

## Chapter - 1

The following is the first mantra of the twenty two mantras, which Veda has given under the heading of mṛgāram:

agner manve prathamasya pracetasoyaṁ pāñcajanyaṁ bahavassamindhate ।

viśvasyāṁ viśi praviviśivāgmsamīmahe sano muñcatvagmhasaḥ । ।

अग्नेर्मन्वे प्रथमस्य प्रचेतसोयं पाञ्चजन्यं बहवस्समिन्धते ।

विश्वस्यां विशि प्रविविशिवाꣳसमीमहे सनो मुञ्चत्वꣳहसः ॥

This mantra belongs to the poetic category of 'triṣṭubh'. As per pada pāṭham (study of division of original verses into atomic words), this verse has the following sixteen padās (atomic words): (1) agneḥ (2) manve (3) prathamasya (4) pracetasah (5) yam (6) pāñcajanyaṁ (7) bahavaḥ (8) samindhate (9) viśvasyāṁ (10) viśi (11) praviviśivāgmsam (12) īmahe (13) saḥ (14) naḥ (15) muñcatu (16) agmhasaḥ

For this, Śrī Sāyaṇācāryār has given the following commentary:

There are five categories of people, if we include hunters and foreigners who are outside the four divisions of people viz., Brahmins, Kings, Business people and farmers. There is a tradition to call this collection as pañcajanās. Agni (Fire God) who benefits all these five kinds of people is described by Veda puruṣa as pāñcajanyaḥ. This explains the sixth word pāñcajanyaṁ in the original text.

There are many people who kindle this pāñcajanyaṁ Agni; i.e. worship Agni. This is the explanation for the words yam bahavaḥ samindhate as numbered in 5, 7 and 8, found in the original text.

Moreover, this Agni came into existence before the creation (sṛṣṭi), i.e. He was the first one to come into existence. This is the explanation for the third word prathamasya.

This Agni, who is the pāñcajanyaṁ, has a glorious knowledge. This is the explanation of the fourth word pracetasah.

manve – I contemplate on such Agni's ..... (form).

Here the prose-order of the original stands as pāñcajanyaṁ yam bahavaḥ samindhate (tasya) prathamasya pracetasah agneḥ .... manve. Veda puruṣa

mentions that contemplation is on something connected with Agni, when He says 'I contemplate on ... of Agni', here. Śrī Sāyaṇācāryār shows that 'form' should be the most appropriate term here and fills up the same in the dotted place. His commentary is agneḥ (mūrtim) manve.

Moreover, the same Agni has entered all the people and indwells in their stomach as 'jāṭhara agni'. This is the explanation he gives for the phrase 'viśvasyām viśi praviviśivāgmsam'.

We attain such an Agni, is the meaning got from the word 'īmahe'.

'That Agni should relieve us from the sins' is the explanation for the part 'saḥ naḥ agmhasaḥ muñcatu'.

In this mantra, Agni is qualified as the first one to have come into existence before creation and hence 'prathamān' is the meaning derived by Sāyaṇar, isn't it?

For the paramaikāntis like us, in the meaning graced by Pādukā Devī, Agni is the divine name of Emperumān. Hence, we can interpret this without the above complexity. Vēdattāzhvān calls the first and foremost person Emperumān as prathamah. Dear Readers, please relish the fact that prathamah aptly describes the Emperumān in Śrīraṅgam, which is the foremost Divyadēśam among all the Divyadēśam-s.

Since Śrīraṅgam is the forerunner among all the Divyadēśam-s, our elders showed the meaning of Śrīraṅgam as indicative of all the Divyadēśam-s, in the phrase 'atraiva śrīraṅge sukhamāsva' occurring in the conversation of Araṅgan with Emperumānār.

Śrī Naḍādūr Ammāl has blessed that Araṅgan alone is the prathamān in the phrase "śrīraṅgasthala veṁkaṭādri karigiryādaḥ śate'ṣṭottare sthāne". Svāmi Deśika also followed his teacher in the following phrase, mentioning Śrīraṅgam as the first place: "śrīraṅgadviradvṛṣṭādvīpūrvakeṣu sthāneṣu".

Every day during all the three Sandyavandanams, it is customary for all the Śrīvaiṣnavas to pray four chief divya desams in four directions keeping Śrīraṅgam in the first place as "śrīraṅga maṅgaḷa nidhiṁ karuṇānivāsam".

In all the temples, mutts, ashramams and houses the sentence ‘śrīman śrīraṅga śrīyaṁ anupadravāṁ anudinaṁ samvarddhaya’<sup>1</sup> is being chanted twice during saatrumurai for many centuries.

Hence, from all the above, is there any doubt that Araṅgan is prathamān (foremost person)?

That prathamān, i.e. Araṅgattamman referred to as Agni, resides in the Tiruvaraṅgam with a determination of staying there till the last soul (jīvātmā) attains the salvation. This is a glorious thinking. On this note, He is referred to as pracetas.

Similarly, since He resides on the snake bed to bless all the five categories of people, he is referred to as pāñcajanya.

Many people praise His glory, kindle His radiance and worship Him.

Please see the following in Periyazhwar’s poems<sup>2</sup>:

“Tiruvaraṅgam stands as the guiding light even as many people such as devotees, ascetics, vedic scholars and siddhas worship Him.

The holy shrine Tiruvaraṅgam is worshipped by people from both Northern part of the country and southern part of the country”.

Vēdattāzhvān enjoys the above only as yam bahavaḥ samindhate.

In line with Thondaradipodiyazhwar’s praise of Tiruvaraṅgan in Tirumaalai as ‘uḷḷuvārullirēllām uḍanirudu aṛidi’ meaning ‘He knows everyone’s thoughts by residing with them’, Vēdattāzhvān also says ‘viśvasyāṁ viśi praviviśivāgmsam’.

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<sup>1</sup> Here a tradition has come up to insert the word naḥ meaning ‘our’ modifying the above sentence to ‘śrīman naśśrīraṅga śrīyaṁ’ to mean ‘Oh! Śrīman Emperumān! Please grow the prosperity of our Śrīraṅgam without any blemish daily’. According to grammar rules, if the vocative case such as ‘Śrīman!’ comes, then the word following that, having the meaning of ‘our’ should be in the form of ‘asmākaṁ’. The alternative word ‘naḥ’ giving the same meaning ‘our’ should not come here. Guruparampara traditions have mentioned this as sentence (vākyam) only. Hence, there is no need to add the letter ‘naḥ’ to make the sentence to be of eight characters each. Hence, elders say that this has to be chanted as ‘śrīman śrīraṅga śrīyaṁ anupadravāṁ anudinaṁ samvarddhaya’.

<sup>2</sup> pattargaḷum pagavargaḷum pazhamozhivāi, munivargaḷum paranda nāḍum cittargaḷum tozhudiṛainja tisaivilakkāi, niṛkinṛa tiruvaraṅgam tennāḍum vaḍa nāḍum tozha ninṛa tiruvaraṅgat tiruppati

The above poem<sup>3</sup> states that, if we think of the fact that He is with us and is aware of all our thoughts, then we would be ashamed of our thinking that we can cheat Him by hiding our thoughts through our pretense.

Vēdattāzhvān uses 'īmahe' term to indicate that we attain such Araṅgathamman referred to as Agni in the lines of Tirumaṅgai Azhwar's usage of phrases 'adiyiṇai adainthēn aṇi pozhil thiruvaraṅgaththammānē' first eight times and 'ponnadiyē adainthu uynthēn aṇi pozhil thiruvaraṅgaththammānē' during the ninth time in the poem 'ēzhai ētalan'. You may ask 'All these are ok, but, how will the term Agni suit Araṅgathamman'?

Śrī Yaska bhagavan has shown that the noun Agni is formed based on multiple meanings. In the way shown by him, that word may form on the basis of the person having beautiful parts of the body.

People arrive at this meaning based on the change of word aṅgī to Agni. According to the grammar rule atiśāyane madhup, the word aṅgī refers to the person having beautiful body. Hence the word Agni, as distorted from the word aṅgī can mean the person having beautiful body.

The Vedic commentator while interpreting the samaveda mantra 'agna āyāhi vītaye', has accepted this meaning while giving the commentary.

For this reason, probably the poets have used the Sanskrit term Agni as aṅgi in Tamil form. In the Adikara saṅgraha poem nadaipera aṅgi, Svāmi Deśika has also used the term aṅgi to represent Agni.

Who else can be aṅgi, i.e. Agni except Azhagiya Maṇavālan?

Nachiyār also enlists His beautiful body parts as the lord who has beautiful locks, beautiful lips, beautiful eyes and a beautiful lotus on his navel<sup>4</sup>.

Śrīraṅganātha mahātmyam states that Tiruvaraṅgathemperumān (Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam) is the aṅgi (container) and all the other Emperumān-s of other Divyadēśam-s are his aṅgam (contained in)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> ullattē uṛaiyum mālai ulluvān uṇarvonṛillāk, kallat tēn nānum tonḍāi tonḍukkē kōlam pūṇḍu  
ulluvārullirṛellām uḍanirudu aṛidi enṛu, velgip pōi ennullē nān vilavaṛac cirittittēnē

<sup>4</sup> 'kuzhal azhagar vāi azhagar kaṇ azhagar koppūzhil ezhukamalappū azhagar '

As per that, Badari Emperumān is the head of Araṅgathamman, Pushkara Emperumān is the tongue, Kurukshetra Emperumān is the forehead, Lord of Ayodhya is the neck, Ālari emman of Siṅgavel kunṛam is the heart, Tiruvēṅkatamudaiyān is the chest, Puri Jagannath is his abdomen, Emperumān of Śrī Kūrmam is the back. Śrīmushnam Varāha nayinār is his voice (probably our Śrīmushnam ŚrīmadAndavan's divine voice touches our heart by its melody for this reason only). His collective beauty is the Aravamudāzhwān of Tirukkudantai. His Shoulders are the Emperumān of Tirumāliruncholai who possesses the beautiful shoulders. His beautiful walk is the Tirukkannapuram Souri perumāl. His divine corner eye is the Mannārgudi Rājagopālan. His divine smile is the Madana Gopāla Swami who resides in northern side of the Thirukkūdalazhagar temple in Madurai. (I have heard from my father that towards this Emperumān only Andal observed 'Madanan Poosai', as mentioned in 'Thai oru thingal' Tirumozhi and this fact was mentioned in Paramata Bangam, by Svāmi Deśika on the basis of Śrī Varaha Puranam, to establish the fact that Andal never veered away from 'paramaikantyaṁ', as wished in the phrase 'maṛṛai nam kāmaṅgaḷ māṛṛu'). The divine thighs of Tiruvaraṅgan is Śrī Vānamāmalai Emperumān. His divine feet is Tiruppullāni Emperumān. Roots of his divine hairs are the crores of Emperumān-s residing in various other places such as Vaduvūr, Villūr, Nāvalpākkam and Kalyānapuram. Included in his divine hairs are all the Thirumūrthis in various temples across multiple nations such as England, America, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Africa, Germany and also any such consecrations in future (including the possible temple in Moon when man starts inhabiting that). Since Tiruvaraṅgan has all the other Emperumān-s has his body parts (aṅgam) he becomes aṅgi, i.e. Agni.

The upanishad part, 'aṅgānyanyā devatāḥ', also indicates that other Divyadēśa emperumāns are part of Him. This was established by Tērezhundūr pāncarātra vidvān Srimadubhayave Kannan Bhattar with his majestic voice during the 66<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> badarīśaccirasthāne jihvāyaṁ puṣkareśvaraḥ | gītācāryo mukhe kaṇṭhe rāmacandro dayānidhiḥ || hṛdaye nārasimhaśca venkaṭeśaśca vakṣasi | udare ca jagannāthaḥ pṛṣṭhe śrī kūrma eva ca || dvanau śrīmuṣṇa varāhassaundarye'mṛta vigrahaḥ | bhuje sundarabāhuśca saurirājo gatau gatau | kaṭhākṣo rājagopālaḥ smite madana mohanaḥ || ūrvām totātrināthaśca setunāthaśca pādayoḥ | romakūpeṣu sarveṣu tiṣṭhanti khilakoṭīśaḥ || arcāvatārārūpāṇi raṅgeśasya parātmanaḥ | virāṭ puruṣa rūpo'yam viśvarūpo na saṁśayaḥ || raṅgaśāyi mahāviṣṇur yoganidrāsamāhitaḥ | sarveṣāmapī devānāṁ ekamāyatanam mahat ||

annual Sri Anna Swamy Iyengar vidvat sadas held in Mannarkudi. I was one of the people who enjoyed this discourse.

With this context, we can understand Tirumālai pāsuram,

“nāṭṭinān deivamengum nallathōraruḷ tannāle

kāṭṭinān tiruvarangam uybavarkku uyyum vaṇṇam”<sup>6</sup>,

as indicating that other Divyadēśa emperumāns are His body and He is the aṅgi (in which others are contained in).

While saying that “I contemplate upon ..... of such *Agni*”, we can understand the phrase by filling the blanks with phrases such as His innate nature (svarūpam), its attributes, His form (rūpam) (divya maṅgaḷa vigraham) and its attributes. However “the form” phrase as accepted by Śrī Sāyaṇācāryār fits in very well here. After all, our ancestors approached His divya maṅgaḷa vigraham, which is not only easily approachable but also capable of yielding fruits.

We should enjoy the poetic beauty of what is left out by Vedattāzhwān in “I contemplate on ..... of *Agni*” in poems like Tirumālai, which states that: “In the flowing waters of Śrīraṅgam, devotees cannot lose sight of the Lord reclined in the snake bed, whose chest is adorned with ‘Tiru’ (Goddess Lakshmi), whose body and the arms are like emerald, who has pure lotus eyes, who has red-petal like lips, who has glorious crown and radiance<sup>7</sup>”.

How can we attain emancipation, when we pretend to meditate while attempting to visualize as given above? Vedattāzhwān indicates with the word “īmahe” that surrendering at His feet is the only means for emancipation.

Parakāla attained His feet as a means through the phrase “aṅi pozhil tiruvaraṅgattammān” in the poem ‘ēzhai ētalan’. Araṅgam is decorated by ‘pozhilkaḷ’, i.e. groves, which are surrounding it. It is headed by ‘aṅi pozhil Tiruvaraṅgattammān’ (Lord Raṅganatha). i.e., all the other Divyadēśam-s are groves around Sriraṅgam. Hence the Emperumāns of other Divyadēśam-s become His body. He is the aṅgi (to which others are part of). i.e., He is agni.

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<sup>6</sup> He established Gods everywhere and out of his grace, He revealed Himself in Srirangam for those who seek emancipation

<sup>7</sup> pāyūm nīr aranganthannuḷ pāmbaṇaip palli koṇḍa, māyanār tiru nan mārbum maragada uruvum thōlum , tūya tāmaraik kaṅgaḷum tuvaridazhppavaḷa vāyūm, āyasir muḍiyum thēsum adiyarōrkkagalal āme?

This was mentioned as ‘aṇi pozhil tiruvarangattammānē’ by Tirumaṅgai Azhwar.

In the poem ‘māṇam uḷa ākilum’ in the final part of periya tirumozhi the phrase, ‘aṇiyār pozhil sūzh aranganagarappā’, also seems to indicate that He is the ‘prataman’ (First) and ‘agni’.

If we surrender at His feet He will free us from our sins. Vedattāzhwān prays for the same freedom in the phrase: sano muṇcatvagmhasaḥ

Parakāla also has mentioned that the riddance of the sins as the fruit of ‘ēzhai ētalan’ poem in the end: “Sing these ten-songs, Oh! Devotees! Sins will not set on you<sup>8</sup>”

Vedattāzhwān indicates this as: sano muṇcatvagmhasaḥ

Hence the essence of the first mantra of mṛgāram is: “Azhagiya maṇavāḷan is denoted as agni, since He has beautiful body parts and also Emperumāns of other Divyadēśam-s are His body. He is the first among the Emperumāns of Divyadēśam-s. He has a glorious vow of being here till the last of ‘jivātmā’ in this world enters Vaikuntam. He blesses all the people including Brahmins and others. Azhwārs and Acharyās worshipped Him and kindled His radiance. He is in the hearts of everyone. I contemplate upon his holy body. Let Him free us from our sins”.

When I had finalized the above commentary my sister-in-law asked me to arrange for paying obeisance to Azhagar.

It was as though Azhagar reminding me, “You have forgotten me, who has been worshipped by your father and grandfather, and who is closer to your birth place villūr. You are talking about Araṅgan without talking about me.” I prayed him in my mind.

Immediately Padukā devi showed another inference centered around Azhagar.

It is customary to denote the Lord of Srirangam by the phrase “Azhagiya maṇavāḷan”. The term ‘sundara’ which is the Sanskrit form of this phrase is very famous.

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<sup>8</sup> pāḍal pattivai pāḍumin toṇḍīr, pāḍa nummiḍaip pāvam nillāvē

The Tirunaraiyur Lord called as ‘thozhi’(friend) by the Azhwār is also araṅgan only. Since the Lord came in beautiful form to marry the Chola Princess, the Lord residing in Uraiyyur is known as ‘Sundara jāmātā’.

The Lord residing in Tirukkuruṅgudi is known as ‘vadvazhagiya nambi’. The Sanskrit form of this name is ‘Sundara paripūrṇan’. This name is also very popular.

The Lord residing in Madurai, which is represented as ‘kūḍal’ in Azhwār’s poems is represented by the name ‘kūḍal azhagar’. This name is popularly known as ‘vyūha sundara rājan” in Sanskrit.

The Lord residing in Nāgappattinam, which is sung as ‘tirunāgai’ by the Azhwar is worshipped as ‘azhagiyaṛ’ by Tirumangai Azhwār. This holy name has become ‘saundarya rājan’ in Sanskrit, which later became ‘saundara rājan’. This is the most widely used form.

The Lord residing in the ‘Thiru Anbil” Divyadēśam is also known by the name ‘vadvazhagiya nambi’. This is known as ‘Sundararājan’ in Sanskrit.

In the same way the ‘azhagar’ residing in ‘Tirumāliruncholai’ is also known as ‘Sundararājan’.

However, amidst all the above ‘Sundarars’ it is customary to enjoy this Sundarar alone with specific reference to His body parts. Only ‘Tirumāliruncholai’ Azhagar is represented by terms such as ‘Sundara bhujaṅ’, ‘Sundara bāhu’, ‘Sundarōru bāhu’ and ‘Sundaraththōḷan’.

In ‘Azhagaranthādi’, Pillai Perumāl Iyengār in lines of phrases used in nācciār’s poem “sundaraththōḷuḍaiyān”<sup>9</sup>, “tiru viḷaiyaḍu tiṇ tōḷ tirumāliruncōlai nambi”<sup>10</sup> has sung

“tirumaṅgai koṅgai tunṛu abhirāmanai, sundarattōḷanai”<sup>11</sup>

tiruviḷaiyaḍu tiṇ tōṛ seṅgaṇmāl”<sup>12</sup>

alaṅkāraṇ sundarattōḷan azhagan”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Lord having beautiful arms

<sup>10</sup> Lord of Malirumsolai having beautiful arms

<sup>11</sup> Beautiful Lord who embraces Goddess Lakshmi’s bosoms and who has beautiful arms

<sup>12</sup> Lord Vishnu, Tirumal, having red eyes and strong arms for Goddess Lakshmi to play with

<sup>13</sup> Lord having names that mean decorated, having beautiful arms and beautiful



vāl nava tār aṇi sundarattōlan<sup>14</sup>

eṭṭu ezhuttuḷ ōdu agaraththanai, sundarattōluḍaiyānai<sup>15</sup>”

In the aḍaiyavalaintān commentary of the ‘īḍu’ one beautiful śloka is shown as follows:

“samjñasundaram aṅghrisundaramaho bhāsvatkaḍi sundaram

pūṣā sundaram indirālayalasatvakṣasthalī sundaram |

kāntasragbhujasundaram smitalasacchrīśālidhṛksundaram

kiṁ pratyāṅgamupāsmahe vanagirau sarvātmanā sundaram | | ”

I don’t know who has written this beautiful śloka. However, in this śloka, the beauty of different body parts of Azhagar has been described as: Azhagar (beautiful) in the name, Azhagar in the lotus feet, Azhagar in the middle (hip region), Azhagar by ornaments, Azhagar in the broad chest where Goddess Lakshmi resides, Azhagar in the shoulders which attracts us, Azhagar in the smiling eyes etc...

Such Azhagar who is bestowed with beautiful body parts is described as agni by Vedattāzhwan.

I had shown earlier that the word aṅgi which means the person who is possessed with beautiful body parts has become agni. Because of this reason only, the word Agni is represented as aṅgi in Tamil Literature. This was also shown with an example of the poem by Svāmi Deśika, who while describing ‘archirādi gati’, refers the first ādivāhikar Agni as aṅgi.

Recently, there was a celebration (utsavam) held at the Sri Rajagopala swami temple in the bazaar street of Tirukkudanthai from 25.5.2010 to 29.5.2010. This utsavam incorporated great things such as recitation of the four Vedas, itihāsa purānās and other holy texts, Examination and Vidwat sadas on granta chatushtayam (four holy philosophical texts of Visishtadvaita) which encompasses Śrī Bhashyam, Śrī Bhagavat Vishayam, Śrī Geeta Bhashyam and Śrīmad Rahasya traya saaram. This utsavam was held during the 121<sup>st</sup> thirunakashathiram of Śrī. Cinnāmu shaili Pātrācārya Mahādesika swamy, who

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<sup>14</sup> Lord having beautiful arms adorned with radiant/ pure and new garland

<sup>15</sup> Lord who represents the alphabet ‘a’ in the holy eight letters and having beautiful arms

is the grandson and disciple of Śrī. Cinnāmu Ranganātha Pātrācārya Mahādesikan who is one of the ‘aṣṭa dig gajās’ of Śrī Periyāndavan. Sri. Ramanuja Pātrācārya Swami (who is familiar to our Paduka readers and who has been blessed by Śrī Tirukkudanthai Andavan as well as Śrī Śrīmushnam Andavan) is the grandson of this swami. Sri. Ramanuja Pātrācārya Swami along with his younger brother Sri Krishnamācārya Swami made excellent arrangements for this utsavam and ensured the smooth conduct of the same.

I had also been there to participate and perform some service like squirrel did to help Śrī Rama during the construction of the bridge.

Śrī Kottaiyur Kannan Swami came to this function to perform ‘adhyāpaka kainkaryam<sup>16</sup>’. He had worked as Deputy Collector in the state government. He had been blessed by Śrī Tirukkudanthai Andavan as well as Śrī Śrīmushnam Andavan. He was blessed with Śrī Bhashyam knowledge under the lotus feet of Śrīmushnam Śrīmadandavan. He reads this article regularly and constantly encourages by giving compliments. This swami asked me, “The word Agni appears as aṅgi in Azhwar’s works. Why didn’t you quote the same?” The poem quoted by him is:

parivu inṛi vāṇanaik kāthum enṛu anṛu padaiyōḍum vañtherthirnthā  
tiripuram ceṛṛavanum maganum pinnum angiyum pōr tholaiyap  
poru siṛaip pullaik kaḍāviya māyanai āyanaip poṛ cakraththu  
ariyinaṁ accuthanaip paṛṛi yān iṛaiyēnum iḍarilanē<sup>17</sup>

The day he asked was vaikāsi Vishākam. Isn’t Nammāzhwār reincarnation of Pādukā *devi*? It appeared to my mind that Pādukā devi herself indicated to me through Sri Kannan Swami that Nammāzhwār poem shouldn’t be left out in Śrī Ranganatha Paduka, when it is appropriate to be quoted. Hence, I quoted this poem as an example. For this poem, the Sanskrit translation given by my Grandfather in the work pratibimbalahari:

“bhāṇam rakṣāṇyadukhkaṁ” dviti samiti purā sāyutaṁ cāpiyuktaṁ  
subrahmaṇyāgnimukhyaiḥ tripuraharam idaṁ taṁ parājetumājau |

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<sup>16</sup> Service of rendering Divyaprabandham

<sup>17</sup> The Lord who rides on the bird Garuda and who carries discus, defeated Lord Shiva, His son Subramanya and Agni when He came along with an army to protect Banasura; I praise the Lord as Achyuta, Hari and Ayan (Gopalan) and hence, I have no despair

kopaṁ sañcālya yuddhyat-śatayutavīhakam māyinaṁ svarṇacakram

haryakṣaṁ cācyutaṁ samśrita iha kiyatāpyasmi nāyāsayuktaḥ | |

In the above Shloka, it can be seen that the phrase “maganum pinnum angiyum” used by Azhwār has been translated to “subrahmaṇya-agni-mukhyaiḥ” in the Sanskrit form.

The phrase “pratamasya pracetasah” conveys the meaning of “chief among the poets”. There is a history that Azhagar appeared as the head of the Poets in the assembly of Paṇḍiya King. In the Poets’ assembly Azhagar used to give speech with roaring voice. Hence he used to be known as ‘athir kural sangattu azhagar’. Don’t think that this is another new story.

In the book “azhagar kalambagam” the places, ‘thanḍamiccaṅgattāṇi īraiyanē’ and ‘suththattamizhppulavar saṅgaththiruppiriyān’, clearly show Tirumāliruncholai Azhagar becoming the chief of Tamizh sangam (association/assembly).

The Azhwār in the poem “kīlaroliyilamai”, mentions as “athir kural sangattu azhagar tham koil” in the second line of second poem. In that also, the above history is revealed. This can be found in the commentary on Azhagar anthādi published by Srimadubhayave Vai Mu Satakopācāryār and his brothers in 1916. Sangattamizhar is the name found in the ‘arumpadam’ of the Jeeyar’s Idu. On this basis only, in the following invocation poem of Azhagar antādi, the first meaning given in the book for the phrase ‘sangaththu azhagar’ is, “Azhagar who is the chief of the tamizh sangam and who resides the hill of Tirumālirum cholai”.

aṅgath thamizh maṛai āyiram pāḍi aliththu ulagōr

thaṅgalku viḍu aruḷum puruḍōththaman thaṇ vakulath

thonḡal parāṅkusan thālīṇai māḷiruncolaimalaic

caṅgaththu azhagaranthādi naḍāththath thalaik koḷvanē

However, in all the commentaries blessed by our preceptors the phrase ‘athir kural sangatthu azagar’ is explained as ‘Azhagar who is holding the conch Pancajanya”.

Sri Kūraththāzhvān also has used this meaning while describing the Azhagar in Sundara bāhu stavam as the person having a conch that makes all the seven worlds to reverberate (bhidurita - saptaloka - suviśṛṅkhala - śaṅkharavam). Sri

Svāmi Deśika also has mentioned as “person who is having a conch that is capable of making reverberating sound” by using the phrase “mukharita jalajam”, while describing the essence of this poem in tātparya ratnāvali. In my Grandfather’s pratibimbalahari also, it has been mentioned as “gambhira dvaniśāliśaṅkamahita śrīsundarasyāspadam”. With this background, people will hesitate to accept the previous meaning. They can be satisfied with the Sanskrit translation of the phrase “vedam mun viriththān” used by Azhwar to denote “pratamasya pracetasah”. Sri Svāmi Deśika has mentioned in tātparya ratnāvali, as “pūrvācāryaṁ śrutinām”, when translating “vedam mun viriththān” to Sanskrit. Here, my Grandfather has also blessed in pratibimbalahari as “śruti visthṛtiḥ racayituḥ pūrvam”.

Many people praise this Azagar as pāñcājanyar. Vedattāzhwan also describes this as:

yaṁ pāñcājanyaṁ bahavassamindhate (यं पाञ्चजन्यं बहवस्समिन्धते)

There are five kinds of people viz., Brahmins, Kings, Businessmen, farmers and those who are not covered under these four categories. The person who is benefactor to all these five types of people is called as pāñcājanyan. This holy name will not be appropriate for any Lord other than Azagar. For the people who worship the Azagar touring on the northern bank of the river Vaigai on the northern part of Madurai, amidst the fountain of water sprayed by all kinds of devotees, it will be clear that this Azagar is the pāñcājanyan.

Why can’t we interpret the word pāñcājanyam in the above Vedic verse to mean ‘the person who carries the conch pāñcājanyam’ in lines with the commentary blessed by our ancestors for the phrase ‘atir kural sangattu azhagar’, as ‘one who is with Sri pāñcājanyam in His holy hand and because of the beauty of such an union represented by the same name’? A thought occurred to me that the person in possession of pāñcājanyam can be referred to as pāñcājanyaḥ according to Panini’s aphorism (sutra) “arśādibhyo-ac”. However, in the pada pāṭam, the word pāñcājanyam occurring at this place is not chanted as a whole word, but, is chanted in the form of veṣṭanai (a convention for indicating that the particular word is a composite word) as ‘pāñcājanyam iti pāñca-janyam’. If we split the word pāñcājanyam in accordance with the convention of pada pāṭam then the only meaning we get is ‘the person who is benefactor to all these five types of people’. When I was restless on the inability of deriving the meaning I had thought of, I consulted Srimadubhayave Maha Vidwan Dr. Sogattur CDAC

Ramanujachariar Swami. You would have seen in Paduka that last year Sri Mushnam Srimadandavan honored this Swami, who is a scholar in ubhaya Vedas and an incomparable expert in Grammar (Vyākharana), Vedic commentaries and computers. This Swami told me, “It is correct to say that we should not derive a meaning outside pada pāṭam. However, whenever we recite the above word our mind thinks about the Lord who is carrying the conch and the wheel. While relishing the Veda, how can we prevent the interpretation got out of the sound? That interpretation is not contradictory to the original Vedic verse, isn’t it? Veda would have used this word so that we get the sound based meaning also, as otherwise, this could have been mentioned as pañca janānām hitam, isn’t it?”

In few places we see that Sri Bhatta Bhaskara gives the meaning that doesn’t augur well with pada pāṭam. He mentions the fact that this is not accepted by pada people by saying ‘tattu padakārāḥ na sahaṇte’. I hear few people murmuring that ‘isn’t it excessive that you giving this meaning based on the sound and Sogattur Swami agreeing to it owing to the affection he has on you?’ I need to give few more details for such people. I pray that the readers be patient and read them as well.

I had previously written that I had consulted various scholars for getting clarifications on various doubts such as the reason for the name mṛgāram. One such scholar is Brahmasri Sundararama Vajapeyee. He has been tirelessly researching on the mṛgāram mantras and passing the information to me over phone. One such fact he shared with me is, “vriddha hārīta smṛti says that while performing samāśrayaṇam (pañcasamskāram or fivefold purification ceremony), ācāryan should chant the mantrā starting with ‘agner manve’ which is the first mantrā of mṛgāram while heating the pāñcajanya (conch) in the fire consecrated for samāśrayaṇam and then use it to emboss on the shoulder of the disciple”. With the help of the place shown by him I referred to the vriddha hārīta smṛti.

vriddha hārīta smṛti is the compilation of instructions blessed by the sage Hārītā to the emperor Ambarīsha. It has eight chapters. In the eighth chapter Sri Hārītā Maharishi blesses the details on the fivefold purification (pañcasamskāram). Here, while describing the tāpa samskāram (purification ceremony through heat), i.e., embossing the impressions on the shoulders, he describes the method of performing the fire rituals (homā) for samāśrayaṇam. In the 228<sup>th</sup> and 229<sup>th</sup> ślokās, he blesses that embossing the wheel (cakrā) should be done by heating

the wheel with the mantra ‘caraṇam pavitram’ and the conch (pāñcajanyaṃ) should be heated with the mantrā ‘agner manve’. The ślokaḥ are given below:

ājyaṃ hutvā tataścakraṃ tadagnau pratapet guruḥ ।

caraṇam pavitramiti yajuṣā taccakreṇāṅgayet bhujam । ।

vāmaṃ sampratapet paścāt pāñcajanyaena deśikaḥ ।

agner manveti taddhomāgnau pratapya vai । ।

From the above, isn’t it clear that the Hārītā Maharishi thinks that the mantrā ‘agner manve’ belongs to the conch pāñcajanyaṃ? The basis of that is the word pāñcajanyaṃ in the verse brings in that interpretation. Hence, I and Sri Sogathur Swami follow the way shown by the sage Sri. Hārītā.

Hence, what is wrong in interpreting that through the phrase pāñcajanyaṃ, Vedattāzhwan praises the Lord who has the conch pāñcajanyaṃ in his hand?

Thus it can be said that through the phrase ‘pāñcajanyaṃ’ Vedattāzhwan sets the precedent for the azhwar’s praise ‘atir kural sangatthu azagar’.

I meditate upon (manve) .... of this azagar. In the place of .... of Azagar, we can fill it with the ‘beautiful radiant holy body’ and enjoy it. Vedattāzhwan has created a poem in which we can fill words such as ‘holy body’, ‘attributes’ and ‘wealth’ in the blanks and enjoy. Something about Brahmasri Sundararama Vajapeyee should necessarily be mentioned here. He has great interest in performing yajñams.

In the tradition of non-dualism (Advaitam) knowledge is the essential means of attaining salvation. The deeds like performing yajñams contradict this knowledge. One will attain salvation only if he renounces all deeds and become a sanyasi.

In our tradition also, knowledge is the one which leads to salvation. Devotion is one form of developed knowledge. Absolute surrender (prapatti) is another form of knowledge.

However, for one to develop the knowledge that culminates into devotion, one has to perform the rites he is supposed to perform, as the offering to the Lord (bhagavadārādhanaṃ) in order to please Him. I.e. karma becomes part of devotion. Since karma is part of bhakti yoga, it is the one other than vidya, i.e.

avidya (non vidya, that other than knowledge). In this way, Emperumānār has explained the following verse from Isavasyopanishad:

avidyayā mṛtyum tīrtvā vidyayā amṛtamaśnute

avidyayā – (jīvātmā) With the rites performed as prescribed and as bhagavadārāadhanam (karmayogam)

mṛtyum – hindrances to the vidya, i.e. Bhakti yogam

tīrtvā – cross

vidyayā – with the Bhakti yogam

amṛtamaśnute – attains salvation

(With the rites performed as offerings to God, the obstacles for the Bhakti yogam are crossed and through the Bhakti yogam the jivatma attains salvation).

Sri Sundararama Vajpayee enjoys the above explanation and shares the same with me whenever he meets me.

Though the absolute surrender (prapatti) does not rely on the rites (karma yogam) for fulfillment, it is the philosophy of our ancestors that the surrendered (prapannas) should perform the rites as a service the Lord as prescribed in the scriptures.

Hence the Sri vaishnava house holders should perform agni hotram, yajñams etc..., to the extent possible.

Sri Vajapeyee compliments the above philosophy and diet discipline of Sri Vaishnavas. He praises our discipline.

It is his wish that at least few young Sri Vaishnavas should become the performers of Soma yaga and they should be able to help each other as ritviks.

Let this wish be fulfilled due to the mercy of Paduka devi.

Let us get into the commentary of our mantra.

This Emperuman, who is 'atir kural sangattu azagan', wishes that the devotees who come to offer their obeisance should come with His disguise and hence we could see lot of villagers with His disguise during the procession. It would look as

though He has entered all of them and become like them. This has been described as 'viśvasyāṁ viśi praviviśivāgmsam' by Vedattāzhwan.

We should surrender to such an azagar, is denoted by the word 'īmahe'. Vedattāzhwan prays that He has to relieve us from our sins by saying sano muñcatvagmhasaḥ.

Thus through the second interpretation of the first verse of mṛgāram, we get the following meaning: "I meditate upon .... of Azagar, who has beautiful parts in the body, who has been praised by Vedas, who is the benefactor for all types of people or who holds the conch in His hand. We surrender to the azagar who has entered all the people or one who resides in all the people who are in His disguise. Let Him relieve us from all our sins".

Arthur Berriedale Keith has translated the entire taitireeya samhita into English. His translation will reflect the Veda bhashya. We, who consider Veda as Vedattāzhwan, can enjoy the same with the following modification:

**Of Arangan (Azagar) first I reckon the wise ones  
Him of the five folk whom many kindle  
Him who hath entered into every concourse we implore  
May he relieve us from tribulation!**