GangAShTakam 2

गंगाष्टकम् २

Document Information

Text title : ga.ngAShTakam 2
File name : gangAShTakam2.itx
Category : aShTaka, devii, nadI, shrIdhara-venkaTesha, devI
Location : doc_devii
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Latest update : November 22, 2006
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November 16, 2019

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GANGASHTAKAM by Shri Shridharavenkatesa of Tiruvisanallur respectfully called as Ayyaval.

Introduction: Once, the author Shridhara had to perform the shrAddha ceremony wherein his ancestors are propitiated. In this ceremony three pious brahmins who are well versed in the vedas and are of exemplary character are invited. The Manusmriti gives details about the qualifications of the brahmins to be invited on this occasion. The forefathers are invoked in them. Then these brahmins are honoured, as one would do his ancestors with food, clothes and dakShina. In Shridhara’s case the ceremony fell on an Amavasya day in the month of Kartika (8th month of the solar calendar). He had made all arrangements to conduct the ceremony as ordained in the shastras, including inviting the three brahmins. The food items to be served to the brahmins (who represent his ancestors) were being cooked. As the preparations were in progress, he heard the plaintive cry of a beggar. The beggar was an outcaste. He said he had not eaten for hours, and so is famished and distressed. Shridhara, who was a very pious person, saw in this outcaste the image of Lord Siva and was immensely moved. He immediately gave the food items prepared for the shrAddha ceremony to the beggar and ensured his hunger was appeased. He beggar ate heartily and went away after invoking Lord’s blessings on Shridhara and his family members. Shridhara came to himself some time after the beggar went away and realised his “folly. One is not expected to serve the
food prepared specifically for serving to the ancestors (invoked in the brahmins) to anyone else till the ceremony was over. He was very upset and asked the brahmins as to how he should expiate for his act. They said that the only way to atone is to take a bath in the sacred Ganges. But Shridhara felt that this was impossible to be done as the trip to Ganges will take many weeks. This implied that he will not be able to perform the shrAddha ceremony on that day. So it will be an act of ommission and will invite serious sin.

Shridhara felt that the only thing to do in such a predicament is to surrender to the Lord. So, in the following verses he explained his predicament to Lord Siva and prayed to Him to release Ganga from His matted locks as He did on an earlier occasion in response to the prayers of sage Bhagirata. The kindly Lord could not bear to see His devotee upset. So He released Ganga from His locks. The well in Shridhara’s house started to overflow. Many animals like fish, tortoises came out along with the gushing waters. The villagers were astounded at the sight and were wonderstuck at the intensity of Shridhara’s piety. They realised his greatness. They requested him to control the flow of the water which was threatening to flood the village. Shridhara prayed and the flow from Ganges subsided. All, including the brahmins who had been invited specially for the ceremony were only too willing to accept that if Shridhara took bath in the waters of the well it will be equal to a bath in the Ganges. Shridhara was very happy at the decision of the brahmins. He took bath in the water drawn from the well and completed the shrAddha ceremony.

This incident is celebrated every year on the Amavasya day in the month of Krittika at the village. The faithful throng in large number at the house in Tiruvisanallur village where Shridhara lived on that day every year and take bath in the water drawn from the well. They believe that the bath gives the same
benefit as a bath in the Ganges.

COMMENTS. The scriptures assure that a true devotee will not encounter misfortune or problems in life. न वासुदेवमत्स्तानि अशुभं विचरते कृषि। says Vishnusahasranama in the phalashruti. Lord Krishna gives an assurance to this effect in Gita (9-31). कौन्तेय प्रतिज्ञानीहि न मे भक्तः प्रणाशयति। The question, then, is why should devotees like Shridhara and many others like Prahladha face problems? The answer is that the problems they face may be attributed to prArabdham or deeds they might have committed in their past births. But, though the problem appears to be of serious nature to us, it does not appear to be so to the devotees themselves. They do not lose their serenity in the face of adversity, nor is there least change in their devotion.

घृंघृं पुनरिप पुनश्चन्द्रं चाहृ पर्यं
छिन्नं छिन्नं पुनरिप पुनं स्वादु चैवेशुभुण्डम्।
ददरं ददरं पुनरिप पुनं काण्डनं कान्तवर्णं
न प्रणात्स्तः प्रकृतिविवृत्ति: जायते सजनानाम्॥

This says that a piece of sandal wood, when repeatedly rubbed against a stone emits only a pleasant flavour. Even when the sugarcane is cut into many pieces it will continue to taste sweet only. A chunk of gold when heated in the fire again and again will give out its natural shine only. So also, the qualities of the great people will not undergo the least change even at the end of their lives. To repeat, a devotee of the Lord will certainly encounter problems. They are designed by the Lord to bring out the devotee’s unshakeable faith in the Lord so that others may understand his greatness. The devotee himself never complains that he is undergoing immense suffering. But he thinks of the Lord as usual for help. He gets it and is happy that his problem is solved. In fact, Kunti—the mother of Pandavas, cleverly converted the problems into advantage. She found from experience that she thought of the Lord whenever she
faced a problem. Krishna promptly appeared on the scene and helped her. So, she prayed to Krishna that she should face problems every now and then so that she can have His darshan often. She said:

विषयः सत्तु न: श्वध्वत्र तत्र जगदुरो।
भवतो दशों यस्मादपुरुषा: दशोंम॥ Shri Bhagavatam (1-8-25).

The verses of Gangashtakam are given below. The translations of the verses given here are not exact.

शंभो भवाम निर्जारानुसयण भाग्येन भवतमेव।
यथेव सर्वत्र तथात्यज्ञेश्व पदवत्त्योऽरूऽत्र कृतोपर्यार्य: || १:॥

Let me agree that a bath in the Ganges is the proper atonement for my transgression of the rules pertaining to the shrAddha ceremony. But the Smriti texts say that even if one just repeats the name “Ganga” few times he becomes pure. Can not I take recourse to this expediency in this situation?

त्वारामनिश्च न हि तावतो में अश्वय वतः कर्मसु न: प्रदर्शा।
अश्वाय में पासुपाण्टरयः मुच्ये तस्मात्कथे आर्तक्षोः || २:॥

If it is Your wish that the shrAddha

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I should be missed let it be lost. I cannot go against Your will.

But, what about the brahmins who have been specially invited for the occasion? They have been fasting since yesterday and will not take food at any other place.

These brahmins are noble souls. They have prescribed the expiation, not with any selfish motive but only to make sure that the shrAddha should not become deficient in any manner. They have not taken into account the inconvenience that they will face in the process.

On account of the fear that the chanting of Your name should not be interrupted even for a moment, I have been taking bath only in the well in the house itself. I do not know any other holy river or waters. This being the case, how will I go in search of Ganga?

I am not an ascetic like Bhagiratha nor do I know the whereabouts of the sage Jahnu. I am not qualified even to pray to You to release Ganga from Your locks.

So, Your name Gangadhara is my refuge. I see no other way out. Oh! What a wonder! Even as I say this, I see the well overflowing! surely, the Lord has shown mercy.
As I repeat the name “Ganga, the very mercy
of the Lord has taken the form of a flood and submerged me. May
this flow of the waters of Ganga purify the people in the days to
come.

CONCLUSION. One may ask as to how it was possible for
Shridhara to have a vision of Siva in a beggar. The answer is that
he was convinced that every thing in this world is the Lord only
and there is no second thing. Krishna says this in the Bhagavad
Gita. He explains that He manifests Himself as the world using the
power of maya. Though He is every thing in the world, people are
deluded by the powerful maya. Their vision is veiled. They see the
objects and overlook the God behind them. As an example, we see that
several ornaments are made of a piece gold. They are given various
names like bangle, chain etc. If we think a bit we will find that
the word “bangle” is not a substance but only a name given to a
particular shape of gold. Gold can exist as gold but bangle cannot
exist without the gold. Similarly, a person can go to sleep and
have a dream. The dream is not substantial and is dependant on the
dreamer; but not the other way round. Such things as the ornament
that have no separate existence but have shape and name are called
unreal objects or मिथ्या वर्त्तु . They do not have a permanent
existence. A bangle may be melted and made into another ornament
any number of times. They are therefore impermanent or अनित्यम्।
But the items like gold that lend substance to them are known as
real or सत्यम्। . They are permanent or नित्यम् . They do
not change when the ornament is changed. We may say that gold
pervades the bangle as, really speaking, there is no such thing
as bangle. Krishna says He pervades the entire universe.
मया तत्तमिदं सवं जगद्व्ययतु-मूर्तिताः। Gita(9-4). The right
knowledge will, then, be to understand first that the ornament
is gold. Overlooking the very existence of gold will be a major
error and will have serious consequences. Extending this idea, we should be able to see that every thing in this universe is impermanent and changing. People and animals come and go. So do the seas and mountains. We learn that even the sun and the stars are not permanent but have limited life only. Thus, the universe is only. These impermanent, changing objects are many names and forms of the Lord only. In other words God is the real thing or. God gives substance to the world and is the substratum or. Krishna explains this to Arjuna and says the right vision is to see Him every where. But we are taken by the world and do not see the God hiding behind it. To start with, we do not see the Lord within us, but identify ourselves with the bodies. This results in numerous problems. We have to take care of the body, ensure it is fed and clothed properly. We require so many things to protect it and keep it happy and secure. To get all these things we have to work hard. The need for comfort and security makes us desire many things. We get a family and friends around ourselves. We import their joys and sorrows on to ourselves. This leads to likes and dislikes. We like things and people who add to our joy and comforts and dislike those who do not. This corrupts our minds. As we go on working hard for ourselves and our family and friends, we do many things that are right and many times compromise with values and do wrong things. The results are puNyam and pApam. We have to enjoy the fruits of the puNyam and pApam in our account and to do this we have to take one or many births. Repeated births and deaths is sorrow only. The only way out of this problem is to have the right vision that shows that God is in every thing and every where. Yama tells this to Nachiketha in Kathopanishad. (2-1-10).

He says that one who sees plurality is condemned to be born and die again and again. Krishna says that
by intense devotion one gets an understanding of the Lord’s true
nature and gets such a right vision. Gita (18-55).

Thus a true devotee is able to see the Lord in every being.

He says that a person endowed with wisdom sees the same
brahman in a brahmin endowed with wisdom and humility, in a cow, an
elephant as also in a dog, and in an outcaste who eats a dog. Sage
Narada said the same in his advice to Yudishtira. Bhagavatha (7-14-9).

One should look upon a deer, camels, donkeys, monkeys, rats, reptiles,
birds and flies as though they were his own children. What is it
that makes them separate from these (own children)?

The vedic seers had this grand vision. The great vedic hymn Shri Rudram has
three hundred salutations to the Lord, not by His names, but as
being available in various beings, both animate and inanimate. He is
saluted as being the one available in the streams, shoals, clouds,
lightnings, trees, grass, animals like horses, vultures and even
in cheats and thieves! Because the hymn contains such a lofty
idea its recitation is very inspiring. But, everyone may not be
expected to study the scriptures like the upanishads, Gita and Shri
Rudram. Understanding this limitation of the people in general our
rishis had incorporated these valuable ideas in the popular hymns.

We see these names encountered above विश्वम्, सत्यः, and
अभिगृहायम् in the Vishnusahasranamam. One of Lalita’s names in
Lalitasahasranamam (No. 734) मिथ्याजगदिधिजाना। (i.e.) She is
the substratum of this unreal universe, says this fact explicitly. As
we keep on reading or reciting these prayers, the great vedantic
truths contained in them will gradually enter our mind and change
our concept of God. That is why we have the practice of pArAyaNam or
reciting such stotras daily. By repeated reading we will understand
that God is not a Being residing in remote places like Vaikuntha or
Kailasa, but He is very intimately available in any thing we see or
hear about - including our bodies. This is said in the Narayana Suktam
यच किंचिजगलस्वं त्रस्यते श्रूयतेऽपि वा।
अन्तर्वदृश्यं तत्स्वं व्याप्य नारायणस्थितः।
Understanding and accepting the facts stated above will cause a great
change in our personality and attitude. We will know that we are
surrounded by God resident in all things and beings. So, we are
never alone or away from Him. This idea will give us great sense
of security, as we can get His help at any time or place.
Krishna says this in Gita(6-30).
यो मा पश्यति सर्वं सर्वं च मथि पश्यति।
तस्यािं न प्राणशयामि स च मे न प्राणशयाति॥
Since He is in all things and beings we will show great
respect and love for them. We will enjoy immense peace of mind and
confidence. This is how the great men like the sages and saints could
be calm and enjoyed happiness. Thus Shridhara’s experience teaches
us an important lesson to be followed in life.
गंगाश्तकम् २

शम्भो भव्नाम निरंतरानुसन्धान भाग्येन भवन्तमेव।
यद्विते सर्वं तथा ज्ञात्यजेष्ठय पश्चात्तयो वै न कृतीपराधः। ॥ १ ॥
अस्त्वेष मन्तु: पितृपञ्च हि गदाः स्व स्व पंचतन्त्रीपुष्टः।
दृगुन्तु तत्सामांज्ञेष्ठे शुचिः न स्यात् कर्मवै सम्पत्तिरवादः। ॥ २ ॥
त्वामनिश्चय न हि तावतो मेघ ज्ञत: कर्मसु न प्रदेहः।
तैशान्न्वं मेघ पुस्तिपादयान: सुमुखेय तस्मात्कर्मार्थ आर्थवी। ॥ ३ ॥
यद्विते ते शार्दुलिनिधिश्च कोऽहं ततो ज्ञातिरितु समर्थः।
श्रावेबं वृत्ता: पूर्वदिनोपवासा: नानायन भुवनीय: इदं तु विचरे। ॥ ४ ॥
श्रावेबं: शार्दुलिदातीथित्वा स्वात्मोपोरोऽथ विग्रहण्य धीरः।
योध्रोचुयात्रापिन्तित्वा महान्त्व: तत्वर्थित यद्विया विषेहं। ॥ ५ ॥
ग्नाश्यां त्वामसमातार्थ भीतित्वा गुहे कृपकृति।
जानेष्ठे न तीर्थाल्पां अय ग्रेशां आसाद्येऽथ कथमार्थवनयेन। ॥ ६ ॥
नानु तपस्वी समर्पवाय: जानेष्ठे न जहु: चरति कर्म:।
शम्भो! जाताजूस्तमपावृण्येत्वम्यथं नालङ्कम्य वरकः। ॥ ७ ॥
ग्नाश्यार्थव्या गतिर्गत नान्या तामाश्रयें स्नेहं मोचनाय।
हन्त: प्रवाह: कथमत्र कृपे विस्मूर्जिती: खलु तेन प्रस्त्र:। ॥ ८ ॥
ग्नेश्वति ग्नेश्वति हरेति गुणहन्म आश्चर्यों दश्या पुरारे:।
कृपोतितोऽथ कर्णप्रवाह: ग्नाश्यार्थव्याज्ञानानु वुनातु। ॥ ९ ॥
इति श्रीअग्निवाल्य एवं श्रीशरवेशुष्ट्वशभिष: विशर्चित ग्नाशकृसम्पूर्णम्।

Written, encoded, and proofread by N.Balasubramanian bbalu at sify.com
GangAShTakam 2

pdf was typeset on November 16, 2019

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