதீநாம்||

The first 11 slokas are a must-recite for everyone as prescribed in scriptures as our daily routine. If, for some reason, it is not possible, one needs to chant at least the above (11th) sloka.

Thereupon, it is all the glory of Sri Bhashyakara, expressively, exhaustively and exquisitely brought forth as only Swami Desika can. Some of the most significant ones are given below with the sloka number in parentheses.

- Sri Ramanuja being an incarnation of the Five Weapons of the Lord (12); of Vishvaksena (32); and Dhaththaathreya (63).
- He being the lustrous pivotal pendant in the line-up of our Sampradaya Acharyas (15).
- His feet being more important for salvation than even that of the Lord (20).
- The implication of his preaching-gesture (24 & 25).
- Sri Ramanuja being an amalgam of the three luminous bodies — the Fire, the Moon and the Sun (27).
- He being the saviour of the Supreme Being (Brahmam) from the devious designs of perverted schools of philosophy (38).
- The enormity and greatness of his works (47 to 54).
- The fate of the detractors of his distinguished works (55).
- The pure water from a well (SaalaikKinaru) offered to Lord Varadaraja by Sri Ramanuja, in turn, taking the form of showers of mercy pouring on us in all its abundance (62).
- The divine works of Sri Ramanuja investing in him (Sri Desika) all-conquering power (68).
- The greatness of the dust of the feet of Sri Ramanuja (64).
- Other philosophies taking a hurried hiding in front of Sri Ramanuja Sidhdhantha — Visishtaadvaita (70).

The author brings into play dual connotations aplenty in this virtuoso composition of his. Especially enchanting among them are: the ones involving Lord Krishna and Sri Ramanuja (13th sloka); Sri Ramanuja and a mountain (16); the great works of Sri Ramanuja and the Kalpa tree (31).

In a categorical exposition of his contrasting attitude towards those who tread Sri Ramanuja's path and the others, Swami Desika declares thus in the 41st sloka: "I bear the lotus foot of

the noble followers of Sri Ramanuja on my bowed head forever. By the same token, let it also be known that my left foot will be placed on the head of those with a raging madness in espousing the cause of other schools of philosophy."

A classic metaphor marks the 72nd sloka, in which Sri Desika suggests that (it is enough) the roar of 'Kavi-Thaarkika Simham' — that is Yathiraja Sapthathi — be passed on to the ears of the rivals who entertain the thought of meeting us in a debate."

Finally, as phala sruti, the author prays in sloka 73, "May the hymn bestow on the reader devotional intellect which encompasses both the worlds of the Lord — Leela Vibhuthi and Nithya Vibhuthi." And the concluding verse declares that those who learn the hymn will see the righteous path as clearly as a gooseberry in the palm (உள்ளங்கை நெல்லிக்கனி) and shall shine in the world so lustroously as to render the jealous rivals as ineffective as stars in the daytime.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Srimathe Sri Lakshminrusimha Parabrahmane Nama:!

Srimathe Satakopaya Nama:! Srimathe Ramanujaya Nama:! Srimathe Nigamantha Mahadesikaya Nama:!

Srimathe Adivan Satakopa Yathindra Mahadesikaya Nama:!

Srimathe Srivan Satakopa Sri Vedantha Desika Yathindra Mahadesikaya Nama:!

Srimathe Sri Lakshminrusimha Divya Padhuka Sevaka Srivan Satakopa Sri Narayana Yathindra Mahadesikaya Nama:!

Srimathe Srivan Satakopa Sri Ranganatha Yathindra Mahadesikaya Nama:!

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Hailing from an orthodox family in the Sri Sannidhi tradition as the son of Bruhaspathi and Vedic scholar Sri U. Ve. Natteri Parthasarathy Iyengar, Adiyen learned Nalayira Divya Prabandham from Vaikuntavaasi Sri U. Ve. Sevilimedu Srinivasacharya Swami and maternal uncle Sri U. Ve. Esayanur Sridhara Satakopacharya Swami (presently Aradhakar, Sri Ahobila Math) and completed the same at the age of 17.

Had Pancha Samskaram done by Srimath 44th Azhagiyasingar and Saranagathi by Srimath 45th Azhagiyasingar. Recipient of special Anugraham of Prakrutham Srimath 45th Azhagiyasingar, Adiyen consider it a great privilege to have been blessed by

HH to contribute an Article on Bhagavath Vishayam (Century X - Sathpadavyaam Sahaaya:) for His Sathabhishekam Souvenir.

Started teaching Divya Prabandham at Sri Vedantha Desikar Devasthanam (SVDD), Mylapore, in 1987 which continues till date. Scores of fully qualified students have emerged from the Veda, Divya Prabandha Patasala which was started at the temple in 1996.

Have had the fortune of undergoing Aahnikam and Grantha Chathushtaya Kalakshepam from Maha Vidwans Vaikuntavaasi Sri U. Ve. Purisai Nadadhur Sri Bhashya Simhasanam Krishnamacharya Swami and Sri U. Ve. Azhisoor Hasthigirinatha Mudumbai Srinivasacharya Swami.

Functioning as the Editor of www.svdd.com since its launch in 2006.

Working as a Senior Journalist with The Hindu, India's National Newspaper.



Sri Srinivasa Perumal with nachimars (above), Swami Desikan thiruveedhi purappadu (below)

Sri Vedantha Desikar Devasthanam, Mylapore, Chennai

Appendix

Swami Desika Darsana Sara Sangraham

by

Oppiliappan Koil Maha Vidvan, Sri Srirama Desikachar Swami

translated into English by

Oppiliappan Koil Sri Varadachari Sadagopan



Swami Desikan in ratnangi - Thiruevvul

SRI DESIKA DARSANA SARA SANGRAHAM

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY

OPPILIAPPAN KOIL SRI VARADACHARI SADAGOPAN

It is important for us to have the essence of Desika Prabhandham as summarized by Oppiliappan Koil Maha Vidvan, Sri Srirama Desikachar Swami prior to enjoying his commentaries of the 405 verses of Desika Prabhandham (DP). His erudition and Acharya Paramparai is illustrious. It is adiyen's bhagyam to translate verbatim his Tamil writings on these verses after his summary of the topics covered in DP and their highlights.

SRI DESIKA DARSANA SARA SANGRAHAM

The 15 categories chosen by Swami Srirama Desikachar to cover the content of DP (Desika prabhandam) are:

- 1) The role of Vedam as Moola Pramanam
- 2) The Azhwars
- 3) The Acharyas
- 4) SrI Bhashyaksrar / Ramanuja, the center piece Gem in the Acharya Paramparai (necklace)
- 5) Swami Desikan
- 6) The irreplaceable help of Acharyas
- 7) The duties of the Sishya
- 8) Performance of Kalakshepam with Acharyas
- 9) The three esoteric truths (Rahasyas)
- 10) The three thathvams (Doctines)
- 11) Chethana /Jeevan
- 12) Achethana/insentients
- 13) Iswaran
- 14) Hitham/Upayam/Means: Bhakthi & Prapaththi
- 15) Purushartham/ Goals of Life

Adiyen will translate the richly informative text on Sri Desika Darsana Sara Sangraham in the following pages. It is important to have the wonderful summary of the scope and content of

Swami Desikan's Darsana Sara Sangraham as bequeathed to us by my First Acharyan, Sri Vangipuram Navaneetham SrI Sriramadesikacchar Swami of Oppiliappan Sannidhi. adiyen has just translated below his magnificent summary, which is the essence of Swami Desikan's Prabhandhams. This should serve as a fitting introduction to the 405 Pasurams constituting the entire (19) Desika Prabhandhams. Here is that Summary.

ONLY VEDAM IS THE MOOLA PRAMANAM

Every one born in this universe should clearly understand the three thathvams (chethanam, achethanam and Iswaran), perform one of the two anushtanams (Bhakthi yogam and Prapatthi yogam) and attempt to gain the Purushartham of Moksham. All of these are contained in the different Veda Bhagams. Vedam is the hand lamp for all of us in this Samsaric world. Vedam alone stands as the eternal/timeless (anadhi), limitless (anantham), not composed by any humans (apourusheyam) and as an independent Pramanam (as Svathanthra Pramanam that does not depend on anything else). All the SasthrAs become Pramanams (means of valid knowledge, evidence) with the help of Vedams. Azhwars out of their infinite mercy to uplift the human beings from their samsaric sorrows analyzed the inner meanings of Veda-Vedanths and blessed us with the essence of them through their 4000 Divine Collect (Nalayira Divya Prabhandham).

THE AZHWARS

There are ten Azhwars (Pathinmar): Poygai, Bhutham, pey, thirumazhisai, Nammazhwar, Kulasekarar, Periyazhwar, Thondaradippodi, Thiruppanar, and Thirumangai. Since they were totally immersed in Bhagavan's Gunanubhavam (Aazhnthu kidanthamayal), they are saluted as "Azhwars". They are all avathara Purushas (Incarnation of either Nithya sooris/eternally liberated jeevans, or Bhagavan's weapons or Abharanams). Many were not born in human wombs (ayonijas). Besides the above ten Azhwars, the Pasurams of ANDAL (the avatharam of the divine consort of the Lord), Madhura Kavi (Key disciple of Swami Nammazhwar) and Thiruvarangaththu AmudhanAr (Disciple of Swami Kuresar) make up the 4000 divine collect. Among all the ten Azhwars, Swami Nammazhwar is the most important. He is revered as Prapanna Santhana Kootasthar. The sweetness and the depth of meaning of Swami Nammazhwar's Thiruvaimozhi is indescribable. The commentary on Thiruvaimozhi is known as Bhagavath Vishayam.

THE ACHARYAS

Sriman Narayanan is the First and Foremost Acharyan for all chethanams. Maha Lakshmi (Periya Piratti) is the second in the line of Acharyas. Vishvaksenar is third in this line. Only after the above three, the Bhuloka Acharya Paramparai comes into being and Swami Nammazhwar is the first among the Bhuloka Acharyas. Vishvaksenar descended from Vaikuntham to earth and performed Pancha Samskarams for Swami Nammazhwar and thus became his Acharyan. Swami Nammazhwar is not only the first among the Azhwar goshti but also in our Acharya Paramparai.

Swami Natha MUni is the next Acharyan, after Swami Nammazhwar - who incarnated many centuries before Swami Natha Muni, who was a Mahayogi. In Swami Natha Muni's Yoga dasai

(Yogic stance), Swami Nammazhwar appeared and initiated him into Dhivya Prabhandhams and became thus the direct Acharyan for Swami Natha Muni. The Vaishnava Sampradhaya Sambhandham also was blessed to Swami Natha Muni through SrI Parankusa Dasar, who belonged to the vamsam of Madhura Kavi, who in turn performed direct kaimkaryam to Swami Nammazhwar during His stay on this earth. This connection also led to Swami Nammazhwar becoming the Acharyan for Swami Natha Muni separated by few generations. After Swami Natha Muni, Uyyakkondar, Manakkal Nambi, Alavanthar became Acharyas in that order. Swami Alavanthar was the grand son of Swami Natha Muni. He is one of the most important Acharyas in our Guru Paramparai. Through his magnificent SrI Sukthis like Sthothra Rathnam, Chathu: Sloki and others, Swami Alavanthar nourished our darsanam and helped the world immensely. The key disciple of Swami Alavanthar is Periya Nambi.

SRI BHASHYAKARAR

Periya Nambi's sishya is Sri Bhashyakarar, who is pravarthakar of our Siddhantham. He is known also by other names such as Udayavar, Ramanujar and Yathirajar. He is the One, who saved our siddhantham from the destruction that would have been caused to it by other mathams. He blessed us with nine Sri Sukthis: Sri Bhashyam, Vedantha Dheepam, Vedantha Saram, Vedartha Sangraham, GitaBhashyam, Saranagathi Gadhyam, Sriranga Gadhyam, SriVaikuntha Gadhyam and Nithyam. Among these nine blessed works, the most celebrated is Sri Bhashyam, which is the commentary on Sage Badarayana's Brahma Suthrams. Swami Desikan states that he spent His life time studying and interpreting Sri Bhashyam. Acharya Ramanuja has instructed us that the study of Sri Bhashyam is the first duty and the loftiest among the kaimkaryams to be performed by a Prapannan. He has placed the Sri Bhashya Kalakshepam and teaching of Sri Bhashyam to others as the foremost act to be performed by such a Prapannan. If we are to think of Acharya Paramparai as a necklace, then Acharya Ramanuja is the center piece of that necklace (Nayaka MaNi for that Haram). He collected the fragmented acharams and assembled them with the help of Vedas and protected the Varnasrama Dharmams from endangerment. He is the guide for all of us through His discovery of the inner meanings of the Vedas and the related pramanams and codified the way of conduct for the people of the world. Acharya Ramanuja never swerved from the Sasthrams of the Lord and His Sri Sukthis based on them even during the most dangerous times in His life. It is important for us to gain a clear comprehension of His Sri Sukthis to understand the Siddhantham revered as Bhagavath Ramanuja Siddhantham. This is the proper way. Anything other than that way to comprehend His siddhantham could only prove harmful. His Siddhantham can also be understood through Kalakshepams at the sacred feet of Sadacharyas.

One of the most important disciples of Acharya Ramanuja was Thirukkurukai PirAn Pillan, who blessed us with the celebrated commentary on Thiruvaimozhi known as Thiru Arayirappadi. The Acharya Paramparai after Pillan is Kadampi Aacchan, Yengal Azhwan, Nadathur Ammal and Kadampi Appullar.

SWAMI DESIKAN

He is the celebrated sishyar of Kadampi Appullar and also latter's nephew. We have to remember what Swami Desikan said about Acharya Ramanuja, when it comes to Swami Desikan

himself. Only those who have the Thiruvadi and Thirumudi sambhandham with Acharya Ramanuja deserve to occupy the throne of Acharyas. We do not need to seek anyone else than Swami Desikan since he has blessed us with every aspect of Sasthras through his vast Sri Sukthis. That great help (Mahopakaram) has no match. We should forever be grateful to the Lord for blessing us with this Mahopakaram of Swami Desikan. Sri Appaya Dikshithar, who wrote a commentary for the great Kavyam of Swami Desikan revered as Yadhavabhyudhayam has stated that even the simplest works of Swami Desikan has the deepest meanings on Vedas and Sasthras. Let us understand the Post-Swami Desikan Acharya Paramparai form one's own Acharyas.



HH Prakrutham Srimath Azhagiya Singar mangalasanam of Swami Desikan - Thiruevvul
ACHARYA UPAKARAM

Every Chethanan has to approach the Sathvika-natured Bhagavathas, move closely with them and gain an Acharyan with their help. Afterwards, the Chethanan should pray to the Sadacharyan to point out the way to Moksham. The Sadacharyan will respond by performing upadesam on the meanings of the important thathvams and ask the chethanan not to swerve from the observance of the Various Varnasrama dharmams. The Acharyan will imprint thereafter the Chakra and Sankham, the insignia of the Lord, on the shoulders of the chethanam and perform Manthropadesam. This is what is known as the rites of Samasrayanam and Pancha Samskaram in the world. This rite is the key observance to become a Sri Vaishnava. This rite is common to Ladies and people of all four Varnams. Without the benefits of this sacred rite, no one can become a Sri Vaishnavan.

During the time of Samasrayanam, the Sadacharyan will initiate the disciple on the three manthrams --Ashtaksharam, Dhvayam and Charama Slokam --with their meanings. The Sishyan should perform japam of these three manthrams with reflections on their meanings. Afterwards, the Sadacharyan will bless the Sishyan with Kalakshepams to grow visesha jnanam about our Darshanam. Finally, the Sadacharyan out of His infinite mercy will perform Bharanyasam/Prapaththi, where He will place the Jeevan of the chethanam at the sacred feet of the Lord, who is the true owner of that Jeevan. The rites of Samasrayanam, Kalakshepam and Prapaththi might take place with the same Sadacharyan or with more than one Acharyas. The Acharyas do not expect any thing in return for performing their invaluable help. It is the same as the Mother Cow that blesses its calf with milk without expecting anything in return. Acharyas perform these compassionate acts solely for the sake of the chethanam's upliftment from the samsaric afflictions. This is thus an act of indescribable mercy.

THE DUTIES OF THE SISHYAS

The Sishyas should consider and revere their Acharyan as the Lord Himself. They should be grateful to Him for initiating them into the most secret manthras and their meanings handed thru Guru parampara and recognize that they cannot pay back their Acharyan in any manner whatsoever for the great help given to them. The sishyan should not waste the precious upadesams through following paths that are diametrically opposite to the Upadesams of the Acharyan. The prime duties of the Sishyan are to glorify their Acharyans and to protect the Manthrams entrusted to them from falling into the wrong hands. The sishyan should worship the Acharyan, meditate on the Acharyan's auspicious attributes, speak about His glories in public and conduct uthsavams to celebrate His avathara dinam. All of these still will not repay even in a small measure the greatest upakAram performed by the Acharyan.

PERFORMANCE OF KALAKSHEPAM

There are four sacred texts that have to be learnt under the sacred feet of the Acharyan:

- (1) Sri Bhashyam created by Acharya Ramanuja as commentary on the Brahma Suthras of Sage Vyasa
- (2) Sri Geetha Bhashyam authored by Acharya Ramanuja as commentary on Sri Bhagavath Geetha
- (3) Srimath Rahasya Thraya Saram blessed to us by Swami Desikan that is a Manipravala commentary on the three Rahasyams
- (4) Sri Bhagavath Vishayam, a precious commentary for Swami Nammazhwar's Thiruvaimozhi by Thirukkurukaippiran Pillan, a direct disciple of Acharya Ramanuja.

These are known as Grantha Chathushtyam or the four sacred texts.

Prior to Kalakshepam of the above four Sri Sukthis, familiarity with Ithihasams and Puranams would have been acquired to improve one's discriminating intellect (Vivekam) and to qualify the sishyan to engage in Kalakshepam. One should learn the recital of the entire Thiruvaimozhi from the Acharyan prior to Kalakshepam on Sri Bhagavath Vishayam. In addition to the Grantha Chathushtayam, the sishyan should learn from the Acharyan additional Acharya Sri

Sukthis and the traditional interpretations of their meanings according to their abilities. Those who cannot perform Kalakshepams of the entire four granthams should at least have Kalakshepam of Srimath Rahasya Thraya Saram of Swami Desikan.

THE THREE RAHASYAMS

The first of the three is Thirumanthiram or Ashtaksharam. It has 8 letters. This is the most sacred among the Manthras. It has many special meanings. It has the power to confer all soubhagyams. Ladies and the members of all four Varnams can recite it. Ladies and the members of the fourth Varnam have to substitute Pranavam with "am".

The second of the three rahasyams is Dhvayam with 25 letters. Our Lord blessed us with this manthram by uniting two separate vakyams of Upanishad. Even utterance of this Dhvayam once would grant fruits all the way up to Moksham. Such is its power. It can be recited by all.

The third of the three rahasyams is the Charama Slokam with 32 letters. This is found in the last chapter (Charama adhyayam) of Bhagavad Geetha. It was blessed to us by the Lord's sacred speech. This manthram deals with Prapaththi or Self-Surrender/Aathma nivedhanam.

These three rahasyams have 3, 6 and 12 padhams respectively. Acharya initiates the Sishyan into them during the time of Samasrayanam. The sishyan should then perform japam on them daily. The meanings of these three manthrams are covered extensively in Srimath Rahasya Thraya Saram of Swami Desikan. In some of his Chillarai Rahasyams also, Swami Desikan has covered the meanings of these individual rahasyams (Thirumanthira Churukku, Dhvaya Churukku and Charama sloka churukku).

In the next posting, adiyen will cover the three thathvams (chethanam, achethanam and Iswaran), Hitham or the means to gain Moksham (Bhakthi and Prapaththi Yogams) and Purushartham or the Supreme Goal of Life.

We will start with the three thathvams that many of the Desika Prabhandham Paasurams refer to.

THE THREE THATHVAMS:

These are (1) chethanam (2) achethanam and (3) Iswaran.

CHETHANAM

The Jeevan with discriminating intelligence is known as chethanam. Jn~Anam is an attribute for that chethanam. This jnanam is referred to as Dharma Bhutha jnanam (attributive Knowledge). The svarupam of the Jeevan would be filled with jnanam. Therefore, Jeevan is known as Dharmi-bhutha jnanam. This Jeevathma will always be cognizant of itself. When it recognizes itself, there is no need for Dharma Bhutha jnanam. But the Jeevan can recognize entities other than itself only through Dharma Bhutha jnanam. It can also comprehend its svaroopam with Dharma Bhutha jnanam.

Jeevan is of the size of the atom and is the embodiment of bliss (anu and anandha svarupam). It is different from the body. It is eternal. It stands as the eternal servant of the Lord,

Iswaran.

Jeevathmas are limitless. They are classified under three categories of (1) Baddhars (2) Mukthars and (3) Nithyars.

Those that revolve around SamsAric afflictions bound by their karmas are Bhaddhars or unliberated/bound Jeevans. Those who receive Sadacharya anugraham and perform Bhakthi or Prapaththi yogam and gain Moksham are Mukthars or liberated Jeevans. Those Jeevans like the Lord having no links to KarmAs and who perform forever Kaimkaryams to the Lord are Nithyars or eternally liberated Jeevans. Aadhi Seshan, Garudan, Vishvaksenar are such Nithyas.

ACHETHANAM

Those without discriminating knowledge are achethanams or insentients. Chethanan enjoys the fruits offered by achethanams. These achethanams are classified into three categories: (1) The three GuNAs (2) Kaalam or Time and (3) Suddha Sathvam.

THRIGUNAMS

This is indeed Mula Prakruthi. Since it has the three Gunams of Sathvam, Rajas and thamas, it is known as the triad of Gunams (Thri Gunams). This Mula Prakruthi will always be undergoing changes (Parinamams). When all the three gunas are of the same measure (Samam), then the ultimate deluge (Maha Pralayam) will occur. At other times, they will not be equal and will transform into different thathvams. The uneven parts of Prakruthi will blossom as "Mahan" thathvam. Based on the dominance of one or the other of the three Gunams, Mahan splits into three sub categories: (1) Sathvikam (2) Rajasam and (3) thamasam

From Mahan, ahankara thathvam originates into its three different forms: (1) Sathvika ahankaram (2) Rajasa ahankaram and (3) thamasa ahankaram.

From Sathvika ahankaram arises the 11 indhriyams. The six of the indhriyams are known as jnanendhriyams: Manas, Ears, and Eyes, Tongue, Nose and body. The remaining five are karmendhriyams such as Speech, legs, hands, paayu (genetic organ) and Upastham (waste removal organ).

Thamasa ahankaram produces thanmathras, which are the basis of the Pancha Bhuthams. thamasa ahankaram generates Sabdha thanmathram, akasam, sparsa thanmathram, vayu, rupa thanmathram, thejas, rasa thanmathram, jalam, gandha thanmathram, bhumi.

The Pancha thanmathrams are then Sabdha, Sparsa, Rupa, Rasa and Gandhams. The Pancha Bhuthams originating from the first and the next thanmathrams are akasam, Vayu, thEjas, Jalam and Bhumi. Thanmathram state is an intermediate state, where the links to one thanmathram is not dissolved and the links to the next thanmathram is not fully evolved. For instance, sparsa thanmathram is when the state of akasam is not fully dissolved and the state of vayu has not fully evolved. This is similar the state, where the attributes of milk are not entirely removed and the attributes of curd have not fully evolved.

Rajasa ahankaram helps the other two ahankarams as they perform their duties.

Prakruthi is the thathvam which undergoes changes to become another entity (vasthu).

Vikruthi is the thathvam that does not experience any change. That which changes into another vasthu while staying as the transformed vasthu is known as Prakruthi-Vikruthi.

In this context, we have to classify Mula Prakruthi as Prakruthi, the eleven indhriyams and Bhumi as Vikruthi and the Mahan to Gandha thanmathram as Prakruthi-Vikruthi. Our body is made up of Prakruthi, Mahan, ahankaram and five Bhuthams. Our body is the abode of the indhriyams.

KALAM AS ACHETHANAM

Kalam is an all pervasive dhravyam. It does not house any guNams like sathvam. Kalam is responsible for the present, past and future activities. Kalam contains from the smallest unit of time (second, minute) to the largest unit (parartham). The changes in the Universe (karma lokam) are subject to the influence of kalam following the sankalpam of the Lord. In Sri Vaikuntham, Kalam is relevant only in the sense of before and after and all activities there are strictly controlled by the Lord's sankalpam.

SUDDHA SATHVAM

This is the third member of the group of achethnam. It is pure Suddha Gunam without even a trace (admixture) of rajo and thamo guNams. This dhravyam is the constituent of all Vaikuntha Vasis and the material there (Gopuram, Prakaram, Mantapam et al). It is limitless and spreads above SrI Vaikuntham.

ISWARA THATHVAM

Iswaran is the third of the three thathvams after chethanam and achethanam. Sriman Narayanan is indeed the sarveswaran. He is the jnana svarupam. He cannot be defined by time, place or vasthu. He remains in all places and at all times as well as in the form of all vasthus. He is of Bliss (anandha) svarupam. No blemishes (doshams) are to be found in Him. All the Universe (prapancham) stands as His body. This includes all chethanams and achethanams. He remains as the means and the fruits for all. He is the Creator, Protector and Destroyer of all. He is the Supreme most God. He is the basis of every one and He rules them all, as well as, enjoys them. He is the One, who destroys all the sins of those, who seek His refuge. He is eulogized by all Vedas. He is worshipped by all karmas and He blesses the worshipper with the fruits of such karmas. He creates Brahma and all the Devas and they follow His commands without fail. Through His svarupam and divine suddha sathva body, He stands far above every thing else in His creation. His auspicious attributes are natural to Him. There is nothing that one cannot get by approaching Him. He is not away from His divine consort even for a moment.

HIS THIRUMENI (DIVINE BODY) IS OF FIVE FORMS:

Param, Vyuham, Vibhavam, Antharyami and Archai

Para rupam is the rupam of Para Vasudevan residing at Sri Vaikuntham. VyUha forms are four in number: Vasudevan, Sankarshanan, Pradhyumnan and Aniruddhan. In Vibhava form, He

incarnates as Mathsyam, Kurmam, Narsimhan, Raman, Krishnan et al. Antharyami is the state, where He appears as the indweller of the heart cavities of chethanams. Archa form is the one, where He blesses us at the various dhivya desams and takes on the forms desired by Bhakthas, Rishis et al.

Periya Piratti also belongs to the Iswara vargam. All except this Divine couple belong to the Jeeva vargam. PirAtti like Her Lord is present in a pervasive form with Him everywhere. She stays as the means and the fruits like her consort. They are like the parents desiring the well being and happiness of their children and divide their respective duties for our benefit. With their own sankalpam, they divide their complimentary duties to protect and bless us. It is beyond us to understand their sankalpam and how they divide their respective duties. When one observes Prapaththi, one should seek her intercession (Purushakaram) and perform Prapaththi to Her and then perform Prapaththi before both of Them.

HITHAM

Hitham is the upayam (means) used to gain Moksham. Both Bhakthi and Prapaththi Yogams are the hithams (means) for realizing Moksham.

Bhakthi Yogam is of many forms. This has to be observed continuously until Moksham is gained. A significant interval of time would go by before gaining the fruits of Moksham. It is very difficult to observe Bhakthi yogam with all its parts. At this time, the qualified people to practice Bhakthi Yogam are limited in number. Mahans like Acharya Nathamuni are the exemplary adhikaris for practising Bhakthi Yogam.

Prapaththi Yogam is observed by those, who find it extremely difficult to practice Bhakthi Yogam as the means for Moksham. Prapaththi Yogam is also known by other names such as Bharan-nyasam, Saranagathy, Bhara Samarpanam and Upaya anushtanam. Sadharana adhikaris call it adhrushtam also.

PRAPTHTHI IS OF FOUR KINDS:

(1) Nishtai (2) Ukthi Nishtai (3) Acharya Nishtai and (4) Bhagavatha Nishtai.

Sva-nishtai is extremely rare these days and is observed by very few.

Ukthi Nishtai and Acharya Nishtai are practiced by SrImath Azhagiya Singars of Ahobila Matam.

Mostly Acharya Nishtai and Bhagavatha Nishtai to a minor extent is practiced by the Acharyas of Muni Thraya Sampradhayam. It is our Purvacharyal's firm opinion that one of the four kinds of Nishtais has to be observed to realize Moksham in Desika Sampradhayam.

When one observes Prapaththi for a specific goal, one can gain the desired phalan at the desired time. For instance, if one prefers to enjoy the karma phalans and wishes to have Moksham at the time of leaving this body, one can realize that Phalan. This is called Dhruvtha Prapaththi.

There are instances when one cannot stand samsaric bonds any more and wish to realize Moksham immediately; if that person performs Prapaththi with that goal, he can gain that desired result. There is no doubt about that. This type of Prapaththi is known as AarTa Prapaththi.

This Prapaththi has the full power to grant different kinds of fruits immediately. There is no restriction based on jathi for observing Prapaththi. There is no gender restrictions. All janthus can practice Prapaththi Yogam and perform Saranagathi/Prapaththi to gain Moksham.



HH Prakrutham Srimath Azhagiya Singar presiding over vidvath sadas

THE DUTIES OF PRAPANNAN

One who observes Prapaththi is known as Prapannan. There is no other Upayam that he needs to observe for securing Moksham. He can rest free expecting Moksham without any anxiety whatsoever. However, He should not ever abandon his nithya and naimiththika karmas. He should not perform them with some goal in mind. They are to be done to please the Lord. He should not seek any other fruits other than Bhakthi and jnanam during the post-prapanna life on this earth. He should perform Bhagavath Kaimkaryams as per his capacity. He should study the Sri Sukthis of his Acharyas and worship the Lord and His Piratti at the dhivya desams. He should not fret about the time wasted until the time of Prapaththi and celebrate his good fortune in attaining a sadacharyan and his blessed Kataksham. He should partake sathvic food to gain the ascendancy of sathva guNam. He should never consume food at his home without performing Bhagavath aradhanam. He should consider himself as the dAsan of Acharyas and

Bhagavathas and serve them as much as he can. He should not boast about himself. He should recite Dhvayam always. He should reject the loka sukham and seek the dhivya dampathis always. He should reflect often on the great help (Mahopakaram) to him by the sadacharyan. He should not ever commit any apacharams (offenses) by mind, speech or body to Bhagavathas. He should not have any links to Gods other than Sriman Narayanan. When during the last moments of incapacitate period of life, he should not permit his relatives or friends to seek the help of any gods other than Sriman Narayanan. Devathanthara Sambhandham and Bhagavatha apacharam will destroy the glories of Prapaththi. One has to be extremely careful on both these fronts to gain the full power of Prapaththi.

SINLESSNESS OF PRAPANAN

The Prapannan who knows the glories of Prapaththi and has practiced it as an upayam has the greatest reverence and affection for the Lord and will not commit any sins consciously. Those sins accumulated without his knowledge will not stay with him. The power of Prapaththi will chase such sins away. If he were to commit any sins knowingly due to desa-kala-nimiththa dhoshams, they will be destroyed if he repents over them and does not commit those sins again and performs appropriate prayachiththams. For the one, who cannot perform the big prayachiththams prescribed by sasthanas, performance of Prapaththi itself is the prayachiththam. Even those prapannas, who do not perform such prayachiththam, our Lord offers light punishments on this earth and makes him pure again. The prapannan is guaranteed of moksham and he never enters narakam.

PRAPANAN AND DEATH

There are no requirements for the prapannan to be at a holy site or leave his body in uththarayanam or sukla paksham or day time for assurance of moksham. All of these requirements/impediments are for non-prapannas. Prapannan can meet death at any place or time without impediments to moksham.

THE EXIT OF THE JEEVAN FROM THE BODY

When the Lord helps to exit the jeevan from the body, He unites the Speech and other karmendhriyams as well as Eyes and other jnanendhriyams with the mind (manas). Then He unites that manas to prana vayu and latter with the jeevan. Next, He churns the thrithunam (three pillars like bones in the back of the body) and releases the subtle essence of the pancha bhuthams. When He churns the thrithunams, the pain experienced by the jeevan is deep and our Lord embraces the jeevan to comfort it. Up to this point, the experience of prapannan and non-prapannan at the time of death is the same. There are 101 nerve centers (nadi sthanams) in our body. For prapannan, our Lord facilitates the exit of the jeevan by the 101st nadi known as Sushumnai or Brahma Nadi or Murdhanya Nadi and guides the jeevan via archiradhi margam to Sri Vaikuntham.

ARCHIRADHI MARGAM

This Margam is known as the path of light. The Jeevan that exits out of Brahma Nadi is received successively by Agni Devathai, the devathai for the Day, Sukla Paksha Devathai, Uththarayana Devathai, Varsha Devathai, Vayu Devathai, Suryan, Chandran, Lightning Devathai,

Varunan, Indhran and Brahma. They welcome the Jeevan to their regions of authority and escort the jeevan to their boundaries and then hand the jeevan for the next Devathai to take care of. This mode of travel with the respectful help of the above Devathais to Sri Vaikuntham is known as the travel by Archiradhi Margam.

PURUSHARTHAM (REACHING PARAMA PADHAM & PARIPURNA BRAHMANUBHAVAM)

At the end of the journey by Archiradhi Margam, the Jeevan approaches Sri Vaikuntham. To enter the Supreme abode of the Lord, He will give up the sukshma sareeram that was maintained so far due to the power of Prapaththi. The jeevan will now cross the nectarine Viraja river by the power of his sankalpam. Once that is finished, Lord will confer the suddha sathva maya sareeram (without any admixture of Prakruthi) to the Jeevan. The Jeevan will continue the journey and cross the pond known as Irammadheeyam and approach the divine pupil tree (asva maram) with the name of Somasavanam. There 500 divine damsels (apsaras) will be waiting for the Jeevan with garlands, fragrant powder and other upachara vasthus. They will welcome the Muktha Jeevan and make him gain fragrance and radiance arising from suddha sathva maya deham. This help by the apsaras is known as Brahmalkaram. The Nithya Suris will next welcome the Jeevan and in their company, the jeevan will approach the Gopuram of Sri Vaikuntham. There the dhvara palakas will offer their salutations; the Maharishis will welcome the jeevan there with purna kumbham and the ladies will have lamps in their hands to join in that welcome. Now the Jeevan guided by them will enter the anandha maya thiru mantapam, where the assembly of the Nithya Suris and Mukthas will be singing the glories of the Lord. In that assembly would be the Acharyas of the Jeevan, who will express their joy over the success of their efforts. The Jeevan will offer his salutations to his Acharyan and he will now enjoy the sevai of the Lord on the throne of Adhishesan in the company of His divine consorts. The darsana soubhAgyam of the Lord with Sri Devi, Bhumi Devi and Neela Devi will thrill the Muktha Jeevan. He will climb over the throne and engage in intimate conversation with Sriman Narayanan/Sri Vaikuntha Nathan to his heart's content. The Lord will embrace Him and bless him with the Gunams like Him and eternal Kaimkaryam to Him (Paripurna BrahmAnandham and Nithya Niravadhya Kaimkaryam). The Muktha Jeevan will now join other MukthAs and Nithyasooris and perform Kaimkaryams to the Lord in all states and places. The Muktha Jeevan will never return to the SamsAric world. Even if the Muktha Jeevan returns to SamsAric MaNDalam out of its own will or because of the Lord's temporary assignmant, he does not experience any interruption in his Bhagavath anubhavam. That is why, it is said that the Muktha Jeevan never "returns" to this SamsAric world of sorrow. This kind of blissful experience is named ParipoorNa BrahmAnubhavam and this is indeed the Supreme Purushartham coveted by a Jeevan through the performance of Prapaththi.

Srimathe Nigamantha Maha Desikaya Nama:
Srimath Azhagiya Singar Thiruvadigale Saranam

Dasan, Oppiliappan Koil Varadachari Sadagopan
