Swami Desikan’s
Garuda Dandakam

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INTRODUCTION:

Swami Desikan was initiated into Garuda mantram by his Acharya, Sri AppuLLar. Incidentally, the Tamil word PuL stands for a bird. Here the reference is to the divine bird, Garuda, who is also known as Pakshi Raja (the king of Birds). Garuda Mantram includes therefore among its five syllables the two syllables constituted by the word Pakshi. The Garuda Mantram was a Mantram of AppuLLar's family. After instructing Sri Desikan on all relevant Sri Vaishnava granthas, Rahasyas, Tarka and Vyaakarna, Sri AppuLLar initiated him into the recitation of Garuda Mantram. After his Acharya’s passing away, Sri Desikan settled at Thiruvahindrapuram and
worshipped Sri Devanayaka Perumal and Hemabujavalli Thaayar. While residing there, he ascended the hillock near the Lord's temple known as Oushadhadri and sat under an Aswattha tree and recited Garuda Mantram for a considerable time in intense concentration. Garuda Bhagavaan was pleased with the devotion of Sri Desikan and appeared before him and blessed Sri Desikan. Sri Garuda Bhagavan also gave an archa murthy of Yogaasika Hayagrivan to Sri Desikan to use in his daily Aaraadhanam. Sri Garuda also initiated Swami Desikan into the recitation of Sri Hayagreeva Mantram. The enormous achievements of Swami Desikan came out of the Anugraham of Sri Garuda Bhagavaan, who is generally recognized in Sri Vaishnava Sampradhaya as Veda Swaroopi. Swami Desikan Composed Garuda Panchasat to record his gratefulness to Sri Garuda Bhagavaan and incorporated the Garuda Mantram in one of the 50 slokas of that Panchasat. He then recited Sri Hayagreeva mantra and had the good fortune of seeing Sri Hayagreevan and received His blessings as well. Swami composed the Hayagreeva Stotram and incorporated the Mantra of Sri Hayagreevan in this stotram.

All the achievements of Swami Desikan as a Great Acharya arose from the blessings conferred by Both Garuda Bhagavaan and His Lord Sri Hayagreevan at Thiruvahindrapuram. The archa murthy of the Yogaasika Hayagreeva presented by Garuda Bhagavaan can be seen even today, next to the Vigraha of Swami Desikan sculpted by his own hands, when he was challenged by a sculptor, who wanted to defeat Swami in a vigraha nirmAnam contest.
Sri Garuda Dhandakam was composed on a later occasion, when a Snake charmer challenged Swami Desikan's title as Sarvatrantra Swatantrar and sent some poisonous snakes towards Swami to test his power in handling those poisonous snakes. Swami Desikan recited the Garuda Mantra and the snakes were carried away by Garuda Bhagavaan. The snake charmer lost thus his snakes and his livelihood. He fell at the feet of Swami and asked for forgiveness. Swami forgave him and requested Sri Garuda Bhagavaan to return the snakes and composed the Garuda Dhandakam to thank Sri Garuda Bhagavaan for his intervention. This stotra was composed at Kanchipuram.

Thus, the Stotras associated with Garuda Bhagavaan and Sri Hayageevan, the Lord of Learning occupies a special place among the 28 stotras of Swami Desikan. Sri Garuda Dhandakam, is a marvelous composition as seen from its Dhandakam structure.

In this stotram, Swami Desikan covers the FOLLOWING topics to illustrate the glory, power and status of Garudan as one of the foremost Nitya Sooris serving Sriman NaarayaNa in Sri Vaikuntam:

1. Vedas praising Garuda Bhagavaan.
2. Garuda's service to Sriman NaarayaNa as His Vehicle and Flag
3. His matrimonial status with his two wives (Rudrai and Sukeerthi)
4. His adornment of great serpents as his jewellery on his limbs.
5. His heroic deed in bringing nectar from Indra Loka
6. His other heroic deeds in battles on behalf of his Lord
7. His splendour as the Amsa (aspect) of Para Vasudeva (i-e) his Sankarshana Swaroopam.
8. His manifestation in five individual forms
9. His conferral of Vedhanta Vidya to his aspiring devotees (i-e) his status as an Acharya.
10. The worship of Lord Garudan by learned scholars and saints
11. His power as the Garuda Mantra Moorthy
12. His power to bless one with the 4 Purusharthas (goals) of Life
13. His incarnation as Garudan as a result of the prayers of the Vaalakilya sages.
14. His power to bless one with the true knowledge or Brahma Vidya

It is generally believed that the recitation of this Dhandakam daily would protect one from the harms caused by poisonous animals such as snakes, scorpions et al.
POETIC STRUCTURE OF THIS DHANDAKAM

In sanskrit poetry, each of the 4 Paadas of a sloka can have 26 letters. If the letters of each Paada increase to 27,30,33,36 (other multiples of 3 beyond 27), then this slokam is recognized as a Dhandakam. The 3 lettered units are known as a GaNa. Thus a 27 lettered Paada will have 9 GaNaas. There is generally no restriction on the length of the Paada in a Dhandakam. Swami Desikan chose Paadas with 36 GaNaas or 108 = (32X4) letters for the four Paadas of Garuda Dhandakam.

The poetic genius of Swami Desikan is abundantly evident in this Composition. The Paadas of this Dhandakam parsed by its 144 GaNaas make intricate swoops in the air and make sharp turns like the high soaring Pakshi Raja (Garuda). The grammar of the flight movement of this Dhandakam is defined by NagaNaas and RagaNaas. At the beginning of each Paada, the first two GaNaas are made up of NagaNaas and the remaining 34 are made up of RagaNaas. NagaNaas are those GaNaas or triads of Aksharas/Syllables, which are laghu in character; RagaNaas are those, where the middle Akshara is Laghu and the remaining two are Guru. The genius of Swami Desikan as a poet is revealed from the study of this Dhandakam, where he scrupulously adheres to the rules of the Dhandakam construction, including the nuances of meter and GaNaas constituting them.

"Kanchi Garudan"
METERS

The first sloka (nama: pannaganaddhaya) is set in the vedic meter known as anushtub with 32 syllables. The last sloka (vichitra siddha:) is also set in the same meter. The sloka prior to the last one is set in aarya vrittham. The remaining sloka forms the body of the dhandakam with its four paadas and each of the paadas containing 36 ganaas.

“Salutations to Sri Garuda with beautiful wings”
My salutations to Garuda with the beautiful wings. His limbs are adorned by the mighty serpents that he has conquered in battle. They are his jewellery. He does all the intimate kainkaryas to his Lord and is His Antharanga dhaasan. Garuda is devoted always to the Lord and His services. He is adept like the Mandara Mountain in churning the milky ocean of Vedas and to bring out the Brahma Vidyas. We can
get the benefits of these Brahma Vidyas by offering our worship to him. My salutations are to him.

DHANDAKAM: PAADA 1

Garudamakhila Veda NeeDadhirood Dam Dhvishath Peedanothkantithaakunta vaikunta peerthikrta skandhameedhe Svaneedhaa gatipreetha Rudraa Suikerthi sthanaabhooga-gaaDopaku Da sphuratkantakavraata veda vyataavepamaana dhvijhavaadhikalpa vishppaaryamaanaaNa sphataavatikaa ratna rochischataa raja-neerajitham kaanti kalollineee raajitam

"Sri Garudans wives Rudrai, Sukeerthi – Bindignavile"

Garuda Bhagavan has designed the Vedas as his cage and uses that cage as his seat. (This suggests that the Vedas sing his praise). His Lord Sriman Narayana is bent upon destroying the enemies of His devotees. No one can stop Sriman Narayana in these endeavors. When He sets about to destroy the enemies of His devotees, he uses the shoulders of Garuda as his transport. When Garuda transports his Lord on His missions, his wives-Rudrai and Sukeerthi—miss his absence from home. When the
Lord’s mission is successfully concluded, Garuda returns to his wives and they embrace him intimately with affection. In that ecstatic state, the hairs on the body of Garuda become stiff like thorns. This in turn hurts the serpents, which are covering his body. The serpents are overcome with fear and they raise their hoods. On those occasions, the ratnas positioned on their hoods radiate their brilliant red rays. That splendid group of red rays appear at that time as the mangala Aarathi to Garuda and he sparkles in that flood of red light.

**DHANDAKAM: PAADA 2**

“Sri ananthan & Sri Garudan – Thiruvallikkeni”
O Garuda Bhagavan! You have been named Suparna, because of the beauty of your wings. Serpents of immense size serve as your food. You brought Nectar, the food of the Devas- from Indra Loka to release your mother from the bonds of servitude. Indra got angry at you during that time and threw his Vajra weapon at you. The sharp edge of that powerful weapon caused wounds on your wings and rest of the body. The welts from those wounds look today as pieces of jewellery on your body and attest to your heroic deed in defeating Indra. Your other heroic deeds stand out like the mighty winds that sweep the universe during the time of the great deluge. You are sitting on the flag of your Lord, which denotes His victory over His enemies; from your position on the flag of your Lord, we are able to infer your glories. You have incarnated as Sankarshana among the four Vyuha Murthys of Sriyan Narayana, which are Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradhumna and Aniruddha.

You have divided yourself into five forms-- Satyar, Suparnar, Garudar, Taarkshyar and VihagEsvarar-- and matched those five forms with the five Vayus (Praanan, Apaan, Samaanan, Udhaanan and Vyaanan) and shine thereafter as a supreme Devan. O Lord with the most exquisitely beautiful golden Wings! There is none, who is equal to you. I offer my salutations to you first and then again repeat my salutations.

Nama Idhamajahath-saparyaaya Paryaaya-niryaata- pakshaaniласppalanodhvela PaToti Veechi- chapetaahataagaadha paatala Bhankara sankruttha nagendra peetaasrunee bhaava bhasvannakhasreNayE chandatundaaya nryat bhujanga bhruve vajrine dhamshtrayaa thubhyam Adhyaatmavidyaa vidheyaa vidheyaa bhavath dhasyamaapaadhayeta dhayaTaasccha meh I
O Garuda Bhagavan! Learned scholars offer their uninterrupted worships to you. Your wings in flight generate mighty winds that stir up all the oceans and make them flow over their boundaries. The waves that rise and fall from those powerful winds reach down to the netherworld (Paatalam) and the effect is like a violent blow given by the palm of one’s hand.

A frightening sound heard as "Bhaam" reverberates around the world at that time. The mighty elephants guarding the quarters are shaken up by this mighty sound of "Bhaam" and run to attack you, the generator of that sound. Your rows of sharp nails acting as the elephant goad attack those angry elephants of the quarters and repulse them. Your mighty beak raises terror in the minds of your enemies. When you knot your brows, it looks like the movement of the hood of a Cobra. Your canine teeth look like the Vajra weapon of Indra and strikes terror in the hearts of your enemies. My salutations to you of such limitless glory! May thou bless me so that Brahma Vidyas become easy to be possessed by me! Please bless me out of your infinite compassion so that I can have the good fortune to offer kainkaryams to you.

“Bindignavile Garudan”
Dhandakam Paada 4

O Garuda Bhagavan residing permanently in Sri Vaikuntam! Your mantram confers to the reciters the four fold (Dharma-Artha-Kama -Moksha) goals of Life. That mantram of yours made up of 5 syllables, has the Pranavam as its first syllable. At the end, it carries the syllable associated with the wife of Agni. May the mantram of that structure protect us! Once, Devendran became arrogant over his powers and insulted the Sages with the name of VaalakilyAs. (The sages got angry and cursed Indra. They cursed that Indra's arrogance be destroyed by an incarnation of Sankarshana (Garuda) on a future date). You were born from the vow made by the VaalakilyAs that you destroy the mighty arrogance of Indra and you made their words come true. You serve as the lord of Death for mighty serpents that challenged you.  

Please bless me with the discriminating knowledge to distinguish between true (superior) and false (inferior) knowledge. Your Lord is the fundamental and principal cause of all the universes. Please bless me to have the cow representing the limitless devotion to your Lord, so that it can yield for me its delectable milk. May that devotion of mine be free from the distractions of the insignificant and evanescent pleasures of life! May thou confer on me the boon of possessing such a superior devotion to your Lord and True Knowledge about Him!

SLOKA IN AARYA METER OUTLINING THE STRUCTURE OF GARUDA DHANDAKAM

विष्णुरूप दण्डकोेंथ विघटततु विपक्ष वाहिनी व्यूहम्।
पद्मिनश्चावण्णरो नर परिपारि नवीन गुम्भगणः।
This entire Garuda Dhandakam is of the form of one slokam. This has four Paadas. Each of the Paadas has 36 GaNaas. Each Gana has three syllables. This Dhandakam follows strictly the rules of composing Dhandakams and has the NagaNaas and RagaNaas in each of the Paadas and yields novel word constructions. When one recites this Garuda Dhandakam, it will destroy the formations of the enemies, who have assembled to do battle with us and scatter them to the winds.

CONCLUDING SLOKA IN THE ANUSHTUB METER

“Bless us with the superior devotion to your Lord – Garudan, Pomona”
This Garuda Dhandakam was composed and sung by adiyEn, the Vidwan known as Venkatesa to please the Lord, who has Garuda on his flagstaff. The recitation of this Garuda Dhandakam will confer on the reciter multifold blessings and fulfill their heartfelt wishes of every kind.