கீகாஷ்டகம் உ

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GANGASHTAKAM by Shri Shridharavenkatesa of

Tiruvisanallur respectfully called as Ayyaval.

॥ ஶ்ரீ அய்யாவால் இதி ப்ரஸித்தை꞉ ஶ்ரீதரவேங்கடேஶாபிதை꞉ விரசிதம் ॥

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. ந வாஸுதேவபக்தாநாரீ அஸு,ப் வித்யதே க்வசித்। says Vishnusahasranama in the phalashruti. Lord Krishna gives an assurance to this effect in Gita (9-31). கௌந்தேய ப்ரதிஜாநீஹி ந மே பக்தஂ ப்ரணஶ்யதி। 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.

கஷ்டட் கஷ்டட் புநரபி புநஶ்சந்தநீ சாரு கந்தீ
சிந்நீ சிந்நீ புநரபி புநஂ ஸ்வாது சை-வேக்ஷுகண்டம் ।
தக்தீ தக்தீ புநரபி புநஂ காஞ்சநீ காந்தவர்ணீ
ந ப்ராணாந்தே ப்ரகதிவிகதிஂ ஜாயதே ஸஜ்ஜநாநாம் ॥

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:

விபதஂ ஸந்து நஂ ஶஂவத்தத்ர தத்ர ஜகத்குரோ।
பவதோ தர்ஶநீ யஸ்மாதபுநர்பவ-தர்ஶநம்॥ Shri Bhagavatam (1-8-25).

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

ஶீபோ பவந்நாம நிரந்தராநுஸந்தாந பாக்யேந பவந்தமேவ ।
யத்யேவ ஸர்வத்ர ததாऽந்த்யஜேऽத்ய பஶ்யத்யஹோ கோऽத்ர கதோऽபராதஂ ॥ க॥

O Lord Shambhu! I am used to repeating Your name all the time. As a result I am blessed to see You only every where. So, today I saw You only in this outcaste also. Is there anything wrong in this?

அஸ்த்வேஷ மந்துஂ பிதயஜ்ஞ நிஷ்டே கஙாப்லவோ யோ
விஹிதோऽபசித்யை ।
தூராத்து தந்நாமஜபேந ஶுத்திஂ ந ஸ்யாத் கதீ மே ஸ்மதிரர்தவாதஂ ॥ உ॥

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?

த்வந்நாமநிஷ்டா ந ஹி தாவதோ மே ஶ்ரத்தா யதஂ॰ கர்மஸு ந ப்ரதக்தா ।

த்ரைஸங்கவீ மே பஸுபாந்தராயஂ॰ முச்யேய தஸ்மாத்கதீ ஆர்தபந்தோ ॥ ஈ॥

O Lord, I accept that I have not

got that intense faith in Your name that I can give up performance

of duties like shrAddha. Thus I am in an awkward situation, like

king Trishanku. How do I get relieved from this situation?

யத்யத்ய தே ஶ்ராத்தவிநஷ்டிரிஷ்டா கோऽஹீ ததோऽந்யச்சரிதூ ஸமர்தஂ॰ ।

ஶ்ராத்தே வதாஂ॰ பூர்வதிநோபவாஸாஂ॰ நாந்யத்ர புஞ்ஜீயுஂ॰ இதீ து கித்யே ॥ ச॥

If it is Your wish that the shrAddha

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.

ஶ்ரத்தாலவஂ॰ ஶ்ராத்தவிகாதபீத்யா ஸ்வாத்மோபரோதீ விகணய்ய தீராஂ॰ ।

யத்ப்ரோசுரத்ராபசிதீ மஹாந்தஂ॰ தத்ரோசிதீ யத்தயயா விதேஹி ॥ ரு॥

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.

கங்காதர! த்வத்பஜநாந்தராய பீத்யா கஹே கூபகதாவகாஹம்ʼ।
ஜாநே ந தீர்தாந்தர் அத்ய கங்கர் ஆஸாதயேய் கதமார்தபந்தோ! ॥ சு॥

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?

நாஹீ தபஸ்வீ ஸகரந்வவாயம்ʼ ஜாநே ந ஜஹ்நும்ʼ சரதி க்வவேதி।
ஸ்ரோ! ஜடாஜூடமபாவணுஷ்வேத்யப்யர்தநே நாலமய் வராகம்ʼ ॥ எ॥

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.

கங்காதராக்யா கதிரத்ர நாந்யா தாமாஶ்ரயே ஸங்கட-மோசநாய।
ஹந்த! ப்ரவாஹம்ʼ கதமத்ர கூபே விஸ்பூர்ஜதீம்ʼ கலு தே ப்ரஸந்நம்ʼ ॥ அ॥

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.

கங்கேதி கங்கேதி ஹரதி கண்ஹந் ஆப்லாவிதோஹீ தயயா புராரேம்ʼ।
கூபோத்திதோய் கருணாப்ரவாஹம்ʼ காங்கஶ்சிராயாத்ர ஜநாந் புநாது ॥ கூ॥

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 மித்யா வஸ்து . 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 அநித்யம்। But the items like gold that lend substance to them are known as real or ஸத்யம்। . They are permanent or நித்யம் . 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. மயா ததமிதீ ஸர்வ் ஜகதவ்யக்த-மூர்திநா। 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 விஶ்வம்

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 அநித்யம் only. These impermanent, changing objects are many names and forms of the Lord only. In other words God is the real thing or ஸத்யம்। . God gives substance to the world and is the substratum or அதிஷ்டாநம்। 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).

யதேவேஹ ததமுத்ர யதமுத்ர ததந்விஹ।
மத்யோ॑ ஸ மத்யுமாப்நோதி ய இஹ நாநேவ பஶ்யதி॥

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).

பக்த்யா மாீ அபிஜாநாதி யாவாந்யம்சாஸ்மி தத்த்வதஂ்।

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

வித்யாவிநய-ஸம்பந்நே ப்ராஹ்மணே கவி ஹஸ்திநி ।

ம,நி சைவ ம்வபாகே ச பண்டிதாஂ் ஸமதர்ம்ிநஂ்॥ Gita (5-18).

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).

மகோஷ்ட்ர-கர-மர்காகு-ஸரீஸப்ககமக்ஷிகாஂ் ।

ஆத்மநஂ் புத்ரவத் பம்யேத் தைரேஷாமந்தரீ கியத் ॥

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 விஶ்வம் , ஸத்யஂ , and அதிஷ்டாநம் in the Vishnusahasranamam. One of Lalita's names in Lalitasahasranamam (No. 734) மித்யாஜகததிஷ்டாநா। (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 avilable in any thing we see or hear about - including our bodies. This is said in the Narayana Suktam

யச்ச கிஂசிஜ்ஜகத்ஸர்வம் த்ருயதே ஶ்ரூயதேऽபி வா ।
அந்தர்பஹிஶ்ச தத்ஸர்வம் வ்யாப்ய நாராயண-ஸ்திதஂ।

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).

யோ மாஂ பஶ்யதி ஸர்வத்ர ஸர்வம் ச மயி பஶ்யதி ।
தஸ்யாஹஂ ந ப்ரணஶ்யாமி ஸ ச மே ந ப்ரணஶ்யதி ॥

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.

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