

Sollin Selvar

Ra.Ganapati



Translated from the Tamil by
Prabha Sridevan
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Translator's Note

Etymologically, 'translate' means 'to carry'. So the translator carries the words of the speaker or writer from one language to another. So when one carries the words of Mahaperiyava, the 'weight' and responsibility is heavier than Bharata's when he carries Rama's 'tiruvadi'. I am acutely aware of it. In fact, in these lectures written as spoken by Mahaperiyava by Sri Ra. Ganapati interspersed with his own Bhakti-drenched observations, Mahaperiyava speaks of the paduka episode.

The title Sollin Selvar needs to be explained. Periyava talks of Anjaneya and his greatness and calls him by that name. This phrase is actually used by Rama about Anjaneya. It means someone who uses words in the best possible way, who has words as his wealth. Kamban's Rama is amazed at Hanuman's mastery of words and refers to him as "sollin selvar?". The title applies equally, in Sri Ra. Ganapati's opinion, to Periyava too. We decided, poor in words, as we are, not to try to translate the words dense with meaning, but to retain them in Tamil.

It is my great fortune, that this is the second time I am 'carrying' Periyava's words. The first was a set of lectures including His explanation of the Shatpadi slokam (Wisdom and Grace-Kalaimagal-2020).

My first thanks and vandanam to Mahaperiyava for blessing me with this task. My thanks and namaskaram to Sri Ra. Ganapati for giving us this extraordinary book. My thanks to Justice Kannan and Smt. Lakshmi for facilitating the project. My thanks to Smt. Rajani Arjun Shankar my co-translator.

Chennai - 600004

Prabha Sridevan

December 2023

Publisher's Note

DIVYA VIDHYA TRUST ceased its publications more than a decade back, but the author Late Ra.Ganapati's niece Mrs. Lakshmi Anand has published from USA, where she lives, some of the Trust's original Tamil editions as expressions of devotion and respect to her uncle, like, *Jaya jaya Sankara.. Hara Hara Sankara...*, *Mahaperiyaval virundu*, *Leela Nataka Sai* and now, *Karunai Kanchi Kanakadharai*. The author's sister, Smt. Thirupuram, has been kind enough to give rights to publish some titles as eBooks through Pustaka Publishers. The publication of this book in English came in an unexpected way.

Justice Prabha Sridevan disclosed more than a year back that she had, for the sheer love of reading and enjoying the text - 'Sollin Selvar', started translating one or two chapters from Tamil to English and gave to one of us to read. I imagined Periava speaking the words the way she had written. I felt thrilled and requested her to continue with other chapters and told her that we might perhaps publish it. We have known her to be a prolific and an acclaimed English translator of some of the eminent authors. She obliged us enthusiastically and gave one chapter each week for rest of 9-10 weeks. Rajani, a scholar and teacher of Sanskrit volunteered to translate the remaining few chapters and said that she deemed the task as a blessing of Periava and the chance to be associated with Justice Prabha, an honour. We thank the translators for their admirable work. We believe, the translation in English will make possible a readership far beyond the Tamil knowing audience,

The artist Keshav put just not his drawing prowess to lend colour and beauty to the wrapper but added his devotion to the Holiness secure an ineffable value addition that only His blessings to him could make it happen. We offer our sincere appreciation and gratitude to his conceptualisation of the content and title of the book by his admirable drawing. We thank our cousin Smt. Thirupuram for giving us the permission to publish this book.

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K. Kannan & R. Yashod Vardhan

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1. Krishna - Sweetness Complete

Madhuramo zhi nallumaiyal siruvan malaradiyai

Muthira ninaiya vallaarku arido?

(Avvaiyar's pillayar Thudhi)

(Is there anything impossible for those who in complete devotion dwell on the flower-like feet of Lord Vinayaka, son of the sweet-tongued and compassionate Goddess Uma?)

“Ev...erything about Him is sweet.” Sri Kanchi Periyava begins in his soft voice to speak of His sweetness, his heart flowing with the honey of devotion.

Who is that He? If we lend our ears to that divine voice, it will become clear.

“He was born in Madura, not the Madura of our Pandya country. Here too there is the goddess who is the embodiment of sweetness. Music was born from her...yes, the goddess of music whom we call Mathangi and Syamala is none other than Meenakshi. Music means sweetness isn't it? This is then Madurai, Madurai of the south.

“I am referring to Vada Madurai, the Madurai of the North. It is in U.P. on the banks of Yamuna. For some reason, instead of saying *Madhura*, they say *Mathura*. The Telugu people turn *tha* into *dha*, here the northerners have made *dha* into *tha*. The white man on the other hand made it *Muttra*. The Lord's incarnation was there...in the jail. The Lord who is our Paramapada, the transcendent goal, was born in a jail only because of his sweetness. It was because of this nature that He wanted to be incarnated and be one among

the common people and uplift them. This sweetness is another name for compassion. It was because he was born in Madhura that Andaal has sung “Vadamadhurai maindhanai.”

“As soon as he was born there, his father carried him just like that and left him in Gokulam. Madhura is on the west of Yamuna, Gokulam and Brindavan are on the east. Vasudeva just waded through the waters, left the infant in Gokulam next to Yasoda, then picked up the girl baby born to her and returned to the jail.

“Everything that happened is illegal.” Periyava laughs loudly.

“Here escaping from the jail unknown to the guards, not only that. Even in Gokulam. Neither the new mother, nor the women who attended on her, or anyone knew that the new-born child was a girl and she was replaced by Vasudeva. Everything is done clandestinely and accomplished in the same way.

“*Krishna*, means stealing, he stole both the butter and our hearts. We call him *Navaneethachora* and *Chittachora*. From where did he get this nature? I think it was inherited by him from his father who did so many things in stealth, as soon as Krishna was born.

Periyava’s smiles are like tiny flowers strung in a garland. He continues.

“But it is wrong to think like that, I made that remark in levity. Poor Vasudevan, he was a gentle person, truly innocent. It was the child who made him do all these stealthy acts. It is only because the guards went into a stupor-like sleep that he could escape. Further the jail lock opened on its own. Similarly, it was only because everyone in Gokulam was in a deep slumber that he could easily accomplish his task. Was it the doing of that innocent man? No, it was the wizard who was born as his son who did all this. It is this that Andaal gently and not blatantly refers to when she sings *Maayanai*. And follows it up with *Vadamadurai maindanai*. What is that *mannu*? It means someone who has immortal repute. We even have a paasuram “*Mannu pugazh Kosalaithan mani vayiru vaathavane*” That

is by Kulasekhara Perumal in praise of Sri Rama.(mentioning Kausalya, his mother)¹

In this song by Andaal too there is a mention of Krishna's mother. "*Thaayai kudal vilakkam seyda Damodaranai*" It means that by being in her womb, the mother's womb gained radiance and sanctity. The words themselves fit here so aptly and beautifully. Before that Andaal writes, "*Aayar kulathinil thonrum anivilakkai*"; which means Yadukula deepam or the light of the Yadu race. It is not just an ordinary lamp- it is an ornamental lamp, a decorative lamp. So, the One who was a light himself, is said to have lit up his mother's womb.

"*Kasmalam*, that is dirt, waste product, *kasumalam* is even used as a slang word commonly. If we want to remove it castor oil or *vilakkennai* is given.² It does not mean the oil used for vilakku or lamp, it means the oil that cleanses. That dirt refers to external dirt or excreta. But here in this phrase Andaal means that the mother's inner self was cleansed, by the Lord residing in her womb. Even otherwise Devaki was pure, that is why Swami chose her *jatara* or womb. And thereby she became even more pure.

"Because He was born to her, instead of calling Him her son or *maindan*, His birth place is honoured by saying *Vadamadurai maindan*. It is said that our mother who gave us life and our mother land are greater than heaven or swarga. *Janani janmabhumischa swargaadapi gariyasi*. Here the mother is mentioned first and then the motherland or you may say the birthplace. But Andaal mentions the birthplace first, and then the mother. Why, because Madurai has such greatness. What is that greatness? The Swami who is without a beginning, a birth, was born in this place. We are born again and again through a womb, *punarapi janani jatarey sayanam*; and this place liberates people like us. Seven places are called mokshapuri, first is Rama's Ayodhya, next comes Krishna's Vadamadurai.

1 All the Transtato's note should be footnotes.

2 Periyava plays upon the Tamil word "vilakku" which means both "to light" and "to clean"

“More than that, you know what I think is its greatness. The name of that city is Madura or sweet, which is the Swami’s nature. What is Krishna? Sweetness, means such sweetness.

Periyava’s voice is drenched with sweetness as He has fully tasted it.

“What is special about this sweetness, is that though he did many things that do not appear to be sweet, even those fill the devotees’ hearts with sweetness. Not only the great devotees like Andaal, Sukar, Leelasukar, Meera, even people like us with a tiny spot of devotion, feel that anything Krishna does is sweet. It is as if he is saying, ‘Look here, I have that sweetness, so I will do any atrocity, misdeed, stealth or deception.’ He has carried out this challenge all his life.

“Shall I tell you how even the acts that are not sweet, became sweet? Now take the sugar sweets of various shapes, let us imagine those sweets are made in the shape of a green chili, a bitter gourd or a lump of salt, will not that green chili, that bitter gourd, that lump of salt taste sweet? Because the appearance is only external, is it not? Essentially they are all made of sugar. It is like that.

“Among the didactic works in Tamil, there are two called “*Iniyavai Narpadu*” and “*Inna narpadu*” each containing forty verses. *Inna* means that which causes harm, *Iniyavai* means those that are good. These two books have been written to tell us what is good and bad. When we think of Lord Krishna, not just forty, everything is sweet or *iniyavai*. We can even sing about him as the endless sweetness or *Iniyavai anantham*. It is because of that conviction, that he did a lot of what is wrong or *inna* in this incarnation. All those wrong acts are only on-the-surface deeds- essentially there is only sweetness.

Inimai is the Tamil word for Maduram, when we speak we use the word *thithippu*. The literary word is *inimai*. Some Tamil words have extraordinary beauty. The sound and the meaning, synchronise so well. One such word is *inimai*, not one hard sound there, all soft.

In English we say sweet for *maduram*, the elongated vowel in ‘sweet’ sounds sweet, it ends with the sharp ‘t’. Someone said in a light-hearted way that what sounds silken when you say *kuzhal inidu yaazh inidu*

with the *zha* sound becomes hard with tap-tap sound when translated as ‘Flute sweet, lute sweet.’

Periyava does not complete the sentence, but with a delicate gesture closes his ears.

“Even in Sanskrit, when we say *madhura*, the *dha* sound is indeed harsh. There is another nicer word *svadhu*. The *dha* sound in this is not as harsh as the *dha* sound in *Madhuram*. The English ‘sweet’ came from *svadhu*, but the light *dha* became the harsh ‘ta’.

“Even in English there are many lovely words, the special sounds and special meanings. For the same object, there are different words to indicate and distinguish the differences in it. There are many such instances in English. For example, let us take *pani* or condensation. The ‘moisture’ becomes ‘dew’ when it is cold; if it covers like a blanket, it is ‘fog’; if it is smoky it becomes ‘smog’ combining smoke and fog! If it hardens it is ‘frost’. If it hardens from the water state, it is ‘ice’. If the moist air in the atmosphere hardens directly it is ‘snow’. If that moisture becomes water and hardens as it rains it is ‘hail’. So many words to show the different shades of meaning! For our single word *unarchi*, they distinguish very well by using the words ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’.

“While speaking of *madhuram* and *inimai*, I have gone on to say something not pleasant, but I do not intend to diminish any one or any language.

Just see how Periyava makes amends for lightly mocking English, by highlighting its special features! That is his all-enveloping sweetness.

He smiled at some thought that occurred to him and then voices it. “Now didn’t I feel apologetic about something that I said which was not proper? Krishna will not do that. There is no such thing as ‘right’ and ‘not right’ in his dictionary. All that he does is sweet, sweet and nothing but sweet, even an act that is not right.

Then Periyava blossomed into a smile.

“In all the roles that he has played, if there is a whiff of apology in any one, even that is sweet. That is why one of his great devotees

has sung, “*maduradhipate: akilam maduram*”(Whatever the ruler of Madhura does is sweet.)

It is a sloka containing eight verses, known as *Madhurashtakam*. The last line of every verse is *maduradhipate: akilam maduram*. The other three lines of each verse will describe his appearance, his nature and his deeds or something connected to him. Each line mentions two such aspects and terms them as being sweet.

“I shall tell you the first verse as an example. The first line in that is *adharam madhuram vadanam madhuram*. Swami’s lips are sweet, and His face is sweet, you have two aspects and both are called sweet.

“Why does the poet mention the lips right in the beginning? When we say sweet we mean music is it not? Sweet songs, sweet voice, and so on, this is how it is described whatever language it might be. Didn’t I tell you earlier, that Meenakshi of *then Madurai* is the presiding deity of music? Her brother in *vadamadurai* is also a lover of music, *gana lolan*. If She is *veenagana priya* He is *venugana lolan*. Just like the words *kuzhal* and *yaazh*, the words *venu* and *veena* sound sweet themselves. All the other deities hold a weapon in their hands. Even Rama, the personification of compassion holds a bow. Only Krishna holds a flute, He is even called Venugopalan, Muralidharan and so on. And he keeps the flute on his lips and plays it, right? The divine breath inside him is blown through the flute, that it is so sweet, and makes everyone mad with intoxication.

“We show our love by kisses. It seems the gopika women are jealous of the flute, because Krishna is always kissing it with his lips.

“Does he have to play the flute to make sweet sounds? Just his speech is so sweet. In another verse of this sloka that is also described (beginning of the second verse) as *vachanam madhuram*.

Normally a philosophic lecture will be terribly boring, but when it is Sri Krishna’s lecture, even that is sweet like a song. Don’t we call it Bhagavad Gita? The child who played the flute, grew up and taught us wisdom and that too was sweet.

“These are all connected to the lips, and hence *adharam madhuram*.

Like these each line barring the last line of the quatrain refers to two sweet things. That means six per verse. Six multiplied by eight gives forty-eight sweet things, that are described in Madhurastakam.

“The author is Vallabhacharya. For him the only god is Balakrishna, and on this basis he has formulated a philosophy called Suddhadvaita. This is a philosophy just like Advaita or Visishtadvaita. People in the north, in particular, those in Gujarat, follow this. When there are different philosophies there is bound to be conflict and animosity. Let us leave that. Any devotional poem will touch the heart, he has composed this Madhurashtakam to gladden all hearts. Though we can say everything is sweet, the way he has chosen forty eight sweet features of Krishna delights the ears whenever you listen to them.

Periyava scans his eyes over the small paper printed with *Madhurashtakam*. “Bhagavan’s *adharam, vadanam, nayanam. hasitam* -that is smile, His *hridayam, gamanam* -that is the gait, His *vachanam, charitam, vasanam* -meaning the garment He is wearing or it may also mean Gokulam where He resides.” Like this the poet goes on listing, one by one and says that each one is sweet.

“It is not surprising that these things are described to be sweet. But what is special is that he adds few more which normally we will not associate with sweetness; they become sweet because of the Krishna connection. He mentions for instance, *valitam, haranam* and *vamitam*. *Valitam* is the slanted or bent pose. This is not normally sweet. But Bhagavan with flute in hand bends His head to the left, from neck down to waist is bent to the right, then again from the waist He bends left again, the right foot is placed at an angle to the left foot; thus there are three bends, and this is celebrated as *tribhanga* and admired for its beauty.

Periyava laughs and says, “Crooked person! In fact Azhvar says *konai peridudaithe*. Even that crookedness is sweet, lovely.

“Madhuram or sweet, only means good lovely, what else?

“An amusing thought. There are many people who do not like sweets. The people in the north are sweet-lovers, the southern like spicy food. And some refuse to touch sweets. There are people who like food that is a bit more salty, sour, bitter or astringent. Some always add a

pinch of salt more. But even they, when describing good people, call them sweet. Not bitter, sour or salt-natured! Sweet nature is the term that is used not only in our country, but all over the world. If someone speaks angrily, we say he used hot words, or if that person is dejected, we say he spoke bitterly, or if something is repeated *ad nauseam*, we say *Kettu kettu pulichu pocchu* (literally translated it means it is sour to listen to the same thing); or if someone uses insulting words, we say *Karichu kottade* (literally translated it means pouring salt) Thus we use the six kinds of taste to describe human nature, but sweet is used for goodness even by those who dislike sweets.

“It is because Bhagavan has all the good qualities, we say *anantha kalyana guna*. So everything is sweet.

“Bhagavan is the to... tally ripe state, no?”, Periyava smiles indicating an inner ecstasy, “He is the seed and the root for everything, he is also the end product that is the fruit. If you say fruit, there will be a sweetness of its own. Even the neem fruit, is sweeter when it is ripe than when it is in an unripe state, is it not? (Periyava compares the veppampazham and veppankai)

“Then the sloka says *haranam madhuram*. This means snatching or to put it plainly ‘stealing’. Krishna steals butter and he steals hearts, both are so sweet. Isn’t it better to have our butter stolen by Krishna than to eat it ourselves? If we eat the sweetness is only what we taste, but if it is stolen from us, not by anyone but by Krishna, then it is an all pervading sweetness.

Then he, the poet, says *vamitam maduram*. ‘Vomit’ comes from this word. *Samanam* became *Santhi*, *vamanam* became *vanthi*. (The tamil word for vomit) Normally we feel like throwing up when we even just think of vomit. But if Krishna does it? It is also sweet. Maybe he did it just to prove it. *Vamitam* can also mean rinse the mouth. Suppose he filled his mouth with the waters of Yamuna and sprinkled it on some Gopika’s face, she would have been thrilled. Even today we are delighted to read about all his pranks.

“*bhuktham madhuram* is mentioned twice. Depending on the context we must give different meanings. First it says *peetham madhuram*,

bhuktham madhuram. *Peetham* means drink. It must have been lovely to see Balakrishnan sip the milk with relish. When *bhuktham* comes with it, it must mean only to eat by association. The one who feeds the Universe, when He eats, it must be a delightful sight. Next is *yuktham madhuram bhuktham madhuram*. *Yogam* and *bhogam* are a pair. *Bhogam* is enjoyment of material and worldly pleasures, *yogam* is spiritual bliss. So *bhogam* is enjoyed by *bhuktham* and *yogam* is enjoyed by *yuktham*. Krishna was the wizard non-pareil and the Omniscient one, he was simultaneously playing both roles in Krishnavatara. Yes that is what He did.” Periyava smiles, revealing the secret of that incarnation.

“Like this he goes on enumerating many sweet aspects of Sri Krishna and concludes the *ashtakam* with *dhalitam madhuram, palitam madhuram*. *Dhalitam* means to break or to smash; we too say it broke all records. Like this, He actually accomplished everything like an expert. In his childhood he really broke and smashed the Asuras. Later He gave expression to his resolution by remaining as tool to help Arjuna and others to smash their enemy forces. “*Kaalosmi*” He says in the Gita “I am death”; and made Arjuna shiver with fear. Even in that frightening aspect, a sweetness would be latent. Even When he is Kala the destroyer, He is sweet, why, even to the one who is being destroyed! Why? Because when He destroys, he is granting liberation to that person. The feminine of Kala is Kali, or Kali (periyava stresses the different pronunciation of ‘la’). She is there in Tiruvaachur.

“We can understand it also as breaking the heart without breaking the body. When the gopikas were suffering the pangs of separation, he had broken their hearts. Who are the they? They are a...ll the devotees whose hearts are fully filled with love for Him. For them in that process of being broken they will discern sweetness inside themselves. It is because one incessantly thinks of the other more when separated than when being together. And thoughts of Krishna are sweet!

“After *dhalitam*, comes *palitam* which is directly opposite. It means attaining what you desire, fulfillment of one’s object. Bhagavan who is ripeness itself, is the one who grants this fulfillment to all living beings.

“In particular, the two terms *dhalitam*, and *palitam* must be taken to mean the heart broken devotee who suffers the separation, and who by his devotion attains the object.

“Becoming one with Him, is the ultimate sweetness when non-duality is realized.

“Just as they serve fruits at the end of the dinner, he has concluded the feast of this Ashtakam sweetly and auspiciously.

Periyava is in a state of sacred silence. Then as though struck by a cheerful thought, he continues.

“In the last but one verse, it says *yashtirmadhuraa srushtirmadhura*. *Yashti* means a stick, Krishna would have held a stick in his hand like the other cowherd boys, driving the cows and calves..” *hey... hey*”. The Lord of Vaikuntha itself has come down in such a sweet form. How accessible to all! If the ruler of the three worlds who holds the scepter, comes down to hold the stick to herd the cattle, what sweet simplicity! Even this tiny bamboo stick, the *yashti*, will seem sweet, and it must be sweet even to be goaded by it.

“In the same breath, he speaks of *yashti* and *srishiti*. The Bhagavatam contains an episode when this Balakrishnan in the garb of a cowherd boy, created something too (*srishiti*). Brahma once, without comprehending the secret of the incarnation, spirited away all the cows and the cowherd boys who were with Krishna.

“Oh? Is that so?” Krishna thought and did something. If he had only wished it, He could have brought back all the cows and the young boys in the twinkling of an eye. Isn't he the repository of wizardry? Does not Andaal begin with the word “*Maayanai*”? But He thought it was beneath his dignity to copy the trick practiced by his son who had learnt from him. So he did another trick. He created exact duplicates of the cows and cowherds carried away by Brahma. This is how the cowherd Krishna did *srishiti*.

“Though in the Trinity, the original of this incarnation has Protection as his portfolio, he can himself be the Creator and the Destroyer. Just now I told you, how he showed the aspects of Creator, and I mentioned

earlier how he says “*kaalosmi*”; from that we can deduce his aspect as destroyer. Siva also is like this. Brahma alone of the Trinity can only do Creation and nothing else. So he was perplexed, not knowing how to protect the cows and cowherds he had carried away. He realized he was being punished for testing his father, and he rushed to the father who was now in the form of a child; he fell down at his feet and sought forgiveness. The all-merciful Lord forgave him, and withdrew the “duplicate” creations within himself and restored the original cows and cowherds as before.

“During that period, Brahma had rushed down anxiously, one whole year had gone by on earth. During that entire period, since the cows and cowherds created by Krishna were going about and doing things just like the originals in their respective homes, no one guessed that there was any difference.

“But that was just on the surface. The parents of those boys felt an extra love towards these children that they had never felt before. Similarly the cows felt towards their calves. It is said that the grownup cowherds would graze the grown up cows and the boys like Krishna grazed the calves. (Till now) I have not explained it clearly. (laughingly) So, here is the corrigendum.

“Do you know the reason for this extra love? These boys and calves are not Brahma’s creations, they are the creations of the One who is the personification of sweetness. It is that sweetness that made the love flow. So *srishtir madhura*.

“I think there is another meaning for referring to *yashtirmadhura* earlier. Magicians and wizards hold a wand in their hand. Then they wave it saying, “*Choo mandrakali*” or some such words. Immediately the magic will happen. English men also use the term ‘magic wand’. The usage of this word *yashti* seems to indicate that Krishna swung his cowherd’s stick and created the ‘duplicate’ cowherd boys and calves! It is enough for the Lord to just think about it, and it will happen, He does not need a tool, but it is his habit to show a tool for all his magic sport. (Pariyava smiles within). Instead of showing that it was done by just his will, it is his playfulness to ascribe it to some tool. So when he created them, he might have waved the stick.

“In total, like that great poet said, everything about Krishna is sweet, *maduradhipaterakilam maduram*. Aandal called him *madhuraimaindan*, this poet says he is Madhura’s adhipathi. Krishna got this title after he killed Kamsa. In fact Krishna did not rule Madhura, he entrusted it to Kamsa’s father Ugrasena. A little later, he ruled Dwaraka that was constructed by him, jointly with his elder brother Balarama and on his behalf. He was really at heart an ascetic, though he fully indulged in romantic exploits and other such sport. It is the sweet steadiness of heart, *yuktham madhuram* or the yogi’s sweetness.

There is another very appropriate meaning for *Madhuradhipathi*. He is the lord of the sweetness principle. So he is *Madhuradhipathi*.

“His sweetness should spread a...ll over the world, and sprout in our hearts too.

Periyava’s hands fold together, and his eyes close. It is a wondrous sight like a flower holding within it an abundance of honey.

Looking at that sight, our eyes become wet, and everyone is totally quiet. Can there be something sweeter than the Voice of the Divine dwelling in Divine silence?

Periyava is also Total sweetness, but he has not indulged in pranks and mischief that are sweet. The reason is, our Mahaperiyava has taken birth to show the path of Dharma to mankind. He has extracted the essence of human life, its nature, and all its aspects without leaving any lacunae, and given it to us with all its sweetness. So he too is madhuram personified.

In the huge gopuram that is Maha periyava, at every level there are numerous idols that are the different facets. I will deal with some of them.

‘*Adharam madhuram*’ is the beginning of the slokam Madhurashtakam. It is our good fortune that this volume begins with this chapter where our Periyava has dealt with sweetness in his characteristic sweet fashion.

The water of the salty ocean evaporates and condenses as rain that is not salty. This rain becomes many rivers, and all of them join the

same ocean. But Periyava is a mighty ocean of sweetness, and from him flowed many streams of sweetness that unite with him again.

What I give here are small spoonfuls of those rivers. Yes, even if I write a hundred pages, it will be just a spoonful of the width and expanse of the original.

Well, now, which stream shall we choose first?

What is the doubt? We will look at the felicity Periyava had in pouring words that are nectar (*vachanamrutham*) and his true mastery over speech.

Vachanamrutham, is not a term said in formal politeness nor is it a hyperbole. It is the absolute truth. Indeed combining in himself many skills, he is also an emperor of words. Not an emperor who throws his weight around, but an emperor who pours sweetness.¹ He did not use in his lectures any of those artifices used by a professional speaker, but spoke so simply that even a child could understand. However puns and alliterations came on their own, and sparkled in his lectures. He is not a speaker who planned his speeches; do the rivers and seas draw limits to the waves with the aid of a geometry box? The waves rise and fall as the wind blows. Yet they are so beautiful, in the same way Periyava spoke naturally as his thoughts took him. The term “naturally” is dense with meaning. He would immediately tell us if he is unable to recall some fact or if he not fully conversant with some subject. Even Homer nods they say -like wise, Periyava may make a slip, but once he realized that, without any hesitation he would tell us that it was a slip.

In spite of all this, or because of all this, his simple lectures captivate us more than anyone else’s ornate orations, and also cause deep and wonderful changes in us. This is what is called Spiritual strength.

Sri Rama called Hanuman “The master of words”(Sollin selvan). We will begin with Periyava’s smooth-flowing torrent of thoughts about the greatness of Hanuman.

1 Here Periyava plays on the words *adhikaram* (power) and *adhi karam*(too spicy)

We have already savoured the beauty of Periyava's speech when he explained Madhurashtakam. Anything he speaks about will be like that, because it flows from his heart, and his heart is the repository of boundless love for all. And if he is going to speak about Hanuman, a *sollin selvan*, it will be sweetness crystallized, a huge rock candy. (kalkandu). True, His speech will not be like an ordinary oration of other speakers, but it will sound like a personal conversation with a few of us. That is how he went on speaking about Anjaneya all night like a Sivaratri and then continued on the next evening too from where he left. That is how he dealt with Anjaneya Mahatmiyam. The excellence of language and thought made it a literary creation.

If a person has mastery over words, he must have mastery over thought too. "Depth of meaning" indicates that every felicitous phrase has as its basis deep thought.

The words of mahapurushas like our Mahaperiyava who have great ability and great humility can only speak in sentences that possess excellence of thought and words. Sometimes it may be just word-play, but it will be enhanced by humour.

Why should I go on expatiating about the banquet in store, without serving that to the readers?

Before sharing what Periyava said about *sollin selvan*, We will tell you how he explained why words are wealth.

2. Words as Measure of One's Worth

Some devotee, during his conversation with Periyava, praised him as “*sollin selvar*”, like us. How could Periyava, the storehouse of humility, accept this? He refuted thus:

“When can we say words are (one’s) wealth? Only when one really handles it like wealth. How do we handle wealth? Of course, we may do it all wrong. So, what we do carries no value. Let’s see how the treatises of moral instruction tell us to deal with wealth. That’s what matters. It is said (in those books) that one must cherish wealth, is it not? All the great men we know, advise us to be thrifty. Except for charity and good causes, one must spend within limits, without wasting even a little. This is the way shown by the scriptures.

Similarly, we must treat words like wealth and use them sparingly. But the meaning must be conveyed clearly. Just like we ensure that the nourishment needed for life is not compromised by being thrifty, we must use words precisely, without affecting the health of their import.

The supreme example of this is (the Tamil literary work) Tirukkural. (The author) Tiruvalluvar has authored it in such an amazing manner, that all aspects educating us on how to lead life, are in small couplets . The book itself is small and handy. There is a chapter in it, titled “*solvanmai*” (Eloquence) with ten couplets. One of them says ‘Only a dim-witted person who cannot express his thoughts in a few words, uses many.’

The word “*selvam*” (wealth) also becomes “*chellam*” (treasure). If “*selvam*” is a living thing and we cherish it lovingly, with affection, it becomes “*chellam*”. We address children as “*chel...lam*” and carry them around. This is how we must treasure and safeguard words and

only such a person who treasures words and uses them in a measured manner is a ‘*sollin selvar*’.

‘And you are praising me as *that*...!’

Notice his humility: even to refute what his devotee extolled him to be, Periyava could not bring himself to repeat the phrase “*sollin selvar*” and converted it to “that”. This humility is one of his infinite sweet qualities.

“I am very ‘*vala vala*’ (verbose). I lack the art of telling (something) concisely and making others understand. When I take up “*maunam*” (vow of silence), I sometimes extend it so much that (all of) you start thinking restlessly ‘Won’t he break his silence?’ When I do break it, I make up by talking incessantly, day and night. Maybe you would think the silence to be preferable. But then (mine) being a position of respect, you cannot request me to stop talking, the way you could request the silence to be ended.”

He laughed heartily.

“There exists a huge gap between me and the act of using words sparingly. But in another sense, I use words like wealth. It is said in jest that wealth is called “*selvam*” because it keeps getting spent, it never stays in one place as if saying “*selvōm*” (we are leaving). Acharya says ‘*lakṣmīstoya taraṅga bhaṅga capalā*’, meaning that wealth is a wave in the ocean, never stationary and ever transient. In this sense, I expend words unlimitedly, like spending wealth.”

Can we say Periyava is verbose? Even when he speaks in an elaborate manner, meandering through topics, all of that is filled with meaning and fascinating. It has richness (“*valamai*”) and make us grow (“*valara*”), and so, in that sense, we could call it “*vala vala*”.

Out of compassion for us, who lack intelligence and retention, he has sacrificed his ability to explain concisely, and explains the same topic in many ways, repeatedly, so that we can understand it well and fix it in our minds and hearts deeply, to never forget. There are brilliant succinct statements he has made, to those who have the maturity to understand them.

In general conversations and public discourses too, such pithy statements have appeared. Like lightning that illumines the skies in a trice, in a few sentences he could clarify even lofty, sky-high concepts. You will see instances of that in the offerings that follow.

We now enter the book “*Sollin Selvar*” and experience the sweetness of his wealth of words verbatim, like fresh milk.

It’s right to begin from the basics, so Periyava starts with “*adi*” (feet) .

3. Fraternal Love Epitomised

“**E**ven brothers will not serve us as much as a slap¹ is a well-known proverb. Usually everyone understands it in one way (Periyava smiles). But it would mean it incites all to violence, and bloodshed. It is indeed to mean disciplining the child. That is why, the proverb.

‘Proverb is *pazhamozhi* in Tamil. It means a moral saying handed down over generations. It will reflect human nature like a photograph, or else it will be something that hits the nail on the head. Though it is a moral saying, it is not prosaic, but interesting and enjoyable. So we can say they are words *mozhi*, that are tasty like a *pazham* a fruit, tasty in the sense it is appealing to the head and the heart.

“The proverb I mentioned earlier is actually only meant for children. But then does it say the children, the poo...r children, should be treated cruelly? This moral saying seems to be a monstrous saying!

When Periyava says ‘children’, it is so melting and there is such compassion in the ‘poo...r’, everything is sweet. But are only those words sweet? The heat of a mother’s agony on seeing her child break down can be heard in Periyava’s searing words ‘monstrous saying’; and that too is sweet.

In a moment, the rage cools down like sandal paste, and Periyava continues.

“That is not the meaning. The general rule is children should be brought up with love, care and compassion, that is why Tiruvalluvar calls children ‘wealth’ (*makkatselvam*) and has composed ten extraordinary

¹ This is the equivalent of Spare the rod and spoil child. Here Periyava plays on the Tamil word for “slap” *adi*. This means ‘slap’ and ‘foot’. The Tamil proverb says “*adi udavara madiri annan thambi udava mattaan*’

kurals on children alone. The title of that section is ‘makkat peru’. ‘Peru’ means the most precious and divine wealth. It is called ‘bhagyam’ in Sanskrit. That is why we say ‘putra bhagyam’ and that is how children should be treated. This is the general rule. But if we are always indulging the child, what will happen? The child will become spoil. That will be the consequence. You know, tantrums, stubbornness, disobedience, refusing to study, not doing anything but mischief, shouting, screaming and so on. In order that a child does not go that way, with the child’s welfare at heart, some discipline is required, a light tap. This is the meaning of this proverb. In English too they say ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’¹. If there is no discipline or a juicy knock, the child will be a waste. We say ‘kuttichuvar’, they say ‘spoil’.

Even this is a meaning given to the proverb, seeing it on the surface, what they call ‘superficial’. To construe it as something that incites people to violence is very superficial. To treat it as an aphorism about the need to discipline children goes a little deeper. But even that does not indicate a complete comprehension of the saying.

If you go deep, the meaning is totally different. It speaks of a very high truth. Just like the songs of the Siddhas, where the real meaning has no connection with what appears on the face of them.

“What is that?”

There is a dramatic pause. Shouldn’t the listeners be left in suspense, to whet their curiosity? Hunger is the best sauce. Only if we are given the information after our interest is aroused, our forgetful brains internalize and benefit by the message.

After a small silence, Periyava continues. But the suspended proverb is left mid-air, and He proceeds to cite an example from the songs of Siddhas. But we will not do that. We will directly come to the explanation given for the proverb. Oh you ask what about the siddha song then? We will share that later.

“The deep meaning for the *adi* proverb is, in this context *adi* is *tiru adi*. It is the term used to refer to the feet of God. It does not mean the

1 Periyava says this in English.

stinging slap, or the treatment administered by the class teacher with a foot-rule.

“I realize now that I have used a pun, only after I said it. When we say foot-rule, we refer to the linear measurement foot equal to twelve inches. Now of course everything has become decimal, and maybe you all know only metre and centimetre. So when the teacher beats with a foot rule, he is giving an *adi* with an *adi*. *Padam* in Sanskrit means a foot or *adi*. That *padam* became the Greek *pedos* and by gradual changes (laughing), it wandered from India to England and became ‘foot’ in English.

“These twelve inches equaling one foot, they say, it is based on the human foot. But will anyone have such long feet? Even if someone is very tall and well-built, I think their foot cannot be more than ten inches.

Our Periyava’s feet are small, like women, like Ambal. They call Anjaneya as *siriya tiruvadi* (the younger tiruvadi or smaller tiruvadi). Our Periyava also is a *siriya tiruvadi*, soft lotus like feet.

“Perhaps, in the earlier yugas, people were much taller than now. We read in the puranas about men being tall like the palm tree. Maybe the word ‘foot’ came like that. But if we say that, the white man will disagree. According to their research, the ancient man, whom they call the Stone Age man, was much bigger than us, but language was not formed then. They say those people communicated by gestures and grunts, so there no word for the leg, and certainly not for the ‘foot’. But I am unable to find out why they have given the same word for a term of measurement and for the part of the leg. If intelligent people give it a thought, they may find out.

Periyava is an example of humility just like Anjaneya ‘*buddhimatam varishtam*’.

“We say *angulam* for ‘inch’, the correct definition for *angulam*, is it is one-twelfth of a *vitasthi*. That is twelve Angulams, make a *vitasthi*. We know how long a *vitasthi* is. That is one *saan* (Tamil), which they call a ‘span’. A ‘span’ is just nine inches long. If we take it as a something that is nine inch long, then it fits correctly for a ‘foot’. I think the Englishmen have misunderstood the length of a span and caused confusion.

“Since the foot is at the bottom(adi) of the human body, it is called adi. Where it ends (mudivu), that is the head, is called mudi. The waist is at the middle(arai) so it is called arai. It is from that we get the word arai-naan-kayiru, as it is tied round the waist. Half the body is below the arai, and those are the two legs (kaal). If you divide arai $\frac{1}{2}$ by kaal $\frac{1}{4}$ the answer is two, right? That is why we call the leg kaal.

“In the proverb, ‘even brothers will not serve us as much as a slap’, it talks of *adi*, which is really the foot. Not our feet, but the Lord’s feet, the *tiruvadi*, the word *tiru* indicates that the divine feet bestows all blessings. If you want to hold on to God, you must hold the feet tightly. That is how the great devotees attained liberation. Appar Swamigal has poured so meltingly about those Divine Feet in an entire Tiruthandagam (Tiruvadi thiruthandagam)

“Whoever the deity is, the *tiruvadi* greatness is extraordinary. About Ambal Kamakshi’s feet, Sri Mookar has extolled in hundred verses-the Padaravinda Sathakam. But even among them Sri Rama’s feet are more special. Why? Do we not sing the bhajan, ‘*patita pavana sita ram*’? He uplifts the fallen. Which part of his gloriously lovely body is that? The entire beauty is condensed in his feet. Srirama padam.

His voice rises unusually in intensity.

“In this incarnation, what is the first act that he did, which shingly proclaims his divinity and his munificence? Isn’t it his redemption of Ahalya’s curse? Wasn’t it his feet that did that? She was a flawless woman, she faltered for a bit, bit means half a second. But won’t a person die even if he has been electrocuted just for half a second? So her flawlessness got impaired.

“Here the poet Kambar differs from Valmiki. He says that she never faltered, and that she really thought that the disguised Indra was her husband Gautama. He has smoothed over this episode, because he truly felt he must not cast a slur on a rishipatni whom he held in deep regard.

“In the last 40, or 50 years (spoken at the end of the 70s) unfortunately, some persons in Tamil Nadu, are engaged in writing disparagingly and in vulgar terms about good epic characters and the sages and wise people; and spread these ideas by their writings, speeches, plays

and cinemas. They also proclaim the greatness of Tamil. But Kamba Ramayanam is the pinnacle of Tamil literature, and the author is called as *Kavichakravarthi*. Look at his perspective, and when you compare that to his followers, one feels anguish.

“Another matter also causes pain. I hear that even writers who do not belong to the above group, one or two who are popular writers, create characters of young women, or good married women, who suddenly fall astray. The word *patita* is translated as *vizhundava* or *vazhukki vizhundava* that means ‘fallen woman’. I am told that they write about such things with great relish. ‘Not in our country!’ is the thought that is unbearable. They celebrate festivals, in the name of Kambar, why can’t they follow him in this regard?

“Though the Kambar version appears special, when you think that he has changed the words of Valmiki who is claimed to be one who will never utter untruth...it rankles. Of course one must never find fault with Kambar whose heart was filled with devotion.

“But the consequence, of this alteration by which Ahalya is enhanced (Periyava says this with relish) is that it diminishes the greatness of Sri Rama. *Patita pavana* is the fame he attained because he sanctified one who had erred. That makes the quality bright. It is not so special if he sanctified who committed a wrong by mistake.

“Which caused her to be sanctified? It was his feet that granted Ahalya redemption.

“You may know about Rama’s vow to grant sanctuary. (*abhaya pratignai*), a vow he had taken with an intensity to give sanctuary to anyone who surrenders to him. He made a vow, ‘It maybe anyone, if he surrenders to me once, just once, saying I am yours, I belong to you, that is enough. I will protect that person from all harm and injury!’ And where will a person fall when he surrenders? At the feet, right? Which brother, elder or younger, can grant us that boon like those feet?

“Ordinarily it will be the siblings who rush to help us wholeheartedly, when we need aid, that is the blood-bond. It is that which will draw us and compel us to help. So generally, we place the siblings

on top of the list of people who will help us. That is why this proverb compares the slap to brothers. But when the God himself extends his help to us, the help given by anyone else is like a mosquito. That help can change our fate, it can grant us liberation, all other assistance cannot be even one-thousandth of its magnitude. We get that grace, if we hold on to the Lord's feet, and they will help us, they are so powerful.

“If you take Rama's case, the comparison to brothers takes on a special meaning that is brilliant. It is full of fraternal love; otherwise, the epic has Characters filled with fraternal hatred and enmity.

“Sri Rama is always with his brother Lakshmana, is it not?

“If you take any deity, we worship and meditate on the form accompanied by the consort and chief attendant. The icon in the temple is also like that. If it is Siva, he is with Ambal and Nandi, if it is Vishnu, he is with Lakshmi and Garuda. Some will be without the attendant, some deities are ascetics or celibates, so there will be no consort. The General rule is Consort and Chief Attendant; many times this attendant will also be the vehicle (*vahana*). That is because, if the devotees cry for help, the vehicle will be at hand!

“Rama alone, is not with just the consort Sita and the attendant Hanuman, but always with the brother next to him.

“Our Acharya in his Rama Bhujanga says he is ‘*sada janakilakshmano(a)bheda:*’ that is never separated from Sita and Lakshmana.

“In Valmiki Ramayana the beginning of the Rama-Ravana battle employs a strange simile.

“Sri Rama **alone** is MahaVishnu, the other three brothers are incarnations of something associated with Vishnu. Lakshmana is Adishesha, Bharata-Shartrugna are the Sangu and Chakra (The conch and the disc). We reverse the order and say Bharata is the disc and Shatrugna, the conch. But Valmiki does not say so. These four were born when their mothers drank the same divine payasam. So, the four are divisions or fractions of the Total energy of Mahavishnu,

apportioned in the same way that Dasaratha shared the payasam among the three queens. Dasaratha gave one half of the payasam to Kausalya. So in the scene of their birth Valmiki uses the word *Vishnorardham* or ‘Half of Vishnu’s power or energy.’ He gave half of the half that is quarter to Sumitra, so Lakshmana is quarter Vishnu (Periyava laughs). The remaining quarter he again divides into two and gives one-eighth to Kaikeyi and the other one-eighth to Sumitra again. So the other two are one-eighth Vishnu each!

“What I have said now is on the basis of how Valmiki describes Dasaratha distributing the payasam¹. But where he describes² Rama’s incarnation and that of the other three, he writes that Bharata was born after Rama. Rama was born under the star Punarvasu, Bharata, Pushya, that is Punarvasu and Pusam. Not only that, Valmiki says *Sakshaat Vishno: Chaturbhaga:*, not one-eighth. Then under the next star Ayilyam, were born Lakshmana and Shatrugna. Both of them are together half part of Vishnu he says. That means each is one-fourth.

“The poet even hints at Lakshmana’s Adishesha aspect. Lakshmana was born under Ayilya. It is Aslesha that has become Ayilya. Valmiki instead of using the word Aslesha uses the other name for the start Saarpam. Saarpam means connected to sarpa or serpent. Is this not a hint at Adishesha?

“The sage, who has shown Lakshmana as quarter Vishnu as per the Payasam distribution, does a strange thing in the Yuddha Kandam. When Rama comes with Lakshmana to fight the war against Ravana, he says, it was as if Indra had come with Vishnu; *Vishnuna Vasavam yatha*. Do you know who is referred to as Vishnu here? It is not Rama, but it is Lakshmana. Rama is compared to Indra. Vasava is the name of Indra.

“Mahavishnu himself was born as the son of Indra’s parents Kasyapa and Adithi, the Vamanavatara. That incarnation happened to reclaim Devaloka from Mahabali, back to Indra. Then, Vishnu came as Indra’s younger brother, very young in age. The brahmachari Vamana may

1 *Balakandam Verse 16*

2 *Balakandam verse 18*

have been attached to the elder brother Indra. So, indicating that meaning as one who was ‘with Indra’ he is even called Upendra.

“‘Upa’ means ‘sub’, that which was secondary to what is primary.(Periyava gives a gentle smile), I am unable to say lower place.(Indicates Periyava’s devotion to the Lord’s incarnation). It is like collector-sub-collector, editor-sub-editor, Indra-Upendra. Until the moment, in this incarnation when Bhagavan becomes Trivikrama, straddling the three worlds by his huge Omni-present frame, he appears as a small, short person as short as the kural couplet. It was not only his appearance, even in his conduct he was extremely modest. He was subordinate to that Indra on whose behalf he had incarnated to restore his position as the king of devas. This is a wonderful incarnation where Bhagavan shows he can be large as Trivikrama and also tiny as Vamana.

“Just like we have the name ‘Annaswami’, we also have ‘Thambiswami’, or it could be ‘Thambuswami.’ For a long time it was Telugu rule here and there was the Telugu connection in other areas too. So some Telugu words have got absorbed in Tamil, with slight changes. ‘*Thammudu* is younger brother (Thambi) in Telugu, or we may also say *Thambudu*. They say *nammi*(to believe), we say *nambi*. Maybe in the same way, *Thambudu* became shortened as *thambu* and then *thambuswami*. I wonder if that name refers to Vamanamoorthi, who came in a diminutive and simple form, and then grew so tall and large that he measured the worlds, and out of them gave away one world to his elder brother Indra.

“Or else we can take the name to signify Lakshmana. Rama is Annaswami, and Lakshmana who is always with him is Thambiswami. Just like the name Ramaswami, there are people named Lakshmanswami too. Don’t we have the Arcot Mudaliar brothers who are famous? (A. Ramaswami Mudaliar and A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar)

“Let us return to the previous incarnation.

“How did the younger brother Vamana help in getting back his elder brother’s kingdom? His foot, the *tiruvadi* itself, measured the worlds and accomplished the redemption. The brother’s help was obtained with the brother’s own feet, the *tiruvadi*.

“Valmiki reminds us of that episode only to enhance the greatness of Lakshmana, by comparing him to Vishnu and Rama to Indra. This is because...

“...Just a short while before the Rama-Ravana battle, Lakshmana had defeated Indrajit. Ravana’s son Indrajit’s real name is Meghanatha, he defeated Indra and was called Indrajit. Earlier Mahabali defeated Indra, Vamana conquered that Mahabali, though it was by trickery and not warfare. It is Lakshmana who faced directly the great warrior who had vanquished Indra. And that too with such humility! He said, “O! Arrow, if my brother Rama is righteous, truthful, and unequalled in valour, you shall kill Ravana’s son.” This is a famous verse from Ramayana.¹ It is for that unparalleled valour and humility, that Valmiki compared Lakshmana to Vishnu himself and Rama to Indra, thinking that Rama too will be pleased.

“Of the three others who are always with Rama as depicted in sculptures and paintings, Sita married him and joined him only after he turned sixteen. Hanuman joined him much later. It is Lakshmana who was born on the day after the day after Rama was born. That is Rama was born on navami, so Lakshmana was born on ekadashi. From that moment of birth, he has always been with Rama. ‘Always’ means really ‘always’. It is impossible to describe the love they had for each other. ‘Joint at birth, cannot be separated’, like that. Bharata-Shatrugna were also like that. Lakshmana and Shatrugna were twins born of the same mother. But Lakshmana was attached to Rama the son of another mother, without another thought. His love was as pure as unalloyed gold.² This was returned in full measure by Rama. The other pair, Bharata and Shatrugna, was also like this. Though we divide the four into two pairs, the four brothers were filled with love for each other. The love between Rama and Bharata was not a jot less than the love between Rama and Lakshmana. In the Uttarakanda, Rama sends Shatrughna to fight with Lavanasura who is killed in that battle. The love between them that is manifest is also of the same measure.

1 *Dharmatma Satyasandascha Ramo dasarathir yadi I*

Pourushe chapratidvanda:sarainam jahi Ravanim II(Yuddha Kandam91.73)

2 *Periyava quotes from Vallalar “Matrariyaada sezhum pasum ponne”*

“Therefore, you cannot find another tale like Ramayana as an example of brotherly love.

“In total contrast to them are the brothers, Vali-Sugriva and Ravana-Vibhishana. Even there Rama adopts those two younger brothers as his own. Guhan is another younger brother. That elder brother (Rama) surrounds himself with a band of younger brothers.

“I have been under the impression that, the names like Annaswami and Annadurai referred to Pillayar. He is the first born of Parvati and Parameswara. It is only after him that they gave birth to all the living beings. So I thought he is the Anna-swami. But then I noticed that even Iyengars keep that name. I realized there is one elder brother who goes here and there collecting younger brothers, one the tribal man who is a hunter, one animal who is a monkey and then one Rakshasa, and understood that Annaswami and Annadurai must refer to Rama. There was such love amongst those seven brothers, each ready to give his life for the other.

“In this Ramayana which extols brotherly love and describes how they helped each other, there is one which gave greater help and occupies a higher status.

“What is that? It is the *adi*, the foot.

“I am speaking in riddles. But it is a story known to all of you. If you think a little, you will find the answer.

Periyava made his listeners think on that day when he gave the discourse. But you readers have nothing to guess, because from the very beginning, the title, it has been indicated that it is about Hanuman. The reader only has to find the connection between *adi* and Hanuman.

Periyava though full of clarity, is yet unpredictable. So let us see what he says.

4. Paduka Enthroned

It was the good fortune of the listeners that day that Periyava in his compassion did not test our ability too much.

“Moral dilemma, it was a real moral dilemma that Rama and Bharata faced on one occasion.

“Bharata had come to Chitrakutam with an implacable determination to make Rama return from the forest to rule Ayodhya.

Do you see how Periyava has entered Ayodhya kadam with no connection to Anjaneya?

“It was not just his abundant love for his elder brother that made Bharata do this. Bharata could not accept the idea of a younger brother taking up the reigns when the first-born was there, he thought it was not right, and not in accordance with the code of dharma sastra. He persuaded Rama to return by proposing several arguments.

“If he was adamant that Rama must return, the elder brother was many times more adamant. He insisted that, their father had issued the order that he should be in the forest for fourteen years, and so only Bharata must rule the kingdom. He in his turn, counters Bharata with his own views. Rama did not say so only because of his love for his brother. He too had the dharma code in his mind, whatever it may be one’s duty was to obey the father’s mandate and was unshakeable in his resolve. Obeying the father or *pitruvakya paripalanam* was one of the highest rules of dharma. To observe the vow made long ago to Kaikeyi, his father had given up his very life. To breach that, would send the father from devaloka to hell, and the sons too would become sinners. It was to prevent all that; this rule of Dharma had to be adhered to.

Generally royalty follows the rule of primogeniture and this is what Bharata held on to. His opinion was that their father by some happenchance had given a promise and was caught in it, but no value could be attached to it. It was Bharata's firm opinion, that actually it was his mother who did what ought not to have been done, and the father had to agree helplessly; he agreed to it only reluctantly in order to honour the promise. On the other hand Rama's stand was that if their father had not given assent, would he not have committed the sin of breaking his vow given to Kaikeyi earlier? And did he not agree to her not to give room to such an act? So Rama believed that if he changed his course, both he and Bharata would share in the sin of pushing their father into hell for breaking his word. If Bharata quoted the general rule, Rama held more firmly to the rule of exception under extraordinary circumstances. So his father had to keep the vow which was given under stressful circumstances. That was his dharma. To follow that was the son's dharma, Rama insisted. If their father decided that Bharata should rule, rather if he was coerced into saying so, to comply with that was the filial duty. He stood like a rock unswerving from his decision that Bharata should allow him to go to the forest and thus protect dharma.

“The two stood on opposite sides, but for the same principles i.e. dharma, sacrifice, love for father and brothers. The groups of rishis like those who were rishis on this earth and had then become immortal, those devarishis who were born as such like Narada, and siddhas, watched this spectacle without being seen by anyone.

“What a fortunate father he is to have such sons who are exemplars of dharma!” They were wonder-struck and they agreed that the dharma that should be protected is the dharma during exceptional contingencies, and not the general dharma referred to by Bharata. If even the rishis whose sense of the ‘I’ had been burnt away in the fire of their austerities, felt that what Rama said is right, then that alone is dharma, that alone is satya.

“Leave that aside. The object of the incarnation must be achieved as per plan; the onlookers from above were conscious of that too. They realized that only if Rama continued in the forest without returning to Ayodhya, Sita will be abducted and then the end of Ravana will follow.

So they decided that instead of letting the two brothers cling on their respective views and doing a tug-of-war, they would themselves advise Bharata what should be done. But it is not proper to reveal the secret of the incarnation even to the one who has incarnated, unless it is absolutely unavoidable. When Bhagavan has intended something to be a secret, it is not correct to interfere with that, right? So, they decided they would speak with Bharata on the basis of what is dharma without revealing that secret. They, who had remained unseen till now, manifested themselves.

“Dear child Bharata, indeed we are overjoyed that you are conducting yourself as befits a scion of the Ikshavuku clan; and have come here to give up the kingdom. But child, you must remember your father’s good too. It is only because he had discharged what he owed to your mother, that he has attained swarga now. So you must listen to your elder brother.” Having accomplished their intent they returned to their place.

“Bharata could not do anything after that. The matter was no longer an issue to be resolved by the two brothers, it had gone to a very high authority which had pronounced the judgment too. So he had to submit to it, which meant he had to listen to Rama. In actual fact, since Rama and Bharata were the Lord and his aspect, the rishis could not be termed as being above them. But now they were transacting like mortals, and discussing their father, the right to rule and so, Bharata was bound to obey the words of the rishis who were embodiments of dharma. But he felt, “My brother is present as large as life, he knows the dharma of kings, he is an extremely capable administrator, and he is most loved by all, (Lokabhiramam Sriramam we say even today!), he stands high as one possessing all the kingly qualities. When that is so, when this Lion of men is around how can I, a mere mouse ascend the throne? Impossible!” He just could not accept that idea. In spite of that reluctance, he willed his mind to accept the Rama’s words that were seconded by the sages.

“Do according to my mother’s mandate in order to maintain the unswerving integrity of the Ikshvakus.” Weeping, he told Rama. Though he had steeled his heart to obey the command of the rishis, he

could not bring himself to say the words “Do vanavasam, remain in the forest.” That was not really what the king ordered wholeheartedly, and so even though he was in the depths of sorrow, his mind is clear and he makes the distinction that it was his mother’s mandate. This is how Valmiki has written.

[Here the writer explains the depth of Periyava’s knowledge of not just the epics, but also philosophy and literature and so on. He says that along with the depth, the lectures display an amazing recall of details, statistics. It appears that Periyava once gave a list of the number of children the Pandavas had, and the names of each and every one of them]

It is these subtle nuances that adorn the Ramayana. Its virtue is not only that it is a holy book, it is also a literary classic. And the readers can rejoice in every line of the epic. This does not apply to Valmiki’s work only; it is the same with Kambar, Tulasidas, Ezhuthacchan (who wrote the epic in Malayalam), Krithivasan (who wrote in Bengali) and all the Ramayanams written by many in the regional languages. They are all equally a holy book as a literary classic. That is because of Rama’s greatness.

“Oh! Oh! I have left Bharata in mid-air and wandered somewhere. He says, ‘Do according to my mother’s desire, but please don’t ask me to sit on the throne and rule the kingdom.’ His plea was, let Rama fulfil his part in completing Father’s orders, but let Rama not insist that he too should fulfil the part given to him. There were two parts to their father’s orders, though reluctantly given- one was that the eldest shall go to the forest, the other was that he Bharata shall rule the kingdom. It so happened that Rama liked his part of the order, but Bharata detested the power to reign!

“So having asked Rama to do (according to his mother’s mandate) that, he said, ‘I do not at all want to rule the kingdom, nor do I have the qualities. Just as farmers look up to the clouds waiting for the rain, the citizens are yearning that you shall become king. So you delegate the power to rule to someone as your representative. And you infuse all your qualities in that person, so that he will rule well.’ Bharata’s pleas were accompanied by tears.

“It is at this juncture that the brothers were caught between the horns of a moral dilemma.

[What follows is not found in any Ramayana, it is Periyava’s own imagination drawn from his internalization of the epic and the characters-R.G.]

“Rama did not know what to do. ‘This child is filled with love and a sense of sacrifice, and is in great distress. Is it dharma to just ignore him without any compassion? It looks as if he will give up his life, if I pay no heed to him. Then I would be guilty of killing a life. But if I appoint someone as my representative, it means I have the authority to delegate and I am exercising that power. That is totally wrong. I am not the king; I am a vanavasi, resident of the forest. What authority does a person exiled to the forest have, to appoint a regent? Whether we like it or not, those are father’s orders.

“This child says appoint a representative. Who better than him? He is not a representative, he is my very image. And it is not that I should appoint someone, for father himself has appointed Bharata. But it will be futile to say so, to someone who insists it would be a crime if he rules the kingdom. It will only rake up the wound. I must somehow appease him for that will be the right and kind thing to do. At the same time I cannot give up my duty to obey my father’s words. What is to be done?’ Rama was in a real quandary.

“Bharata too knew that the prime duty was to obey their father’s words. And he was now convinced that Rama was unshakeable. ‘If he will not become the king and I too refuse the throne, then the kingdom will be headless and anarchy will ensue. Rama is worried that the family treasure that is the kingdom will then be destroyed. That is why Rama is asking me to rule. I have a duty to take it as a command of the elder brother.’ Bharata understood this well. Slowly the fact that Rama cannot be shaken from his stand and the counsel given by the sages, sank inside Bharata. But even so, he could not totally accept that his elder brother had no right to the throne, or that he should ascend it. That is why he asked Rama to appoint a representative.

“ ‘I am a sinner; because it is for my sake that the one who had to

be crowned was given the bark dress and sent to the forest, right? That Embodiment of Purity's power will not enter this sinner's frame, who does not deserve that good fortune. Further how can he delegate the power to rule unless he had got it from our father?' It is not that Bharata did not think of all this. Since Rama kept reiterating what was dharma, his eyes had opened to it too. That is why Maricha said '*Rama vighrahavan dharma:*', yes, this well-known appellation is Maricha's words. When Ravana asked him to go disguised as the false deer, Maricha gives him wise counsel, there we find these words. Bharata knew that his elder brother, who is the personification of dharma, will never utter the words appointing him as the representative. He had also decided that he would never, not even for a day, sit on the throne. 'When the noble person, who is entitled to succeed to the throne, who has committed no fault, is ordered to roam in the forest with matted locks, would it not be a crime for a person who is neither entitled nor qualified for the position, assume kingship?' This was Bharata's conviction. Thus Bharata too was in a real quandary, torn between two dharmas.

"Both of their thoughts were highly principled. The **thought** may be right, but now, one had to **act**, so that the throne of Ayodhya is not left vacant. Bharata saw that Rama too was at a loss to decide what is to be done, what to do. 'There is no use if I too remain muddled in confusion, some decision must soon be made.' He felt.

"It is only because he internally grappled for a solution, because he sincerely fought within himself to find a way out, that Iswaran appeased his rightful anxiety. In a flash the solution came to him.

When Periyava spoke these words, it was as if he had himself felt the surge of happiness that Bharata felt when he experienced that flash

"In a rush the solution appeared before him, step by step, thought after thought. When he came from Ayodhya he expected Rama to accede to his request and had brought a pair of gold-adorned padukas. Ramayana says '*paduke hemabhushithe*'. The idea that struck him now, don't they say 'stroke of genius' like that an idea struck him, which was truly divinely inspired. He thought that if he asked Rama to wear the padukas for a moment, Rama will melt and not refuse. If he asked him to wear it during the exile, he would refuse as it would not be in

conformity with the rules of exile in the forest. He would definitely walk around bare feet, the stones and thorns hurting his lotus-like feet.

“The story of Rama is recorded in a very concise form in Bhagavatam. Even in that brief record, where it speaks of Rama returning to his Divine Abode, it says beautifully that, ‘Rama placed his feet on the hearts of those who remember him always.’ Those feet are themselves the Divine abode. So it means that the eternal presence is imprinted on the hearts of the devotees. In the Bhagavatam, the adjective for the feet is *dandaka kantakam*, the flower like feet which was scraped deeply by the thorns of Dandaka forest, *kantaka* means thorns.

Continuing, Mahaperiyava uttered an eternal truth.

“For God and godly persons, their feet are their representatives, completely representing them, completely equal. So the feet themselves are the god or the godly person. That is why installation of the feet or *padukaprathishta* is happening everywhere.”

Periyava has performed the padukaprathishta in many holy sites, to extol how Sankara Bhagavatpada walked on feet throughout our country from Himalayas to Kanyakumari reclaiming it from other faiths and to establish Vedadharma.

“At this juncture Bharata suddenly remembered the greatness and power of the paduka. ‘If my brother stands on this paduka for a moment it is enough, automatically his power will be infused in the paduka. Did not Ahalya who was lying as a stone, resuscitated as herself again by the touch of his feet?’ It was only because there was a soul that was Ahalya, when his feet touched her in the stone stage, Rama’s *chaitanyam*, consciousness became that very Ahalya. What is his consciousness but the *parabrahma*, the supreme undivided, non-dual consciousness? In the same way, the *paduka* that has been ever lifeless and non-sentient, if touched by his feet, will be infused with the undiluted power of his *chaitanyam*. There is one more advantage. He will not openly declare any human being as his representative, because he does not have the power to delegate. But for the *paduka*, it is not necessary for him to say anything in words; his power will infuse in it **on its own**. But we cannot expect the *paduka* to pass orders, resolve the citizen’s disputes or

defend the country against war or aggression. My brother will not allow it to manifest his power through it to the whole world. For if he does that, the world will think he had exercised the power to appoint, will it not? In truth, there is no appointment here, without any appointment the *paduka* became his representative. Nobody need know that. Even if they did, not many will understand.’

[Periyava has with great brevity made a profound statement. We may know something, but may not understand it-Ra.ga.]

“ ‘ They will misunderstand my brother and think he has made the appointment. So nobody need know. I will enthrone the *paduka*, and offer all the royal respect like *chatra* and *chamara*. Let it rule with the power of Rama’ (Periyava observes) Nowadays they say vibration isn’t it? Bharata thinks, ‘The *paduka* will vibrate the power... subtly the *paduka* will be ruling, though tangibly the world will only see one person ruling. Who will do that? Here I must also give in a bit. If on my request, my elder brother agrees to step on the *paduka* and give it to me- he will surely do it. He will not, being so compassionate deny me that prayer; then I should, at least to comply with his words, at least for the sake of appearance, (Periyava laughs) be that tangible person sitting below the throne. I must console myself by offering all the honours to the *paduka*- the real ruler. The entire world will think this fool, (Periyava laughs) is ruling the kingdom. Through me, let the *paduka*, exercise its power.’ So ran Bharata’s thoughts.

“This was the solution to all the problems. Bharata must rule was the father’s order, half-hearted though it was, the brother was clear that Bharata should rule. This solution satisfied both the commands. At the same time he was reluctant to sit on the throne with all pomp and splendor when the elder brother was there. This solution satisfied the general rule of primogeniture too. From Rama’s perspective, he was obeying the father’s command to remain exiled in the forest, and he was also acceding with compassion to Bharata’s request and given him the *paduka* as his representative.

“If his act will invite the world’s censure *lokapavadam*, or raise the slightest doubt, Rama will not be even a whit indulgent or kind, he will be strict. Did he not do that again and again, even in the case of Sita,

the embodiment of purity? But here, there was nothing like that. There was room to show sympathy and mercy, *aanrushamsya*. Bharata knew this, so he had a strong hope that Rama would agree.

“Bharata had brought the gold-encrusted *paduka* with the fond hope that he could take him back to Ayodhya, now he offered the same *paduka* praying that it will become the representative of his elder brother. ‘*Anna*, please stand on this for a moment and give it to me as your *prasadam*. Then I will hand over the administrative power to the *paduka*. It will bring about universal welfare.’ Bharata pleaded. The words used in the Ramayana are, ‘*sarva lokasya yogakshemam vidhasyata:*’

“Later in the Krishnavataram, Bhagavan says ‘*yogakshemam vahamyaham*’. (Periyava smiles) Even if someone does not know their significance as Krishna’s words, they will know at least it is L.I.C.’s motto. This is the meaning. ‘*yogam*’ means securing all the wealth we need for our livelihood like money, materials etc. ‘*kshemam*’ means safeguarding the property and other rights. Krishna says that he will ensure the *yogakshemam* of all those people who are forever thinking of him. On the other hand Bharata’s words do not make the distinction between the devotees and the others and assures that the *paduka* will ensure universal welfare.

“Rama also acceded to Bharata’s earnest plea. He placed his divine feet on the *paduka* and gave them to him with all his blessings.

Since Bharata’s intention was to take Rama back with him, along with the golden *paduka* he had also brought the caparisoned elephant to accord him the royal honours while returning. Why mention the elephant alone? Everyone had come with him, the citizens of Ayodhya, charioteers, the cavalry, the foot soldiers and so on.

“He received the *paduka* blessed by his elder brother, and felt a little consoled. And to indicate that the *padukas* were the king, he seated them on the elephant and returned to Ayodhya with the entire royal paraphernalia and the people.

“But he did not stay in Ayodhya. He went to Ayodhya, because it was his duty to see that his mothers and the citizens reach home safely.

This duty, this *rajadharmam* was instilled in him because of the *paduka* touch. (This is not found in any Ramayana, they are Periyava's words.) But he could not bear the emptiness in Ayodhya caused by Rama's absence. The moment he got this idea in a flash at Chitrakutam, he also realized he cannot stay there. This is because he had to be where the enthroned *paduka* reigned, offering it all honours in his role as a king-in-name. The royal representative cannot be enthroned in the forest; it is improper and not permitted by sastra. This meant the *paduka* and he who had entwined with it must be in the city. But he did not have the heart to remain in Ayodhya. So he decided he would install the *paduka* as the monarch in nearby Nandigramam. This was his firm idea. Among the many ideas that rushed in when he decided to solve his problem with the help of Rama's *paduka*, this was one. He had also obtained Rama's consent, when he received the *paduka* from him.

“Accordingly he went to Nandigramam, decorated the *paduka* as was proper for a monarch, while he wore the same attire of bark and matted locks like Rama. He spent the fourteen years reciting Rama's name and serving the *paduka*.

Generally, you just have to say the words, ‘*Rama paduka*’ it will make anyone offer worship to it. Over and above that, there was the feeling of gratitude that the *paduka* had helped him surmount his problem, so the devotion with which Bharata served the *paduka* cannot be expressed in words.

Here is where the Ramayana proves that no brother will help like an *adi*.

People like Rama and Bharata who are ready to help each other are rarest of rare to find. Yet on that day in Chitrakutam Rama could not help, nor could Bharata help Rama. Help means what kind of help? A be...eeg help. There were two different views of dharma, and to make the world agree to let each stand firmly by their view. If Bharata had agreed to rule, Rama would have happily been in the forest. But he did not, instead he wept and made Rama who was happy till then, cry too; and Rama was distressed that he was causing his younger brother to cry, and Bharata was also the cause for Rama's distress. Not only did the brothers not help each other, they made the other sad. Rama

hurt Bharata as he could not do what Bharata thought was dharma and satisfy him!

“At this juncture, it was his *tiru adi* that helped both. Wasn't it the *tiruvadi* that ameliorated the grief that Bharata felt by Rama's exile and comforted him to the maximum extent possible? And the joy that is felt by remaining in the forest is needless to describe. It was enhanced by the satisfaction he felt that he could fulfil Bharata's wish.

“The feet represent the entirety of *mahapurushas*- great people. Remember I told you that the *paduka* is equal to the feet that wear them? So Rama's *paduka* means his *tiruvadi*.

[Pariyava feels a child-like glee at having explained the Tamil proverb with reference to Ramayana, and the listeners express their appreciation.]

“This is how the underlying meaning of the Tamil proverb explained; by narrating how the *adi* helped when the brothers who were born to help each other, could not do so.

“It is not only this occasion, I think I said that this is how the proverb is proved. That was just to emphasize the thought. There is another incident in Ramayana where this is proved for the second time. I shall tell you that too.

5. Anjaneya's Real Beauty

[Periyava pondered on the other occasion when the adi helped, and also generally on the greatness of the paduka and the two brothers Rama and Bharatha]

“Having listened for so long you would have realized the greatness of the Lord's feet, the *adi*. Vedanta Desikar has written 1000 verses only about them in the *Padukasahasram*. We perform the *sahasranama archanai, laksharchanai and koti archanai* only to the deity's feet.

“Tyagaraja has composed a song ‘*Sri Rama padama*’ making the feet themselves as the deity, in a rare raga appropriately named Amritavarshini. The name means ‘the flowing river of nectar’. The nectar of wisdom and compassion flows only from the feet, is it not? He says ‘*nee kripa chalune*’ that means ‘your compassion is enough’. That is we do not even need Rama's compassion, the benediction of the feet is enough. This is because, Rama behaved only as a mortal, knowingly he never revealed his divine power. Though he ‘acted’ like this, on rare occasions, his compassion burst forth manifesting his divinity.

[Sri R.G. says ‘Periyava has described himself here.’]

But this paduka which is really Rama's divine feet, spread total welfare by its godly prowess and protected the entire kingdom during the fourteen years that Rama was in the forest. When Bharata was sitting there like an ascetic, could not the Rakshasas or some enemy king have come and swept Ayodhya away? But nothing like that happened, there was no violence, no famine no disaster in the kingdom, everyone was peaceful and happy. And it was the power of his feet which is the *paduka*, both are equal. This was the time when the one

to whom the *paduka* belonged was devastated as he had lost his wife because the rakshasa had abducted her, had lost his peace, and was wandering without food and water; but the kingdom ruled by his *paduka*, you must note, was peaceful and prosperous.

“After the defeat of Ravana, it was when Rama himself was ruling, that Lavanasura ‘wagged his finger’ and other untoward incidents happened. But not a wrong step was taken during the *paduka* rule. That rule was so perfect.

“I saw a book in Tamil titled ‘Valmiki Ramayana Vachanam’. In that where Rama gives the *paduka* to Bharata, it does not praise or eulogise- just smoothly proceeds, and then says that Rama without any anger tells Bharata to protect mother. That is his greatness. Like the Tirukkural says you must do good even to those who harm you.¹ The words used are *mataram raksha* ‘protect mother’, is translated in Tamil in that book as ‘*thayai paduka*’. When you quickly read it, it is puzzling. I wondered if some words had been omitted. Nothing like that. This *paduka*, is not footwear or SriRama’s *paduka*. The poet has used the verb form of ‘padugappu’ or protection in a poetic way. But actually the footwear *paduka* has also protected both the brothers from their moral dilemma, and the kingdom too for fourteen years. I just wanted to tell you that *tiruvadi* was much greater than the person to whom they belonged.

“Rama hid his divinity fully, and conducted himself as an ideal man with utmost humility. He would never ever have placed his feet on Bharata’s or any one’s head for that matter. We read in the Ramayana that he showed his filial love to his brothers as laid down in the dharma sastra, had seated them on his lap and had embraced them. So during his time no one could have had the boon of placing on their head the feet of an incarnation. It was only Bharata who loved Rama more than his life, who had that blessing. The *paduka* did that, and Bharata’s eyes were streaming. You will all know what Kambar says ‘*Kaivannam angu kanden, kalvannam ingu kanden*’ (I saw what the hands could do there, and what the feet could do here). The greatness of the feet was revealed in the episode where Ahalya who lay as a stone was resuscitated, and

1 *Tirukkural*

these are the words spoken by Viswamitra at this moment. The killing of Tataka is the instance when he says he saw the greatness of the hands or the arms. He says this to Rama himself.

“The greatness of the feet is vastly superior to the greatness of the hands. There have been many kings of valour who have vanquished the asuras and rakshasas by their strength and bravery. But to sanctify in a moment the poor cursed woman, that greatness belongs only to Rama’s feet. The difference here is this was the touch of Rama’s feet and not the *paduka*. It was only because it was a stone, that Rama placed his feet on it. Don’t all of us walk on sand and stone? Similarly, when he was going to Mithila with Viswamitra, he happened to place his feet on that stone on the way. It became a miraculous event because of the greatness of the feet. The sin and the curse were replaced by grace and purity.

“The foot was placed only on the stone. Rama would never have placed his feet on the throne of Ayodhya. No king would do that. Many objects like the throne, though insentient are respected as if they are alive. If you take the human feet, it is the lowest part of the body. So his feet would never have been placed on the throne. Even when Rama himself was the king, he would not have placed his foot on the throne of the hallowed Solar race. But long before Rama was crowned as the king, the *paduka* was crowned as the ruler and happily occupied the throne. Till date we perform the *paduka pattabhishekam* For the *upanyasakas*, the scholars who give Ramayana lectures, honours are given for *paduka pattabhishekam* long before they are given the Rama pattabhisheka honours.

[For a few moments Periyava smiles thinking of something, and then starts again]

“Nowadays often brothers give the Ramayana lectures, or the elder brother speaks and the younger brother sings. So when the honours have to be done, the organizers have to make double payment. I also hear that instead of the brothers being mutually helpful, the contrary happens. Though there are lectures about many epics and puranas, but Ramayana is the subject of half or more of the lectures. In that, instead of just one Rama *pattabhishekam*, since there is also *padukapattabhishekam*, it saves the brothers from allowing the misunderstanding to grow too

much! So, it is this *adi* or *paduka* which brings about peace between brothers who are at each other's throats instead of helping each other.

“The *adi* or foot that is in the *paduka*'s form has so much greatness, so much power.

“The *adi* has helped the brothers in Ramayana, in another form too.

“When you say greatness or power, the worlds of the devotees immediately think of only one form, one deity. I am sure you all know who I'm referring to.

[When the writer thought that Periyava would speak about Anjaneya he spoke about Bharata. Does the reader expect Periyava to talk about Hanuman at least now? Periyava solves the question.]

“Yes, I mean only Anjaneya swami.

“There is no one to beat him in greatness and power. '*Ullangya sindho:salilam saleelam*' He crossed the ocean as if it was nothing, then he crossed even longer distance when he flew from Lanka to the Himalayas in a moment, and plucked the Sanjeeva hill from that mountain range as easily as one plucks a flower to return at once; the burning of Lanka; killing millions of warriors when Rama waged the war against Ravana; reviving millions of monkey warriors with the aid of the Sanjeeva hill; giving hope to Sita when she was about to kill herself by giving her Rama's ring; reviving Rama who was drowned in sorrow because he did not know where Sita was, by giving the Chudamani; thus making him emerge as a triumphant warrior; being of special assistance to Rama in his victory; then in the same way he protected Sita from suicide by giving her the glad tidings, he prevented Bharata from entering the fire (if Rama did not return at the end of the fourteen years) by giving him glad tidings and so we can go on and on about his greatness. There are people who give lectures on '*Anjaneya Mahimai*' and '*Anjaneya Prabhava*' and you will be awe-struck to hear it. In every version of Ramayana and other epics, there are many wonderful tales about him.

“His exploits begin right from his birth, his incarnation. Much later he flew from the southern tip of India to Lanka and from Lanka to the

northern tip of India twice, that is another matter. The Uttara kanda says that as soon as he was born, he crossed a much, much greater distance from the Earth to the Sun. He saw the red rising sun and thought it was some fruit. He wanted to eat, and so when he was an infant he flew. This is found in his story as narrated by Agastya. Then he flew backwards facing the Sun all the time, from the Udaya giri to Asta giri, since this is how disciples sit facing their teacher, and thus he learnt from the god Surya the entire Vyakarana sastra, grammar. There are numerous such wondrous tales.

“Fine, what is the connection between him and the *adi* helping?”

“There is a great connection. In the Vaishnavite lingo Anjaneya is called *Siriya Tiruvadi*. Just as we refer to Acharya as Bhagavatpada, two other persons are referred to as the embodiments of the Lord’s feet.¹ One is the ‘*Periya Tiruvadi*’ that is Garuda and the other is ‘*Siriya Tiruvadi*’ that is Hanuman. Garuda is called ‘*Periya Tiruvadi*’ because he carries Mahavishnu himself, who is the source of all incarnations and holds Mahavishnu’s feet in his hands and helps him to protect the good and vanquish the evil, he is also much older than Hanuman. Mahavishnu has no beginning and Garuda has been his vehicle always, that is, from beginning less time. So, he is *Periya Tiruvadi*. Anjaneya who is a later incarnation during the time of Ramavataram is ‘*Siriya Tiruvadi*’. He has also carried Rama on his shoulders at times on the battlefield...only at times. Not like Garuda who always carried his master whenever he set out. One of the names in the Sahasranama is ‘*Bharabhurut*’, that is Vishnu carries the weight of all the worlds, and Garuda carries the weight of Mahavishnu, so of the two ‘*Tiruvadis*’ he gets precedence. Adishesha also carries Vishnu but he is stationary. Isn’t it Garuda who carries him and flies swiftly?”

“After the coronation of Rama, all the time Hanuman held Rama’s feet in his hands, that is, when he did not have other errands. He is depicted only like that in Tanjore paintings. Because he loved to hold them so much, he became that which he held. (Pariyava smiles)

“The Purusha sukta says that all living beings ‘*viswa bhutani*’,

¹ *Pariyava here refers to the words ‘pada’ and ‘adi’ which mean the feet or foot.*

emerged from the Lord's feet. It also says from which of his parts the four varnas came. The blessed people who serve others are embodiments of his feet. So the *tiruvadi* is the universe and also those who serve. Avvaiyar has sung a song which lists what is bigger than the other in a serial manner, and ends with saying that the greatest is to sing the praise of those who serve. That old woman's words very aptly fit the purusha sukta. Sukta means that which is well said, 'su' is well, 'uktam' is said.

Anjaneya saw Rama in everything that he saw. '*Sarvam Ramamayam pasyantam*'. He was the best of the servants of Rama, and earned the appellation of Ramadasa. He has also taken the cosmic form '*viswarupam*'. Rama did not take that form, only Ramadasa did. In the same way, it was only he who flew over the ocean in a moment, Rama had to take great pains and build a bridge with the help of the toiling monkeys and went to Lanka only by crossing the bridge by foot. That is the greatness of the ones who serve, of Anjaneya!

"Yet he is called '*Siriya Tiruvadi*', indicating smallness. But this smallness is real greatness. If others humiliate us and make us small, that is demeaning, if we are humble ourselves then that is great. As Valluvar says, '*Adakkam amararul uykkum*', that is humility elevates us. If others demean us it is, humiliation, if we are humble, it is humility. Humility is the best of all virtues.

"Anjaneya was the epitome of humility. It was especially noteworthy, and very amazing, that though he was mighty enough to make all the worlds tremble, he served Rama with such humility. It is not quite accurate to say that this was a diminishment that he voluntarily adopted. He really felt that before the divine incarnation, all his might was nothing and whatever he possessed was by the benevolence of god.

"This one who took on the cosmic appearance also made himself very minute. That was when he crossed the ocean. He was not just strong. If one is merely strong, it may cause harm not just to oneself but the whole world. Only if the strength is combined with wisdom will it benefit not just the self but the entire world. Anjaneya was like that. When we pray To him to give us many qualities we say

'*buddhirbalam*'¹, '*Buddhi*' that is wisdom comes before strength '*balam*'.

“He was both *buddhiman* and *balavan*. The devas wanted to test if he was really that, and to rejoice in that sight. There is a group of snake-like beings that lives under the sea called nagas. Surasa was their mother. They told her, ‘You stand taking a gigantic form, barring his way when he flies across the ocean. Tell him that anyone who crosses this path must enter your mouth and you have the right to eat them, and that it is a boon given to you by Brahma. He may decide to ignore you and fly ahead not wishing to delay the mission he had come for. He may even accomplish it. He is *asadhya sadhaka swami*, he can accomplish the impossible. So he may proceed without answering you. But because you have Brahma’s boon, he may respect that, and do as you say without harming and also fulfilling his task. We want to see how he does it intelligently. So we seek your aid.’

“Surasa for her part did accordingly and blocked the path. Do you know how wide her mouth was when she opened it? It was ten *yojanas* long and ten *yojanas* wide. One *yojana* is equal to nine miles. At once Hanuman grew 20 *yojanas*. She was not deterred by that. She opened her mouth 30 *yojanas* wide, and he became 40 *yojanas* huge. Just as if a switch is pressed on and off, both of them changed their size. When she opened her mouth ninety *yojanas*, he decided these tactics will not work, and three ideas struck him. [Pariyava is delighted and plays on the word *yojana* which also means idea or thought] One idea was how he changed his height, then he realized that it didn’t work, then he thought of an alternative. He quickly decided what to do. Just when he was about ninety *yojanas* tall, he made himself the size of a mosquito and before she could blink her eye, entered her mouth and came out, either through her nostril or her ear and went his way. The strong man achieved his end intelligently.

Just as he was both gigantic and microscopic in appearance, though

1 *Buddhir balam yaso dhairyam nirbhayatvam arogata*

Ajadyam vakpatuthvam cha hanumad smaranat bhavet. If you think of Anjaneya you will get wisdom, strength, fame, courage, fearlessness, freedom from ill-health, freedom from idleness, and good articulation.

he was colossal in power, because of his humility he made himself small, as Ramadasa, so small that you could not see where he is.

“Do you now understand that for him, his greatness was his humility?”

“What extraordinary greatness! It is because of this quality, that since the time of the *Tretayuga*, till today, of all the seven kandas in Ramayana, it is Sundarakanda where Hanuman’s eminence is extolled, that is chosen for doing *parayana*, recitation. Leaving aside the other six cantos where Rama’s greatness and virtues is dealt with extensively, it is this canto where Rama has no part to play and just peeps in at the end, which alone is chosen. Here Anjaneya makes little of his achievements and says in all humility, that whatever he has done, it is by Rama’s grace, and that is how it ends so beautifully. That is why it is Sundara kanda, sundara is beautiful, the beginning, middle and end of this canto are all beautiful. The cantos where the exceptionally good looking Rama and Sita appear are not called Sundara, but the canto where what we call an ugly monkey appears is called that. Importance to captivating appearance is cast aside, he was captivating by his virtues and might, and it is that which has got him pride of place. Those who have these two qualities, even if they are not good looking, they will look as if they are painted with beauty from head to feet. They will appear captivating. Doesn’t Anjaneya appear like that to us?”

“I sometimes think that in all fairness Valmiki ought to have named that canto Anjaneya kanda. Why he didn’t do that is because, he knew very well Anjaneya’s captivating virtues. He knew that Anjaneya will suffer ‘A canto in my name in Lord Ramachandra’s story who is god himself, and I am the smallest of small.’, because Anjaneya placed humility as the greatest virtue. Valmiki respected his feeling and so he called it ‘Sundara kanda’.

“There is a nuance here. Anjaneyar’s mother was Anjana, Anjaneya means, ‘born of Anjana’, ‘Anjana’s son’. She was blessed with such a child, it seems whenever she thought of him, she would think of him only as Sundaran or the good-looking one, and not by any other name like Anjaneya, Hanuman or Maruthi. There is this Tamil proverb that means ‘to the crow its child is golden’ ‘*kakkaikku than kunju ponkunju*’. This one is really golden in goodness and greatness, and that

gilded colour spread to his appearance too, that is why he is praised as '*kanchanadri kamaniya vighram*' (Who has a captivating appearance just like the golden mountain Meru). So, to warm the heart of the one who will be happier than all those who listen to the canto that extols his greatness, the mother who rejoices when her child is praised more than how she rejoiced at the child's birth. Valmiki gave the canto the heading *Sundara kanda*, thinking of Anjana. Anjaneya shrinks all the prowess he displayed in this canto, and surrenders at Rama's feet beautifully, and Valmiki makes us see him really as siriya *tiruvadi*.

“All this is fine. But where did he help more than a brother would?”

6. Restoring Life from Stupor

“Two very critical situations arose, when only this little *tiruvadi* came to the aid. And do you know who was in danger? Let us see that event first. The danger was to Rama himself who was the foundation of all worlds, disguising himself as a mortal and putting himself through all sorts of rigmarole, as they say ‘*leela manusha vesham*’. The one whom we worship as ‘*aapadam apahartaram*’, the remover of all dangers, was himself endangered and unconscious. At that time it was this *siriya tiruvadi* who earned the name of removing that danger.

“At that time, if you ask what the inseparable younger brother the *ilaya perumal* Lakshmana, was doing, he too had lost consciousness. The elder brother could not help as Rama was also in the same stage.

“When? What story is that? (Periyava clears his throat and proceeds)

“Ravana had six sons. Everyone knows Indrajit, there were five others Akshakumaran, Devanthakan, Naranthakan, Trishiras and Athikayan. When Hanuman went to Sita as Rama’s messenger, did not the Rakshasa warriors take him from Asoka vanam? Right then Anjaneya ‘closed’ Akshakumaran’s life. So that was the inauguration ceremony to the destruction of Ravana’s clan.(Periyava smiles) Later when Rama came with the monkey army and waged the war in Lanka, Hanuman killed Devanthakan and Trishiras. So half of Ravana’s six sons had met their end at his hands. Lakshmana put an end to Athikayan and Indrajit. Indrajit came later. Before him, the four sons Devanthakan, Naranthakan, Trishiras and Athikayan came one after the other to the battlefield, but they never returned alive. Though I say they came one after the other, I don’t think it was in that order.

(What a perfectionist Periyava is! If he finds the smallest imperfection in his lecture, he immediately and transparently mentioned it. That degree of perfection! He was right; the order was first Naranthakan, second was Devanthakan, third was Trishiras and last came Athikayan. Angada the son of Vali killed Naranthakan.)

“When four sons died in quick succession, Ravana railed in great distress. Indrajit who remained was an extraordinary warrior, bravest of the brave. In addition to his valour, he had acquired rare and wondrous powers to destroy his enemies by performing some terrible rituals, *homams*. He consoled his distressed father, gave him encouragement. He came to the battlefield, with the resolve of finishing off Rama and his army. Added to that was the intention to avenge the death of his brothers whom he had lost. His desire to take revenge was hardened, and so his fighting spirit increased so much that he killed and heaped the monkey army as though he was the god Rudra at the time of deluge.

“Ultimately he used the highly potent Brahmastra.

“You must notice here that he did not wage war against a particular person. What is the common practice? One warrior will employ the astras and sastras¹ against a warrior on the enemy camp, is it not? Sastram is the weapon, the mere weapon. Astra means invoking the power of a deity in that weapon increasing its power. It is not mandatory that the power of the deity should be invoked only in a weapon or a tool of war. You can invoke it even in a blade of grass. Rama invoked the power only like that in a darbha grass and aimed it at Kakasura. But generally, the power is invoked in a weapon, and that weapon is used. The normal practice is for a warrior to attack an opponent with the astra or sastra. At that time if a very powerful divine weapon is used, it will not attack a particular enemy; sometimes it may affect the entire rival army. The impact on one person will be much more than on the rest.

“Now what Indrajit did is this. Rama is the main foe. But he wanted to take vengeance on Hanuman and Lakshmana who killed his brothers; he was also filled with an intense rage to destroy the entire army... for this how much mantra power will be needed? He earned the entire

1 This is not Shastra. This is pronounced as *sustra* with a short vowel sound.

potency by doing many homams and invoked the Brahmastra.

“Just as he did not attack anyone in particular, he made sure that no one could attack him. This he did by using *Tiraskarini*, one of the many magical powers he had, and became invisible to everyone when he used the Brahmastra.

“Nowadays in warfare, there is nothing like fair and unfair- *dharma yuddham* and *adharmayuddham*. They employ any means to destroy the enemy. In particular, instead of aiming the weapons on those who are in the war-field and in war service, they do something more terrible. They drop bombs from the planes above on the civilian population who are not waging war. This World War that happened, there they dropped the all-destroying bomb on Japan to make them surrender, and this killed or grievously harmed not just human beings but all living creatures, and the impact had a long-term negative effect. When the air force drops bombs it is also one kind of waging war invisibly. Gradually it changed, and they attacked on air and also shot down the planes from below.

“In ancient times, when men fought, they attacked one enemy or that part of the battalion, or that division of the army that accompanied him. They never attacked the common population, and even the enemy army will not be destroyed totally by using dangerous missiles. They would only aim one person, that itself will affect the army surrounding him.

“It was only the asuras or rakshasas who instead of fighting face to face, employed magical techniques to cause complete destruction. When the devas or those whom we call gods defend them, they also employed the same technique.

“The surprising thing here is that when those cruel races fought mercilessly and without fair means, the men who opposed them, thought perhaps that this was their nature and never objected that the opponent was using unfair means. It is only when two sides belonging to the human race fought like when the Kauravas and Pandavas fought, that we read in the Mahabharata people objecting that it is not *dharma yuddham*. But nowhere in the Ramayana where Rama with his monkey army fought Ravana and his rakshasa army, does one read that Rama

objected it was *adharmayuddham* when something like that happened. It is only when there was no combat, and Ravana carried Sita who was defenceless by cunning and disguise that Rama's supporters accuse him of unfairness, but not when he uses magic in warfare or destroys totally. This is something we can be proud of.

“Why I am saying this is...when you talk of *jaathi* and here I am not talking of the differences among humans, all mankind is one *jaathi*. Similarly, rakshasas are one, asuras another, then like that there are birds, animals, trees and so on. That is, I am referring to one group among the sentient beings, genes, species...this is what I call *jaathi*. So they had accepted that this was the nature of that species, even something which is considered wrong by humans. Doesn't it show that they have sympathetically seen that such conduct was not wrong for that species? I am amazed at their large heartedness and willingness to give in!

“Indrajit by employing magic and sorcery baffled the monkey army and it was a dance of death. He spread darkness of the most intense kind, over the battlefield blinding the monkey army and destroyed them. Not only did he blind them, he also silenced the sound of his chariot movement, and the twang of his bow, so that the monkeys heard nothing. Even if it is dark, one can find where the opponent is by the noise, isn't it? So he made that also impossible by his trickery.

“Lakshmana could not bear it. He told Rama, ‘Anna, he is going too far. I think I will use the Brahmastra and send not just him but the entire clan wholesale will be dispatched to Kailasam’.

“Then was Rama not the embodiment of Dharma? He explained to Lakshmana the Dharma, what the righteous path is for human beings. ‘My child, just because you want to kill one person, you must not raise arms against the Rakshasa clan in entirety.’ He spoke with compassion and told him the rules of dharma. We have heard that one must not attack a foe, who has raised his hands in surrender and that one must not attack a foe who is running away from the field in fright. Rama added on more special rules like one must not attack an enemy who is hiding, an enemy who stops fighting and stands still or an enemy in a drunken stupor.

“He uses the word ‘*prachchanna*’ to describe the enemy who is hiding. *Pracchatam* means a sheath or cover. If you put the sheath, the object inside is hidden, isn’t it? That is why the hiding enemy is *prachchanna*. Indrajit was hiding like that.

“But I think Rama has extended the rules of dharma too much here, because of his insistence on not swerving from dharma even a bit. That rule may have been framed, keeping in mind a warrior who is hiding from the enemy because of fear. I wonder if it was meant for a person who creates darkness by magic, plunging the enemy army in confusion and hiding himself so that he can attack freely. But whenever a moral dilemma arose, Rama always interpreted the rule in a manner that may even be adverse to him and favourable to the enemy, in his anxiety not to do *adharma*. He felt that any harm that may arise by doing that wrong will only be to his body, but failing dharma would hurt the atma. Don’t they say ‘err on the right side’? Here ‘right side’ is not considering one’s own welfare or selflessness.

[Periyava the embodiment of selflessness emphasizes that word]

“Why I said that, is only to show that our culture had the magnanimity and generosity to accept other modes of warfare that are unfair in our perspective.

“In the middle of this, there is another dharmam too in Rama’s words. And that is, one must not start a holocaust of an entire population by sending the Brahmastra to kill one enemy. I said just now that, this is not our royal ethics. Now what Rama says confirms that. But that is not the dharma, I wanted to tell you about. The great warriors obtained weapons like Brahmastra only after performing many strict austerities, but they never employed it at the beginning of the war. If they did it, they can effortlessly gain victory, even so they did not do it. This is because those weapons had an enormous destructive power. So they controlled themselves, and used them only when there was a crisis and there was no other go. It was not being favourable to friends or to enemies (*mitr paksham*, *shatru paksham*), instead they had the interest of all beings as much as they could. The warriors showed kindness, sympathy and consideration to the entire world. Our lof...ty tradition taught culture and refinement, by the right kind of education and by

association with the noble, to the bravest and fiercest fighters so that they did not indulge in random destruction of all.

“There is no civilization superior to ours. They say ‘civilization’ is ‘culture’. Culture means to be cultivated. Even now the same word came from my lips, I said, that our tradition taught culture to our fighters and made them conform to noble and righteous parameters.

“Cultivate means to plough the land. If we cultivate land it is ‘agriculture’. But if we do not use any prefix like ‘agri’, the mere word ‘culture’ means to refine the mind and heart. By using this word to generally mean refinement, the superior culture of the westerners can be seen. If ploughing is agriculture, this is **agriculture**.

[Periyava laughs. The word ‘agra’ means prime, the foremost.]

“To indicate ‘culture’ they have coined a similar sounding word ‘*kalacharam*’. That is nice too. *Kalaachaaram*, civilization, *panpaadu*, *sampradaayam*, *marabu*, are all same or at least closely connected to each other. I rue the fact that without knowing how superior our culture is, we have ruined ourselves by adopting foreign ways. It is enough if our people understand this much...But I have strayed somewhere.

“When there is a war where killing and attacking is a part, the cruelty of asuras which is not righteous according to human beings is accepted as their nature. There is another thing. Rama’s army was composed of monkeys mainly. Jambavan alone was a bear. He and the monkeys were ‘Allies’ (Periyava laughs). The bear can stand on two feet like man. And then the Darwinians say that the monkeys are in many ways the progenitors of human race, so it also accords with the Evolution Theory. Let that be. So, Rama’s army has been a huge division of beasts like bears and monkeys. None of them, that is Anjaneya, Vali-Sugriva and Jambavan have ever used a weapon. Nowhere in The Ramayana does it say that this bear, monkey army used an ordinary weapon or a weapon in which magical powers have been invoked. They only fight by throwing stones, trees and branches. More frequently, they used only their body, they hit the enemy, or clawed at them, kicked, pummeled, boxed or wrestled with them to fight the enemies. The unrighteous asura-rakshasas did not object to this mode of warfare.

(Periyava smiles sadly) Being humans we behave without any norms, they seem to have adhered to some norms at least. There is only one instance in the Ramayana where a beast that is a monkey warrior employed a weapon. This is an exception. As far as I remember, to the extent I have read, listened or understood this is the only occasion. That is when Anjaneya pulled out a pillar from the entrance hall of Asoka Vana and clobbered the rakshasas.

“But what about all those images of him with a mace in hand? You may ask. That is an aspect he adopted in the future for our sake. It will seem odd if he is depicted holding a stone or a stick, isn’t it? If he held a huge rock like the mount Sanjivi, it is acceptable to us, but if he threw or flung a stone or branch, we may not look at it with sympathy that it is the nature of that species, like our ancestors have done, and we may think it is peculiar. That is why he carried the mace like the later son of Vayu, Bhima who held the mace; and appeared like that to his ardent devotees. They reported what appeared to them in their vision and sculptures and drawings were shown like that.

“Indrajit unseen to all, had invoked the Brahmastra to wipe out Rama and his army. Rama could have employed the counter astra. He did not do that. Not only that, he also told Lakshmana not to do it. Before he could say anything to his army, the weapon released by Indrajit, killed Rama’s men or rendered them almost lifeless. Though not openly, in his mind Indrajit had aimed the astra primarily at Rama. However much Rama tried to don the role of a human being, now and then his divine aspect manifested itself. Because of that power, the Brahmastra took some time to affect Rama and Lakshmana who was part of his divinity. It only affected the army first. Whatever it may be, isn’t he as Vishnu, the father of Brahma? Lakshmana is either a part of him or as Adishesha where Vishnu rests, so the Brahma’s astra acted against them both with some hesitation.

“Then why did Rama strangely say it should not be countered? If the astra was left to act without stopping will not it be a total devastation? Even if there is hesitation, will not the astra show its power against them both ultimately? Since Brahma had given that to Indrajit as the result of his austerities, and its duty was destruction of enemies, will

it not be bound by its duty and hurt the lives of Rama and Lakshmana? The question then arises, how could Rama acquiesce to that?

“To this question, Rama had right then given his answer to Lakshmana. He was aware that the astra will do its duty. But he too was an embodiment of Dharma and this is what he said, “Brahma could not be without giving the astra to Indrajit in return for his austerities. It is a divine astra. And by performing many homas Indrajit had guarded its potency. We human beings must respect the astra given by the first of the Trinity, and accept it without resistance.” He did not think of himself as Brahma’s father. He reduced himself so much -only he could do that- and said this, referring to Brahma as god and themselves as mortals.

“The question arises, whether they should succumb to the Brahmastra without killing Ravana that was the purpose of the incarnation. No. What Rama said was ‘Let us fall down letting go of our consciousness ourselves. Without giving up our life, we will give up our consciousness.

“Rama and Lakshmana had learnt from Vasishtha and Viswamitra all arts and sciences including yoga sastra, and dhanur veda, and mastered them. This included the art of being alive but in a coma state.

“He said, ‘If we fall down unconscious, the Brahmastra will not affect us beyond that stage. Even though Indrajit is a cruel rakshasa he too will not fight with us if we are lying like logs of wood. Our task is also to fight with him, isn’t? But he is now invisible. So, when we recover consciousness, he will come to fight with us and we can commence the fight.’

[This author enquired Ramayana experts and they all said that there is some indication for this retention of life without consciousness, in Valmiki Ramayana but no other versions. Perhaps Periyava wanted to elaborate this as he holds Valmiki Ramayana as the most truthful text]

“When he said that, Lakshmana immediately agreed, as far as he was concerned, Rama’s word was gospel.

“Immediately both of them fell down unconscious.

“Yes, then if you ask did he fix a time-limit for regaining consciousness, no he did not. In a strange quirkishness, he did not tell

that either. The younger brother too did not think of asking him, if he did not choose to explain.

“Without making any resolve about the time-limit, they gave up their consciousness. When they are in that stage, how can they decide how to get back consciousness? That coma stage will continue forever is it not? Isn’t that like losing one’s life? Then what about the aim of the incarnation?”

“How do we know what Rama had in his mind? He never revealed that. But this is what I think. **He must have done that only to reveal the greatness of Hanuman to the whole world.**

“Whatever it is, the two divine incarnations, Rama and Lakshmana fell unconscious on the battlefield.

“Before that, the army had fallen down.

“Indrajit thinking that he had wiped off everyone without exception and gained a great victory, decided that the army of dead bodies could be removed later and that he must first inform these glad tidings and celebrate the triumph. So he left.

“Here Vibhishana was distressed that this had happened, but since he was a great devotee of Rama and Lakshmana, he realized by divine grace that there was no loss of life, only loss of consciousness. But he was also anxious as he did not know when they will regain consciousness, and worried what the enemies might do in the meantime.

“Even the monkeys had all not died. All of them were aspects of the devas, and among them had more of the respective deva’s aspect and some had much more on it. And depending on that, was the severity of the harm done to them, and some of them had not even lost consciousness, they were only extremely debilitated. Vibhishana realized this.

“It is here that the extraordinary greatness of Anjaneya was revealed.

“Didn’t I tell you that as soon as he was born, he went in one leap to reach the sun which looked like a red fruit and he wanted to eat it?”

“It was new moon then, the *Amavasai* of the month *Margazhi*,

and the star was *Moolam*. Anjaneya was going to be the ‘moolam’, the source of physical strength, intellectual strength and devotional strength, Anjaneya was going to be the source of the monkey army’s prowess—who was going to destroy¹ the army that was the source of Ravana’s strength. On new moon, the moon would have completely waned, but yet we call it the fully auspicious day. Anjaneya who had the fullness of all things good, shrank all his prowess before Rama. He was born in the month of Margazhi the month that Krishna praises as ‘Among the months I am Margazhi’.

“The solar eclipse will occur only on new moon. The day Anjaneya was born, is the day when Rahu eclipsed the sun. When he went to catch the sun, Rahu also came there. ‘Who is this person coming in between?’ Anjaneya thought and went to catch Rahu.

“He ran for his life. He went and asked Indra, “You are the one who ordained that Ketu and I could catch the sun and the moon, and consume their essence now and then. Now another fellow is threatening to toss me over. Can you allow that to happen?”

“Indra got enraged that someone was thwarting his command. He took Rahu along and went to the solar region on his royal elephant Iravatham.

“Just as he was about to swallow the sun, the infant Anjaneya’s attention was distracted by the pure white massive elephant. So, he thought he could eat that instead of the sun and leaped at Iravatha.

“Already Indra was angry, when he saw Hanuman attack his vehicle, he could not bear it.

“He smote Hanuman with his Vajrayudha, though Hanuman was just a tiny child.

[Periyava becomes a bit emotional now and controls himself.]

“Vajram, diamond, is the strongest of everything. That became ‘vairam’ in Tamil. In the north Indian languages it changed to, ‘javra’

1 Periyava uses the word ‘nirmoolam’, meaning destruction, a play on the word ‘moolam’

and then ‘joughra’ jauhar’ and became ‘jawahar’. You all know the name Jawaharlal. Just as in our place we give people the names of gems like Rathnam, Manikkam or Muthu, in the north too they do it. Jawaharlal Nehru’s father is Motilal Nehru. Moti is pearl. (Laughs) Father is pearl, and the son is diamond!

“In Sanskrit too we have the word ‘vairam’. It is derived from the word ‘viram’ valour. ‘Vairam’ means enmity, the valiant enemy is ‘vairi’. We use it in Tamil too, we say do not show ‘vairam’ or enmity.

“The entire strength gained by the sage Dadhichi’s austerities, was accumulated in his spine which was as strong as vajram. The kundalini power ascends through the chakras only along the spine isn’t it? That is what gave so much strength to the great sage Dadhichi’s spine. Indra’s vajrayudha was made of his spine. So, when the enraged Indra employed this weapon with all his might, the child Hanuman though strong could not take it.

“He fell down to the earth dashing against a protruding mountain rock. He was stunned out of his wits, and further his left jaw bone was broken to pieces because he fell on that side.

“His father Vayu could not bear his sorrow when this happened. He was uncontrollably angry with Indra because his darling child had met this plight. That anger caused by his grief for his son, got diverted against the entire universe.

“He stopped his movement.

“What will happen to all living beings if there is no movement of air? Everyone suffered terribly. Indra and other devas also suffered and complained to Brahma.

“Brahma told them that unless they appeased Vayu, he will not move. So he went along with all the devas to the mountain where Vayu was seated with his child on his lap.

“He took the child from Vayu and stroked him tenderly. Immediately Anjaneya sat up.

“Brahma told Indra and the devas, ‘A lot of help and assistance for

you is destined to be done by this child.’ Did not Mahavishnu take the incarnation of Rama, because the devas pleaded to be released from Ravana’s torment? Wasn’t Anjaneya of huge support to Rama in that task? This is what Brahma referred to. ‘So, all of you, instead of hurting him must grant him boons. Only then Vayu will be pleased and start his movement.’ On hearing this, Indra came forward and said that, ‘He will not be harmed by the divine weapon having the powers of that Vajrayudha with which I hit him.’

“Not only that. Because Brahma stroked and revived the child Hanuman, his body, powers and virtues became strong like ‘vajra’. The North Indians call him ‘Bajrang’-Vajranga-The one with a vajra-like physique.

“it is only then that Indra gave him the name ‘ Hanuman’. Hanu means jaw. ‘Didn’t his jaw break because he fell due to the blow from my weapon? So let the name Hanuman become well-known.’ Indra said. This is found in the Uttara Kanda of Valmiki Ramayana.

“The name ‘Hanuman’ can only mean the “One who has a jaw’ and not ‘One who has lost his jaw’. ‘Sriman’ means ‘one who possesses Sri(wealth)’ right? So, what I think is, though his jaw got shattered at first by Indra’s blow, it must have become whole when Brahma stroked and revived him. So, I think, Indra gave this name ‘Hanuman’ particularly to indicate this wonder to the world.

“You must note that in no picture or sculpture is he shown with a broken jaw.

“As soon as Indra said that the vajrayudham will not harm Hanuman, all the devas gave him the boon that the astras bearing their respective powers will not harm him. Will Brahma keep quiet when the others are blessing him? So he also said that his Brahmastra will not touch him.

“The entire creation of Brahma which is there now, will after millions and millions of years, end in the Great deluge (mahapralayam), and Brahma’s lifetime will end too and he will become one with the Paramatma. Then creation will begin anew. At that time, it is Anjaneya who will be the new Creator. In this creation-period he is Immortal. In the next creation-period he will be the creator. But whatever he did,

he never thought of himself as the creator, but only of Rama as the creator, the Paramatma, and that he was only Rama's tool. At the same time whatever he did, he thought that his Inner being the 'antaratma' was only Rama and that he dwelt in that Paramatma. In between both, in order to also continue to taste the nectar that is the Bliss of Love 'Premananda', he was Rama's devotee, always uttering Rama's name, savoring the nectar of love in that name itself. That is, he is a confluence of three, a Triveni Sangama of Duty, 'Karma', Devotion 'Bhakti' and Wisdom 'Gnana', a unique entity in whom all the three converge.

"When Indrajit employed the Brahmastra, it did not affect Hanuman because of Brahma's boon. Earlier Indrajit had used it against him to imprison him when he was in Asoka Vana. Even then it did not have any impact on him actually. But he was also like Rama. He remained tied by the Brahmastra for a period of one muhurtham (roughly 48 minutes), as he felt he must show respect to the Creator. But on that account he did not undergo loss of consciousness like Rama did. (Periyava smiles). Rama did that because he knew he had Hanuman by his side! But who was there for Hanuman? You may ask wasn't Rama there? But will Hanuman demand Rama to protect him when he considers himself to be Rama's lowliest of servants? That is why he allowed himself to be impacted by the Brahmastra only to the extent of extreme exhaustion.

"So even He remained like that for a muhurtham, then got up normally and went to Vibhishana. Both of them are immortal, *chiranjeevis*. According to one narrative, Jambavan was also immortal. So these two went in opposite directions of the battlefield to find out where Jambavan was, because Jambavan could advise them how to proceed next.

"It was Vibhishana who found him. He was lying down so weak that he could not even open his eyes. When he heard Vibhishana's voice, the first question he asked was, 'Is Hanuman safe?'

"Vibhishana replied, 'What is this? You are not asking about Rama and Lakshmana or your leader Sugriva, but only about Hanuman?'

"Jambavan's reply to this is, you may say, a big testimonial to Hanuman's greatness. **'Why I ask about Hanuman is, it is enough if he is safe. Then all the other monkeys even if dead will come back**

to life. But if he is not there, even if the entire army is alive, they are as good as dead.'

“Vibhishana described to him the critical state of Rama and Lakshmana.

“As he was narrating this, Hanuman also arrived there. Immediately Jambavan informed him of the urgent situation and gave him an urgent task. ‘It is you, who has to revive the lives of everyone including Rama and Lakshmana. Between Mount Kailasam in the Himalaya mountain range that is at the northernmost end of our country Bharata desam and Rishabachalam, there is in the middle a mountain call the Oshadhi Parvatam.(The Medicinal mountain)’ [Periyava explains that this is what we commonly call Sanjeevi parvatam] ‘In that mountain there are many divine herbs that are antidote to the impact of these divine weapons. Among these divine herbs there is one called *Mruta Sanjeevini* which can even bring back to life those who are dead.’ [Periyava explains that this herb is referred as Sanjeevi and therefore the mountain is named after it] ‘There is another herb called *Visalyakarani* it heals people who are lying down felled by an arrow, it heals them removing not only the trace of the arrow mark but even the scar.’(Periyava smiles) ‘There is a third herb called *Sandhana karani* , which joins torn flesh and broken bones...then a fourth herb called *saavarnyakarani* which heals skin burnt by the weapon’s flames, and even restores the colour. There are these four herbs.You, the son of Vayu must go there at the speed of wind and bring these herbs’. These were Jambavan’s instructions.

“Hanuman left at once with a leap, shouting with joy. In that single leap, he crossed all those thousand miles and jumped on the Oshadhi Parvatam itself.

“Those divine herbs which are normally shining, decided that they should test his intellectual prowess even in this crisis and show it to the world. So, just like Indrajit, they too turned invisible.

“But the wise Hanuman was not deterred by this. ‘What if I can’t see the herbs, I will pluck the whole mountain’ he thought and easily and effortlessly plucked the Sanjeevi parvatam as though it was just a

flower and flew back.

“Vibhishana and Jambavan stood there wringing their hands- every moment seemed like aeons. At that juncture, Hanuman jumped before them with the mountain in hand, indeed a timely deed in the time of need. He was always successful in accomplishing any task he undertook.

“He brought the Sanjeevi, he was a Chiranjeevi. It is he who is the life of Ramayana. He is the spirit of our country’s culture. What is that culture? You must be powerful in every way, at the same time you must be humble.

“As he came in mountain in hand, the wind blowing through the divine herbs revived Rama, Lakshmana and the monkey army. They woke up as though they had just been sleeping.

“When the brothers could not be of assistance, it is this small tiruvadi alone who helped.

“He restored the lives of aa...ll of them, and restored their power, this all powerful person who is modestly called the *siriya tiruvadi*. He did not think that he had accomplished the impossible, he did not jump with joy hugging the ones who had been revived, then what did he do? Since the Sanjeevi Parvatam had done what should be done, he thought it was his duty, his dharma to restore the mountain in its place without a moment’s delay. So he turned towards the Himalayan range and restored the mountain. Then he came to Sugriva to receive instructions about what he should do next.

“I don’t know what to say of him, who did not boast of his exploits, nor rejoice with his kindred, but had only his duty as the sole goal.

“There is another episode in the Yuddha Kandam itself, where this *adi* helped. That is even more special and must be narrated.

7. Anjaneya in Rama's Embrace

“When Indrajit felled the brothers, I mean Rama and Lakshmana, with the Brahmastra and both lay unconscious, neither could help the other. Of course we can give the excuse that an unconscious person cannot be of any assistance.

“Moreover there was a benefit in them losing consciousness. That sounds funny, what is it, you may ask. Because of their state, they escaped the sorrow they might have felt for the other's plight. Did they not love each other as their very life? So, if either of them was conscious, he would have been tortured looking at his brother in this condition. They were spared that agony because they were in that senseless state.

“Not only these two, the entire monkey army was lying unconscious barring Jambavan, Vibhishana and Hanuman. So ,though a terrible catastrophe had befallen them, no one except these three, knew that it had happened. They were just lying like logs of wood.

“So those brothers, and the countless numbers of monkeys and bears that were like younger brothers to that divine elder brother Rama, could not help anyone, and at this juncture it was the siriya tiruvadi that came to the aid of all by bringing the Sanjeevi Mountain. When the aroma of the herbs, pierced the nostrils of everyone, all were restored to health. This unparalleled help came only from the siriya tiruvadi. But the others, who should have experienced relief of the same magnitude, did not know that a huge calamity had been averted and could not feel the joy of that relief, except those three.

“So though not only Rama and Lakshmana but also the numerous monkey warriors had been revived by his assistance, the ‘result’

(Periyava searches for the apt word and then smiles) no, the impact was not proportionate to the magnitude of the help. It was minimal. The words of Jambavan that if just Hanuman was safe the entire army would be restored to life was proved right before their eyes. But only Jambavan and Vibhishana felt the joy and relief and no one else. Hanuman was not one who would take pride over his own achievement. Though subsequently when they came to know of what he had done, they would surely have thanked him and applauded him. But that is not the relief one would feel, if one had suffered the anxiety of the surrounding calamity and had seen it being set right. So, the Himalayan achievement of transporting a portion of the Himalayas could not get the recognition it deserved.

“I told you that this siriya tiruvadi rendered the same help on another occasion. At that time both were not lying like logs like this time, unable to help the other, because they could not help it. (Periya laughs) . On the contrary, one was fully conscious and yet, he did not help his brother. It was only the siriya tiruvadi who helped. What makes it more special, is it was the elder brother, Ramachandra himself who though conscious, was helpless. Since he was in human form, he acted the role perfectly and reduced his power, and enhanced the greatness of siriya tiruvadi by letting him do that immense help.

“For some diseases they take the serum from the patient’s own blood and cure him, is it not? When the patient is weakened, even a little blood gives him strength. This is like that. Rama shrank his divine power, and throughout his life time, only displayed the power of a human being. And that too at times when he was filled with sorrow, he really behaved as though he had lost his mental strength. What Anjaneya did was to imbibe that divine power because of his devotion especially by uttering the name of Rama. I am told that people suck cool drinks with something called a straw. Just like that, by merely uttering the Rama Nama he drew upon the power of Rama which is like an ocean of consciousness, and he could achieve the unachievable and got the name of *asaadhya saadhaka* swami. There is sloka in his praise to be said for accomplishing successfully some task that is very difficult. In that sloka it is by this name that we invoke Hanuman.

“Asaasdhya saadhak swamin asaadhyam tava kim vada

Rama doota kripa sindho matkaryam saadhaya prabho

“The meaning is ‘Oh! Lord, who can achieve the unachievable! Is there anything that you cannot achieve? Do tell me. Oh! Rama’s messenger, ocean of grace! Please make my task succeed.’ There is a beauty in that phrase, ‘Do tell me.’ There is the beauty in leaving the decision to the god to whom you are praying. Instead of asking what will the world say- what will people say when there is a wrong decision, there is a certain power in leaving it to him. You can hear the pleading note. They sing a vrittham, that you know, ‘Oru daram Saravanabava enru’ (Just say Saravanabava once), this is found in the collection ‘Tiruveraga Navarathna Malai’. The Vedas, say that ‘If you say the shadakshari just once, whatever you wish will come true.’ In that vrittham the devotee asks Muruga himself, ‘Still even if I have said the japam countless times, my prayers remain unfulfilled. Why? Tell me Muruga.’” Some unknown person sang that plaintive song here standing far away. He sang the words, ‘Sol Kumara’ (Tell me Muruga), in so many different ways, pleading, coaxing, demanding, the ways he sang with such feeling still rings in my ears. He was not a big musician, just a person from the village. He sang with such devotion, did not ask for anything more, and just went away.

“I realized that the word, ‘Tell me’¹ has so much meaning. In this sloka that we saw just now, the word ‘vada’ in ‘asaadhyam tava kim vada’ means ‘tell’.

[Periyava did not say anything more about that singer. It appears that the unknown singer came again after a few days, prostrated before Periyava and left without saying anything. When Periyava’s attendants asked him he said ‘I had prayed to this Muruga to tell me the answer. He has answered my thoughts.]

“So, in this way Rama kept his supernatural power under control and his devotee drew strength by his devotion and accomplished unachievable tasks. Rama made it appear as if he was helpless, and

¹ Here Periyava plays upon the Tamil word ‘sol’ which means both ‘word’ and ‘tell’

gave that strength to his devotee to do the task- just like the serum drawn from a patient cures the illness.

“To manufacture that medicine, a drop of blood is enough. But Hanuman drew not just a drop of his lord’s power, but the whole of it. And he rendered help to the whole world, why even to that lord himself! But he understood that he achieved all of it, by the drop of Rama’s largesse. So he lay at Rama’s feet, like a small dot of dust. If you ask me which is greater, Rama suppressing his power and maintaining the mortal form in all his aspects or Hanuman diminishing himself as a dust particle after achieving impossible feats, it is difficult to hold them in the balance and give an answer.

“I told you about the second occasion when the tiruvadi helped where brothers could not. Rama was lamenting the dangerous condition in which Lakshmana was placed, and instead of saving him he had masked his power. On the first occasion since both of them were unconscious, there was no occasion for anyone to lament. We could reconcile ourselves saying how could one help the other or even help themselves in this unconscious condition. On the second occasion it was not so. The younger brother, who had dedicated every moment of his life to his elder brother, had lost consciousness and was lying down very nearly incapable of breathing. The elder brother was bemoaning his inability to help, and cursing himself for that, and beating himself.

“What happened was, after Rama, Lakshmana and the whole army was revived by the Sanjeevi herbs, the battle continued with more ferocity. Rama’s army killed more warriors of Ravana’s army. At that time, Indrajit conjured a form just like Sita and cut it up in front of Rama’s eyes. Rama and the monkeys were horrified and knocked in to inaction because the person they had come to save by waging this war was gone. Then he went to a temple with a terrible power called Nikumbila to perform a sacrificial rite. If he was allowed to complete it without interruption then he would become invincible. Indrajit thought that only if he immobilized Rama and his army, he could perform the nikumbila yagam without any interruption from his enemies; and he thought that if he created a vision of Sita being cut up that would numb his enemies. So he did just that and returned to the temple to do

the yagam

[Even Homer nods, comments Sri. Ra.Ganapathi. The incident of cutting up Sita was done not before Rama's eyes but Hanuman's. It was his sadistic idea that the same Hanuman who gave the glad tidings about Sita after meeting her in Asoka vana, should now see this and convey to Rama that Sita had been killed. That is what happened and Rama became paralysed with sorrow.]

“Starting from Rama the entire army sat down totally drowned in sorrow, and they gave free pass to Indrajit to complete his yaga as he wished. At that juncture, Vibhishana heard the news and came running. He knew Ravana's mind, and Indrajit's mastery of sorcery, and since the people with him were also Rakshasas, he could get the inside information of all that was happening. Since he received the information that preparations were on to perform the Nikumbila Yaga, he guessed what was happening. He told Rama, ‘I know that Ravana still has a fond hope that one day Sita may acquiesce to his desire and he would not allow her to be killed. This is well-known to all the Rakshasas. So Indrajit would not have gone against that and killed Sita. If he had done it, Ravana would have killed Indrajit. Therefore he must have created the magic Sita appearing to kill her, so that he can continue performing the yaga without any interruption”.

“Immediately Rama and the army were rejuvenated and their spirits were revived. They prepared to fight. Since there was no way they could win the war without drawing Indrajit from his yaga, the monkey warriors went to the Nikumbila temple to do that. They say ‘roles got reversed’, it is like that! (Periyava smiles). Usually the practice is that, when rishis and good kings perform yagas the asuras and rakshasas will ensure that is not completed. The first thing that Rama did, as an incarnation, was to protect Viswamaitra's yaga, by killing the rakshasas who were causing harm. Now it is the right opposite of that. The good monkeys went forth to destroy the Rakshasa's yagna. And they also accomplished their object. Indrajit came to the battlefield in a state of uncontrollable anger and hatred.

“I won't stretch my narration. Lakshmana killed Indrajit. Ravana

could not bear that his son was dead, and that too, a son who was a warrior among warriors. The urge to take vengeance overcame even his sorrow at losing his son (putrasoka). He aimed his Shakti ayudham on Lakshmana who had killed his beloved son.

“Its name itself is Shakti. The potency of the weapon combined with the rakshasa’s power, plunged into Lakshmana and broke his chest. He fell down at once. A thin thread of life was still sticking on, liable to be severed at any moment.

“Rama considered Lakshmana as ‘his own life in an external human form’, he would say ‘bahischara prana’. He began to wail, totally heartbroken that there was no point in living, or waging the battle or rescuing Sita, once the brother who lived for him was gone. In Rama’s words there is a famous sloka that stands as an example of brotherly love. It was spoken by him at this moment.

“ *Desey deseey kalathraani, deseey deseey cha bandhavaa:*

Tham thu desam na pasyaami yatra bhrata sahodara:

“It means, ‘In this world, you may get another wife to replace the wife who has gone...remarriage is possible is it not? He says this keeping that in mind. Among other relations, if one goes, you can replace it by forming another relationship. But I don’t know where one can replace a brother by another.’

“It seemed as if Rama would mourn like this and lose his life, so the entire army was stunned by sorrow into inaction.

“Even in those days amongst the royal families there was this practice to request a doctor to certify and confirm that a person is really dead. In that way the monkey doctor Sushenan tested Lakshmana. And he found that a thin thread of life was still there. So they made Hanuman bring the same mountain that Jambavan had earlier made him bring to revive Rama, Lakshmana and the entire army. He knew that it was possible to revive Lakshmana’s life. So he consoled Rama and the army and sent Anjaneya to the Oshadhi Mountain once again.

“Once more Anjaneya went and brought the whole mountain again.

“On that occasion, the wind that carried the aroma of the herbs was enough to revive everyone. That was because Indrajith had aimed the weapon against all, so its potency was also spread out. But now Ravana concentrated on Lakshmana alone and aimed the weapon, so its effect was that much greater. So the aroma of the herbs was not sufficient to revive Lakshman. Sushena had to squeeze the juice of the herbs into Lakshmana’s nostrils. This is how during the ritual of pumsavanam it is the custom to squeeze the extract of the banyan tree into the nostril of the pregnant woman to ensure healthy issue. As soon as Sushena did that, Lakshmana jumped to life. And at once Rama and the army jumped with joy.

“Hanuman too jumped. But he was focused on doing his task correctly. So he jumped and carried the Sanjeeva hill back to Himalayas in one leap. He replaced it back in its original place yathasthanam and returned to the battlefield.

“When the super great elder brother, who was the very incarnation of Vishnu was unable to help—or seemed to be unable to help his younger brother who was an incarnation of Vishnu’s aspect, it was this siriya tiruvadi that rendered a great assistance!

“Where it concerned Sita and Bharata who were also dear as life to Rama, his brothers were unable to help, and it was this little Anjaneya the siriya tiruvadi who helped. Even the padukas of Rama which were the manifestation of his divine feet (tiruvadi) could not help Bharatha and it was this siriya tiruvadi who did it. Of all that is described as feet, the padukas were the most tangible and took the place of a king on the throne, but they could not do what Anjaneya the siriya tiruvadi could accomplish. It is the might of the tiny.

“You may all guess the occasion when Anjaneya helped Sita. After Ravana abducted her, Rama suffered not knowing where she was hidden as the entire world was under his control. Wasn’t it Anjaneya who went and met her in person in Asokavana in Srilanka and consoled Rama? There after Rama defeated Ravana in battle and accomplished the object of his incarnation and became Jayarama and Vijayaraghava¹

1 The words ‘Jaya’ and ‘Vijaya’ mean victory

brought back Sita as Sitarama, his coronation was performed with Sita making him Pattabhirama. It gave meaning to Anjanaye's constant utterance of 'Jaya Rama Jaya Rama', and Rama Rajya was established such that today the term has become synonymous to righteous rule. All this was made possible only by Anjaneya.

“All that his dear brother Lakshmana could do was to suffer with Rama when he was separated from Sita or console him, but he could not be of help to Rama by doing what should be done. Lakshmana was all the time doing what he could to assist Rama and was inseparable from Rama. Now when Rama was somewhere in Kishkindha amidst monkeys, crying for Sita, how could Lakshmana have gone anywhere in search of his sister-in-law, leaving Rama alone? Though this justification is there, the fact remains that this brother did not help Rama when he was desperate to hear the news of Sita's whereabouts. Wasn't it this siriya tiruvadi Anjaneya who helped then? It is the account of what Anjaneya did that has become Sundara kanda, the canto that is foremost of the texts chosen for recitation, parayanam. It is the same Anjaneya¹ who revived Rama physically when he was injured and fallen by carrying the Sanjeevi Mountain and who also revived him emotionally, when he was heartbroken on losing Sita, by carrying information of her safety.

“The joy that Rama felt then was unparalleled. He said, 'What a great help you have done to me. What can I give you in return? I have lost my kingdom and am left without anything, and in this state I cannot give you gold or land. Now there is only one thing I can do...come here.' [Pariyava literally enacted this scene and was quiet for a few moments overcome by emotion] Rama then embraced Anjaneya tightly to him.

“Here Rama has spoken very slyly-a lofty slyness. Generally Rama never did that, it was Krishna who made that his business! In a rare moment Rama does it here! Actually if Rama had been the emperor of Ayodhya and had given the whole kingdom to Anjaneya that would not have been as precious as this close embrace. By this gesture, Rama

¹ Throughout this chapter Pariyava uses the word 'adi' meaning foot to denote Anjaneya. For clarity in translation I have used the phrase 'siriya tiruvadi' or Anjaneya.

virtually gave himself to Anjaneya. That is the truth. But to say it in words will not be proper. And Anjaneya will be apprehensive thinking ‘Give himself to me? Do I deserve this?’ So to make it easy for all, he enacted this play.

“Sri Rama’s physique is the culmination of divine male beauty. In the same way, for women it is Ambal, she is called Tripurasundari, to indicate that. It is said that Krishna’s loveliness is a combination of both kinds of beauty- the masculine and the feminine. That is why we decorate Krishna with a nose-drop, bullaakku. Even the rishis of Dandakaranya who had burnt all desires, said on looking at Rama’s beauty that they wanted to embrace him. What he said in reply was ‘In this incarnation the only person who has the sole right to my embrace is Sita and no one else. At the end of Dwapara yuga I will appear in Brindavan. At that time all of you who are focused on the practice of karma and gnanayoga, take birth as the gopika women who have no knowledge of karma or gnana, but only of love, prema, as the unequalled mode of devotion. I will embrace you then.’

“The same person who asked those who pleaded to him for an embrace to wait for one more yuga, now on his own called Anjaneya and embraced him. What more proof is needed to demonstrate the greatness of siriya tiruvadi.? This is the greatest blessing that Anjaneya received. There is nothing to match it.

[Another thought strikes Periyava and he continues.]

“No, another thought occurs to me. If Anjaneya has taken Rama’s embrace that is Sita’s sole right, Sita should have had feelings of rivalry. But here,if Anjaneya has utmost devotion to Rama , his devotion to Sita transcends that. In the same way, if Rama has great fondness for Anjaneya, Sita’s affection exceeds that. Rama gave his embrace in exchange for the great joy that filled Rama on hearing Anjaneya’s message, ‘Sita was seen by me’ (Kanden Sitayai). Before that, when Sita was constantly pining for Rama, and was being intimidated by Ravana’s threats, and tormented by the rakshasis, and very near to death, it was Anjaneya who gave her the tidings of Rama, and more than that his signet ring. It was also he who told her that Rama would soon arrive with the monkey army to completely rout Ravana and his

people. So she was also beholden to him. Infact she thought her debt to him was irredeemable. Later when Ravana was killed and Anjaneya came to Asoka Vana with that information and to take her back, she said the same thing.

“It was almost the same words that Rama said, ‘My child, you have brought such glad tidings, even if I give you the suzerainty over the three worlds it will not be enough. I don’t know what I can give you.’

“It was because Rama was a man, he could embrace him. Though Sita was the Mother herself, - she is Mahalakshmi and they say thaayaar, thaayaar sannidhi, - there is something as propriety and what is right, isn’t it? Just as a mother hugs her child she did something subtly. When she said with her whole heart that she was unable to do anything in return, Anjaneya felt it was like a mother enveloping him. He replied with joy, ‘Amma, what you have said is more than the power of the heavens.’ Only he knew what an immense blessing it was because he heard it directly.

“Like this both the husband and wife gave Anjaneya something immense in return tacitly, though they spoke explicitly of their inability! But that is not enough in the eyes of the world, so after the coronation the divine couple gave Anjaneya a tangible gift.”

8. The Pattabishekam Portrait

There is nothing that gives us more happiness. We all have Rama pattabishekam pictures in very home, and there are sculpted images in temples too. The whole world rejoices to see Rama in the coronation scene. Sugriva and Vibhishana who are like his brothers are very happy. And Anjaneya is filled with such happiness that is the aggregate of every one's happiness.

One sloka that is very famous among the slokas that describe Rama Pattabisheka is this. When Ramayana is done as parayanam by the Smarthas they recite this.

Vaame Bhumisuta, purascha Hanuman paschaat Sumitrasuta:

Shatrugno Bharatascha paarsva dalayo: Vayvaadi koneshu cha I

Sugrivascha Vibhishanascha yuvarat Tarasuto Jambavan

Madhya neela saroja komalaruchim Ramambhaje syamalam II

“Rama is in the seated pose. Sita sits as his queen to his left. This is indicated by, Vaame Bhumisuta. ‘Bhumisuta’ means Bhumadevi’s daughter. Janaka picked her up from the earth and raised her. They also say Bhumadevi is the embodiment of patience. Sita inherited this quality fully from her mother. There is a proverb, ‘poruthaar bhumiaalvar’ which means the patient ones shall rule the earth. She had suffered untold misery patiently and now when Rama as Saarvabhauma is seated on the throne to rule the world, the daughter of Earth is seated as his queen on his left.

“The moment you say, what comes next is Anjaneya’s position, only after him, the brothers’ positions. He has that kind of a position among the Ramayana characters. (Periyava smiles).

“The good fortune to be embraced by Rama that was Sita’s alone, was given only to him, isn’t it? That is why. You may show from the Ramayana that others were also embraced by Rama. But that is the general display of affection, like the north Indians do, and not more. But it was only to Anjaneya that he embraces as if to say, I am giving myself as my quid pro quo for all that you have done for me. The rishis too requested him to embrace them not as a general gesture of affection but as a deeply felt and thought out one. Rama’s reply was, “In this incarnation no one is entitled to my embrace other than Sita.” It is to them that Rama says this, to all others he concealed the factum of incarnation. But rishis are all-knowing. They would remind him even if he had forgotten. That is why he declared that he was an incarnation to them.

“It was Anjaneya who comes after Sita. When Sita is on the left, Vaame Bhumi suta, Hanuman is slightly to the opposite, at an angle to the right. He would be seated on the ground, pressing Rama’s feet. Service to the divine feet was what this siriya thiruvadi did. Only these three persons are seated in this scene. Anjaneya would have also been standing respectfully. But he might have thought, ‘Will it be convenient if I stand and press Rama’s feet? Will it be possible to give the right pressure?’ and decided to sit down so that service to Rama is done correctly. Otherwise this is nothing for the one who can achieve the impossible, the ‘asadhyasadhaka’. But Rama may have asked him to sit down. Because Rama had made the monkey hordes build the bridge over the ocean, fight the battle getting injured and killed and so on all for his sake. Rama did not have the heart to make anyone strain themselves for his sake, unless it was absolutely essential. So though Anjaneya was very strong, standing and pressing Rama’s feet will be a strain. So Rama may have asked him to sit down.

“In that picture, Rama has his left leg folded across and only the right foot will be on the ground. If so Anjaneya would not have had the satisfaction of pressing both the feet. For that my answer is this. The embodiment of compassion Sita compensates this lacuna, by keeping her left foot down. That is how it is. So Rama’s right foot- the foot of the male half of the Ardhanareeswara, and Sita’s left foot-the left

half being female- will be together on the footstool. So I imagine that Anjaneya is pressing both the feet.

[Smiling a little to himself, Periyava continues.]

“Pressing’ is expressed as ‘pidichu vittundu’ that is ‘pressing and letting go. It does not mean Anjaneya let go. He held on to them tightly and forever, and that is how he held on to their feet too! We do not say pidikkaradu’ alone, then that would mean gripping hard. So we say pidichu vittundu’ that is gently massaging that is pressing and letting go. It is just like us saying poyittu va or sollivittuva.

“When Rama and Sita are seated on the throne and Anjaneya seated on the floor like that, the sloka mentions in which position the rest of the persons who are all dear to Rama are standing. Rama will be facing east. That is the settled custom. It is not necessary to say it explicitly, so the slokam does not mention it. On his left is Sita and she also faces east. It is not necessary to mention that either. Both of them will not be looking directly towards the front, instead they will be at a very slight angle towards each other.

“Vaame Bhumisuta’, ’purascha Hanuman’ indicates that Sita is to the left of Rama and Anjaneya is in front. Thereafter the rest. Paschat Sumitra suta: Lakshmana is behind Rama.

It was Lakshmana who has always been with Rama even during the exile in the forest. That is when they have in temples the image of Rama in the standing pose, it is always Sita on the left, Anjaneya in front and Lakshmana on the right. Likewise in this sloka, Lakshmana is mentioned right after Rama, Sita and Anjaneya.

But in this scene Lakshmana will not be on Rama’s right. He will be behind, but he will not be just standing. He will be holding the royal white parasol, sveta chatram (Sanskrit) venkotrakudai (Tamil), above Rama. Lakshmana is fair-skinned, and the umbrella is white. At the end of the verse it says ‘syamalam’ and nila saroja komalaruchim. Providing a contrast to this colour, is the white background. Syamalam means blue which is light and not too dense. The word sambal comes from that. What is a Syamalam in the north, is sambal in the south. Red lotus is commonly seen. But once in a way the rare blue lotus is found.

That too is light blue. And lotus is soft komalam to touch. Isn't it? The softness of touch seems to be reflected in Rama's blue complexion. nila saroja komalaruchim! 'Ruchi' here does not mean 'taste', it means radiance. Even though he was light-blue, Rama will have the radiance of light. Rama is also described as emerald –coloured, and there are versions where these close persons are differently positioned. But we need not go into that now!

“Rama may have appeared in slightly different ways before those who have experienced him. So we will assume that this slokam is one such, and just proceed.

“If Lakshmana was behind Rama he could not have seen Rama, but the person holding the parasol must stand behind.

“The three brothers wished that, when their beloved brother, after completing the exile and suffering the misery of Sita's abduction is now the Rajaraman with the kingdom restored to him; the important services due to a king of holding the parasol and fanning the chaamaram on both sides; must not be given to paid attendants, they alone must perform it! Then Lakshmana must have thought, 'I have been with our brother all the time even during the exile, while my two brothers were away from him for fourtee...n long years, so let me stand behind. Let them both stand on the sides with the chaamaram seeing him all the time', and in the goodness of his heart went and stood behind. As I am telling you all this, you must have known the positions of Bharata and Shatrugna, they stand on the sides waving the chaamaram. That is what the slokam says 'Shatrugno Bharatascha paarsva dhalayo:' Bharata will be standing on the right side and Shatrugna on the left side. Just like Sita is mentioned standing vaame, Shatrugna who is standing on the same side, is mentioned first.

“Then it goes on mentioning the names as in Vaayvaadi koneshu Sugrivascha Vibhishana:. That means, 'in the four directions like Vayu and others, there are four persons Sugriva, Vibhishana, Angada and Jambavan'. If you take the main directions like east, west, south, north, Rama is seated facing east, Hanuman is facing slightly west looking at Rama and pressing his feet. Behind on the west, Lakshmana also facing east just like Rama. On the north-south are Bharata and

Shatrugna, the verse does not specifically say who is standing where. But we can take it that the elder of the two that is Bharata is standing on the right of Rama that is south, and Shatrugna on the left, that is north. These are the main four directions. Then there are the four in between directions, starting from east clockwise they are south-east, south-west, north-west and north-east, right? It is all the eight taken together that are referred to as ashtadik, or eight directions. And don't we call the guardians of the directions as ashtadikpalakas? They are; Indra is for the east, south-east is Agni, south is Yama, south-west-Nirruthi, west is Varuna, north-west is Vayu, north is Kubera and north-east is Isana. Different persons are referred to as Nirruthi, who does not belong to the group of Devas and is a Rakshasa or Rakshasi. If Yama is the god of death, Nirruthi is also death-connected and it is said Nirruthi rides a donkey with a drawn-out sword in hand. Isana on the north-east is an aspect of Parameswara. Of these Vayu is on the north-east, and starting from there going clockwise north-east, south-east and south-west, in that order, stand these persons according to the sloka. They are Sugrivascha, Vibhishanascha, Yuvarat Tarasuto Jambavan. Yuvarat means Crown Prince, Tara suta means son of Tara, that is born to Tara and Vali. When Rama killed Vali and crowned Sugriva, everyone that is Rama, Vali and Sugriva whole-heartedly appointed Angada as the crown prince. Sugriva had no issues.

In the sloka, three 'sutas' are mentioned. First it is 'Bhumisuta' that is Sita, next Sumitra suta: 'Lakshmana is Sumitra's son, right? Shatrugna also is her son. But his name is stated as such, but for his elder brother, instead of his name, this appellation is used, why? This is because of the children the one who is the eldest or the one who is most well-known is generally named by using the father or mother's name. There may be some rare exceptions. Names like Dasaratha nandana, daasarathi mean Dasaratha's son. But isn't Rama the first and the best of them, who alone is referred to like that? Partha means 'Prutha's son'. Prutha is Kunti's real name. She is Krishna's aunt, the own sister of Vasudeva. They were the children of a chieftain called Surasena. Surasena gave her in adoption to his cousin Kuntibhoja who was another chieftain. So she got the name Kunti, and that stuck. Prutha's son is Paartha. Then all the five Pandavas should be Partha right? But the name Pandavas

that is derived from the father Pandu, is the one that is used for them generally and the name Partha is not like that. It is not even used for the eldest who is Dharmaputra, but for the best of them that is Arjuna. If you take virtue, then Dharmaputra is the best too, but in importance, it is only Arjuna, and it is he who is the hero of Mahabharata. Starting from winning Draupadi in the swayamvara, it is he who performs many of the crucial deeds and it is he who has the closest connection with Krishna. In fact even the Gitopadesam is only for him. Mahavishnu took a dual incarnation called Nara and Narayana. They again took the incarnations of Krishna and Arjuna. Krishna is Narayana, it is not even necessary to say it. The one who is Nara's incarnation is none other than Arjuna. For all these reasons it is he who is Partha. Though both Lakshmana and Shatrugna are Sumitra's sons, Lakshmana is referred to as Sumitra suta because he is both elder and more known for his qualities than Shatrugna. In this incarnation, isn't he the one who was closest to Rama and always near him? The name Soumitri which is derived from Sumitra is also used only to refer to him.

“‘Bhumi suta’ and ‘Sumitra suta:’ then the third is Angada who is called ‘Tarasuta’. In the Rama Pattabhisheka scene, starting from North-west where Sugriva stands, going clock-wise to north-east where Vibhishana is, we come to south-east the Agni corner and Angada will be seen there. Finally, in the direction of Nirruthi, is Jambavan.

“In this positioning, just like Lakshmana but not so directly behind Rama that his face cannot be seen, but slightly at an angle on the two corners where a glimpse of Rama can be obtained, Sugriva and Jambavan can be seen. And in the corners from where Rama can be seen well, Vibhishana and Angada can be seen. Sugriva may have thought, ‘I have obtained huge benefits from Rama, he killed Vali who made me shiver in fright and granted me great relief; Rama also crowned me and so I have received huge gains. So it is not fair if I also grab the vantage position.’ And as for Jambavan, he is a really aged person. And such persons will not push their way in, they will allow others to go ahead. Moreover he had obtained a boon that he will live till the birth of Kaliyuga. I had earlier once told you that Jambavan is an immortal a chiranjeevi. That is a lapse of memory. If I am an English man, I will

say ‘excuse me’, ‘sorry’ and so on. This has become a fashion and our people also say that. But my position¹ does not permit that. But it is not that I do not feel apologetic. Because of that position and because devotees come truly believing that a person in that position will only say what is right, there must be that care and caution that nothing wrong must be said to the devotees. I too am careful in this regard, but sometimes it trips.

[Sri R.G then extols the greatness and humility of Periyava referring to this]

“Just before Kali yuga, at the very end of Dwapara yuga Swami will incarnate as Krishna. At that time, Jambavan will give his daughter Jambavati in marriage to Krishna and become his father-in-law. Jambavan knew this hazily, so he too went and stood behind in the Pattabhisheka scene. Vibhishana came to Rama only after these two i.e. Sugriva and Jambavan. So they gave the better positions to him and the child who has lost his father (Vali) Angada; and they went behind.

“Eight planets stand encircling Surya, the sun. Like that the gem of the solar race, Rama as Sitarama is in the centre. Around them starting from east are, Anjaneya, Angada, Bharata, Jambavan, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Shatrugna and Vibhishana thus nine. (Smiles) All the nine are beneficial ‘planets’, This Rama ninesome Ramayatana will not be a geometric set-up like the solar navagraha, which is an exact intersecting pair of squares, eight in the corners and sun in the centre. Ayatana means something set up as a group. Since this is somewhat similar, I compared this scene to that.

“Nine is an important number for Rama. He was born on the ninth day of the moon, navami. When Ramayana is read as parayanam, or it is delivered as a lecture or upanyasam, it is done in nine days, they call it navaham.

“Didn’t I tell you that though Rama and Sita gave an intangible gift to Anjaneya as a thanksgiving for all that he did for them, they also gave a tangible and visible gift to him at the time of the coronation? That is why I started telling you all this. I also wanted to tell you then,

1 Periyava means as the head of the Math

that while Rama gave gifts to others who were close to him, distinct from them, for Anjaneya alone they gave it as a couple. That is how the description of the whole scene came to be described.

“It is not the tradition to give such gifts of gratitude to one’s brothers in public, nor is it necessary. So Rama also did not give anything to Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrugna. Rama considered his brothers as part of him. If so do you give gifts to yourself? But later when the successors were nominated, Rama in an unprecedented way, did not name just his own sons; he divided the kingdom among all the sons of his three brothers. Though in this scene that is before us, Shatrugna is close to the front, in Ramayana he was somewhere in the background. So to compensate for that, as soon as Rama became the king, he sent Shatrugna to fight with Lavanasura so that the world would know about this valour. And he also made him the king of Mathura- the vadamadurai- which was Lavanasura’s kingdom. All these demonstrate Rama’s excellent qualities.

“it is not necessary to give gifts to one’s brothers. Though Sugriva and Vibhishana were like brothers, isn’t it only ‘like brothers’? They and their entourage have come as guests, and since Rama had been crowned as king, they were honoured guests, and the kings were royal guests. So according to the protocol, Rama had to honour those two and also Angada the crown prince. This is what Rama did as soon as he was crowned.

‘Among his great virtues, the sense of gratitude is one. Even though he may have done a huge help to another, without making much of that, he gave importance to what they did for him and acknowledged his debt.

[Periyava too had the same quality]

“If you measure it like that, anything that Anjaneya did for Rama may seem diminished when compared to the fulfillment and joy he got by assisting Rama and the pure bliss he experienced by chanting Rama’s name. But Rama gave him gifts at the same time as he gave to Sugriva and Angada.

“Did he forget Vibhishana you may ask me. Ravana had conquered Kuberan who was abundant in wealth, and had transformed Lanka

into a place where prosperity danced. Kishkinda was not like that, it is only the forest kingdom of the monkeys. Rama has secured for Vibhishana that glorious Lanka. What is there to give him more than that? Yet, Rama also knew that Vibhishana's devotion was much more than Sugriva, it was the height itself, and he would have preferred to serve Rama and pay homage to him instead of ruling even Lanka. But Ravana's family had been fully wiped out, it was only right that Vibhishana should go there and administer the kingdom instead of letting it go to ruin, so Rama sent him back. And to compensate him for the sorrow of being away from Rama, he gave Vibhishana a very big gift. A really big gift! That was the idol of Sri Ranganatha that had been worshipped by the Ikshvaku clan generation after generation, all the ancestors of Rama including Dasaratha. Rama who always hid that he was an incarnation, revealed it only at this juncture, by indicating to that great devotee that the Ranganatha idol is being given in his place. It is not proper to give the worshipped idol in front of the assembly. It had to be done in a kind of concealed manner. Further if it was done publicly, the secret of the incarnation had to be revealed. And also it would give room for the people of Ayodhya to murmur, 'How can the family idol of the royal clan, be given to the king of Rakshasas?'" So when Vibhishana took leave Rama gave it quietly.

"During Rama's lifetime itself, Valmiki caused his Ramayana to be performed by Rama's twin children before Rama. So in that Adikavya Valmiki has very intelligently mentioned this giving away of the Ranganatha idol, not explicitly but impliedly. He wrote, '*Labdva kuladhanam raja lankam prayath vibhishana:*' One way to understand this is, 'King Vibhishana obtained his family treasure Lanka and went back.' That is how everyone listening to Ramayana would have understood it even during Rama's time. The other way to understand it is, 'King Vibhishana received Rama's family treasure the Ranganatha and went back.' This is what happened in reality. But since no one would have expected this, they would not have understood the true import. Without mentioning whose family treasure it was, or the name Ranganatha, by just writing '*kuladhanam*' the great sage who was also a great poet managed to say it!

“For the aged Jambavan, Rama did not give any gift, perhaps because he wanted to give it as Gnana vairagya. Or maybe he thought that anyway Jambavan would become his father-in-law in the next incarnation. So who remained? Anjaneya, Sugriva and Angada.

“First Rama honoured Sugriva. Having become a king, it is only proper to honour another king first. And also he must be honoured before his subjects Anjaneya and Angada. Moreover, had he not given his entire army to assist Rama in his search for Sita and the battle against Ravana and his rakshasas? Then Rama is solar dynasty, Suryavamsa and Sugriva is an aspect of Surya. Rama gave him sovereign necklaces. At once as per diplomatic protocol he gave to Angada the crown prince of Kishkindha, the navaratna studded armlets or bahuvalaya. Only thereafter Rama came to Anjaneya, Sugriva’s friend, though he had a great love for him.

“At that time, Rama and Sita the couple made that gesture so gently. It is wonderful even to think of it. How did the two, without speaking to one another, just by mutual understanding, do something so big in such a subtle manner?

“Rama had given only to Anjaneya, the place next to Sita. Knowing that whether others understand or not, Sita had accepted this with all her heart, Rama did something. Rama also knew that Anjaneya also understood this because of his intelligence and devotion. Without giving to Anjaneya anything directly, at a time when everyone assembled where expecting to see Rama honour Anjaneya, Rama gave a necklace to Sita. It was a chandrahaaram, made of mainly pearls and also some gems. It was not the custom for a king who was the husband, to give to his wife the queen. And that too, he did it after giving two outsiders, totally in an unconnected way. Why did Rama do this, Rama who never started anything, which had no precedent, who was always righteous? Because, if he had to honour someone who had no equal who was asadharana, he had to do something asadharana that had no equal.

“Sita put it round her neck. But right then Sita realized, ‘This necklace is meant for Anjaneya. Rama knows that I too am equally bursting with gratitude, to give Anjaneya a gift. And that is why he has given it to me so that I can give this to Anjaneya with my hands.’ Sita,

the Universal Mother would have been overcome with the joy that her husband himself gave her this chance, and the happiness realising her husband's great qualities. But what if some evil eye is cast on the child Anjaneya in this crowd by giving him a special gift? The mother's heart would have wondered about someone feeling jealous of Anjaneya. On such occasions gods will also behave like human beings. That itself will have a beauty that touches our human hearts.

“So Sita thought that she should give this necklace to Anjaneya not publicly but in private.

“Immediately another thought must have occurred to her. ‘After honoring two persons openly, will it be proper to exclude the third? And that too when the whole world knew that it was the third one who had found where she was, had set fire to Lanka single-handedly, brought the Sanjeevi hill during the war and also demonstrated his valour in the war. So even the people gathered here, will think that, it is not proper to exclude him. So though people may cast the evil eyes, if I gave as our joint gift, what Rama had given to me, something must be given to Anjaneya to please the gathering. That was good too! Though Rama and I are one, and I have a share in all his good deeds, I myself must do something specially for this Anjaneya. So we will take this as an opportunity. Won't Rama know this? But he has also done this knowing everything. Only the wife has a share in what the husband does, the husband does not have a share in what the wife does. This is the sastra. Rama knows and adheres to this rule. But he must have thought Anjaneya is an exception. Why else would he give something to me and make me give that to Anjaneya on his behalf too? Let me do that later. Now I will give Anjaneya something new and separate.’ After making up her mind like this she gave Anjaneya rich clothes and valuable ornaments. This was an honour bestowed on him alone and not to anyone else by the queen!

“The moment she gave it, the loving qualities of Rama came to her mind in a gush, and all that she had done after much thought, was wiped out. ‘Look at this, I was only thinking of my fondness for Anjaneya, will that even be a fraction of what my lord has for him? It is because he does not demonstrate his feelings openly as a woman like me, and

shows restraint and calm. If he were to openly reveal his fondness for Anjaneya it will be matchless. It is only because he had in his mind the foremost of his devotees, that he gave me this pearl necklace. It is not fair that without giving it to the person to whom it most go, I am imagining all kinds of things’, Sita thought. And she took off the pearl necklace from her neck. The moment she held it in her hand, another thought occurred to her. Isn’t that how our mind works, every second a new thought? ‘We gave him just now clothes and ornaments, an honour not bestowed on anyone else. If I give this necklace that was given to me, will not people think I am excessively partial to Hanuman?’ To give or not to give became a dilemma for her. With the confidence that Rama alone will resolve it, she looked at him , with the necklace in hand. She looked at him and then bent down in turn. And he understood her discomfiture. Here Valmiki calls him ‘inkitagna’. That means one who understands another without verbal communication, just from the facial expression. In Tamil it is called kuripparidal.

“Rama solved the dilemma very skillfully. People may think why such an honour for Anjaneya alone. He gave the answer to this question explicitly. He made it very clear to all, Anjaneya fully deserved it. Once he made this clear to all in a way that everyone concurs with it, and then no one will be jealous, or cast an evil eye or raise an objection. He adopted a lovely ruse, by which Anjaneya’s qualities will be known at the same time it will not be an on-the-face gesture. Without mentioning Anjaneya’s name Rama tells Sita, ‘Dear Sita, You give this necklace to someone dear to you, not just that, who is also a perfect combination of manhood(pourusham), valour(vikramam) and wisdom(buddhi)’

“It was not a display of favouritism because Anjaneya was loved, it was given on a balanced consideration of his merit. When that is so, no one will have a dissenting opinion. Rama said this only to make people understand that.

“Pourusham means manhood. Manhood does not mean a crude aggressive nature. It is courage, fearlessness, helpful nature and humility. Vikramam means the ability to cross all obstacles, displaying a superior power over others. There is a famous king called Vikramaditya. Many kings all over the country including Tamil kings called themselves

Vikraman. Bhagavan grew as Trivikrama in Vamanavataram. Did he not measure with his feet the three worlds?

“As they listened to the good qualities, and that too when Rama said that one person possessed all of them, everyone would have unilaterally thought that it was only Anjaneya. So they would have all given him an unequalled honourable position.

“At that very opportune moment, Sita with inexpressible joy gave the pearl necklace to that foremost of devotees with her own hands.

“Valmiki has sung ‘Chandrakasaya kowrena swetabhrena yatha achala:’ to describe Anjaneya when he wore it. He shone wearing the pearl necklace which is like the rays of the moon, white and cool, on his broad chest like a white cloud. Just as the white cloud rests on the mountain

“That is how the divine couple expressed their gratitude openly. And they made everyone understand therein the greatness of Anjaneya.

“How much greater would Anjaneya’s happiness have been than the happiness of this couple!

“What a great good fortune was this, to receive from both Bhagavan and Mahalakshmi herself! And Mahalakshmi also gave him gifts separately, something that she did not do for anyone else. And even the joint gift, was something special that her beloved husband gave her, which she gave Anjaneya after wearing it on herself.

“He had found where Sita was, and at the right time saved her life, and thereby removed Rama’s grief. This was something that no other brother had done, and only the siriya tiruvadi did it. So the gifts were given in return for that great help!

9. At Hanuman's Feet

“If Sita was his very life, his dear brother Bharata was very dear too. And when he was prepared to give up his life, just like Sita, he was also saved only by this tiruvadi and not any other brother.

“Bharata was in the throes of anxiety, ‘The fourteen years of exile has come to an end. There is no sign of my elder brother’s return. By this time he should have reached the outer limit of the city.’ Unable to bear it any more, he lit the fire and was about to enter it.

“Shatrugna who has been literally attached to him since his birth is in distress. Though he is suffering he is not able to stop him from entering the fire.

“Kausalya who had been assuaging the pain of Rama’s absence by looking at Bharata is weeping, ‘Don’t do this, my child.’

“But Bharata is not prepared to listen to her.

“At that time , Anjaneya came flying in the sky shouting, ‘Arrived, arrived,’; and jumped before Bharata and saved his life.

“Why did Rama not reach even the limits of Ayodhya after the fourteen years’ period was over? Didn’t he know that Bharata will not bear to live even a moment thereafter? Even at the time when Bharata received the padukas from Rama, he had said categorically that if Rama is not back at the end of the fourteen years he would jump into the fire. In spite of that why did Rama not arrive?

“But one thing, even though Rama did not arrive, Anjaneya landed at the right moment. But if he landed there, it would not have been on his own initiative. He had surrendered totally to Rama and he never did anything on his own, but he only carried out Rama’s mandate.

The beauty is there was no coercion in this surrender, it was purely voluntary. Anjaneya had out of total love and devotion sacrificed his autonomy to Rama. People who surrender must be like that.

“So we may conclude that it was Rama who had sent Anjaneya to Bharata at that crucial moment.

“If he could send Anjaneya, could he not have come himself? Why did he send him? What was he doing that was so important?

“What he was doing was gorging on a banquet! He proved he was a ‘sappattu Raman’!

[Periyava smiles. Listeners are puzzled hanging in suspense. Then Periyava continues.]

“Did the noble elder brother think of food, when he knew his younger brother would give up his life? No he did not think that food was more important, but he respected the words of the one who was offering that hospitality. He thought that it was an order that could not be disobeyed and bound himself to it.

“Who was the person who issued that order? What did he say?

“It was the sage Bharadwaja. He was one of the great sages with extra-ordinary powers. Rama had great respect for such persons. For Rama who had great respect for Brahmins and elder people, the words of Maharishis were like Vedic dicta. A Vedic dictum, vedavakku, means Vedic command. That is how all the people of this country thought for eons. It is because it has sunk in so deeply, that even now when people have totally forgotten the Vedas or have deliberately disregarded the Vedas behaving in a contrary fashion, if A implicitly obeys B, we say, ‘B’s words are like vedavakku to A.’ Or if someone persists that something should be done, we say, ‘Must I do it, is it vedavakku?’

“Rama thought that the rishis’ words were like vedavakku. Those Vedic sounds which are subtly present in the entire universe, are made audible, are made capable of being learnt by us, only by the efforts of the rishis.

“The sage Bharadwaja had his hermitage close to Ayodhya in the

Prayag forest, on the way from Ayodhya to Dandakaranya. Right at the beginning of his exile, after crossing the Ganges, the first person Rama went in search of was Bharadwaja who was at the confluence of Ganges and Yamuna. He told the sage then that he would be living the life of an ascetic during this period of exile, the only exception being the one duty of a Kshatriya which he can never give up, which was destroying the evil ones. He particularly mentioned that his diet would only consist of tubers, roots and fruits.

“Hospitality was something very dear to Bharadwaja. Serving a guest is Aathithyam, Serving the Sun god is Aadithyam. Please note the difference, tha and dha. Since Surya was born to a noble woman called Adithi, he is called Aadithya. What I am now talking about, is not connected to Sun, it is only about hospitality. And Bharadwaja loved that. And that too, when the divine incarnate Rama visited him, he knew by his prescience that he is an incarnation- he very much wanted to invite Rama. Rama to his dismay said that he will be on an ascetic like diet of tubers, roots and fruits. But he still respected Rama for this. He was touched to hear that Rama who ought to have lived on the lap of the luxury, had to adopt a contrary life style, that of an ascetic, and he had accepted this happily and had also resolved to follow an austere diet. So he decided he must respect Rama’s resolve and not insist on him accepting his hospitality. So he only offered the food that Rama would take.

“Now Rama was returning to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana, and his exile period had also come to an end. So he was returning to Ayodhya. And from the Pushpaka vimanam, he was showing one place after another to Sita, ‘this is where this happened’ and ‘this is where that happened’ and so on. As they approached Ayodhya the hermitage of Bharadwaja was seen. Rama thought, ‘This is the place we visited first at the beginning of the exile and obtained the sage’s blessing. We will see him again in the end- get his blessings since all has ended well. Moreover, we will also learn from him all that has happened in Ayodhya in these fourteen years. We do not know how it will be if we land there all of a sudden.’” So they all descended and got down from the Pushpaka vimanam.

“That was the day that the fourteen years had exactly come to an end. Rama knew he must surely meet Bharata that day. But the hermitage of the sage was directly on the way, not a diversion or a bye-pass (Periyava smiles), and Rama felt it would not be proper to just fly over it. Moreover he also needed to get the blessings of the sage and information about Ayodhya up-to-date. So in that Treta yuga, he decided to make what was really a ‘flying visit’ (smiles). The Pushpaka flew faster than planes, so he thought he would reach Ayodhya in a minute.

“Though Swami thought like that, what really happened was... you may think if what he thought did not happen how can Rama be god? Just like the true devotees who have surrendered, do not have a will of their own but have left everything to God, this God is known to do what the devotee wants. When that is so, if a devotee even if not in total surrender, but in total devotion wishes for something, God will be bound by that. So what happened now is, though Rama thought he would just make a flying visit, Bharadwaja made a request. He said, ‘Dear Rama, when you were on your way to the forest, you did not let me have the good fortune of offering you that hospitality that befits an unparalleled guest like you. Don’t deny me the joy again. I have received numerous guests; don’t break my heart by not letting me show the same hospitality to you. At that time since you said you were going to adopt an ascetic style of life, I felt that when you were in exile and not holding kingly power, your decision was appropriate and I did not compel you. Now the exile in the forest has come to an end. You are going to become the emperor of a huge empire. So now you must not say no to me. All that I ask is that you should stay overnight and take rest and then accept the feast that I serve you tomorrow and then leave.’

“Swami gives himself to devotees however lowly they are. And as Rama, he did not show himself as God, so he was even more submissive to the Brahmins and sages.

“What could he do? If he accepted what the rishi said, then by the time he met Bharata more than fourteen years would have elapsed. Bharata will not bear that delay and will enter the fire. If he explained this to the sage Bharadwaja, he might even accept it. But Rama did

not have the heart to say it. He thought that no harmful consequence can ensue if he fulfilled the wishes of a great sage pure at heart. So he knew Bharata would somehow survive. As these thoughts ran in his mind it also occurred to him in a flash, how to save Bharata from sacrificing his life. He thought, ‘Instead of telling Bharadwaja about the Bharata issue, it is better to send word to Bharata about the sage’s wish and make him wait.’

“But there was a problem here too.

“There was very little time for the fourteen-year period to come to an end. He landed at Bharadwaja’s hermitage, only because he thought that the Pushpaka would carry them without delay. But now the short visit he had planned became extended. If he sent a messenger now, by the time he reached Bharata, he might have ended his life because the deadline he fixed would be over. Only if the messenger went very quickly, at the same speed as the Pushpaka, he would reach before the deadline. But it was not possible to give the Pushpaka to the messenger. The Pushpaka not only flew at a great speed, it could accommodate any number of persons, like the Sanga plank. Rama brought the entire bear and monkey contingent only in the Pushpaka. After partaking of the feast at the hermitage, Rama had to take them all only in the Pushpaka. So it could not be sent to carry a single messenger. But if the messenger did not go at the speed of Pushpaka, Bharata will die.

“It is here that the siriya tiruvadi again came of use where the brothers could not help. There was no use in sending younger brother Lakshmana, he was thambi to both Rama and Bharata. He could not reach in time. So that brother will not come of use, nor will anyone else. Only Anjaneya who is described as manojjavam maruta tulya vegam who could travel like the mind at the speed of wind could reach Bharatha in the short time and reach Nandigramam to save him.

“It was him that Rama sent to convey to Bharatha the news of his arrival.

“Though I have been talking of how Bharatha’s life should be saved, there is another subtle matter here that could be understood only by an extraordinary mind like Anjaneya’s and convey it to him properly.

Bharatha was a great devotee, capable of renunciation. That is true and Rama knew it. But Rama knew one more thing and that is the craving that power can produce in anyone. If one gets a high position, it will make him cling to it and not give it up at any cost. The lust for power has enslaved many great persons. And here Bharatha had ruled not for a day or two but fourteen years. He honestly decided that he would not rule but would just be a representative of the padukas, and a king only in name. True. But even a man with a steadfast mind, could be by circumstance made to sway. Suppose Bharatha's mind had changed? Rama did not think that the fault dwelt in Bharatha, he truly thought that the fault dwelt in the power and the position.

“Rama considered this delicate issue. ‘If he desired the power now, let me not go and spoil that. I know he will surely rule the kingdom well, along the righteous path. I will let him continue in the kingdom and return to the forest from here without leaving a trace.’ This was his thought.

“‘But who will find out and tell me if Bharata wants to retain power? Bharata is a noble person and so even if he desired it, he would not show it on his face. Not only will he not reveal it to others, even in his own mind he will feel that it is not fair. So he will try to suppress the thought and desire. Who can detect that deep-held secret? Only Anjaneya who was both very wise and intelligent could do it. Anjaneya alone could comprehend the inner thoughts of a person, who may not express them verbally, from his minute changes in the facial expression, gestures, the variations in speech and so on. He alone had that capacity. So, for these reasons Rama decided to send him.

“We saw that Lakshmana could not have saved Bharata's life which he was about to give up. He could not travel at that speed. Further, even as regards comprehending Bharata's thoughts, just as the person who entertains an unfair wish will keep it suppressed, the one who has to discern those thoughts must also not reveal that intention. Only then he can succeed in comprehending those inner thoughts. Lakshmana undoubtedly had noble qualities, but he was impetuous. And he would not serve this purpose.

“Only the siriya tiruvadi would be suitable looked at from both

angles and Rama sent him.

“If the younger brother was of no use, you may ask what about the elder brother, the anna?”

(Periyava laughs so much he has to stop)

[Here Sri Ra.Ganapati. comments about how openly Periyava shares with the listeners his thoughts, openly and as though to friends. And he says that Periyava has decided to offer ninda stuti to Rama, which means eulogy disguised as censure]

“Don’t ask about the elder brother, because he is the cause of the whole problem! It is because he was so noble and so lovable, that Sita earlier and now Bharata, could not bear his absence and went to the extent of giving up their lives.

“Rama also asked Anjaneya to stop at Sringeripuram on the way to Nandigram to inform Guhan too that he has returned safely and triumphantly. It was an urgent of all urgent missions and in the middle of that Rama asked him to halt on the way. That was because Anjaneya was an Aasadhya sadhaka and could accomplish the impossible.

“He too went not as Maruta tulya vega as swift as wind, but swifter than wind across the sky. He informed Guha and proceeded. It was the exact moment when Bharata was about to jump into the fire when he jumped in front of him. Someone who helps in a timely manner is called Samaya sanjeevi. Anjaneya did that when he appeared in Nandigramam. He arrived proclaiming, ‘Arrived, arrived’ and prevented Bharata from jumping into the fire and saved his life.

“It is somewhat peculiar in Valmiki Ramayana. It does not give importance to this episode where even a moment’s delay would have resulted in Bharata giving up his life. There are many differences in the Ramayana text, in some this is referred to in just one line, in some others there is no mention at all!

“Bharata who should have been resplendently royal in appearance, looked just like Rama with matted hair, dressed in bark, eating roots and fruits, ascetic in appearance. At least Rama lived very happily for the major part of the exile that is thirteen years until Sita was abducted. On

the other hand Bharata felt deep distress, regret and torment, and was all the time pining for Rama and had almost wasted away waiting for him. Valmiki Ramayana merely speaks generally about his suffering and his expectation of Rama's return. This is given importance and not his readiness to fall into the fire. But that must have surely happened. Because when he received the padukas , the Aranyakanda clearly speaks of how Bharata said that even as Rama's representative he would only rule for exactly fourteen years, he would be alive in Rama's absence only for fourteen years and even if there is a moment's delay, he will jump into the fire. But for some reason there is no mention of this in the latter part of the epic.

“It is Kambhar who has poured heart-rending verses elaborating this. I told you that Shatrugna was watching with anguish Bharata preparing to fall into the fire, and so was Kausalya. All these are mentioned only in Kamba Ramayana. Even Shatrugna could only watch with anguish, he could not help Bharata. Only the siriya tiruvadi helped.

“According to Kamban, just as Anjaneya gave Rama's ring when Sita was about to give up her life, even at this moment he produced that ring. Rama gave that ring on both occasions, to confirm that the messenger was not a fraud, but sent by him. When Sita was about to give up her life, it was not as if Rama knew that Anjaneya would only save her life. Or at least since Rama conducted himself as an ordinary mortal, he acted as though he did not know. But as far as Bharata is concerned, Rama knew and had sent that ring only with the intention of saving his life. This is what Kamban says and it seems appropriate.

“Bharata who was in terrible sorrow, was overjoyed to hear the message. Both Valmiki and Kamban compete with each other in portraying this beautifully. Valmiki says that on hearing the news Bharata fainted, and that when he revived, he embraced Anjaneya and drenched him with the tears of joy that flowed. He had said that Rama embraced Anjaneya since he was in exile and could not thank him with gold and other gifts; and that when he became the king, he and Sita together gave him the pearl necklace. Now though Bharata was a king only in name, he not only embraced Anjaneya but also gave him rich gifts including cattle and land. Valmiki also says that he further gave

young women so that Anjaneya could get married. However Anjaneya treasured only that pearl necklace given by the divine couple and wore it as if it was a prasadam. He shone like a mountain garlanded by a white cloud. Anjaneya did not even look at anything that Bharata gave, since as a naishtika brahmachari he had no need of a life or property for himself.

“How noble this Siriya Tiruvadi was! We must keep thinking of that and sharing it with others. My idea was to explain the proverb that meant, ‘Even brothers will not serve us as well as a slap’, and I have gone on and on extending like Anjaneya’s tail. His tail may extend to any length, we can also speak at any length about his feats. But at the end of it, all of us must mentally place his feet on our head, just as he bears Rama’s feet on his head, letting go of arrogance and vanity and be humble and respectful. It is customary to say dasanudasan or adiyarkadiyan. So we must be a servant of this Ramadasa, this siriya tiruvadi, that is Anjaneya, and pray that we must become like him. The sloka says we will get wisdom, strength and fame and much more if we even think of him. Let us get all that too. But let us not get that for our individual benefit all alone, let us serve the world’s welfare, and do what we can to make the world a better place. Over and above that, by resting his feet on head, he must destroy our ego totally and make us humble. Let us pray for that. He is the embodiment of compassion. He will surely grant that to us.

“Let us help others, but like Anjaneya without the thought that we helped others. Let us make ourselves light and enjoy the greatest bliss.”

10. Title Re-visited¹

“**R**ama could see Anjaneya’s qualities as clearly as one sees objects in a glass case, from just the few first sentences Anjaneya spoke when he met Rama and Lakshmana for the first time. Rama saw that he possessed all the qualities that a royal messenger should have when he meets another king even a king who may be a foe. This is because the first meeting was when Anjaneya went as Sugriva’s messenger. He was very afraid of what Vali may do to him or how he may torment him so he had hidden himself in the *Rsyamooka* hill which Vali could not enter because of a sage’s curse. *Rsyam* means deer, *mooka* means mute. Many deer lived in that mountainous region. The sages were in meditation lost to the world. It was absolutely quiet. The stillness was so peaceful. It seems the deer thought that they should not make any noise to disturb that peace. So they decided that they should become mute. They prayed to God to make them mute, and their prayer was granted. That is why the hill was called *Rsyamooka*.

“Another reason is also given which is that the hill’s peak has the shape of a deer’s face. So it became *Rsyamuka*. Sometimes the vowel sounds get elongated as in Hanuman becoming Hanooman, and *Rsyamuka* became *Rsyamooka*.

“When Rama and Lakshmana went looking for Sita after she was lost, they entered this territory when Sugriva saw them. He was terribly scared to see these two well-built men carrying bow and arrow, for he knew by their appearance that they were great warriors. He thought

¹ *Sri Ra. Ganapati writes that this book is only to record the unique quality of Periyava’s thought and speech. To demonstrate that Periyava’s lectures about Anjaneya were chosen amongst other instances and that this chapter is about the sweetness of Rama’s name*

that Vali must have sent these two men in his stead to kill him, since he himself could not enter this territory and he was petrified. He sent Anjaneya to find out all details of them, since Anjaneya alone had the capacity to do that. That is, Anjaneya was capable of meeting even an enemy and be a wise ambassador. That is why Sugriva sent him to Rama and Lakshmana. Anjaneya also wisely took the form of a human sanyasi, without revealing himself and approached them.

“Rama too was extraordinarily intelligent. He conducted himself only as a mortal and not an incarnation, and I am making this comment about him only as such. At the beginning of Ramayana, Naradar describes Rama as a perfect human being to Valmiki. He lists all good qualities and virtues that a human being can possess, and that Rama is the best in respect of each quality and virtue. While doing so, Narada says he is *buddhiman*, and it is only based on that, that I am saying he had great intuitive intelligence. So he understood that Anjaneya has come as a messenger sent to spy on him and see if he was a source of danger.

“What is important for a messenger or an ambassador is he should speak intelligently and tactfully to the person to whom he is sent as an emissary. So the capacity to articulate is very important. That is why Rama specifically mentions this quality to Lakshmana while listing Anjaneya’s qualities like wisdom, strength, humility and so on.

“Fine, let Anjaneya have the skills of a messenger. Why does Rama mention this in particular. It is because what he required then was a good messenger. They say *shatru-mitra*, that is foe and friend. At that time he needed a messenger to send to his dearest friend Sita, and bitterest foe Ravana. These two were polar opposites and the messenger had to go and speak appropriately and complete the mission successfully. For that, Rama required an excellent messenger.

“When Rama returned after killing the golden deer, he sees that he had lost Sita and went in search. The first person he saw then was Jatayu. He was in a near-dead state after having fought with Ravana. He told Rama that it was Ravana who had abducted Sita, and that he had flown southwards, carrying her. After conveying these two important details, he could speak no more and died. Then Rama met the asura

creature(*asura janma*) Kabandha and killed him.

[Sri Ra. Ganapati explains the term *asura janma* used by Periyava. Hiranya and Soorapadma are Avunas which is Asura race. Ravana and others are Rakshasas. The two are different. Kabandha is not Rakshasa. He is an Asura that is Daitya which means descendant of Diti. Kabandha is connected to Diti according to Valmiki Ramayana.]

“Rama performed the last rites for the friend Jatayu killed by Ravana. Likewise he performed the rites for Kabandha too because in his dying moments, he recognized Rama and prayed that he should perform his rites. While he was breathing his last, he confirmed that Ravana carried Sita and went southwards. Not only that, it was destined that he would be killed by Rama and if Rama did his last rites, he would take the form of Deva. So he told Rama, ‘You have killed me, you may as well cremate me.’ And Rama did accordingly. Once he got the supernatural form he also got supernatural vision. He told Rama that if he met Sugriva and befriended him, he would get back Sita.

“(Periyava smiles to himself) Really funny this is. The Lord-Maha Vishnu- who determined how the tale of the incarnation should happen, is himself Rama. But he enacts a strange drama, as though he possessed only mortal powers, and that he did not know what the future held, and some asura who transformed into a deva and that too by his hand, had to tell him all this!

“He had come to Rsyamooka hill only to make friends with Sugriva. His plan was this. Just because Ravana had carried Sita and had flown south did not mean that he would have kept her captive in his capital Lankapuri. He had annexed wrongly by force the seven upper worlds and the seven nether worlds, in all fourteen worlds. So even though he may have gone in the direction of his capital, it is possible for him to have gone to any of the world and kept her there. He may have also kept her anywhere else in this world itself. So with Sugriva’s help and the monkey army Sita must be searched in very part of this world. And through the person who found her he should send the message to her that he would come with the monkey army and destroy Ravana. And he would not straight away embark on a war against Ravana. In accordance with the law of Sama-Dana-Bheda

and Danda (Conciliation, enticement, trickery and punishment), he would first by sending a messenger, persuade Ravana to hand over Sita amicably. The messenger would inform him that if he did not listen or agree to this conciliatory mode, Rama would arrive with an army and destroy him in battle. This was his plan.

“That is why Rama had noticed the felicity of speech, which was a hall-mark of a messenger, which Anjaneya possessed and mentioned it to Lakshmana.

“Without making it explicit, he did this (because) He belonged to a family of kings. As a mortal, he was entitled to be an emperor. Once the exile was over, he would become an emperor. Sugriva belonged to a family of monkey kings. He had learnt from Kabandha that Sugriva wanted to get rid of Vali his tormentor who was actually the king, and who had the chance to become the king once Vali was gone. Unlike these two, Ravana was actually the king of Rakshasas, and had got the title of ‘Iswara’ viz; Ravanaeswara and Lankeswara, whose flag was flying high. So this matter involved three kinds of royals. And Rama decided that statecraft required (Periyava smilingly) that this should be done diplomatically and tactfully. He did so because he followed the rules to be adhered to by kings. But if he later realizes that the persons whom he treated like that, deserved his love, then Rama cast aside that royal protocol that protects his respect and gave his heart and even his life showering his love on them. That is what happened in the case of Sugriva later and even more so in the case of Anjaneya.

“But this was only their first encounter. Even so an indescribable love arose between both Rama and Anjaneya. But in this incarnation, God had to demonstrate to the people of the world how we should behave to different kinds of persons. Anjaneya had also come with diplomatic caution. That is why he disguised his real form and came as an ascetic. According to Kamban he came as a brahmachari. He uses the word *maani*. That means a student as a brahmachari, *manaakkan*, *maanavan* are all the same. If you say that Anjaneya took on a human form instead of appearing as a monkey, there is falseness and a bit of cunning, is it not? So Kamban might have thought let the degree of falseness be slight. He was really a pure brahmachari a celibate among

the monkeys, so it is just the same in human form. So I feel that is why Kamban instead of moving him to the fourth stage of life *sanyasa* or asceticism, keeps him in the first stage that is a brahmachari.

“I’ll also tell you why the two forms. Did not Rama and Lakshmana come with bow and arrows? Sugriva and Anjaneya did not know who they were, did they? In case they were emissaries of Vali, it was better not to reveal himself as a monkey living in Rsyamooka, so he disguised himself. He thought that they may be Vali’s men or even hunters.

“The monkey race that we come across in Ramayana is not the real monkey, the quadruped. They were like the gorilla or anthropoid ape, but a step higher. This race had an erect spine, they could work with hands and legs separately, they wore costumes and jewellery, but yet the human beings did not treat them as their race but only as animals. This was because the face is the most important part of our body, and these creatures had the face of a monkey. Further they also had the tail which is important for a monkey, its strength and power is in the tail. So men treated them as monkeys and even hunted them.

“You may wonder why I say this when even real monkeys ought not to be hunted. That taboo was imposed only after Rama’s times. It was the monkeys which were the greatest support to Rama who had no one else but Lakshmana. So it is for that reason that later the ban on killing monkeys was imposed. Rama says this explicitly to Vali, ‘It is only human beings who must be fought with in direct combat. You are only an animal, which can be killed hiding oneself. That is why I did it. Do not question me.’

“Anjaneya thought, whether Rama and Lakshmana are Vali’s men or whether they have come to hunt, they may aim their arrows at Anjaneya if he appears as a monkey in Rsyamooka which is Sugriva’s sanctuary. So he went in disguise.

“Why should he be either a sanyasi or a brahmachari? That is because people will not kill those who belong to these two *asramas*. That is a strict rule of sastra. It is said that killing them is such a grievous sin. Brahmachari has dedicated himself to Learning. Sanyasi has dedicated himself to Wisdom or Knowledge. So our tradition gives them a special

place. Even the most despicable person who commits the worst sins would hesitate to kill these two. That is why Valmiki and Kamba had chosen one of these two for Anjaneya's disguise.

“We do not know of any monkey who had become a sanyasi. Anjaneya was a brahmachari. He could have therefore gone as himself a brahmachari monkey. But that was not possible because, as I told you earlier, this race was not considered as human beings but only as animals. So even when they were killed, it was treated as an animal killing. So perhaps it was permitted to kill brahmachari monkeys, unlike the human ones. Moreover at first sight, the human brahmachari can be clearly identified, with the tuft of hair, the dandam or stick, the dhoti tied above the knees. But the monkey will be hairy all over, and no hair on the head to tie a tuft. Nowhere do we find that Anjaneya was holding a dandam, so probably the monkeys did not follow that practice. And as for the dress, if you see the olden sculptures, all the monkeys wear the dhoti above the knees. Since there is a lot of evidence in the Ramayana, that they behaved like monkeys leaping from one tree to another, climbing mountains, high buildings by leaping up; it must have been convenient to wear the dhoti knee-high and not touching the floor.

“Let these reasons be kept on one side. If you consider it from Kamban's perspective, he was one who considered Rama as the Almighty even above the trinity. At the same time he had to write about him as though he was a man, since that is how Rama behaved. So he must have felt troubled at some situations, that is, the compulsion to write about the Almighty as though he was a mere human being. Kamban who understood Rama being a stickler for rules, has written that Rama was disturbed when Anjaneya who came as a Brahmin brahmachari offered his namaskaram to him who was a Kshatriya. That being the case, how much more would Rama be troubled had Anjaneya gone as a sanyasi? Rama himself would have fallen at Anjaneya's feet, right? Would Kamban have had the heart to write like that? He would have thought that Anjaneya would have also felt like him.

“I am giving you all kinds of reasons. Kamban has modified Valmiki's version. Whether he can do it is one point. But he had great

respect for Valmiki and the traditions and adhered to them. He was not like the upstarts of today, who think they can tamper with anything and everything. He was a great devotee, a scholar –even in Sanskrit–and also an intellectual. So if he has made a change, we just have to accept it. We need not go in search of his reasons. Or we can assume that he must have done it for a good reason.

“Whatever it may be, he went in a disguise, that is, Anjaneya has approached Rama with caution. So Rama also follows diplomatic protocol. So after a while, when he learns that Anjaneya has come as his master Sugriva’s servant, he decided that he should not speak to him directly and lets Lakshmana who ‘serves’ him speak to Anjaneya. A little before that he cautiously tells Lakshmana something that he alone will understand, about Anjaneya. (Periyava smiles) One thing, this caution and diplomacy must not be known to the one in front, he must think that it is all done in a friendly manner. This is an aspect of diplomacy. So what he told Lakshmana was seemingly in praise of Anjaneya. But since Anjaneya really deserved that praise, it was an opportunity for Rama to openly praise him too. It is at that juncture that Kamban uses the term ‘*sollin selvan*’.

“What was the sub-text here to be understood by Lakshmana alone? That is the dispatch of emissary. Wasn’t Rama thinking of sending someone suitable to be an emissary to both Sita and Ravana? Rama told Lakshmana in a very brief, cryptic almost code language ‘Here is that person- Anjaneya.’

“How do those words indicate that, you may ask. (Periyava speaks in formal literary Tamil) Lakshmana must understand that if we send Anjaneya he will go. On a simple reading *sol* means words or speech and *selvan* you can take to mean master.¹ So *sollin selvan* means master of speech. But *sollin* in Tamil also means ‘if you say’. So in this context it means ‘if you say to him to go as an emissary’. Lakshmana was not only intelligent, he was on the same wave-length as his brother so he would have understood what he said.

1 This is not translation but more an explanation. What Periyava says here will be understood only by those who know tamil.

“*selvan* also means *selvaan*, or he will go.

“Then *sollin selvan* would mean ‘he will go if you say to him go as an emissary’

[Periyava laughs and the gathering is also delighted too.]

“He had found the person who has all the qualities that he was looking for. Moreover Rama knew at first sight that Anjaneya would be totally subject to him and devoted to him. That is why he says with certainty ‘he will go’ or *selvan*.

“From this we see that not only Anjaneya is a ‘master of speech’ but also Rama who gave him that title. Instead of rambling and wasting a number of words, he conveyed what he meant in just two words and so he is *sollin selvan*.

[Sri.Ra.Ganapati observes that the same applies to Periyava]

(Now, Periyava explains the sweetness of Rama’s name.)

“Rama’s name is nectar, *amrutham*, Ramayana is nectar *amrutham*, Rama himself is nectar *amrutham*. We have the name Ramamrutham but not Krishnamrutham or Sivamrutham. What is so especially sweet about Rama? His birth itself was from a payasam! Kausalya gave birth to him only after she ate the payasam which was the divine prasadam from the *putrakameshti yagam*. Purandaradasa has sung *Ramanama payasake*. We say Rama’s name is rock sugar. It is the sweet crystal squeezed from sugarcane juice.

“Poets from all over India have sung about Rama or the whole Ramayana itself. The reason is this- even if you have many sweets like Laddu, jangiri, halwa, you have to use the same sugar for them. And Rama is that sugar!

[It is the custom to offer sugar to a visitor, so we offer rock sugar and take leave of these lectures which show Periyava as a master of speech]

11. Not Dumb Charades

A part from the spoken word, Periyava was a specialist in an area of “unspoken” sweetness. Let’s see what that is:

“Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter” said the poet. Our saint spread sweetness with words as well as without them. When he did not speak, he would use gestures to convey his thoughts, both, to emphasize something, as well as to delight us.

Indeed he was Nataraja (the lord of dance) himself in his gesticulating prowess. Let’s see an incident where the beauty of words mingles with the beauty of “*abhinaya*” (communication through gestures.)

“Now all will be well, (because) the month of “*tai*” will begin soon” - one of Periyava’s attendants was telling another. Periyava snapped his fingers and drew his attention. His finger snap was graceful yet majestic and loud in the way it could draw one’s attention.

Periyava was a “*vicitra-citta*” (the incomprehensible one) who would assume silence often. Now too, he called the attention of the attendant, pointed to a lady who was standing nearby, having come for “*darśanam*”, and said nothing. The attendant was used to Periyava’s unique ways and only understood that it had something to do with what he had been saying, nothing more.

“I was saying “*tai*” will begin soon”, he paused and Periyava nodded as if saying “Exactly!” and again pointed to the lady. Both understood and laughed. “Taiyamma, aren’t you?” said the attendant, stating the answer as a question. The name was “*tai*”, leaving out the common suffix for women: Amma.

Let’s see here, what Periyava has explained about the name

“*taiyamma*” at another time:

The Goddess in Vaideeswarankoil is called Balambika. A young girl or “*bālā*” is known as “*taiyal*” in Tamil, so the goddess’ Tamil name is “*taiyalnāyaki*”. The verb “*taivatu*” means to decorate. Dressing is the most important part of decorating, and so stitching clothes with a needle and thread became “*taippatu*”, “*taiyal*”, etc. A young girl, being a form of the child goddess, ought to be dressed well, and hence the word “*taiyal*” is used for her. Here the word has no connection to the month “*tai*”.

Periyava has explained the origin of the Tamil months’ names in great detail. They are all derived from Sanskrit words, which are in turn the name of the Star on which the “*pūrṇimā*” (full moon day) occurs in that month. These base words have changed their form due to the genius of the (Tamil) language, and generations of usage by people. Some have changed a lot!

The first month is “*citrā*”, and becomes “*cittirai*” in Tamil. This is very clear. In this month, the “*pūrṇimā*” occurs in the “*citrā*” asterism, or the one before or after it.

The next is “*vaiśākhā*” which becomes “*vaikāsi*” in Tamil, just like Madurai becomes Marudai. The month connected to the star “*anuṣa*” is “*ānuṣī*”, and becomes “*āni*” in Tamil. Next, “*pūrāḍam*” and “*uttarāḍam*” are consecutive stars, which are Tamil forms of “*pūrvāṣāḍha*” and “*uttarāṣāḍha*”, the two parts of “*āṣāḍha*”. The month with its “*pūrṇimā*” in this star is “*āṣāḍhī*”, becoming “*āḍi*” in Tamil.

The star “*śravaṇam*” becomes “*ōṇam*” in Tamil (similar to “*śramaṇar*” becoming “*samaṇar*” and “*amaṇar*”) Since it is the star of Vishnu, “*tiru*” (meaning sacred) is added to it. In Malayalam, it is simply “*ōṇam*” and the day of this star, in the month is celebrated there as Vamana Jayanti, the day Mahabali was conquered. “*śrāvaṇī*” is our (Tamil) “*āvāṇi*”.

Periyava, the embodiment of impartiality, has shown us a rare truth here, signifying the equal importance given to Saiva and Vaishnava. Of the twenty-seven stars, only two have the prefix “*tiru*” given in

the Tamil land. They are “*tiruvōṇam*” which belongs to Vishnu and “*tiruvādirai*” which is sacred to Shiva. The original name “*ārdrā*” becomes “*ādirai*”. (We wrongly link it to Rudra and say “*ārudrā*”.)

The star “*bhadrapada*” is also known as “*prōṣṭhapada*”. The first and second halves of this star are the 25th and 26th, of the twenty-seven, and are called “*pūrva prōṣṭhapadī*” and “*uttara prōṣṭhapadī*”. These strangely, become “*pūraṭṭādi*” and “*uttaraṭṭādi*” respectively in Tamil. Even more strangely, “*pūraṭṭādi*” becomes “*purattāsi*” as the month’s name.

The month “*āsvinī*” based on the star “*aśvinī*” becomes “*aippasi*”. Unlike these months’ names that have changed considerably, the next month “*kārtikā*”, based on the star “*kṛttikā*”, has remained “*kārttikai*” in Tamil. Next is “*mārgaśīrṣī*” connected to the star “*mṛgaśīrṣa*” which has become “*mārgazhi*”. Let’s keep aside “*tai*” for now. Next is “*māghī*”, linked to the star “*magha*”. When referring to the festival, English magazines mistakenly write Mahamaham or Mahamakham. “*makham*” means a Yagna, while “*mahas*” means a bright light. Both are incorrect as the star is “*magha*” and hence the festival is “*mahāmagham*”.

“*phalguna*” has two parts, “*pūrva phalguna*” and “*uttara phalguna*”. In Tamil, the first of these discards the more important part, “*phalguna*”, and retains “*pūrva*” distorted as “*pūram*”. The latter retains only the “*uttaram*”. The month name “*phālgunī*”, becomes “*panguni*”.

Coming to “*tai*”, the star “*puṣya*” has another name, “*tiṣya*”. “*puṣya*” becomes “*pūsam*”, understandably. The month name “*puṣyī*” (based on “*puṣya*”) has not taken a Tamil form. Instead, the other name “*tiṣyī*” (based on “*tiṣya*”) has become “*tai*” in Tamil, leaving out the second syllable.

The month name “*tai*” has no connection to “*taiyal*” which means a young girl. “*taiyal*”, which refers to needlework, is not to be construed as the work that a “*taiyal*” (young girl) does. She is called that only because she is to be adorned well.

“In old literary works we hear the phrase “*parutti peṇḍir*” (Cotton

women). They are not to be confused with “*taiyal*”. “*parutti peṇḍir*” means widows. Long before Gandhiji exhorted people to spin cotton yarn while chanting prayers, these women used to spin cotton yarn like a sacred vow, thinking, “doing this, we can help the family, not waste time on gossip and sing divine hymns for our spiritual growth as we spin”, and hence acquired this epithet. Similarly in western countries, women were called “spinsters” because they spent their time spinning. But spinsters are not widows. They are women who chose not to marry and remained maidens. Even today we refer to such people as spinsters. They are similar to “*bālā*” or “*taiyal*”, being young and unacquainted with marital life. Being engaged in spinning, they are also connected to “*taiyal*” (needlework).”

“Tailoring and “*taiyal*” sound similar. This supports a pet theory of mine. This theory is: The British have created a narrative that Sanskrit and European languages belong to the Indo-European group of languages, while Tamil is a completely different Dravidian language, and they belong to people of different races. They’ve popularized this ‘study’ as Philology, as a Science, and used it to create the Arya-Dravida racial divide. Now this idea is completely wrong. What they label as “Aryan languages” and “Dravidian languages”, are all from the same base and the speakers of both belong to the same race. This is my pet theory.”

Periyava has shown numerous examples to support his theory, i.e., between the two groups of languages separated as “Indo-European and Dravidian, he has brought out several instances of words of one found in the other with some changes. One such is this “*taiyal*”-tailoring.

Periyava’s divine words further on Balambika-Taiyalnayaki: Balamba become “*taiyalambā*” in Tamil, and then “*tailāmbā*” in spoken form, as if linked to “*tailam*” (oil used for anointing the head). “*taiyalambā*” is also “*taiyalammā*”, which becomes “*taiyammā*”, the name by which women in the Thanjavur region, named after this goddess, are called. Some are called “*tailā*” or “*taiyū*” too.

It was pointing to one such Taiyamma that Periyava spoke that day. Both she and the attendant laughed at his connecting her name to the month “*tai*”. After that, Periyava continued his sign language with her.

“*abhinaya*” means facial expressions or dramatic representations.

When Periyava, who embodies the truth that is beyond words, observes “*kāṣṭha maunam*” (total silence), he expounds the truth of Vedanta simply by his state, like Lord Dakshinamurty. It then proves that “Silence is more eloquent than speech”. When he observes a milder form of silence, he communicates through gestures, and what immense capacity to mime that is! Like a danseuse skilfully using gestures that only seasoned “*rasikas*” can appreciate, Periyava would gesticulate such that only the sharp-witted could understand. Some of these could be very unusual. Once he gesticulated cutting off the nose. While most people were clueless, one attendant understood that he referred to one Mukherji. (“*mūkkaru*” means cutting the nose in Tamil). When asked how he figured it, he said he had seen Periyava earlier use this gesture while talking about that name. This cheerful playfulness is one of the sweet qualities of Periyava.

Periyava looked at Taiyamma and pointed to a stone. “Yes, I am Kallur grandpa’s granddaughter” she said (“*kal*” means stone.) Periyava searched for a piece of turmeric and showed it to her. “Manju grandma is weakened due to age” she said (Turmeric is “*manjal*” which sounds like Manju).

Periyava pointed to his head “Yes, she is from Talaiyur”, she said (“*talai*” means head)

Periyava then showed her the clock that he always had with him. The quick-witted lady understood. “Yes, in her paternal home, they are “*maṇiyakkārars*” for generations” (“*maṇi*” means time, “*maṇiyakkārar*” means village headman.)

Periyava was very pleased. He wanted to test her with an ever more difficult gesture. He patted his stomach. The intelligent lady did not skip a beat. She said something about a Vaitheeswara Iyer (“*vayiru*”, “*vayittu*” colloquially, means stomach and sounds like Vaitheeswara)

Thus, for several minutes, Periyava who is the Master of words, proved to be the Master of the subtle, unspoken word too. We shall see in the next section how he is the master of “*maunam*” too. Although he often observed “*kāṣṭha maunam*” (total silence), at other times he

would, like us, use writing and gestures to communicate, for many days. There is no virtuous facet of life that he left unexplored. One such is this half-silence that he took up like ordinary spiritual aspirants.

Although he may do things we do, there would be his unique stamp on them. Here too, instead of overt gestures that we might make, he would use graceful ones.

Humour was the special beauty of this kind of gesture-filled silence. Sometimes we would be unable to understand what he was conveying, and lose patience. His exasperation at that, also had its charm. Such vibrant silence was different from his other, statue-like, serene silence. He thus played with different kinds of silence.

The above conversation with Taiyamma is itself an example. There was no real “*abhinaya*” here, only pointing to objects like a stone and clock. We saw how Mukherji’s name was conveyed through real “*abhinaya*”.

Similarly, to refer to someone named Kannan he would touch his eyes (“*kaṇ*”). To indicate people like Ganesan or Ganapati who bear the name of Lord Vinayaka, he would gesticulate an elephant’s trunk. His pose of a hand holding a parrot, to indicate a lady called Meenakshi, was oh, so charming! The majesty with which he held an imaginary bow, to refer to one Veeraraghavan, was amazing. We cannot but laugh with delight, when he would refer to Anjaneyaswamy, his long-term personal attendant, gesticulating a tail rising from his back and curving above his head, with supple ease.

One particularly hilarious incident was: When a devotee came, Periyava showed his trunk “*abhinaya*”. But the visitor had Lord Subrahmanya’s name, not Lord Vinayaka’s. Even as we were wondering, with an artistic grace surpassing (the famous danseuse) Balasaraswati, he “pushed” the elephant to the back, and gestured “in front” with lightning speed. Then he held an imaginary bell and rang it. The visitor was in fact called Mani (which also means bell). He worked for a prominent person who had Lord Vinayaka’s name and would always come ahead and announce his employer’s arrival to Periyava, before the latter arrived.

So Periyava had enacted the Tamil proverb which says, “The sound of the bell arrives first and announces the elephant coming later.”

Another time, he enacted the name Puri, the city of Lord Jagannatha, by pretending to knead some dough and fry it in oil, making a “*pūri*” (deep-fried bread). In Periyava’s “*abhinaya*”, a “*vīṇā*” would make pleasing music, kettle-drums would sound loudly, a deer would run timidly, a tiger would roar...

Once he spoke about all the wild animals being brought to an Ashvamedha Shala (sacrificial hall), and immediately made us see those animals by his “*abhinaya*”. When he showed the lion and tiger, the entire hall resonated with his growls. Just thinking of this, even today, captivates the heart. The tranquil sage made even the lion’s growl sound sweet.

There are many more instances that can be given to this sweet and strange silence of his. Let’s conclude with a sacred, small gesture, since it is apt to close a discussion on “*abhinaya*” with Lord Nataraja.

One evening, on a “*mahāpradoṣam*” day, Periyava was seated as the very embodiment of ripe devotion to Shiva, wearing sacred ash, “*rudrākṣa*” beads covering his entire person, the bliss of Shiva emanating from him. To add to this sacred scene, a Dikshitar arrived with “*prasāda*” from Chidambaram. With great tranquility Periyava placed the “*prasāda*” on his head and wore the Vibhuti and Kunkumam. A group of eminent “*vaidikas*” (scholars in the Vedas) who arrived then, sought his permission to chant “*śrī rudra krama*”.

“*krama*” is one of the many methods of chanting the Vedas, arranging the words in various ways. To answer them, Periyava silently searched the “*prasāda*” and took something that looked like a blade of grass from it and showed it to them. It was a piece of “*veṭṭivēr*” (a kind of dry grass.)

Immediately the chanting of “*śrī rudram*”, in a method called “*jaṭā*”, resounded there, confirming that place was Kailasa itself. They had asked permission to chant “*krama*” but “*jaṭā*” is even more complex and majestic.

So, how is that connected to “*veṭṭivēr*”? In Chidambaram, it is a bunch of “*veṭṭivēr*” that is used to decorate Lord Nataraja as his “*jaṭā*” (matted locks). It was a sliver of this “*veṭṭivēr prasāda*” that Periyava showed them.

12. Words as Prasadam

Now, we shall sample some of the sweetness of Periyava's words, as he was not only a master of words, but also a great thinker. Many of these (anecdotes) prove that it's not right to say (as he claimed) that he is verbose and uses a great many words.

Once while brilliantly explaining some spiritual concepts to some devotees, he said, "We think about sense objects and seek their pleasures all the time. Such things, which are available to the senses and connected to this world, are called "*viṣaya*" in the scriptures. Enjoying them, spreads toxic roots into our mind and grows luxuriantly. Hence, only these transient sense-

pleasures, which gives a little joy but a lot of sorrow, is all we know. Since they create the desire and frenzy to keep going back to them and seek pleasure, the mind keeps pestering us to attend to them, and does not give us a moment's peace. This keeps us from realising what permanent bliss is, what joy unadulterated with sorrow looks like, what undisturbed peace is."

"The antidote to this, is to repeatedly pull back the mind that is incessantly thinking of sensory pleasures of this world and lead it towards spiritual thoughts. By doing this constantly, we should cut those poisonous roots, and make way for the crop of divine bliss to grow, which can root out our future births."

As he was saying this, one of the staff of the Matham, came and quietly kept some lit incense sticks there and went away. He did this because some garbage was dumped outside nearby, and the odour was drifting inside too.

An enchanting smile played on Periyava's lips. He continued "I

tried to conclude quickly using short-cut, since I have been going on and on. So, he (the staff member) has demonstrated what I missed, by lighting these incense sticks.”

“The missed-out point was related to what I said about sense objects stirring up the desire and frenzy to keep going back to them. The pleasure received from an object, gets over that moment, but leaves its memory in the mind, which never goes away. This is called “*viṣaya vāsanā*”, or simply “*vāsanā*”. There is a well-known idiom, about a container which had asafoetida. Even after the asafoetida is used up, the smell never leaves the container. Even washing the container doesn’t help. Hence the idiom “the container which had asafoetida”. Similarly, even when not actually enjoying a sense object, the redolence lingers and grows roots in the mind.

Both “*vāsanā*” which is from Sanskrit and “*nāṭram*” in Tamil, mean “smell”, without any connotation of good or bad. It is just something discernible to the nose. But in spoken Tamil, the former denotes a pleasant smell, a perfume, while the latter denotes (here Periyava simply closed his nostrils with his fingertips to indicate ‘a bad smell’.) But in literary Tamil, it is the reverse. “*Nāṭram*” means fragrance. There is a line from a verse “*ponmalar nāṭramuḍaittu.*” And in Vedantic books “*vāsanā*” is “*viṣaya vāsanā*”, which is a bad thing, not good.

“*viṣaya vāsanā*” is the root of evil, since it ruins us by goading us to earn the same pleasure experienced once, again and again. In my “shortcut”, I missed this “*vāsanā*” business, (laughing) like a singer who skips a couple of “*saṅgatis*” (melodic variations) in an elaborate “*kīrtanam*” (song), to save time. But it persistently appeared as the incense sticks and made me talk about it.”

“So far there was some unpleasant odour wafting here, but it is gone now, extinguished by the perfume of the incense sticks. So also, the route to *vāsanā* “*kṣaya*”, or cutting the root of evil, viz. “*vāsanā*” from the mind, is possible by taking the mind to thoughts of God and the Self, and filling the mind with the perfume of these things. This incense performed the service of demonstrating this.”

“Here I used the word “*vāḍai*” for an unpleasant smell, but it actually

is a neutral term. There is a reason why it has acquired this connotation. “*vāḍai*” is connected to “*vaḍa*” (north). So “*vāḍai*” means northern wind. In Tamil Nadu, northern winds blow in the months of Aippasi or Kartikai, which is the rainy season, and garbage mounds would be rotting, and this smell would be carried by the winds. But in the earlier discussed words “*vāsanā*” and “*nātram*”, there is no such reason for the acquired connotations. In fact I am afraid that searching for reasons may lead to polarisation and misunderstanding around Sanskrit vs. Tamil, Brahmin vs. others and Aryan vs. Dravidian.”

“The Tamil word “*tenral*” starts with “*ten*” which means south. “*tenral*” means southern wind and this blows in the summer months when every surface on earth is dry and nothing is rotting. Hence the wind carries no unpleasant smell of decay. Moreover, poets glorify this breeze as blowing through the “*malayaparvata*” (Pothigai hills) and therefore carrying the scent of the Sandalwood trees growing there. So, the breeze is cool as well.”

“When there was some unpleasant odour here, could one make it dissipate by pushing or compressing it? Of course not. So, lighting the incense caused “lighting the wick” (slang for detonating, destroying) of the bad smell. Of course, this usage is not said of incense sticks. The word ‘*vartanam*’ means rolling up in Sanskrit and ‘*varti*’ is anything made by rolling. Since incense sticks are also made by rolling, they are “*ūduvartis*” or “*ūduvattis*”. “*ūdu*” means blowing and their perfume indeed spreads when the wind blows the spark at the tip. “*varti*” means a wick too. Maybe it is because the spark rests at the tip of the incense stick, just as the flame rests on the tip of the wick, that an “*ūduvatti*” is called so.”

“Now coming back to ‘lighting the wick’ which means detonating. Here the wick refers to the one which is found in a firecracker. Even a tiny spark placed on the wick causes a big explosion. If one similarly passes on some small piece of news slyly, and causes a big damage, it’s called ‘lighting the wick’.”

“Without getting into a wrestling match with a bad odour which refuses to go away, the best way to tackle it is to light an incense stick, and it vanishes as if pushed away. Similarly, trying to destroy

“*viṣaya vāsanā*” by taking it on directly and crushing it, can backfire and harm the mind. Instead, without directly engaging with it, if we divert the mind towards any of the divine pursuits like chanting the names of God, singing His praises, listening to discourses, meditation, “*yōga*”, “*pūjā*” (ritual worship) etc., it naturally stops running towards “*viṣaya vāsanā*” and easily latches on to something else. This is what is defined as “*pratipakṣa bhāvanā*” in the “*yōga sūtra*.” When a sinful thought arises, creating an opposite thought consciously is “*pratipakṣa bhāvanā*.” There are two benefits in this. First is that the negative theme is removed, and where it was, instead of a vacuum, having a good theme is another benefit. “

What a great, thinking mind ! Using an incense stick, he infused fragrance into an explanation of Vedanta. So many concepts, one leading to the other ! What an intricate inlay of humour ! All that wealth of thinking is converted to a wealth of words, sifting out what is unwanted, and conveying complex ideas with simplicity and clarity.

How many such dialogues have happened naturally and regularly ! Let’s see a few more, beginning with one, where our Guru shows us Vedantic ideas in children’s playthings.

A couple had brought all the playthings of their child along, so that it could play in case they had to spend a long time in the Matham. The child was playing happily and variously with them, in Periyava’s sight.

It was pushing the Thanjavur “*talaiyāṭṭi*” (bobblehead) toy and clapping its hands in joy, seeing the toy bounce back speedily when pushed.

The great man laughed like a little child. A great truth about realised souls emerged from the lips of Periyava who ever remained childlike because of his wisdom. “A “*jñāni*” (realised soul) is like this toy. Due to his limitless compassion, whoever seeks his help, from whichever stage (of spiritual maturity), he may share their difficulty as if pushed to their level by “*māyā*” (the illusory power of the Supreme Being), in whose throes the others are in. But no sooner than the entreaty is over, he will be back to his neutral state. Bending to the pressure from

them, seeming to be caught in “*māyā*”, is a sport done out of mercy and not real. To use children’s language, it is “*uḷa uḷākkāṭṭaiḱku*” (make-believe.)

(The author’s father has told him that the word “*uḷa uḷākkāṭṭaiḱku*” itself carries a philosophical basis. It indicates playing tricks by hiding what is real (“*uḷa*”). He said that “*uḷa ilavākkāṭṭi*” (showing what is real as non-existing) and “*ila uḷavākkāṭṭi*” (making unreal appear real) have become this phrase. What does “*māyā śakti*”, the illusory power of “*brahman*” (the Supreme Being) do? It makes the only reality, “*brahman*” to be unperceived and that is “*uḷa ilavākkāṭṭi*”. It makes this world with its living and non-living things appear real. That is “*ila uḷavākkāṭṭi*”. Even though his father was an authoritative person, he would be very humble and reticent in Periyava’s presence. So, when the author told the above explanation to Periyava, he rejoiced greatly and kept asking with amazement “Did your father say this?”)

“A “*jñāni*” seems to be affected by other’s persuasions, but this is make-believe. Saying this, Periyava, the embodiment of this empathetic mercy, continued “What then, when there is no influence from others and the “*jñāni*” is by himself? What happened when the child took its hand away from the toy? It sprang back to a state of equilibrium. This state is the real state of a ‘*jñāni*’”.

“The toy has been made bottom-heavy but light at the top, and hence behaves so. So also, a “*jñāni*” has the profound experience of the self inside himself, but his head is free of ego (thus being heavy in the depths of his being, but light at the surface) and therefore he plays along with everyone, nodding his head to everything they say, knowing well that “*brahman*” is the only truth and all else is falsehood.”

Next, the child amused itself with a rattle.

“This is how God operates, with “*māyā*”. The rattle is made with an outer covering, with small balls inside. He places us, the “*jīvas*”, inside the outer shell of this world, made of “*māyā*”. Like the balls clash and clang when shaken, He stirs us, making us chatter incessantly and collide and engage with one another, at the speed of thought. “*siddhas*” (mystics) have used this analogy (of a rattle.)”

The little one then threw the rattle aside, and floated a balloon, leaping higher than the balloon in its excitement. The joy of the child delighted our divine grandfather.

He told his attendant, “See how happy the child is! This happiness lasts as long as the balloon has air. When the air escapes, which is sure to happen in a while, the balloon will blow up loudly, shrink and fall to the ground. Then, all this happiness will be converted to sorrow and the child may start crying.”

“The “*siddhas*” have sung: “this body is an illusion, it is but a bag filled with air”. The human body moves around doing things, only as long as the breath of air is inside. When it goes around, friends and relatives are happy. If that air is taken away, he is “out” (slang for dead). All their happiness is gone and they start lamenting.”

He felt compassion for the little one. “It is playing all alone, without other children to play alongside.” His face lit up as he thought of something. “There is a game, where even if there are playmates, they cannot be seen by a child. I refer to “Hide and Seek”, where the playmates hide after tying a cloth to cover a child’s eyes. If it searches them out with its eyes covered, it wins the game, and the cover is removed. God is similarly playing “Hide and Seek” with us. He covers our eyes with “*māyā*”, making us flounder. With that cover, if we wander around looking for Him, and make the slightest contact with Him, He removes the wrap and reveals His complete self to us clearly and showers His grace. He also does something playmates never do - if we take one step towards finding Him, he comes out of hiding and takes four steps towards us.”

“Searching with eyes covered has another interpretation. We should meditate (on God), withdrawing our mind from external pulls, particularly with eyes closed, since it is visual stimuli that disturb the mind the most. If we do this, the inner eye opens, and we can have a vision of God.” (In a voice that is steeped in his own experience:) “After this, even if the eyes are open, everything we see would be His forms only.”

In times of yore, many “*dēvas*” (divine beings) and “*asuras*” (demonic beings) and even some “*rṣis*” (sages) performed austerities to please Lord Brahma, and received many special gifts by His grace. “But now that there is no worship of Brahma, we have no way of receiving His grace, despite Him being one of the Trinity”, a devotee said, expressing his regret.

“Are you saying there is no way for us to get Brahma’s blessings?” asked Periyava. “It has come to such a state”, said the devotee.

“Oho?” said Periyava. The tone seemed to hint that it was not so.

At that very moment, a devout Brahmin entered. He prostrated before Periyava and offered the “*prasādam*” (things brought with blessings from a temple or event of worship) that he had brought to him. Periyava took it with reverence, placed it on his head and then on his palm. His eyes twinkled. Maybe he now had evidence to the thought he had hinted at by the “Oho”. He smiled enchantingly at the first devotee and said, “Here are Brahma’s blessings for you, which you said is impossible to get”, placed the “*prasādam*” on a wooden plate and pushed it towards him.

The devotee happily fell at his feet and accepted it, but asked doubtfully “How come this man has brought Brahma’s “*prasādam*”? There are temples for Brahma only in far-away Pushkar and perhaps one or two places in Tamil Nadu, isn’t it so?”

“Today is “*amāvāsyā*” (new moon day) combined with Monday, the day to perform “*aśvattha pradakṣiṇam*” (circumambulation of the Peepal tree). He has done that and brought the “*prasādam*”, said Periyava, mischievously revealing nothing more.

“But it was Brahma’s blessings that I said is hard to get” said the first devotee. “Yes, you have received that. One third of this “*prasādam*” is Brahma’s blessings” said Periyava, like a riddle. The devotee pleaded with him “My mind is so dull that I don’t get it. You, my “*gurunātha*” (supreme Guru), should clarify”. Periyava, the most gracious, continued:

“The Peepal tree is an embodiment of the Trinity. Don’t you know

how we praise it?

“*mūlatō brahmarūpāya madhyatō viṣṇurūpiṇē | agrataḥ śivarūpāya vr̥kṣarājāya tē namaḥ ||*” Salutations to you, O King of trees, whose roots are Brahma, whose middle is Vishnu and whose tips are Shiva.”

The devotee was filled with delight and astonishment at Periyava. “I know it (the verse) well, I say it every day. In fact, I was planning to go for “*pradakṣiṇam*” now. Yet it is you, our “*gurunātha*”, who understands the deeper connotations of things that all of us know.”

(Another gift from Periyava’s treasure trove of thoughts, about the Peepal tree, is that it is called “*vr̥kṣarāja*” which means the king of trees and fittingly, its Tamil name is also “*arasa maram*” which means the same.)

One night, a devotee approached Periyava and asked for *prasādam* because he wanted to leave the next morning. Periyava replied “You want to leave tomorrow morning? It is Ramanavami tomorrow. Either you should take part in the worship to Lord Rama done here in the Matham now that you are here, or you should have left earlier today by the evening train, so that you can do the “*pūjā*” at home. You say you are leaving tomorrow morning, which is neither here nor there.”

Though we said “devotee” out of politeness, the man was a wrangler, who could argue even with the Jagadguru disrespectfully. Hence, he replied “I only do the actions clearly spelt out in the Vedas. Vedas are everything to us, aren’t they? Why do we need things not mentioned in the Vedas? They don’t talk about Rama and Krishna, who were born much later and were themselves followers of the Vedas. So, I do not accept anything to do with Rama and Krishna. I don’t celebrate Ramanavami. In fact, I don’t even have a picture of Rama at home.”

Does this mean this man carried out all the “*karmas*” (rituals) *specified* in the Vedas? Not exactly. And Periyava knew that. With rising anger, he spoke in a very stern tone, “Oh! So, anything not there in the Vedas is taboo to you? What about the toothpaste and coffee you start the day with? Are they prescribed in the Vedas? And the soap you

use while bathing? You eat what your wife makes using a grinder and Prestige (a brand of pressure cooker.) Are they told in the Vedas? To top it all, you wear a suit and go to work to make a living. Forget the suit being there in the Vedas, are you even allowed to work in an office, being a Brahmin? Which Veda talks about the scooter or bus or electric train that you take to get to work?” He didn’t stop there. He listed electric lights and fans, cinema, cricket, and other things the devotee experienced and questioned each one being in the Vedas.

Finally, he said “Nowhere in the Vedas directly, is there an allowance to an Advaitic “*sanyāsi*” (renunciate) doing “*pūjā*” in public and distributing “*prasādam*”. Intellectuals like you may conclude so with your research. Hence the “*prasādam*” you are asking for, is not as per the Vedas. You may go!” The wrangling devotee was shaken. He fell at Periyava’s feet and begged for forgiveness and wisdom.

Periyava, who was like an angry tornado, immediately became a soothing merciful breeze, and started explaining, “Even after the Vedic period, new aspects have been added to the tree of Vedas, like branches and leaves, at different times, but in keeping with the spirit of the Vedas. We must respect them as Vedas and follow them. Just like (in Science) a fundamental theory is created and over time, as it is adapted and new discoveries made, we still consider these to be under the same field. Similarly, using the principles of the Vedas, a lot has been added over time, and become what we call Hinduism at present”

After a long explanation of the above, he continued, “That is one aspect. The other is that, for actions allowed in the Vedas, new devices, not mentioned in the Vedas, have been created later. The Vedas do not stop with talking about “*adhyayana*”, “*yajña*”, “*pūjā*”, “*japa* and “*dhyana*”. (Learning the Vedas, sacrificial rites, ritual worship, repeating Mantras and meditation respectively.) They also instruct us about brushing teeth, bathing, eating, drinking, pursuing a livelihood, going around places on various tasks, travelling, recreation - all these are said and allowed by the Vedas. But for carrying these out, the instruments mentioned there may have been replaced by newer ones today. Travel was on horses and bullock carts in those days, and today we have scooters and electric trains. We don’t have to avoid

these, with a policy of accepting only what is said in them. Only the innovations that are contrary to the spirit of the Vedas and are the cause of “*anācāra*” (proscribed conduct), like toothpaste and coffee, must be eschewed. Some, due to the tyranny of the times, have come in and become unavoidable. A Brahmin, giving up Vedic ways and going to work in an office, is indeed a great “*anācāra*”, a huge violation. But what can we do? It has become indispensable. So, at least, we could avoid giving in to pride and feeling self-congratulatory thinking “I hold a big position, I make heaps of money and must try to make even more”. We can seek God’s forgiveness, feel contrite, earn only what is necessary for living, and ensure we get enough spare time. In that time we must learn the Vedas and perform the rites prescribed there. After retirement we must submit ourselves to the Vedas and make a resolve about that right away.”

“Festivals like Ramanavami and Gokulashtami and activities like “*harikatha*” (religious discourses) and “*bhajana*” (group singing of the praises of God) are not there in the Vedas, but very conducive in taking us to the path of the Vedas. In Vedic times, men were strong as lions but later they have become weaklings. So, these methods have been devised to delight such men’s minds and bring them to the Vedic way and are therefore immensely helpful.”

“In (Carnatic) music concerts, there is something called “*pallavi*” singing, where the “*tāla*” (beat) is arranged and combined in intricate ways, which musicians enjoy a lot and participate in. To others it is all Greek and Latin. Vedic rites are like that to weak folks like us. In a concert too, before the “*pallavi*”, there are popular “*kīrtanams*” (songs), then, during the “*pallavi*” there are “*svaras*” (musical notes sung in creative patterns) in a series of Ragas, and later there are “*tukkaḍās*” (small, popular songs). In this manner, in the concert scheme, things are simplified, and everyone is pleased, and even the lay “*rasikas*” (music lovers), start thinking “What is this “*pallavi*” business? Let me learn something about it” and start taking interest in it.

Even so, Ramanavami, Gokulashtami, “*bhajanai*” etc. are enjoyable to us, and provide the incentive of wanting to get acquainted with the Vedas, since we hear that the Vedas are the basis for all these.

From “*pallavi*” to “*tukkaḍās*”, everything is music, and similarly from “*vājapēya*” (a very difficult sacrificial rite) to “*hari bol*” (clapping while chanting the name of Hari), they are all born in the spirit of Sanatana Dharma. I have myself seen one or two people who started listening to “*tukkaḍās*”, going on to identifying Ragas, then learning music, and finally becoming experts in “*pallavi*” singing. The “*pallavi*” is the centrepiece of a concert. The query “What was the main today (in the concert)?”, proves that it is considered the main thing. Similarly in the Vedic tradition, “*yajñas*” are the main. They are our final destination.

“One must **do** these “*yajñas*”. Merely saying that they are vital, but not doing them and giving up the other activities that will lead up to the Vedas, is self-destructive. Since these leading activities are born from the spirit of the same goal, even those who perform “*yajñas*” must do these. Only that will guide the entire society, without causing disruption. That’s what great men of pure conduct have done till date, practising both.

“Start with a small “*pūjā*”, like that of Ramanavami and may you advance to do even upto the “*vājapēya*”! Tomorrow, attend the regular “*pūjā*”, as well as the Ramanavami “*pūjā*”. I’ll then give you a double “*prasādam*” and you can leave happily.”

The previously arguing devotee simply melted hearing this.

The above was a beautiful instance, of when his wealth of grace blossomed into a wealth of thinking and further into a wealth of words. Here he took the example of music. Let’s see some further amusing wordplay about music. There is an old Tamil film song which says, “I am giving up the arduous act of cooking and taking up music instead”. We shall also see some delightful and thought-provoking musings about cooking.

13. Musical Musings

Next to foods, we associate sweetness with someone's voice, perhaps even ahead of it. We use descriptions like a sweet voice, sweet music etc. Periyava was himself a sweet music, harmoniously playing, not seven notes, but infinite "*rasas*" (sentiments, flavours). Hence, his reign as the head of the Matham, did not have the stiffness of a king's court. Instead, it had the sweet grace of a music recital.

It is common practice everywhere that, in the presence of a "*mathādhipati*" (head of a Matham), irrespective of his credentials, others stand with hands folded and mouth closed, bow and serve him, addressing him as "*mahāsannidhānam*" (the great presence). It is like a ceremonious court. Our Periyava effected a hundred-and-eighty-degree revolution to this, gently, with love, such that it had no hint of a revolutionary act. He made it felt that a Matham is not a palace where a royal court is held, but a home dearer than home, where sweet love is showered and the head of the Matham is a beloved family member, indeed like one's mother. Such was his miraculous achievement.

The striking feature here is that, when a person is strictly righteous and conservative in following the tenets of scriptures, he exudes a sternness that instils fear. Yet Periyava, who was the summit of these two qualities, was somehow most sweet-natured. The reason is of course universal love overflowing from him. Particularly, this love became sympathy towards those who could not adhere to the righteous ways, and the tenets of scriptures. Without even thinking of ideas like "forgiveness", he would 'punish' himself with additional rituals, to cleanse those who moved away from these and committed transgressions, like a mother who takes medicine to cure her child's ailment.

Again, the surprising fact is that unlike people who become fastidious and critical when they take up rigorous austerities, he was very gentle to all.

Early one night, Periyava had completed all his austerities, and was seated in a room with a few devotees. One of them, who was always frank with Periyava, commented that although Periyava did not have the regal air that heads of Mathams usually have, unfortunately, some of his close attendants indulged in such loud affectations.

Periyava listened with a smile and looked kindly at the young lad attending upon him at the time, with a hint of mischief. His look conveyed that he knew this good-natured young lad, who had recently come to serve him, had suffered much at the hands of the above-mentioned attendants.

Periyava told him, “Go out and see! Indeed a ‘*darbār*’ (royal court) is in progress”. He went out and looked around. Nobody was throwing their weight around, to justify Periyava’s words. Instead, someone was singing sweetly at a distance, with a few people sitting around and enjoying the music.

He returned and said, “There is nothing like what Periyava says. I guess it is some musician, who is singing. Even that is neither loud nor overbearing but sounds melodious.”

“Fine. Why don’t you ask the listeners if “*darbār*” is in progress?”, said Periyava.

Though he didn’t get it, the young lad went again and returned with an even more puzzled look on his face. “I asked them and they said that indeed “*darbār*” is going on.” He looked at Periyava pleadingly, as if asking him to explain.

“Is that so? The song is going to end, so go quickly and find out what the “*pallavi*” (first line, refrain) is, and come and tell me. You know that after singing the entire song, they conclude with the “*pallavi*”, don’t you?”.

“Yes, I know”, he said and hastened away. When he returned he said, “The ‘*pallavi*’ is ‘*yōcanā kamala lōcanā*’.”

Periyava pointed to one of the devotees in the room and told the young lad, “Ask him to explain things to you.”

The venerable old man creates so much drama! Indeed, he must be the Avatar of the power that created the play that is this world!

The young lad accordingly asked the indicated person, who answered pithily, trying not to laugh, “That song is in the Raga ‘*darbār*’.”, thus solving the dramatic puzzle.

Here, Periyava used the royal court to refer to the Raga, while in another instance he did the vice versa.

Once a musician sang a song “*rāmābhirāma*”, in the same Raga. After the singing, a dialogue ensued between him and Periyava, during which, Periyava had to describe someone being very authoritarian. “He is conducting the Raga that you sang a while ago”, he said (meaning that the concerned person is holding a ‘*darbār*’, a royal court.)

A singer, who was yet to make a name for himself, asked Periyava if he could seek the help of an eminent figure well-known in music circles, who was also a devotee. Periyava said, “Get someone to help you approach his wife. Your mission will be accomplished more easily.”

“His wife? But isn’t he the one who can recommend me to Sabha Secretaries etc. (people who organize concerts) ? This lady...” he hesitated.

“See, he may be the influential one. But what Tyagayyar has said in the “*pallavi*” of the “*udaya sūrya candra*” (rising sun and moon) song is the case everywhere. So, earn the sympathy of this lady first,” Periyava spoke in riddles. Moreover, being the compassionate kinsman to everyone, Periyava named a person who could introduce him (the singer) to the lady and said “Tell him I told you to get a recommendation from him”.

Although the singer was happy that Periyava had solved his problem, he was eager to know about the “rising sun and moon” song.

“I do not understand which song Periyava has mentioned. I don’t know any Raga called “*udaya sūrya candra*”. Ragas like Bhupalam, Bauli, Malayamarutam and Bilahari are said to be morning Ragas, so we assume they are “rising sun” Ragas. I haven’t heard of any “rising moon” Raga. Purvikalyani is said to be an evening Raga.”, he mused.

Peiyava intercepted saying “I didn’t mean two separate Ragas, for rising sun and moon. The rising sun and moonlight, are combined in the name of one single Raga. Think and you will get it. What are the other names of the sun?”

“Aditya, Ravi, Bhaskara...”

“It’s the second name you listed. Add it to “*udaya*” (rising).”

“*udayaravi*” said the musician and immediately got the answer, “Is it (the Raga) Udayaravichandrika?”, he asked.

“Exactly”, said Periyava, “What are the words of the “*pallavi*” of Tyagayya’s song in this Raga? You know Telugu, don’t you?”

The musician uttered the words of the song “*enta nērcina enta jūcina enta vāralaina kānta dāsulē*”. He must have reflected on the meaning too since a smile appeared on his face.

The meaning? It is, “No matter how erudite and worldly-wise they (people) may be, however great they may be, they are all slaves to their wives.”

The singer understood that the influential man whose recommendation he was seeking, belonged to the group described in the “*pallavi*” and this is what Periyava hinted at using musical clues, and happily expressed his understanding to Periyava.

So, this was one of the instances of playing around with words, that the Master of Words did. A few more in the same vein (or tune):

There was a singer by name Sathur Sri Subramaniam, who was almost considered one among the leading musicians of the time, but since he did not live long, could not consolidate his position there. He was a great devotee of Periyava, who was also very kind to him, many times asking and listening to him sing. He would also discuss intricacies of music with him. When Periyava convened a conference in Thiruvaidaimarudhur to inaugurate the Thiruppavai-Thiruvempavai movement, he invited two musicians to perform concerts consisting only of the Pavai (Thiruppavai-Thiruvempavai) songs, as well as hymns from Thevaram, Thiruvachakam and Divyaprabandham. One of them was Sri Ariyakkudi (Ramanuja Iyengar) who was dominating the music world at the time. The other was our Sathur Sri Subramaniam, which shows the high opinion Periyava had of him.

One day, Periyava asked him, “Please sing the (Purandara) Dasar composition in the Raga, which is (the same name as) something people drink so eagerly, despite my dissuasions.”

Immediately, the Sathur singer delighted Periyava by singing Purandaradasar’s song “*jagadōddhāraṇa*”, in the Raga Kapi (which is how coffee is pronounced in Tamil.)

“You made me drink with my ears and enjoy what all others drink with their mouths,” said Periyava, making him elated.

A seasoned Rasika (connoisseur) of Carnatic Music once complained, “In earlier times, they would sing the works of saints, as “*viruttams*” (improvised melodies, free of rhythmic beats) in several Ragas. Mostly (Raga) Kedaragaula would be the first of them. It (Kedaragaula) has the ability to lift the mind to a lofty sphere and captivate us. But all that is gone now. Only lack-lustre Northern Ragas like Desh are in demand!”

Periyava said, “You say so! But I have heard that Kedaragaula and Desh have the same scale, except that the “*niṣādha*” (one of the seven musical notes) is different.”

The Rasika hummed to himself and said in astonishment, “It is indeed as Periyava says. But because Hindustani musicians linger

on each note, while our singers, till the previous generations, had a different approach, one Raga appears to be weighty (purely classical) while the other appears light.”

Periyava, as a greater connoisseur, but downplaying it, said, “I don’t know the distinction between light and weighty Ragas. At my level it seems that both have a beauty of their own. Their Bhairavi, which we call Sindhu Bhairavi, has the same scale as our Todi. There is a majestic beauty in the way we sing Todi, filled with “*gamakams*” (embellishment with oscillations of notes etc.), but there is something that touches the heart in the way they sing Sindhu Bhairavi with varied arrangement of notes too - so feel, people like me. Even our great men like (Muthuswami) Dikshitar and (Tyaga) Ayyar have adopted Hindustani Ragas. It seems strange that the same scale of notes can sound so different just by the way they are handled, but then it is proved true in the case of Hindustani and Carnatic Music.”

The Rasika added, “In Carnatic Music too, we have this aspect. If we use the notes of Todi and sing it in “*madhyama śruti* (changing the starting note to Madhyama), as “*niṣādhānta*” (ending in the note “*niṣādhā*”), it becomes Punnagavarali (Raga), which sounds very different.

Periyava: Is that so? Todi and Punnagavarali have the same notes? I’ve not noticed this. Will you sing them now? Do some “*ālāpanā*” (elaboration) and sing a composition too in each. Sing ‘*kamalāmbikē*’ (in Todi) and ‘*kanakaśaila*’ (in Punnagavarali).

The Rasika was also a good singer. Periyava’s request inspired him to sing very well. It is hard to describe how much Periyava enjoyed every small detail of the music.

His knowledge of music fuelled his keen, humour-filled intelligence. His clues and tips to guess the names of many Ragas, without saying them out himself, was delightful as music itself. We have already seen one instance, and we shall see one more, which is on the same lines.

A singer: So many problems ! I am filled with “*vicāram*” (worry). Periyava must show me the way out.

Periyava : You are a musician and so you already know of a way out ! Forget yourself as you sing. There is no bigger solution, or medicine (than music). Sing now, the song by (Tyaga)Ayyar, in the sun-moon Raga.

Singer: The sun-moon Raga? I don ’t know what Periyava means.

Periyava : What are the other names of the Sun?

Singer : Aditya, Bhaskara, Ravi ..

Periyava : Yes, that one !

Singer (trying to suppress his laughter): Oh! Ravichandrika (sun and moonlight)?

Periyava : Yes. You know the song by Ayyar in that Raga don ’t you? Not “*niravadhi sukhada*”. Another one. Sing that.

The musician who submitted his worry to Periyava, sang this song “*mākēlarā vicāramu*”(Why should we worry, when Lord Rama is there !) Such a comforting, strength-giving song!

Here we see heartfelt sympathy in harmony with humour and musical knowledge.

Periyava’s father, Sri Subramanya Sastrigal, was an ardent music-lover. He used to sing all the time and had many musicians as friends. So, our Periyava, the summit of wisdom, was used to soaking in music from a tender age. “*kini*” means a parakeet in Kannada. His father, who addressed his sweet-voiced child by that name, has also taught many songs to the little parakeet.

After becoming the head of the Matham, like Adi Sankaracharya, Periyava became a master of all the sixty-four arts, which included a deep scholarship in music.

“When there is no food available to the ears, something shall be offered to the stomach too”.

said Valluvar, the divine poet. We can compose an entire literary work on the words connected to music, which is the greatest of gifts, spoken by Periyava, who was himself ambrosial music with all kinds of sweetness brought together. But since, at the end of Chapter 12, we have already promised to describe his statements about cooking and food and whetted the appetite for that, we shall leave musical discussions for later, and “offer something to the stomach.”

14. Tasty Musings

“That which has “*sattu*” (nourishment, goodness) is ‘*sādam*’”, said Periyava about rice, which is the “main performer” in the concert of cooking. “Just as we say “*sādhu*” about those who are “*sat*” (good people), we say “*sādam*” for rice, which is the main dish, and gives nourishment aplenty. We can interpret it another way too. “*prasādam*” (food etc. offered to God) is that which is created by “*prasannam*” (God being pleased.) To acknowledge the neivedhyam God appears in a pleasing way, accepts it and gives it back to us as prasadam. We do not add the prefix “*pra*”, which indicates sacredness, to what we humans eat, so we deduct the “*pra*” from “*prasādam*” and get “*sādam*”, one could say in jest. “

Periyava, the best of “*sādhus*”, did not stop with plain rice. Being filled with the “navarasas” (nine different sentiments or flavours), he started talking of the accompaniments that add taste to rice. He was not only a religious Guru (samayaguru), but a Guru of cooking (samayalguru) too.

“*rasam*’ means juice or extract. It also means quintessence. If some speech or music is very delectable, we say it has “*rasam*”. Vaishnavas are attached to Tamil. They say “*sāttamudu*” for “*rasam*”. We should not interpret this to mean “*amudu*” (ambrosial dish) added to “*sādam*”. It is actually “*sāṛṛamudu*”, (“*sāṛu*” meaning juice or extract), which becomes “*sāttamudu*” in spoken form. They add “*amudu*” to the names of all dishes, making them sweet, like “*kaṛamudu*” or “*tirukkaṇṇamudu*’.”

“It is “*pāyasam*” (sweet milk porridge) which they call “*tirukkaṇṇamudu*”. What is “*tirukkaṇ*”? Does it mean the “*kaṇ*” (eye) of “*tiru*” (Lakshmi)? Is it some ingredient added to the

“*pāyasam*”? None of these. It is “*tirukkannalamudu*” that has become “*tirukkaṇṇamudu*”. “*kannal*” means sugarcane. Sugar and jaggery, which are essential ingredients in “*sarkarai pongal*” (sweetened rice), are both made from sugarcane, aren’t they? I was talking about “*rasam*”. When we extract the juice of something, obviously the fibre and roughage are gone, and it is clear. Therefore, anything that is described as “*rasam*” would have only the “*nayam*” aspect of “*ghanam-nayam*” (dense-light), and would be gentle, fluid. In our cooking, we have two dishes which have a flowing consistency, one being “*rasam*”. It is the second course of the meal. First is “*kuzhambu*” which is mixed with rice. Since it is made thick with tamarind extract and “*tān*” (vegetables) are also added, it is hard to guess what is in it, and hence it is called “*kuzhambu*” which means dense, not clear. On the other hand, “*rasam*” is clearer and more dilute, isn’t it?

The great Tamil scholar Ki. Va. Ja. said that “*kuzhambu*” (which also means confusion) is the state of having “*tān*” (which also means ego), while “*rasam*” (clarity or bliss) is not having “*tān*”. When this explanation reached the ears of Periyava, he enjoyed it, saying this interpretation has “*rasam*” (delectable taste). But later, he concluded that this explanation is not correct as per the nuances of Vedantic Tamil usages and sent word of his conclusion to Ki.Va.Ja. The Tamil scholar was amazed at Periyava’s knowledge of the nuances of the language. We shall see this in a later chapter that talks of Periyava’s linguistic mastery.

“*kāikari*” refers to vegetables in general, so a side-dish that is made with any vegetable is called “*kari*”. Another reason could be that, although vegetables are added to other dishes like “*kuzhambu*”, “*kūṭṭu*” (vegetables in gravy) and “*paccaḍi*” (vegetables in curd or sweet gravy), it is only in “*kari*” that they are roasted black, unlike in the other dishes. “*kari*” could have got its name due to this blackening also.

Periyava, who revels in novel research, once asked “Why is “*uppumā*” called so? If you say it is because we add” *uppu*” (salt) to it, then even (other dishes like) Idli, Dosa and Pongal have salt, and it’s not any extra here.” No one could answer this convincingly. Finally he himself revealed the secret, “It is actually “*ubbumā*”, not

“*uppumā*”, (“*ubbu*” means to swell), since the semolina swells up to fill the cooking pan. Rice swells too when cooked, but it takes time. Broken rice and semolina, on the other hand, quickly swell to fill a vessel. Hence the name “*uppumā*” which means swelling (“*ubbu*”) flour (“*māvu*”).

He who researched deeply into Sankara Bhashyam, has probed into, and explained facts about Idli, Idiyappam etc., considering everything in this worldly life to be important!

“Someone said that Idli is called so because it is “*iṭṭu ili*”, meaning it disappears (into the stomach) from the plate as soon as it is served, because one eats it so eagerly. It was just a clever interpretation. “*iḍutal*” means placing something down and not going back to it. We say “*iḍu kāḍu*” (cremation ground) since the body is placed on the pyre and everyone returns. To refine gold, they place gold in fire for a long time without moving it. It is called “*iḍu tangam*” (“*tangam*” means gold.) The “*vasiya marundu*” (medicine for charming someone) is given only once, with no further doses and is called “*iḍu marundu*”. On the same lines, if the ingredients in the cooking vessel are not stirred or turned over, and left to be cooked in steam, while we do nothing, that too is “*iḍutal*”, which can also become “*iḍal*” or “*iṭṭal*”, and a dish made in this manner is “*iṭṭali*”, which becomes “*iṭṭili*” or Idli in spoken language.”

“Steamed likewise, is “*sēvai*” as it is called by Brahmins and “*iḍiyāppam*” by others, which too is made by “*iḍutal*”. Why is it not (solid) like “*appam*”, and is made of thin strands? Because it is “*āpam*” not “*appam*”. “*ap*” is water (in Sanskrit), so anything connected to water is “*āpam*”, which becomes “*āppam*”. “*Iḍiyāppam*” is cooked in water vapour, is it not?”

“The word “*āpūpam*” (cake) in Sanskrit becomes “*appam*” (in Tamil.) “*āpūpam*” means the dough which is the raw material for “*āpūpam*”. An oddity here is that, though the “*āpūpam*” comes from the dough, the word for dough has been derived from “*āpūpam*”. “*āpūpam*” becomes “*āppam*” in Tamil.”

“We have something called “*appaḷām*”, which is “*appaḷam*” when

said correctly. “*la*” and “*la*” are similar sounds and interchangeable. Words we say in Tamil as “*mangalam*” or “*nalinam*” are pronounced “*mangalam*” and “*nalinam*” in Sanskrit. People speaking Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Rajasthani, all of North India in fact, do not use “*la*” at all, only “*la*”. Telugu also has “*la*” predominantly. Only in Maharashtra, they use “*la*” even more than us(Tamils.) I was saying that “*la*” and “*la*” are interchangeable, so we can have “*appalam*” as “*appalam*” too. Like “*appam*” this too is made round-shaped from flour. It is an “*appam*” but tastier than other “*appams*”, hence the “*la*” is added to show it is our favourite, as a particle of endearment !

One day, there was a discussion about the “*bhakṣaṇams*” (sweets and savouries) given as gifts during weddings. Was there any topic that did not come up for discussion in that holy presence? Since he had become a dear relative beyond being a Guru, there were devotees who would bring up anything and everything, to talk about in that presence, and Periyava would listen to them with great interest and involvement. In this manner, the topic of wedding “*bhakṣaṇams*” came up. Periyava went further and enquired about the dishes served during the wedding feast too. Here are the commentaries Periyava, the expert in cooking, gave about (different sweets and snacks like) “*laḍḍu*”, “*porivilangāi uruṇḍai*”, “*jāngiri*”, “*halwā*”, “*sojji*”, “*vaḍai*” and “*manōppu*”, which is another name for “*mullu tēnkuzhal*” :

“*laḍanam*’ means to play and “*laḍakam*” refers to sports goods that help in playing. Prominent among games are ball games. Even now, not only football, but also volleyball, cricket which is a craze amongst everyone, tennis, and basketball - all these are played with balls. So “*laḍakam*” has come to mean a ball. A “*laḍḍu*” looks like a ball, doesn’t it? Hence it is called “*laḍakam*”, which became “*laḍḍukam*”. It also becomes “*laḍḍu*” or “*lāḍu*” in spoken form. “*laḍḍu*” is also called “*gunjālāḍu*.” If you are wondering what this “*gunjā*” is, it means “*gundumaṇi*” (seeds of the red bead tree.) The composer of the Mooka Panchashati in praise of Amba Kamakshi, has, in the first Shatakam (hundred verses), extolled the other forms of Parasakti. Among those is Her form as Matangi, where She is born as a hunter-girl. In that description she is called “*gunjā bhūṣā*.” It means She wears

ornaments like necklaces and bracelets made of “*gundumaṇi*” seeds. The “*laḍḍu*” is nothing but a ball rolled with sugar syrup, of many small “*būndis*” (fried droplets of dough), which resemble “*gundumaṇis*”, isn’t it? So, it is “*gunjālāḍu*”, not “*kunjālāḍu*”.

“Someone has written that “*poṛuḷviḷangā uruṇḍai*” (the sweet ball that cannot be understood) has become “*poṛiviḷangāi uruṇḍai*”. But I cannot understand how he arrived at this. Anyone who knows a little about cooking, will easily guess that since this ball is so hard, it must be made of jaggery syrup added to flour, without adding much of Ghee etc. Even those who don’t know cooking, upon tasting it, will deduce that it contains jaggery, rice flour, “*sukku*” (dried ginger) etc. Thinking about it, it is sweets like “*jāngiri*” and “*kūṣmāṇḍa halwā*”, which, even after devouring lots, are impossible to guess the ingredients of, which are Urad Dal and pumpkin (respectively). People say “*poṛiviḷangāi uruṇḍai*”, and that is indeed correct. It is named so for good reasons. The ball resembles the hard shell of a “*viḷangāi*” (wood-apple), does it not? In earlier times, it would have been made with “*poṛi māvu*” (powdered puffed rice) This “*poṛi māvu*” is healthier and easier to digest compared to rice flour. Tastier too. Therefore it was used earlier, but when later generations who did not want to take that much trouble, they would have thought,” Why work hard to roast(to puff) and then powder the rice? Moreover, “*poṛi māvu*” balls become very small in size when rolled tightly”. So they may have started making them with rice flour, but the old name has stuck.”

Some elucidation on “*jāngiri*” appeared here. But a key fact about it shall be described later. It is a sweet that is worth waiting for, isn’t it?

“Following the dominance of Muslims in our country, many of their foods etc. came into vogue. One such is “*halwā*”. Even from much earlier times, there were dishes made with flour, Ghee and sugar all stirred together. They were called “*paiṣṭikam*.” But it is along with the Muslims, that many items like “*bādām halwā*” came in and then, the Arabic name “*halwā*” that they gave to this category, has entered here (our vocabulary.)”

“Another such word, “*sūji*”, has become “*sojji*”, which is more common as “*kēsari*” these days. “*kēsaram*” means mane. “*kēsari*”

is a lion, which has a mane. Anyone who excels in any field, is given the title of “*kēsari*”. Even in Tamil Nadu, we have had kings who gave themselves titles like “*vīra kēsari*” and “*ari kēsari*”. Many words for kings, including the German Kaiser, Caesar of the Roman Empire and the Russian Czar have been derived from our “*kēsari*”. You’ll know this if you look up these words in any dictionary which contains the etymology of words.”

“What colour is the lion? A kind of tawny red, isn’t it? A shade that is neither orange nor red. That is the colour called “*kēsaram*”. A powder made of a rock of this colour, is called “*kēsari powder*”. A pinch of this powder added to “*sojji*”, colours the entire dish. So the dish is itself called ‘*kēsari*’.”

“I’ll tell you what a Tamil scholar said about “*vaḍai*” : In olden days, there seems to have been no dish in Tamil Nadu which contained salt and was fried in oil or Ghee like “*appam*”. Even “*appam*” must have been directly cooked on fire like a Chapati. That’s why they say “*appam suḍuvadu*” (roasting the appam). I countered this with a question, “Don’t they say “*suḍuvadu*” for Idli and Dosa too? How is that?”. He justified it by saying, “Anyway all these are cooked by “*suḍuvadu*” (which also means heating)” He then said with certainty that, in any case, there was no savoury that was fried which found mention anywhere. Later, “*vaḍai*” arrived from North India. It is called “*māṣāpūpam*” (in Sanskrit). It is an “*apūpam*” made from “*māṣa*” (Urad dal). Since it came from “*vaḍa nāḍu*” (north of the country) it is called ‘*vaḍai*’.”

Periyava described “*manōppu*” as follows : It is called “*manakoppu*”. It is “*maṇal kombu*” which has taken the other forms. If broken, it becomes curved “*kombus*” (sticks), with small globules on them resembling sand (“*maṇal*”). The reason for this sand like appearance on the “*manōppu*”, is the star-shaped aperture in the press used to squeeze it (into the frying pan.) Hence “*maṇal*” and “*kombu*” combine to become “*maṇal kombu*”, “*manakoppu*” and “*manōppu*”.

“Replacing “*maṇal*” (sand) with “*muttu*” (pearl), there are people who call it “*muttusāri*” It is “*muttu*” with “*sāram*” (choicest taste), or “*muttu*” in “*sāris*” (strands) - ‘*muttusāri*’.”

A few other expositions connected to food, at another juncture:

“Vaishnavas have something called *“dadyārāadhanai”*. *“dadhi”* means curd, so someone thought it meant offering curd rice to the Lord, and distributing it to devotees. Later he came to know it was not so, and the devotees were fed a complete *“samārāadhanā”* (a ritual of feeding devotees as a worship) meal. He asked me why it is called *“dadyārāadhanai”* alone. Although it is *“dadyārāadhanai”* in colloquial usage, its correct form is *“tadyārāadhanai”*, i.e., *“tadya arāadhanai”*, worshipping *“tadyas”* (people who belong to Him, the Lord). So it means *“samārāadhanā”* for Bhagavatas.”

Vaishnavas often shorten words, “eating up” several syllables, as if they are in a hurry. If most of us shorten *“sāppiṭṭu viṭṭu”* (after eating) as *“sapṭṭu”*, they shorten it further as *“sāṭṭu”*. The word *“tiruppakṣi”* with which they refer to foods like Pongal etc., offered to God during the dawn Puja in the *“dhanur māsam”* (month of Margazhi), is another such contracted word. The word *“tirupalliyezhucchi”* which refers to waking up the Lord at dawn, was used to denote the food offered too. This became *“tirupazhucchi”*, then *“tirupazhcchi”*, and finally *“tiruppakṣi”*, acquiring a Sanskrit letter *“kṣa”*. (Smilingly) It is vegetarian, there is no *“pakṣi”* or bird (in it.)

“bhakṣippadu” means eating, so I once thought that this *“pakṣi”* may have come from that. But since their love for Tamil is special, I concluded that it must be *“tirupalliyezhucchi”* that has become this word.

When we say *“dhanur māsam”*, we automatically remember Andal and Tiruppavai. She has herself, in the 27th verse, made a *“tirupalliyezhucchi”* offering of *“pāl sarkarai pongal”* (sweet rice cooked in milk), and described beautifully how she and her friends who observed the Pavai Nonbu with her, relish the food along in His company. It is the tradition among Vaishnavas to make this *“pāl sarkarai pongal”* on that day (the 27th day of Margazhi), celebrating it as a festival known as *“kūḍāravalli”*. *“kūḍāravalli”* does not mean a *“valli”* (creeper) spreading onto the *“kūḍāram”* (shed). The starting words of the 27th verse *“kūḍārai vellum”* has taken on this strange form as *“kūḍāravalli”*.

We describe offerings to God to be “*ney soṭṭa soṭṭa*” (dripping with Ghee.) Andal goes a step further and says in the verse “*pār sOru mūḍa ney peitu muzhangai vazhivāra*” (covering the dish with Ghee such that it drips through the elbow.) The Ghee that was mixed and stirred into the Pongal, after it has been cooked and taken down (from the stove), since it was more than what the rice could absorb, has been exuded by the rice and covers its top. When they eat it, the Ghee runs down their hands and wrists and drips from their elbows! That’s how she describes it.

Someone asked, “Why is there no reference to “*kannal*” (sugarcane extract) in this verse, even when the words “*pār sōru mūḍa ney peitu muzhangai vazhivāra*” mention milk, rice and Ghee?” (Laughing) Maybe he thought it would be a bland, tasteless dish like that made for sugar patients. I told him that it was not so. “*kannal*” is a key ingredient, and hence need not be said. In the sense that it goes without saying. Another thing struck me immediately. In Sanskrit, “*pāyasam*” denotes the same “*pāl sarkarai pongal*”, but with a more running consistency. “*payas*” means milk. It is made by cooking rice in milk and adding sugar or jaggery. Later, “*pāyasam*” made with lentils or semolina or vermicelli came into vogue. Some of these don’t even contain milk. Yet the original “*pāyasam*” means the dish made with rice, with milk and sugar or jaggery. The word “*pāyasam*” only means something connected to “*payas*”. Therefore, it mentions only milk and not rice and sugar. Rice and sugar go without saying. Such a name was given because the need was to specify that rice must be cooked in milk, not water. In Andal’s times, “*pāyasam*” made with lentils were common, so she said “*pār sOru*”, mentioning both rice and milk, to specify it has only these and lentils are not to be added. I told him this too.

Vaishnavas gave a beautiful Tamil name to this - “*akkāra aḍisil*.” “*akkāram*” is the derived form of “*śarkarā*”. This word which is also the origin of (the Tamil) “*sarkarai*”, is a proper Sanskrit word. It has taken many forms in many languages, used to indicate sweetmeats which contains sugar or jaggery. Since “*śa*” in Sanskrit can change to “*a*” in Tamil, “*sarkarai*” can also become “*arkaram*” and then

“*akkāram*”. (Laughing) The opposite of “*kāram*” (spice) is “*a-kāram*” or “*akkāram*”!

“*śarkarā*” has itself become ‘sugar’ too. Sugar is derived from the Arabian word “*sukkar*”, which in turn came from the Sanskrit “*śarkarā*”. It has also taken the forms “saccharine” and “jaggery”. From “jaggery” we get the name of a sweet which is extremely sweet - “*jāngiri*”.

All this sweetness may lead to a surfeit. So, let’s sweetly and happily conclude this portion and end with something sour, for a change of taste. Adi Sankaracharya has said that sourness is the antidote to too much sweetness, in his Saundaryalahari. What he said as Adi Sankaracharya several centuries ago, we should listen to his incarnation (Periyava) as he said in this century* !

*(originally written in the 20th Century)

“Poets talk of the “*cakōra*” bird which subsists on moonlight - do you know why it drinks the moonlight? It is said that it drinks the “*amirtam*” (ambrosia) that flows out of the moon. Once they (“*cakōras*”) drank the ambrosia that is the compassion and loveliness flowing from the moon that is the face of Ambal. Since it was utterly sweet, these birds felt cloyed and their beaks became numb. So they wished to drink some sour “*kanji*” (porridge.) At that moment, the full moon rose and spread its ambrosial rays. The birds rejoiced thinking “Here is the sour porridge we wanted” and began drinking them.

The nectar of mercy and beauty, emitted from the Divine Mother’s face, which puts the moon to shame, has demoted the moon rays’ ambrosia to the status of sour porridge. So says Sankaracharya, who has drunk and relished this nectar, without ever feeling cloyed.

Our Periyava, the “cooking Guru” who has expounded about major “*bhakṣaṇams*”, has also served (us) the humble porridge.

Once a devotee from Andhra asked loudly “*kanji śrīvāru ekkāḍavunnāru?*” (Where is the divine one of Kanchi?) and this fell in Periyava’s ears directly.

His typical mischievous smile flashed on his lips.

He had noticed that the devotee said “*kanji*” (porridge) instead of “*kanci*” (the city of Kanchipuram). We in fact say “*kanji*” for porridge that we drink, even though it is written with a “*ci*”. His matchless intelligence that could see the connections in everything, connected the city of Kanchipuram and the porridge that is drunk.

He spoke as if talking to himself, “Yes, this Samiyar (informal word for an ascetic) is indeed a “*kanji*” man. He is always telling people, “Don’t drink coffee ! Drink “*kanji*” instead.”

He called for the Andhra devotee, blessed him, and sent him away. Then he again took up the “*kanji*” topic.

“A poet has composed a “*ślēṣai*” (verse with pun as a figure of speech) saying that Goddess Kamakshi does not drink “*kanji*”. She drinks neither “*kanji*” nor “*kambancōru*” (gruel made with pearl millet), he has sung.”

He sang the verse with a childlike joy that would put a child to shame:

“*kanjik kuḍiyālē kambancōruṇṇālē.*”

“In the “*ślēṣai*”, the other meaning, the real, hidden meaning is that She resides in Kanchipuram. “*kuḍiyāl*” means “one who resides”. Then, in other cities, the food is offered to the Lord (Shiva) first, is then offered to Ambal and other deities. So, we could say She eats His food. But here (in Kanchipuram), Shiva who is called Ekamreshvara, or “*ēkamban*” or “*kamban*”, is somewhere else. She is enshrined as a queen in Her own temple, Kamakoshtam. Seated there, She reigns and gets Her food offerings made exclusively. She does not eat the food of “*kamban*” That’s what “*kambancōruṇṇālē*” means.”

Footnote : This complete verse has been explained in Deivathin Kural Part 3, under the Section “Kavi Chaturyam”, in the Chapter titled “Kanji kuḍikkāda Kamakshi”.

Not only this poet, Acharya (Adi Sankaracharya) too has linked Ambal to “*kanji*.”

Here, Periyava explained the Saundaryalahari verse we saw earlier. In the end, he added a new thought.

“Here, we get evidence for the fact that Acharya belongs to Kerala. (The phrase in the verse) “*kānjika dhiyā*”, which means “thinking it is ‘*kanji*’”. Since the birds considered the “*amirtam*” flowing from the moon to be just “*kanji*”, they drank it when they wanted something sour, he says. He has used “*Kanjika*” to mean “connected to ‘*kanji*’”. There is no word as “*kanji*” in Sanskrit. It’s a word only used in the South. It is especially prevalent in Kerala. Even the elite there drink “*kanji*” in the mornings. “*Malayālam kanji*” is the name for the variety of “*kanji*” they make.”

Coffee is bad for one’s health. It causes ulcers. Moreover, as a stimulant, it excites the nerves, which is in fact bad for the body and the mind. As if all this is not enough, it creates the penchant for drinking it again and again, causing more harm. Above all this, it entails much spending too.

“*Kanji*” is good for the body and the mind. It is inexpensive too. Made with only a fistful of broken rice, with buttermilk and powdered “*sukku*” (dried ginger) added, it is good for four persons easily. It is filling and satisfying, and makes one feel strong and clear-headed.”

“The buttermilk should be a bit sour. A pinch of extra salt is to be added. When this sour-salt comes together with the mild spiciness of “*sukku*”, it tastes healthy and soothingly delicious.”

“The book “*nīti śāstram*” says “*tintri lavaṇa hīna bhōjanam vṛthā*” (food devoid of sour and salt tastes, is no good.)”

“Many great people have written works which, through small verses, instruct young children about important codes of conduct, which they can memorise and use all their lives. The help they have provided (through this) is unmatched. It is the good fortune of the Tamil land that Avvaiyar was born here and has composed many such wonderful works. Athichudi for very young children, Konrai Vendan for a little older ones, and Vakkundam also known as Moothurai, and Nalvazhi. A poet called Ulaganatha Pulavar has composed *Ulaga Neeti*. Athiveerarama Pandian, who was the king of Korkai region, has composed *Vetri Verkai* very beautifully. A great man known as Sivaprakasa Munivar, has composed *Nanneri* which is more advanced,

both in language as well as in content.”

“The Sanskrit book “*nīti śāstram*” is a cogent collection of verses culled out from many old books, some like Mahabharata which have verses echoing Dharma here and there, and others like the Smritis and Bhartrhari’s Niti Shatakam, which are entirely didactic. It is an anthology. There is a Tamil translation of the same, called “*nīti venbā*”. Who composed it? Some (anonymous) great soul. One of “*endarō mahānubhāvulu*”, who Tyagayyar has sung of. “

“In those days, every student would memorise this “*nīti śāstram*” as the basic text for moral instruction. In this book there is a line that exalts the place of food that contains sour and salt tastes. ‘*tintriṇī*’ means tamarind. One could say just “*tintri*” too. The place called Dindivanam in South Arcot, is actually “*tintrivanam*” that has morphed.”

“There is a verse (in Nalvazhi) that says.

‘nīrillā neṟṟi pāzh, neyillā uṇḍi pāzh ; āṟillā ūrukku azhagu pāzh’

The forehead devoid of Vibhuti is purposeless and so is food without Ghee. A town without a river has no beauty. Also, life without loving, harmonious siblings is pointless and so is a home without the lady of the house.”

“Similarly in a verse which talks of four things which are “*vīṇ*” (useless), and the third of these, is food without salt and sour tastes.

*‘māṟṟ hīna śiśu jīvanam vṛthā , kānta hīna navayauvanam |
tintri lavaṇa hīna bhōjanam śānti hīna tapasah phalam || “*

“A motherless child, youthfulness without a husband (make that *kantā* or wife if you are a man), food without salt and sour tastes and penance that does not result in a peaceful, restrained mind - these four are ‘*vṛthā*’.”

“The first three are for householders like you all. The fourth is for “*paṇḍārams*” (informal word for ascetics). But here I am talking about food with relish!”

“Here both salt and sour tastes are mentioned. Just as four things are said to be in vain here, there is another verse which talks of four

“*pradhānams*” (most important) things). There, salt alone is mentioned and exalted as the primary of the six kinds of tastes. In the entire body, among all limbs, the head is the most important. We have a Tamil saying of this too. Of the five sense organs, the eye is the most important. Salt is the first of the tastes and among drinks, water is the most important.

“*sarvasya.gātrasya śirah pradhānam; sarvēndriyāṅām nayanam pradhānam |*

ṣaṅṅām rasānām lavaṇam pradhānam; bhavēt pānīyān udakam pradhānam ||”

“Let’s not start on the importance of salt now. We are not done with sourness yet!”

A lady offered a garland of lime fruits to Periyava. He smiles, “This is the third such garland since this morning.” He rubbed his head with his hand, denoting the application of a lime, “They bring it knowing that this is a “*sāmīyār*” (informal word for Sanyasi) who needs it a lot.”

“Don’t they do this (offering lime garlands) to Ambal, one may ask. Why not? She is the wife of “*pittan*” (A name of Shiva indicating He his mad). If Sundaramurti Swamigal sang about him beginning with the word “*pittā* !” (O Mad one!), the Lalita Sahasranama gives Her a name “*mattā*”, which means gone crazy. We say “*matta gajam*” for a rogue elephant, which is not in its senses, maddened with lust. If the mind is senseless due to intoxication from alcohol, that too is called “*matta*”. The “*mada nīr*” (temporin secreted by elephants) is actually “*pitta nīr*” (bile). “*mattam*” and “*pittam*” are the same. “*paittiyam*” is the state when “*pittam*” is in excess. We describe it as “*pittam*” having gone to one’s head. So the “*cittam*” (mind) being muddled is called both “*pittam*” and “*mattam*”. All rhyming words!

“There is a plant called “*ūmattai*” (Datura). It is the Tamil form of (the Sanskrit) word “*unmatta*”. The prefix “*un*” or “*ut*”, added to a word, indicates it rising, or raising something else.

“*tāram*”, “*uttāram*”, “*dharaṇam*”, “*uddharaṇam*”, “*mōcanam*”, “*unmōcanam*” - all these refer to God lifting us up to make us cross (the worldly existence) and giving us liberation, through the prefix “*un*”.

Similarly when the intoxication or insanity rises high, it is “*unmattam*”. Such a person is said to be in “*unmādam*” or “*ummādam*”. Among plants, there is one called “*matta*” or “*unmatta*”. The reason is that, when some of it is consumed, particularly if the seeds are ground and imbibed, the mind is unhinged. It is extremely bitter. All bitter foods, if taken a little more than ideal, cause biliousness. But many such vegetables also have other health benefits. So they are cooked along with some ingredient that reduces the biliousness, and consumed. But “*ūmattai*” has no such benefits but causes insanity or even death if it exceeds the limit. It is called “*mattam*”. That is why Arunagirinathar, in his Tiruppugazh song about Lord Ganesa, refers to His mad father (Shiva) as “*mattamum madiyamum vaittiḍum aran magan.*”

“The “*madiyam*” which is mentioned after “*mattam*”, is the moon, which too can cause insanity. On the one hand, the moon showers “*amirtam*”, on the other, if one sleeps under the moonlight for a long time, it can unhinge the mind of one whose nerves are not strong enough. Lunar means anything connected to the moon. Luna in Latin means the moon. We know what lunatic means...”

Whenever Oduvamurtis came to see him, Periyava would never miss asking them to sing some Pathikam (decad from the Tevaram). Later he would explain to the singer the specialities in the words and contents of the Pathikam, and any story connected to it.

Once a ripe old Oduvamurti started singing Sundaramurti Swamigal’s “*pittā piṛaisūḍi*” in Periyava’s presence. He stopped in a kind of ecstasy after the second word itself. “I have sung about Periyava himself, who has the name “Chandrasekhara” and is none other than Shiva who is ‘*piṛaisūḍi*’, “he said in a choked voice. (Chandrasekhara and ‘*piṛaisūḍi*’ both mean the same - one who wears the moon)

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi (Periyava) smiled and made light of his greatness, which had moved the Oduvamurti. He said, “Whatever that may be, the previous word which you sang (“*pittā*”) is very suitable here (to me).”

Coming back to “*ūmattai*”:

“Just as the mind is unbalanced due to liquor, it is similar when

there is a divine intoxication caused by drinking the blissful nectar of divine experiences. But later it becomes “amirtam”. There are lots of descriptions of the moon in the Head Chakra showering “amirtam” at the culmination of the Yogic practice. Even for Bhaktas and Jnanis, who do not follow the path of Yoga, this pouring of “amirtam” from the moon in the Head Chakra occurs sometimes, when they reach lofty states.”

“The Purusha Sukta describes how the Sun, the moon, Indra and Agni etc. were born from different parts of the Lord’s body. There it says that the moon was born from His mind, the inner organ. That’s why the moon affects the mind in good and bad ways, under different conditions. In Tamil, “*mati*” means the mind as well as the moon. In Sanskrit “*mati*” is only connected to the mind, not the moon. The word “*mattam*” is derived from “*mati*”, which means mind. That “*unmattam*” has a very superior, divine meaning. This mind is the reason we are constantly creating thoughts and running amok, and are buffeted by a thousand emotions like joy, sorrow, anger and pain. It is the individual mind that keeps us Jivatmas (individual souls) separate from Paramatma (the supreme soul). If we raise the mind high and cast it away, that elevated state is very peaceful and our real nature, devoid of any capriciousness. There is no one there to be “*mottu*” (buffeted about). (Laughing softly like child) “there is only “*meddu*”(gentleness) it is not like “*mattam*” or “*unmattam*”, which are like being churned with a rod (“*mattu*”), but is very soft (“*meddu meddu*”) This going beyond the mind or “*mati*” is a lofty state called “*unmanam*”. That too is called “*unmādam*” or “*unmattam*.”

I said Ambal is called “*mattā*” as a wife befitting “*pittan*” and that led to all these (thoughts.) This lime started the topic of “*mattā*”. The lime reduces “*pittam*”, it helps cure insanity. (Laughing) Devotees bring it in strings for me!”

“This is sour. What is bitter causes “*pittam*”. Sour things reduce “*pittam*”. We cannot say that of all sour things. Something that is not sour naturally, if fermented, has yeast, and becomes sour. Such a thing can never reduce “*pittam*”. Toddy, which is intoxicating, is made this way. Even among the naturally sour, not everything can reduce

“*pittam*”. Tamarind, which is the root for the word “sour” (in Tamil) too is not so. Among sour things, it is especially lime that has this quality. They say it has Vitamin C. Apart from all this, it also has some subtle mystical qualities which make it special, which is why it is offered to Ambal as garlands. People who have the ability to contact Yogis etc. who exist in their subtle forms, use limes to converse with them. The lime is their telephone” (Laughs)

(Laughing some more) “We know only of lime “*rasam*” and pickle. The “*rasam*” is of two types. One is sugared and drunk cold. The other “*rasam*” is mixed with spices, boiled and added to rice. Even the pickle is of two types. One is bland without spices, the other has it loaded.

Periyava asked the lady who brought the garland, “One can make both “*rasam*” to be had with rice, as well as pickle, both from these limes, isn’t that so?”

“Yes, one can.”

“If so, what would you call that “*rasam*” and the pickle? The question is not clear, is it? Well, say you make “*rasam*” or pickle with these, how will you tell people at home about what you have made?”

“I’ll say I have made “*elumiccam pazha rasam*” (“*rasam*” with lime fruits), and “*elumiccam kái ūrukāi*” (pickle with raw lime fruits). Is that right?”, she asked, a bit agitated. She seemed to be perturbed thinking, “Is Jagadguru likely to ask about these kitchen facts? I must have understood wrong and am talking incoherently.”

Periyava asked kindly, “Why are you afraid?” and as if reading her mind, said, “You answered right. And I am a Samiyar interested in kitchen matters. You say that it is “*elumiccam pazha rasam*” but “*elumiccam kái ūrukāi*”. In other words, even though the same ingredient is used for both, one is described as made with fruit and the other with raw ones. Isn’t it?”

The lady replied, still sounding agitated, “Yes, indeed it seems so. It may be wrong...”

“Nothing wrong here. You are saying it right. Not only you, but everyone also says so. But why?”

He paused for a few seconds, as if expecting a reply, and then continued, “You don’t know.” Realising that she may get perturbed over this, he looked at her mercifully, saying “Don’t be afraid Amma!” in a soothing manner. “Most people will not know this, I think. If any of you here know why, tell me.”

Not content with asking in general, this Kitchen Samiyar enquired with almost everyone assembled there, devotees who had come for Darshan and those in the Matham, about this “great truth”!

Nobody knew the answer. It was indeed odd, (felt everybody) that of two items made with the same ingredient, one is described as made with fruit and the other with raw ones. There was also an eager expectation of how Periyava would solve this puzzle.

But he was acting as if he really did not know the answer. Is he not Shiva himself, described as “*ati viḍamba*” (the great actor) in Shivanandalahari, by Adi Shankaracharya (who again is not different from Periyava)

Long-time devotees, in various ways, insisted that he knew the answer and he must enlighten all of them. To add to the dramatic tension, Periyava persisted with his stance, and finally relented.

‘*rasam*’ means juice. That has been the name given to the dish served between “*kuzhambu*” rice and buttermilk-rice. Juice can be obtained only by squeezing ripe fruits, is it not? Can we extract juice from raw fruits? That’s why we extract the juice of grapes, mangoes etc and call it “*pazha rasam*” (fruit juice), served chilled with added sugar and similarly, even when made hot with green chillies added, it is called “*elumiccam pazha rasam*”

“The very word “*ūrukāi*” (pickle) contains “*kāi*” (unripe fruit). Take a mango. They pickle it only when raw. If it ripens, will anybody pickle it? They eat it or make mango juice. So how can we take “*elumiccam pazham*” (lime fruit) and pickle it, marinating it for several days?”

“Therefore, even though the same ingredient is used for two foods, one is described as made with fruit and the other with raw ones. Our elders noticed even these small details and used words carefully. We

infer that when we see such usages.”

The listeners were all pleased. The speaker was delighted as if he had expounded the commentary of “*tat tvam asi*” (A great teaching of the Upanishads). He had seen the Self as the Only Truth, and everything else, ranging from commentaries to “*tat tvam asi*” to kitchen matters as Maya, or as not different from the Self. Due to this “*sama dṛṣṭi*” (impartial, undifferentiated gaze) he observed even small things, understood the tiniest details and explained them. How attentively he has noticed that our forefathers used words like wealth, with a lot of care.

More thoughts for us to feast (our minds) on, about sourness, a tasty repast about all six tastes in fact:

“Sweet, chilli (or spicy), bitter, salty, sour and astringent - there are six such tastes, called “*ṣaḍ rasam*”. All of them are said to be “*rasam*”. Of these, except for astringent, we associate the other five with our feelings too.”

“In general, we do not notice the astringent taste much individually. We club it with bitter. But they are different in reality. When naming the six, bitter is called “*tiktam*” and astringent “*kaṭu*” in Sanskrit. That’s why a particular condiment which is highly astringent, is called “*kaḍukkāi*” in Tamil. Only the bittergourd is purely bitter. Though we do not differentiate between bitter and astringent (in taste), they are very different in their qualities and effects. Many bitter things are very good for one’s health. Most of the herbs we make “*kaṣāyam*” (medicinal decoction) out of, are either bitter or spicy. They say eating bitter-gourd gives wisdom. Of course, some say sardonically that only a wise person can ingest bitter-gourd. Astringent is even healthier than bitter. When they both form the basis of a sour product, the sour product that is based on astringent will not harm us, while the sour product based on bitterness, can cause ill-effects such as ulcers.”

“I’ll explain how these two tastes can be the basis for sour products. The basis of any plant is its seed, is it not? Now, both lime and gooseberry are sour. Let’s examine their seeds. If you bite lime seeds, how do you find them? They are extremely bitter. What about gooseberry seed

(stone)? It isn't bitter. It is astringent in a discernible way, different from bitter. Those with ulcers should not have lime. We can say it is better than tamarind, but if it exceeds the low permissible limit, it is harmful. But even they can have gooseberries more liberally. It won't cause harm. Pomegranates are also similar. Their seeds are astringent, and so they can be had. Here, there is another difference (between it and lime). Lime juice, when heated too much, becomes bitter. Pomegranate juice, on the other hand, even when boiled, tastes good, without losing its natural taste of sour sweet."

"Tamarind, from which sourness gets its (Tamil) name, has astringent seeds. But tamarind fruits, raw or ripe, cause a lot of heat. Isn't the shade of the tamarind tree the same? It can dry us up. That's why people with ulcers should never have it. But its astringent seeds have medicinal value to cure some diseases."

"I started by saying that the six tastes are associated with feelings. How?"

In this series, in the first chapter, what Periyava said on the same topic in another context, has been presented. He elaborates more here.

"When someone is good-natured, we say he has sweet qualities. A good voice is called sweet. Sweet is called both "*tittippu*" and "*inippu*". We describe some things as "sweet experiences". Even the grace of God is called "Sweet Grace". So, all things pleasing and superior are called sweet, and it is so in English too."

"What is amusing is that there are people who don't like sweets and prefer spicy things. There are those who like sourness, extra salt, or even bitter tastes. But even such people, when referring to superior things, don't call them salty or spicy or sour which are their favourites. They only call these things sweet."

"Let's examine the other tastes too. Salt is used to judge the quality of food. If it's tasteless, we say it is "*uppu-sappu illāmal*" (saltless and bland.) Any food that is not sweet, becomes tasty only due to salt. Even to the dough for "*pōli*", they add salt, to enhance the sweetness. In the same vein, it is common to add a bit of jaggery or sugar to "*kaṛi*" and "*kuzhambu*". Let me tell you the greatness of salt. Without salt,

food is tasteless and cannot be enjoyed. Only because food depends on salt, we have a saying, “*uppiṭṭavarai ullalavum ninai*” (As long as you live, remember the people who gave you salt (meaning food))”

“There is another reason too. Sweets are not made everyday. When sweets are made, people do not reduce the sugar or jaggery needed to make them. But even if they did use a little, the difference is not felt much.”

“In everyday cooking, if the sour, bitter and spicy tastes are too high or too low, they cannot be rectified while eating. One cannot reduce the excess in these, and similarly cannot correct the shortfall by adding chilli powder or tamarind white eating. Spiciness of course, if too much, can be mitigated by adding Ghee or oil. Moreover, eating with these tastes somewhat more or less than normal, is quite possible.”

“But with salt, even a little excess or short, are (not accepted and) labelled salty or tasteless (respectively). “*uvarppu*” (saltiness) is also said “*karippu*”. It is the spoken form of “*kārppu*”, which is the grammatically correct synonym of “*uvarppu*”. There is too much “*karippu*” with excess salt and too insipid if less. If it’s excess, nothing can be done. But if some food has less salt, unlike tastes like sour and spicy, we can add salt to it while eating, and it dissolves in a trice and rectifies the taste. Only here (in saltiness), it is possible to correct an error in the taste of some food, by adding the main ingredient. Hence, our grandmothers, being wise ladies, served some salt on the leaf (plate) even before serving other dishes, so that the person eating can correct any shortage of salt, without having to tell them, and without having to wait or make others wait. Keeping this in mind, we say “*uppiṭṭavarai ullalavum ninai*”, to instruct people to be grateful to those who feed them.”

“As the saying “*uppillāta paṇḍam kuppaiyile*” (any food without salt is useless) claims, in daily cooking, where there are no sweets, salt is primary. Unlike tamarind or chilli powder, only a small quantity of salt is needed to add taste. Saltiness is found thickly concentrated in salt. That’s why good people in whom virtues are concentrated, are called the “Salt of the Earth’.”

“One would be surprised to know that to glorify salt, even tasty sweets are (sometimes) given the name of “*uppu*”. Not only that, beauty too has been connected to salt. “*lavaṇam*” means salt. What results from it is “*lāvanyam*” and that means beauty, as is well-known.
“

“All tastes have “*uppu*”, since even words like “*tittippu*”, *pulippu*”, “*uraippu*”, “*kasappu*” and “*tuvarppu*” have “*ppu*” in them. They all end with ‘*uppu*’.”

“Depending on the way jaggery is made, some types actually taste salty. Tender coconut also is salty sometimes.”

“Despite all this glorification, when it comes to connecting the taste with feelings, the tone changes. When we use the word “*karippu*” and say “*kaṇḍālē karikkiratu*” (harangue everytime one sees), or “*karittu koṭṭugiratu*” (showering abuse) do we mean lofty feelings?”

“It is the same when we say “*puliccuppōccu*” (become sour.) When the same thing happens repeatedly and we are tired of hearing it, we say “*kēṭṭu puliccuppōccu*.” It probably springs from fermenting something by keeping it aside for a long while, and letting yeast grow.”

“Anger is associated with spice. We say “*kāramāga pēsinān*” (spoke angrily). If a debate was hot but interesting, we say ‘*kārasāramāna pēccu vārttai*’.”

“With phrases like “*mukham kasantu pesinan*” (he spoke with bitterness) “*manakkasappu ērpaṭṭatu*” (bitterness in the heart resulted) bitterness too is associated with unwelcome feelings.”

“Here we club “*tuvarppu*” (astringent) with bitterness. There is no feeling described as astringent. But it is this taste that is the healthiest of the six tastes.”

“All said, among the six tastes, whatever one may like, except sweet, no other taste is linked to noble feelings. Only sweetness has been unanimously awarded this supremacy.”

Do you see how Periyava, the personification of sweetness, has finally brought us to it?

Sri Periyava gave a beautiful reason for why among the six tastes, even those who like other tastes, use sweetness to describe superior and beautiful objects.”Saliva secretion is necessary for good health, for digesting what we eat. We see that when the tongue is parched, it is very uncomfortable. Among the six tastes, only natural sweeteners like sugar, jaggery or candy cause saliva secretion as soon as they are placed on the tongue. Chillies and pepper suck out the mouth’s saliva quickly. We say (when having these) ‘My tongue is singed’. Sour and salt tastes also are in the same list. Astringent and bitter tastes may not dry out the mouth of saliva, but neither do they induce its secretion. Hence, it is sweet that helps in the production of life-saving saliva, and that’s why whatever taste they may have a taste for, (smiling at his own wordplay) everyone compares superior and beautiful products to sweet things.”

Periyava, the epitome of fairness, brought out a speciality that spicy taste has, that even sweet does not. He said that proverbs like the one that exhort us to remember those who gave us salt, originated due to this (speciality.) “Sweet taste may help in saliva production, but considering the teeth, sweet things are harmful. Those with toothache and swollen gums know this well. Here it is salt that helps. Someone told me that an American dietician has endorsed our food habits here. We serve sweets and ‘*pāyasam*’ first, and finally have buttermilk and rice, or buttermilk to conclude the meal, and he has apparently lauded this. ‘Whatever harm the sweets cause to the teeth will be cancelled by the buttermilk. Moreover, it is germicidal. Sour buttermilk alone would not have been so effective. It is the salt that’s added to it that makes it curative.’ ‘Your forefathers must have been very wise, to notice such things and act on them’ he said admiringly, I hear. He also said that the reason that even people in their twenties in Western nations have decayed and artificial teeth, is that a sweet or fruit is served as dessert at the end of a meal, or that people there are constantly eating chocolates, without taking necessary remedial steps.”

“When one has toothache and swollen gums, gargling with salt water is done, is it not?”

The epitome of fairness returned to sweetness, “Here I must

mention an exception to the rule. Jaggery and sugar are harmful to teeth. But honey, which is immensely sweet? It causes no harm. Just like gooseberries and pomegranates, which have sourness, have none of the ill-effects of (other) sour tastes, honey has none of the ill-effects of other sweets. In fact, when honey is applied to the aching tooth and swollen gums, though sweet, it acts as a medicine and cures them.”

“Honey has many specialities. We offer ‘*tēnabhiṣēkam*’ (bathing with honey) to God. While other sweet things harm the throat, honey removes the damage done by them. When one’s voice (which emerges from the throat) is very sweet, we describe it as honey-like. Many of the ‘*lēhyams*’ (medicines in paste form) in Ayurveda have honey mixed into them. Sugar is taboo there. All the powdered medicines they give, come with the instructions to be mixed with honey and taken. In many foreign countries, they have started using honey to treat various ailments, calling it Honey Therapy.”

“One astonishing fact about honey is that it can be the medicine to treat diametrically opposite kinds of diseases. To a lethargic man, it gives energy and enthusiasm. It can induce sleep in someone suffering from insomnia. To those who are fat, it helps in weight reduction when had with lime juice. When emaciated people have it with milk, it nourishes them. It is generally known that honey can arrest diarrhoea. But a practitioner of traditional medicine told me that mixed with specific ingredients in the right quantity, honey can act as a laxative too. Honey provides heat to those whose bodies have a cool disposition, while in limited quantities, it reduces the heat to those with a warm disposition.”

“All these are reasons why a very considerate, loving nature is described as flowing like honey, honey-like heart etc.”

“It is felt that even diabetics can have honey in small quantities.”

“This reminds me that the most important of the six tastes, viz. sweet and salt, are on one hand used to give strength, and on the other hand, these two are prescribed for people with certain diseases. Diabetes is called ‘*sarkarai vyādhi*’ (sugar disease.) Such a name for a condition that must totally shun sugar! It may be called so because it is caused

by sugar levels in the body shooting up and staying high. People with (high) blood pressure and heart conditions are told to avoid salt. Those with ulcers must steer clear of sour and spicy foods. (Smiling) Only bitter and astringent, the tastes we evade due to dislike, are not medically disallowed. In fact, most medicines, including English medicines, are bitter. They are sugar-coated so that we will not push them away and (with a charming smile) will push them in instead. Sugar and salt, though prohibited for some ailing people, if someone is weakened due to anaemia, or dehydrated, then these two are directly added to the bloodstream, as saline and glucose solution drips. When we say glucose, we only think of what is made chemically and sold. But it is found naturally in many substances. It is found particularly in grape juice and honey, both of which are called '*madhu*' (in Indian languages.)”

“The word '*madhuram*' has originated from '*madhu*'. The nature of '*madhu*' is '*mādhuryam*' or '*madhuram*'. We think the direct meaning of '*madhu*' is liquor, which is a harmful substance made from coconut and palmyra (sap.) In reality '*madhu*' is not anything we make; it is the nectar which flowers produce naturally. That is the primary meaning of '*madhu*'. “

“Among all sweet substances, it is this honey which does no harm, is delicious, medicinal and above all these, conducive to spiritual growth too. It is from this honey that the word '*madhuram*' has come about.”

With this, Periyava concluded his exposition on the glory of sweetness.

We too shall conclude with fruit as dessert, this feast where we had a glimpse of Periyava's wealth of words and thoughts, and go on to the next topic connected to his sweetness.

Once Periyava asked Sri Balu, who had the fortune of serving Periyava closely for a long time, about how the orange got its name. This was soon after Sri Balu had started serving him.

“I don't know” was his answer.

“Ok, peel this orange,” said Periyava, as he tossed him a fruit which had been earlier submitted to him as an offering.

The follower (Sri Balu) peeled it.

“How many segments are there? Count and check,” said Periyava.

He counted and said “Eleven”.

Periyava said, “All oranges have exactly eleven segments, like this. If you take a peeled fruit and break it roughly into two halves, one would have six segments and the other five. So ‘*āru*’ (six) and ‘*anju*’ (five) become ‘*āranju*’ (the way orange is pronounced in Tamil.)”

Is the English word ‘Orange’ from Tamil? Periyava has given several examples of Tamil origins for English words and explained that the Aryan-Dravidian division is incorrect. That would be apt while talking of his multi-disciplinary knowledge, among the many sweetnesses. Here, let’s see only about the orange, which is our dessert now.

“Is it not incorrect to say that the word orange has been formed by adding ‘*āru*’ and ‘*anju*’?” he asked someone who had an Honours Degree in English. “Yes (it is incorrect)”, the man replied.

Then Periyava replied, addressing everyone present there, “What we call ‘*nārattai*’ (in Tamil) comes from the Sanskrit word ‘*nāraṅgi*’. Orange belongs to this ‘*nārattai*’ family. Our ‘*nāraṅgi*’ became ‘*nāraṅj*’ in Arabic and reached English. They pronounced it likewise and spelt it as norange. A single fruit was called ‘a norange’. As time went by, some people assumed that the ‘n’ at the start of norange, is part of the article ‘an’ used before words starting with vowels, and ‘a norange’ became ‘an orange’. Thus, the Sanskrit ‘*nāraṅgi*’ became orange in English.”

Periyava then asked the English graduate, “There is a term in linguistics, for the last letter of a word getting added to the next word and a new word thus being formed. What is that term?”

The man didn’t remember. “Look it up and tell me later”, said Periyava.

We shall also see it later.

We have the satisfaction of having tasted a small dose of the feast Periyava provided on the topic of food. But a feast is always served on

a (banana) leaf, is it not? How can we conclude without seeing what he said about the banana?

“Among trees, the banana is very small. But while very big trees have smaller leaves, this has a leaf so big that we can serve a meal on it. So, the banana is regarded highly in our tradition, due to this motherlike heart, which takes pleasure in feeding us.”

“There are many tasty fruits which provide health and nourishment. But is there any other fruit, apart from the banana, that can be a substitute for a meal? Even the other two among the *‘muppazham’* (the trio regarded traditionally as the best of fruits), mango and jackfruit - can they be eaten to one’s fill? Maybe an apple can be so (satisfying hunger), but it is affordable only by the rich. Only banana is the fruit that all people can buy a few, eat and be sated. It is indeed the ‘People’s fruit’.

“If banana fruit is food, banana flower is medicine. It is sweet as a fruit, and astringent when it is a flower. Astringent foods are very good for the body. Banana flowers can suit even those with delicate digestion.”

“Other flowers have a fragrance. Banana flowers do not. *‘vāsanā sahitam’* and *‘vāsanā kṣayam’*, they say in Vedanta. (*‘vāsanā’* means fragrance as well as innate tendencies in people), and this flower epitomises that. Another strong Vedantic connection is that banana trees grow without seeds. Our actions become the seeds for the cycle of births. So the banana reminds us of *‘jnānam’* (enlightenment), where the seeds of further births are destroyed.”

“Saying this doesn’t mean it’s not connected to our lives. It is the banana that teaches us to live well all our life. *‘Vāzhai’* (banana) is connected to *‘vāzhkkai’* (life). It is our ideal in life that no part of our life should be wasted and should be entirely useful. The banana epitomises that ideal. Its stem, bark, leaf, flower, ripe and unripe fruits, upto the fibre, are all useful, are they not? Hence it is named *‘vāzhai’*, meaning that it is *‘vāzhvu’* (another word for life.)”

“We call it the banana **tree**. Usually trees are rough, while this is smooth. This smoothness advises us to be similarly devoid of roughness,

and to be gentle and nice to all people in all situations. It may have been called 'vāzhai' because of this 'vazhavazhappu' (smoothness) too."

"Trees like mango and banyan that propagate through seeds, produce countless seeds. If they were all to grow, then the entire earth would be insufficient for that tree species alone. Since it is not so, it is proved that most of the seeds won't germinate. Even among the seeds that germinate, it is hard for anyone to say which sapling is from the seed of which parent tree. Only among banana trees, since the saplings grow around the parent tree, it is possible to say with certainty which tree is the source of each. Once the young trees grow, the parent tree dies. If our Dharmashastram tells us that after obtaining good children, a householder should practise celibacy and then take up Sanyasa, the banana tree goes one step further and takes the great Sanyasa (renouncing life). That is Vedanta. There is also philosophy for life here - the banana tree leads a useful life, and creates similarly useful offspring, in a manner that we can identify the offspring to have sprung from a particular tree. No other tree has this. That's why it is a custom to bless people as 'vāzhaiyadi' 'vāzhaiyāga' 'vāzh' (May you live like the generations of banana trees). It is symbolic of this blessing, that we tie banana trees (at the entrance) during weddings and other auspicious events. The banana tree is a symbol of 'mangalam' (auspiciousness).

With this we too sing the 'mangalam' (concluding benedictory song) to this feast by Periyava.

Periyava who engaged in wordplay, also used to enjoy wordplay created by others and shared his enjoyment. He used to beautifully unravel the songs of Siddhars (mystics), which are filled with puzzling play with words. One such, which also reveals the suspense from Chapter 3:

It is of added interest that Periyava's tact and discretion are revealed in this. Since it would not be apt to discuss the meaning of this song openly, he has discreetly unravelled the puzzle, but with great delicacy such that the unstated can be caught only by the perceptive. How sharp his intellect was!

“māngāppālunḍu malaimēl iruppōrukku !

tēngāppāl ēdukkāḍi ! kudambāi !

tēngāppāl ēdukkāḍi! “

After singing the above sweetly in a folksy tune, Periyava continued : “This is one of the songs by the Siddhars. There is a word ‘*kudambai*’ which occurs here. The composer is also called Kudambai Siddhar. What is this ‘*kudambai*’?”

“It is an ornament worn by women in the ears. ‘*kudambāi*’ means addressing someone ‘O Lady wearing a ‘*kudambai*’!” “

“Poets sometimes compose verses addressing one person in particular, to make them more interesting. We hear ‘*aḍiyē*’ or ‘*aḍā*’ in some songs. Or ‘*tōzhi*’, ‘*sakhiyē*’, ‘*ammā*’ etc. There are many addressing ‘*kīliyē*’. Such songs which address a ‘*kīli*’ (parrot or a pretty girl) in every stanza are called ‘*kīlikkaṇṇi*’.”

“‘*kaṇṇi*’ means a garland. This literary garland is where many verses are strung together into one song. Every verse has three lines. In many of them, the third line is the same as the second line.”

“It is so in this song too, the second line (humming) ‘*tēngāppāl ēdukkāḍi*’ also is the third line. The word ‘*kudambāi*’ alone comes additionally in the second line. In any ‘*kaṇṇi*’, the address to the person to whom it is addressed, comes in the second line. Just like ‘*kudambāi*’ here, one would see ‘*kīliyē*’ in the same place in a ‘*kīlikkaṇṇi*’.”

Periyava again spread sweetness through his singing in a folk tune:

“vallikkaṇavan pērai vazhippōkkar sonnālum

ullam kuzhaiyutaḍi - kīliyē!

ūnum urugutaḍi !”

“We were talking about ‘*māngāppāl*’. I said it is composed by Kudambai Siddhar. Siddhars don’t reveal their names or origins. As the saying goes ‘*siddhan pōkku sivan pōkku*’ (the conduct of Siddhars is inscrutable like Lord Shiva’s), their actions and even their poetry can be strange and hard to understand. This Siddhar too has lived without

us knowing his name and place. Since he composed verses addressing a girl wearing a 'kudambai', people named him Kudambai Siddhar."

"Alright, so what is the meaning of this song?"

"He has composed this song which seems like a cheery folk song, using words like 'tēngā'(coconut) and 'māngā'(mango), conveying a very lofty idea, which is the important essence of Kundalini Yoga."

"Those who experience sense pleasures and delight in them, roam at the base of the mountain called Yogamarga, without ascending it. They wander around in Bhogamarga (path of worldly gratification) and waste their vitality in carnal pleasures."

"What do those who take up Yogamarga do? They protect their vitality without losing it, by their practice of Yoga, and finally convert that into divine bliss. The vital energy of sensualists stays at the base of their spine, just like they are at the base level (of spiritual growth). It does not stay there too for long but is lost during Anubhoga (enjoyment). This causes loss of physical, intellectual, and spiritual strength. As one practises Yoga, what happens is that that vital energy climbs up the spine through the lotuses (which is another name for the Chakras, or subtle centres there). Accordingly, the physical, intellectual and spiritual strength of the person practising Yoga increases. Finally when they reach their goal of divine bliss, that vital energy reaches the lotus in the crown, becomes Amritam(ambrosia) which floods all the 'nāḍis' (nerves of the subtle body) with cool delight, and fills the heart with sweetness. Even in our state of ignorance, when someone delights us greatly, we say 'ucci kuḷirndu pōccu' (my head has become cooled). The usage 'ice vaikkiratu' (informally, gratifying someone, literally placing ice on someone) has come from this cool Amritam which flows from the head. Just as nectar flows from a lotus, this honey flows from this lotus. When Manickavacakar sang 'pāl ninaindu ūṭṭum', melting as he thought of the Lord's grace, he says in that verse 'ānandamāya tēninai sorindu', which refers to this Amritam. Here 'ānandamāya' must not be split as 'ānanda' and 'māya'. It only means 'ānandamāgiya'. This is the exact opposite of 'māyai'.

“This honey or Amritam never diminishes despite flowing all the time through the nerves. Its vigour too is never depleted. In other words, it has ‘*mangāta*’ (never dimming) brightness, and the whiteness of pure Sattva. It is this never-reducing flow of consciousness that he has mentioned at the very beginning as ‘*māngāppāl*’. ‘*mangāppāl*’ is extended to ‘*māngāppāl*’ by poetic licence, to deliberately confuse us, for fun. Just as ‘*nizhal*’ becomes ‘*nīzhal*’ and ‘*naḍatti*’ becomes ‘*naḍātti*’, ‘*mangā*’ becomes ‘*māngā*’.

‘*māngāppālundu malaimēl iruppōrukku*’ - Here, ‘*malaimēl irukkīravar*’ (one residing on a hill), refers to one who has ascended Yogamarga. It refers to the Siddhars, who have reached the peak of Yoga, having left the foothill of base pleasures.

“Such people, who experience the tasting of the inexhaustible Amritam, who have divine bliss, what use do they have of carnal pleasure? He asks ‘*ēdukkāḍi?*’ (why is it needed?) to ‘*kudambāi*’. Indeed, why would they want it?”

One could experience a drop of Periyava’s aesthetic sense, by the way he sang ‘*ēdukkāḍi?*’ in its correct tune, with his hand gesticulating the meaning.

He refers to carnal pleasure as ‘*tēngāppāl*’ (the milk that does not stay.) The vital sap is lost in that process, is it not? Since it does not stay with the person and drains away, it is called ‘*tēngāppāl*’.

“He describes it as milk since it is called ‘*śukram*’. The ‘*r*’ and ‘*l*’ are interchangeable. So ‘*śukram*’ and ‘*śuklam*’ are the same. Though it is described as milk since it is ‘*śuklam*’ (white), it is not the white of pure Sattva. It is impure Asattva. Yet, in the Lord’s creation, coal can become diamond, and so also this too can become Amritam, and hence he said ‘*tēngāppāl*’.”

“Everyone knows ‘*tēngāppāl*’ (coconut milk). Only ‘*māngāppāl*’ is unknown. But using what we know, we can apply the same basic facts and must accept the unknown too. Instead of arguing that divine bliss is a feeling and cannot be a tangible thing as Amritam, we must accept it. Here too, we see that a ‘feeling’ results in what is visibly white. If lowly pleasure can be thus, why shouldn’t the highest pleasure have

the ‘*māngāppāl*’?”

“The Siddhar has used the word ‘milk’ for both - what ought to be discarded and what ought to be aspired for as the goal, by gently asking ‘*ēdukkāḍi*’ about the former. This is as if he is teaching us not to discriminate, and not to ascribe highness and lowness to things.”

Whether the Siddhar intended this or not, our great Periyava, whose heart is pure as milk, felt so, since he embraces everything in this world without discrimination.

Periyava, despite describing himself as verbose, was expert at explaining things concisely. You would have seen several proofs here and there. Now we present a few such brilliant statements.

He would use this thrift with words, only with those who could grasp things without needing long explanations.

A devotee opened his heart out to Periyava, “Even some of the giants among scholars, who soak themselves in the Vedantic works, do not experience the truth said in Vedanta, and live and die like other ignorant people. Leaving aside more popular branches of knowledge, they have chosen and dedicated their lives to research in Vedanta. Why is God simply watching such scholars, when they are in the grip of ignorance (lack of self-realisation)? Why aren’t they impacted by the experience of the great souls, whose books they study?”

He concluded wistfully, saying that he was afraid his trust in the power of the words of great people, and in the grace of God would be weakened, seeing such scholars remain so till the end.

He expected that Periyava, who was always sympathetic to everyone, would be touched and console him and clarify his doubts with some brilliant explanations, thus soothing his heart and providing a feast to his intellect.

Instead, Periyava simply asked him, “When you say ‘till the end’, you only mean the end of this birth, don’t you?”, and got up leaning on his stick!

He had compressed a very big concept into just a few words.

One lifespan, which seems like a long time to us, is a negligible part of a soul's journey in the cycle of births, which extends to several Yugas. So, would it not take several births to cleanse the impurities acquired? So we need not lose heart and lose faith in God and in the efficacy of the works of realised souls, since a single lifespan is too less a time for it.

When it comes to evolution that we see in the external world, it takes thousands of years to move even a millimetre. People like Tagore have extolled God for the patience He has in this. We should realise that it is the same for evolution in the internal world too, and accept what Periyava has said about this, which is as follows:

“We suffer in many ways and suffer long. God has shown no mercy and we feel very angry that He is not merciful, but is hard-hearted. In reality, we do not know all that we have done. We know only this birth. We don't know what is before or after it. We are unaware of deeds done since time immemorial. If we knew them, we would feel that all that we suffer is inadequate, and we should suffer a lot more, and longer, to cancel them. We would then realise that because He is most compassionate, He has graciously spared us at this.”

Even among those who are great scholars today, there may be some who have a huge baggage (of Karma). Would they not need several births to undo that? Is it not likely that the Lord and the words of realised souls, may reduce that 'several' to less? What is the use of arguing that they must become eligible for liberation in this birth itself, without reflecting on this truth?

A devotee who was a singer, finished singing Dikshitar's '*kanja dalāyatākṣi*'.

Periyava said, “The line you sang '*śrī kāncana vasanē*', should be '*śrī kānci nivasanē*'. That's how Dikshitar would have composed it since it has a '*śrī*' in the beginning.”

'*kāncana vasanē*' addresses one who wears golden garments, and

'*kānci nivasanē*', one who resides in Kanchipuram.

If we take the lyrics to be '*śrī kāncana vasanē*', there is no reference to Kanchipuram in the song about Kamakshi, the goddess of Kanchi. The correction stated by Periyava rectifies this flaw.

Notice how laconically Peiyava mentioned the '*śrī*' in the start of the line, without explaining in detail, to show that it was the composer's intent and not his own correction.

We saw that '*kāncana vasanē*' is about golden garments. Why should one add the glorifying prefix '*śrī*' to golden garments? Whereas adding '*śrī*' to the names of holy cities is a common practice, is it not?

“Adorning the Lord with clothes and ornaments and enjoying seeing that, and clothing ourselves in clean, washed clothes as per the Shastras, to please Him, wearing Vibhuti and Kunkumam or Tirumann brightly, donning Japamalas - these are real '*alankāras*' (adornments). Dressing up to appear beautiful, or to attract others, is not real '*alankāra*'. It is actually '*ahankāra*' (egoism). We should do an '*alam-kāra*' to it, while we must give '*angīkāra*' (acceptance) to the real '*alankāra*' described earlier, for ourselves (touching himself gently) as well as the Lord”.

The above was said by Periyava to a group of bright scholars. So, apart from giving special emphasis to the words '*alam*' and '*angī*', and touching his own sacred person, he did not elaborate further.

The scholars understood these and said “Aha!” (Expressing their amazement and appreciation.)

'*alam*' means enough. So '*alam-kāra*' means saying enough (to decking oneself).

Clothes and jewels are worn over different parts of the body ('*angas*'), so placing them on the Lord's person and similarly wearing clothes and symbols ordained by Him, is '*angīkāra*' (literally, making it part of the body).

A group of scholars of philosophy were discussing the spiritual path prescribed by a particular saint, in Periyava's presence. During the discussion, one of them described the method of penance whereby the powers of God, who controls the entire world, can be drawn and redirected to a human. Another countered this saying, "To draw God's power, one must be more powerful than God. If so, why does that more powerful person have to do penance to take God's (lesser) power. He can feed his own (greater) power to the world. To get God's grace, we must pray with humility and surrender to Him. Sucking His power doesn't seem right." To this the first one replied, "The saint has indeed prescribed surrender as the first step in his path" and quoted the relevant text.

At that juncture, Periyava simply said a few words in the form of a question, "First step? What does that mean?" and left it at that.

They were bright people. They immediately understood and appreciated how Periyava had, with minimal words, hit the root of the issue.

Surrender is leaving everything to God and not taking the onus for any action. If one has done that, what more is left for him to do? It has no first, middle and last steps and is complete even as it starts.

India is a name which people of other countries have given us. Bharatam, Bharata-khandam are what our ancestors called it. So, when we got political independence, the leaders of the freedom movement felt that we should correct it to Bharat. Noticing that the name India was long and well established in the rest of the world, and even here, they decided to retain India for the time being and add Bharat also to it. That way, Bharat would come into vogue and in due course, only Bharat can be used permanently, at least within our land. Accordingly, at the start of the Constitution, we find "India that is Bharat". All this came up for discussion in Periyava's presence.

One devotee, who knew Periyava's heart well, and was deeply interested in the culture and traditions of the country, said, "What is the use of just calling the country Bharat? The Government is not taking

any steps to make our people embrace our traditional ways of life. It is in fact encouraging them to continue embracing Western ways of living. ``

Then Periyava made an impactful statement, “There’s one thing they can do. Anyway, they are bringing an amendment to the constitution every day. They can make one more and amend the first line as “India that is *anything but* Bharat!”.

We conclude this section with another thought-provoking ‘*ratna surukkam*’ (gem-like conciseness) from him, “Blindly aiming for equality, we should not let quality be lost”.

Talking of ‘*ratna surukkam*’, Periyava has given a long and profound explanation for this idiom.

“Does anyone squander away gems? People lock and safeguard them and think many times before giving away a gem, don’t they? Not just spending, even when it comes to using, women do not wear gem ornaments like diamond bracelets or pearl necklaces every day, but take them out only for special occasions like weddings. That is how carefully they preserve them, with minimal use. That minimum is what is meant by ‘*ratna surukkam*’, we could say. We should use words too with such care and economy, is what is meant by talking being ‘*ratna surukkam*’.

Normally wealth means money, and when we call words ‘*soṛselvam*’ (wealth of words) we imply that we should use words thriftily like money. But this idea is further emphasised when we say ‘*ratna surukkam*’. We pay a lot of money (a bundle of notes or a bag of coins) to buy even a tiny gem, say a diamond, pearl or emerald. Since it contains the value of so much money in its small size, it is given top rank among various kinds of wealth. So we could also say that ‘*ratna surukkam*’ means packing a lot of sense into minimum words, like a gem that packs the value of a lot of money, within itself. Like Tiruvalluvar said, “*yā kāvārāyinum nā kākka*” (whatever else you do, be careful with your words), epitomising this idiom.

Just as a small gem contains within itself the value of a lot of money, it also keeps a lot of brilliance inside. This could also be the reason we say '*ratna surukkam*'. A diamond results from a huge quantity of coal that is enough to fuel a ship. How much dazzle it emits! Each of the nine gems, even if tiny, scatters so much of its own brightness. There's a story that when a well-polished ruby was lying at the bottom of a pond, the entire pond's water turned red. When we say polished or cut (literally churned) gem, the question arises 'Cut what?' The original rock ore is sawed, ground, faceted on all sides and polished till we get a small gem. This is the "churning" process we refer to. Through this process, a much bigger stone is made smaller into the gem we see. This is also (why we say) '*ratna surukkam*'.

Just as it packs a lot of brilliance, a gem is also compressed in weight. The rock ore reveals no sign of the gem. It is dull and coarse. The gem is densely packed inside it like (a child) in a womb. Here again, the larger part is lighter, while the smaller part, the gem, is heavy. This is another interpretation of '*ratna surukkam*'.

The ray of light from a small gem shines far. So also, even if our words are short, the meaning should spread the light of knowledge far, i.e., the meaning should encompass many things.

Like the grinding process, we must remove all unnecessary stuff, hone our words using the intellect, and make them like gems.

Just like the gem represents the essential part of a large rock of ore, the few words spoken or written by us must allow many ideas to be expanded.

We say, 'strong as a diamond'. Not only diamonds, but all gems have much more density and weight compared to the mass of ore it was part of. From the coral reefs, they leave out the soft, crumbling parts, and only take out the hard parts, to whet them into the coral stones. In the same manner, our words must have 'weight' to impress the listeners. Only something with weight can press, right?

So, there are many ways to understand '*ratna surukkam*' and it is generally connected to speech.

With an amused smile at his own self-deprecation, he concludes, “So much talk about the economy of words!”

We somewhat wrap up the section on Periyava’s sweetness in the wealth of words and thoughts. “Somewhat” because these come up amidst discussions on other topics too, where we experience the sweetness. But unlike here, those will only have glimpses of his eloquence, with richness of words as well as thoughts.

Which is the next Ghat?

Is it not the same river that flows through all the Ghats?

In the river that is the life of Periyava, we have seen many Ghats, but what makes this river one of great historical significance is his great compassion. Lord Varadaraja of Kanchipuram is called ‘*pēraruḷāḷa perumāḷ*’. Our Periyava who lived in the same Kanchipuram as a ‘*varada*’ (giver of boons) is another ‘*pēraruḷāḷa perumāḷ*’. His life story unfolds as a stream of compassion of wondrous depth, width, and length. The incidents which show that are literally countless. The condensed form of these are a few which can overwhelm us with his amazing grace. Even of these, there are hundreds (the author knows of) and thousands that haven’t reached the eyes and ears of the author. And a lifetime is not enough to share what he does know. So before flitting from one topic to another, offering a few cupfuls as samples of the sweet essence that his immense mercy is our intent. This mercy transcends all classifications based on topics, types, or categories.

Among the hundred and eight names of Shirdi Saibaba, one is ‘*bhaktānugraha kātara*’. We all understand ‘*bhaktānugraha*’. What is ‘*kātara*’? In a way it is the same as (Tamil) ‘*kādalar*’ (filled with love). Just as the devotee has love for the divine, the Lord is filled with divine love for the devotee. What a great love that is! In His eagerness to shower His grace, the serene Lord loses his equanimity and desperately yearns for the devotee to receive it. ‘*kātaryam*’ is that state of helpless agitation, and ‘*kātara*’ is someone in such a state. So this name shows Shirdi Saibaba as someone waiting impatiently to shower his grace on devotees.

It is most appropriate to describe this as a mother's love. Just as the mother cow anxiously waits with her udders full of milk, for her calf to come and feed, a compassionate one waits eagerly to bless devotees.

Periyava, who kept his infinite powers quietly under wraps, similarly kept his love for devotees, which was oceanlike, veiled. Yet, there were instances where he was restlessly '*anugraha kātara*'. Here is one:

Either in the latter half of 1966, or in the former half of 1969, when Periyava was touring the southern districts of Andhra, an incident seen in one of the towns there is indelibly impressed on the mind.

It was a day of '*alpa dvādaśī*', *i.e.*, the twelfth day of the fortnight but lasting only for a short while after sunrise, after which the thirteenth would start. In that short while, all those who observed fasting on the previous day ('*ēkādaśī*'), must complete their Puja and take food to complete the fast. Periyava who observed all the Dharmas in minute detail, to set an example to the world, used to follow this unfailingly. Even though he had woken up at 3 a.m. as usual, he had to hurry to start the Puja of Chandramaulishvara, since the '*dvādaśī*' lasted only till about 8 a.m.

At that time, an aged Telugu Brahmin, who looked poor, rushed in with great anxiety and perturbation, truly as a '*kātara*' seeking his blessings, and prostrated before Periyava. His body language made it obvious that he was impatient to say something.

Periyava paused.

The attendants serving Periyava were upset. They were irked that this man had cut in during this time. One of them told the devotee sternly that he can see Periyava after the Puja.

Periyava raised his hand to stop them and gazed at the anxious devotee with his serene, fully blossomed beautiful eyes (which later devotees did not have the fortune of seeing due to his cataract and glasses), caressing him from head to toe with his glance. He told him in Sanskrit, to state his problem in a '*bahu samkṣēpam*' (very brief) manner. It was the interval (before the Puja) that he would converse only in Sanskrit.

Luckily since the devotee belonged to the region which had not abolished Sanskrit wanting “pure Telugu”, he understood the meaning of ‘*bahu samkṣēpam*.’

But he was unable to state his problem in such a concise manner.

He seemed to be very humble. Maybe because he did not want to trouble Periyava at that time, he simply said that he was unable to cogently state what he had to and that he had to return to his town at the earliest. Then he tearfully said that only the mercy of Srivaru(Telugu for divine one, here referring to Periyava) should save him and moved away.

But Periyava asked him which town he was from, and continued walking. How helpful that was later!

The Puja to Chandramaulishvara took place. In the quiet and cool ambience of the early morning, the Puja was uniquely soothing.

After the Puja, Periyava came up for Bhikshavandanam. Did it seem so? Not at all.

That day, a prominent industrialist’s family from Chennai were doing Bhikshavandanam. Provisions for the Bhikshavandanam were being brought in large quantities following them and filled up the Mandapam.

But it seemed like Periyava’s big eyes hadn’t even noticed them or these things.

They were restlessly wandering around the Mandapam, searching. It was obvious that although his body was still, his mind was seeking something without rest.

It was indeed the ‘*anugraha kātaryam*’ of the serene divine one.

He had to distribute Teertha to everyone and have his Bhiksha in the short duration of ‘*dvādaśī*’. So why was he making everyone wait and not accepting his Bhiksha either?

It was to protect that devotee who met him on his way to the Puja. It was because of the ‘*bhaktānugraha kātaryam*’.

Periyava's order to seek and fetch the devotee from wherever he was in the Matham's camp, was given.

Only after giving this order, Periyava came to accept the Bhikshavandanam, and ever gracious, he enquired about their welfare to the eminent family which had come for Bhikshavandanam. Even while doing this, his mind was concerned about the anonymous Andhra Brahmin devotee, and he kept looking up to see if those he had sent with his search orders had come back. Who in this entire universe can have so much compassion?

Even during the high-speed Bhikshavandanam held due to the '*alpa dvādaśī*', the attendants who had gone looking in all directions, returned saying they could not find that devotee despite careful searching.

That's when Periyava's asking the devotee about his town came useful.

Announcing the name of the town, Periyava enquired when the bus to that place would be from the place they were camping. He knew it was a town without a Railway Station.

From the reply it was gathered that there was a bus in half an hour's time.

Periyava hurriedly gave orders to an astute, resourceful disciple who knew Telugu. He should take one of the cars of the family that has come for Bhikshavandanam and go to the bus stand. "I'll give you Prasadam. Find the devotee and give it to him. Tell him that I have prayed heartily for his sake to Ambal and he should do likewise with complete faith. Tell him in a manner that he is comforted, that all his troubles will vanish and he will be fine. Otherwise, speak to the Driver and Conductor of the bus, and if they can wait for a few minutes, bring him here. I'll talk to him myself and then send him."

"But how can Periyava complete the distribution of Teertha to everyone and have his Bhiksha in the short interval? And by the time he leaves '*dvādaśī*' will be gone," said the astute disciple. If '*dvādaśī*'

is past, the practice was that one should not eat again that day. Since the next day too was a day of fasting, Periyava would take Bhiksha only after the evening Puja. In other words, the 'ĕkādaśī' (fast) would extend to the current day and a good part of the next. That's why the disciple asked so in an agitated tone. But Periyava, the embodiment of sacrifice, who lived for those in distress, thought nothing of this extended fasting.

"I'll take care of that! I am pleased you brought this up, but now quickly do as I say," said Periyava, as he gave some Vibhuti, Kunkumam, Akshata, candy and raisins, to the disciple, placing his fingers on the Kunkumam with eyes closed, with ocean-like compassion." It was the Mahaprasadam given after "praying heartily to Ambal '. It was unusual for him to state that openly. It was the '*kātaryam*' that wrought this rarity.

He quickly filled a bamboo tray with some of the many fruits that the eminent family had brought, for the '*pāraṇā*' (food to conclude the fast) of the anonymous Brahmin, ordering that these too should be given to him. With the same speed, he filled a basket with fruits for the disciple.

The astute disciple went away with these, his eyes brimming with tears. The tears were because he was now sure that Periyava would be only taking some Tulasi teertham since the scriptures consider it equal to the meal of "*pāraṇā*".

He was sending fruits for the devotee, more tenderly than a mother would.

He would feed the assembled devotees a feast with Agathi greens, Sundakkai and Nellimulli and Payasam(dishes which are specially prepared on '*dvādaśī*') while he himself would have nothing but Tulasi teertham instead of a meal, unknown to anyone except this personal attendant.

The resourceful disciple, true to his description, returned in ten or twelve minutes with the Andhra Brahmin.

Who can say which of the two was more fulfilled at this meeting: the devotee or the master?

All that was clearly evident was that the former's fervent need to receive grace and the latter's fervour to shower his grace, both were sated.

Where can we see such a gracious, merciful one, who learned from the bottom of his heart, to give his blessings to some anonymous person.

We take leave after having experienced the sweetness of seeing the master of words as the master of compassion. In between we also enjoyed the unique sweetness of seeing him as the master of words, silence, and gestures, which is between the two. Silence, where speech and action subside, is sweetness beyond the definition of sweet. We shall meet in the next volume and begin with seeing Periyava as the master in that too.

Jaya jaya Shankara! Hara hara Shankara!

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