

Sri Yamunacharya's **STOTRA RATNA**

A
Rendering in English with Notes
by

DR MS RAJAJEE

With a Foreword
by

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Among the great Vaishnava acharyas, Sri Yamunacharya, also known as Alavandar, occupies a unique place. He has made substantial contributions to Visishtadvaita philosophy and established the pre-eminence of Sriman Narayana through his philosophical works and hymns. Sri Yamauna's "Stotraratna" occupies a special place in the devotional literature as it clothes philosophical ideas in poetic language.

The 'Stotra ratna' consisting of 65 verses conveys the basic ideas of Visishtadvaita philosophy like the relations of the individual self to the supreme and His Consort, the place of the triple path of karma, jnana and bhakti and the means for His Divine Grace. Above all, it emphasises the supreme significance of Prapatti or surrender to achieve salvation. Considered as a rare jewel among hymns, the 'Stotra ratna' calls upon us to surrender at the Lotus Feet of Lord Narayana.

The present translation of this well-known stotra by Dr. MS. Rajajee is refreshingly simple and lucid. The author, an able administrator and an ardent devotee of Lord Srinivasa, has admirably captured the original spirit of the verses. The translation along with an exhaustive commentary brings out the enduring charm of the 'Stotraratna' in a masterly style.

We take great delight in presenting this book to the theistic public and hope, in all humility, that they would derive immense spiritual benefit by reading this book.

P. Krishnaiah
Executive Officer, TTD

FOREWORD

I have immense pleasure in writing this Foreword to the English rendering of Sri Yamunacharya's *Stotraratna* done by Dr M.S.Rajajee, I.A.S., who held many high administrative positions such as the Chief Secretaryship to the Government of Andhra Pradesh and the Chairmanship of the Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission. Dr Rajajee is a man of many parts and his passion for philosophy and religion is at once amazing and abysmal. Born in a Srivaishnava family of great piety and nobility, he, notwithstanding the onerous responsibilities of his high office, has been finding time to study the cardinal works of this tradition and expound the truths contained therein in simple but effective English so that the layman who has no access to the original works in Sanskrit can catch their spirit and relive the glorious past in which the authors lived and wrote.

I have had the opportunity of going through his English annotation of the *Mukundamala* of Saint Kulasekhara, which, by all means, is the best-written one. The speciality of Dr Rajajee's style is its astounding simplicity marked by smoothness of flow and aptness of expression. Even the profoundest idea can be put across by him with commendable ease and dignity. This, in my opinion, is a rare quality to be found in translators. I have also seen a recent publication of the Satsampradaya Parirakshana Sabha, Warrangal, which is an English translation by Dr Rajajee for the *Satsampradaya Sudha* written by one of our most erudite and prolific Srivaishnava Acharyas, Mahamahopadhyaya, Kavi-Sabdika Kesari, Sri U.Ve. S.N.C.Raghunathacharya Swami. Here again we find the translation very easy and telling, bringing out the spirit of the original in its best possible way.

The *Stotraratna* occupies a very high place in the hymnal literature of the Srivaishnavas of South India since it is the first hymn to have come from the pen of a great pre-Ramanuja writer who happened to be the grand-teacher of the great Ramanuja and the grandson of Nathamuni, the first Srivaishnava teacher whose works, the *Nyayatattva* and the *Yogarahasya* have not come down to us. The *Stotraratna*, along with the *Sristuti* or the

Catussloki of the same Acharya are very significant in the Srivaishnava tradition. Clothing the philosophical ideas of the School in a poetic garb, they have inspired many later Srivaishnava writers to compose more detailed treatises, hymns and works highlighting the basic tenets of the School such as the Supremacy of Lord Vishnu, the glory of His highest abode called Srivaikuntha, the position of his consort Sri or Lakshmi and the efficacy of the paths of Bhakti and Prapatti in effecting salvation. Inspired by these hymns of Yamuna only Sri Ramanuja composed his *Gadyatraya*.

The present work viz., the *Stotraratna* has been quite popular with authors of texts on the Alankarasastra also. For instance, Sri Appaya Dikshita in his *Kuvalayananda* cites the verse "tavaamrita-syandini paada-pankaje..." (no.27) as an illustration for the figure of speech "Prativastupama" and the verse "abhutapurvam mama bhaavi." (No.25) as an example for the figure of speech called "Sambhava".

I am immensely happy to note that Dr Rajajee has done a commendable work on this important ancient Stotra of the Srivaishnava Literature. The popularity of this hymn is such that it is recited every day in every home of the orthodox Srivaishnavas. I take this opportunity to thank Dr Rajajee for giving me the opportunity of writing this Foreword to his translation, and to request him to carry on his literary activities. A gifted writer as he is, the benefit of his scholarship should reach the common masses who are well acquainted with English language but are not well-rooted in Sanskrit. I understand that he is currently making an in-depth study of the Ramayana written by poetess Molla in Telugu, with a view to present the beauties of that composition to the common people through the medium of English. I also understand that he is making a study of the Narasimha Kshetras and preparing an authoritative and exhaustive monograph on this very interesting subject. I wish him well in his enterprises and do earnestly hope that all his works will come in print so that the scholars and laymen alike can be benefited by his wisdom and scholarship.

M. Narasimhachary

PREFACE

Recently, I had undertaken a study of Kulasekhara Azhvar's "Mukunda Mala". I had completed the translation, with notes, in English. The TTD had published my work. I had seperately translated some scholarly lectures of Mahamahopadhyay Sri Raghunathacharya Svami varu of Warangal. These were published by the Veda Parirakshana Sabha of Warangal. I was therefore drawn to Vaishnavaita literature and took up a study of the *Stotra Ratna*, by Sri Yamunacharya. Sri Yamunacharya, as readers know, is pre Bhagavan Ramanuja and had laid the foundation for Visishtadvaita, though, it was not known by that name, at that time. I looked around for English translations, of this scholarly work. I found only two – one is an excellent translation, into English, without any comments, by Svami Adidevananda, of the Ramakrishna Mutt. The other one, an equally good translation, with brief notes, was by Sri S. Satyamurthi, of Gwalior, who has rendered great service to the readers by his many translation works and comments. The translation of Sri Satyamurthi, is based on the scholarly work in Tamil, by Sri Anangarachariar. The most outstanding work is, however that of Prof. Narasimhacharya, presently Head of the Dept. of Vaishnavism, of the Madras University. His is a scholarly dissertation on the "Contribution of Sri Yamunacharya to Visistadvaita". He presents Yamunacharya, on a much larger canvas. I felt that there was a need for a book, for people like me, who are not scholars, but would like to have a translation of this great work and would like to have detailed notes, about what others have said on the embedded thoughts. Hence, the present work.

I do not claim any scholarship to warrant my venturing to write such a book. That I should have attempted to do so can only be attributed to the great mysteries of life and to the divine will. On a particular day, I felt that I would like to write such a book and started this work, trusting the Divine Feet of the Lord. His unseen hand enabled me to complete this work. If it is was the

unseen hand of the Lord that helped me to write the book, it is the seen hand of Prof. Narasimhacharya, which encouraged me at different stages. Prof. Narasimhacharya is very well known and needs no introduction. He is heading the Department of Vaishnavism, Madras University and is widely known in Vaishnavite, Sanskrit and Telugu literary circles. He has won many accolades for his contributions and has received many national awards. He combines in himself erudition, outstanding scholarship, a thorough understanding of the subject, an unmatched meticulousness and a rare humility. It was he who went through my manuscript and advised me to publish it, when I had doubts about the merit of my work. This does not mean that my work had any great merit; it shows that he has that unusual quality of encouraging fledgeling writers. I deem it as a rare honour conferred on me that he went through the manuscript and agreed to write an Introduction.

I have kept Sri Anangarachari's commentary, in Telugu, as the basis for my work. I have amplified the comments, by quoting from the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the *Ramayana*, the *Narayaneeyam*, the Stotras of Sri Vedanta Desika and my earlier translation with notes on *Mukundamala*. I gratefully acknowledge the quotations from the scholarly translation of Desika Stotras by Sri Raghavan, Dr Lakshmi Kumari and Prof Narasimhacharya. I am grateful to Prof Venkatakrishnan, Professor of Vaishnavism, Madras University, for having spared me a photo of an idol of Sri Yamunacharya in a temple, which adorns the cover page of this book.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Sri Koteesvara Rao, working in the "Peshi" of the Chief Secretary's Office at Hyderabad. He did the typing work, willingly, with his usual efficiency and above all, most cheerfully. He did it during his spare hours, which really meant late, late hours of the night. I am deeply touched by the manner in which he did this work, as a labour of love. I am thankful to my family members, who encouraged me at different stages of the work.

I am very thankful to Dr I.V. Subba Rao, I.A.S., former EO of the TTD and the members of the Publication Committee, for having agreed to publish this work. I am deeply touched by the warm sentiments expressed by Sri Subba Rao, while accepting the book for publication. I am also grateful to the present EO, Sri P. Krishnaiah, IAS., who expedited this publication. I am thankful to Dr Ramamurthi, Editor, Saptagiri and his team of officers for the very efficient manner in which they took up and completed this work.

I place this work at the Feet of the Lord and seek His Divine Grace.

Rajajee

Introduction

The Stotra Ratna is a work of 65 slokas, written by Sri Yamuna Acharya, also known as Alavandar. It is rated very highly in Vaishnavite literature and hence this Alavandar Stotra is known only as Stotra Ratna - a jewel among the stotras. It is a priceless jewel in the devotional literature and expounds the tenets of Vaishnavism. The later pillars of Vaishnavism, Ramanuja, Parasara Bhatta, Vedanta Desika and others derived their inspiration from this work. It is said that a recital of these slokas by Mahapurna, used to always cast an irresistible spell on Ramanuja. Sloka 11 in the Stotra Ratna used to cast a magic spell on Ramanuja. It is this same sloka which weaned away Ramanuja's cousin Govinda (known as Embar) from Saivism. In turn, Yamuna derived inspiration for his work from the Divya Prabandham and many slokas put across in mellifluous Sanskrit, are what had been stated in the Divya Prabandham.

Sri Yamuna was born in 953 AD in Viranarayanapuram of Tamilnadu (not far from Cuddalore). He was the son of Ishwara Muni and the grandson of Sri Ranganatha Muni (known popularly as Nathamuni). It is said that Nathamuni and his family members were going on a pilgrimage in North India. As the conception took place on the banks of the river Yamuna, Sri Nathamuni gave the child the name Yamuna. Sri Ishwara Muni died at a young age. On the death of his son, Nathamuni renounced the world and became a recluse. The education of young Yamuna was left to Bhasya Bhattaraka. Yamuna was an excellent student and shone in all branches of studies.

Yamuna's teacher and all the others were under the rulership of a Pandyan king. The chief preceptor and religious disputant in the court was Vidvajjanakolahala. As his very name indicated, he threw all the learned people into turmoil, as he used to mercilessly vanquish them in scholarly debates. Yamuna's teacher was one among those who had been defeated. He was therefore required

STOTRA RATNA

नमोऽचिन्त्याद्भुताक्लिष्टज्ञानवैराग्यराशये ।

नाथाय मुनयेऽगाधभगवद्भक्तिसिन्धवे ॥१॥

*Namo achintyadbhuta klisha
jnana vairagya rasaye
naathaaya munaye agadha
bhagavad bhakti sindhave.*

"Obeisance to Saint Nathamuni, whose devotion is like an ocean, whose depth cannot be measured (who is an unfathomable ocean of divine love) who is the embodiment of knowledge and renunciation, which are marvellous, and have been so easily acquired but are beyond our comprehension."

Sri Yamunacharya is offering obeisance to his grandfather Sri Nathamuni. In the introduction, we have seen who is Nathamuni. He is the person who weaned away Sri Yamuna to the spiritual path. What sort of a person is Nathamuni? This sloka explains his knowledge is not like that of others; his 'vairagya' (renunciation) is not like that of others; his devotion is not like that of others. They are all "achintya"-beyond one's comprehension. They are marvellous ('adbhuta'). They are "aklishta" easily acquired i.e., innate. Sages like Vyasa, Parasara and others also had knowledge and renunciation. But, they were acquired through severe penance. In the case of Nathamuni, (as in the case of Alwars), they were conferred by the Lord himself and therefore acquired with ease.

Sri Nathamuni is like a deep ocean of divine love ("agadha bhagavad bhakti sindhave"). It is not possible to so easily assess the depth of the ocean. It is not possible to disturb or agitate the ocean. The devotion of Sri Nathamuni is of the same nature. It is possible to glean two meanings from this sloka. One may say that he was an ocean as far as devotion to the Lord is concerned or one can say that he had within him, the ocean called divine love. It

may be mentioned that devotion (divine love) has been separately referred to, so as to emphasise that devotion is the product of jnana and vairagya.

This is precisely what the Lord had said in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 12). The Lord had explained the path of knowledge and the path of devotion to the manifest and to the unmanifest. Arjuna has a doubt. He asks the Lord "Those devotees, whoever integrated, those who meditate on you and those again, who meditate on the Imperishable and Unmanifest - which of these have, greater knowledge of Yoga? The Lord replies "Those, who, ever integrated with Me and possessed of supreme faith, worship Me, focussing their minds on Me - these are considered by Me the highest among the Yogins".

तस्मै नमो मधुजिदंघ्रिसरोजतत्त्व
ज्ञानानुरागमहिमातिशयान्तसीम्ने ।
नाथाय नाथमुनयेऽत्र परत्र चापि
नित्यं यदीयचरणौ शरणं मदीयम् ॥ २ ॥

*Tasmai namo madhujidanghri sarojatattva
jnana anugraaga mahima atisayaanta simne
naathaaya naathamunaye atra paratra chaapi
nityam yadiya charanau saranam madiyam.*

Obeisance to that master, Nathamuni, whose feet are my eternal refuge in this and the next world and who represents the farthest landmark of that surpassing greatness which consists of the true knowledge of the lotus feet of the vanquisher of Madhu and intense love for them.

In the previous sloka, Sri Alavandar had paid obeisance to Sri Nathamuni. Since in Vaishnava Sampradaya, the principal acharya after Nammalwar is Sri Nathamuni, Yamuna continues to offer salutations to him. The lotus feet of Nathamuni are the refuge in this world and the next world. Sri Nathamuni has a perfect spiritual knowledge about the Lord and hence is himself a "complete" person. He had personally experienced the love and

affection of the Lord. The Lord had come to reside in him. Hence, Sri Alavandar is paying obeisance, both before and after obtaining liberation.

A doubt may arise as to the appropriateness of paying obeisance to the feet of the Acharya, both before and after obtaining liberation ("atra paratra chapi"). Should not the refuge, after obtaining the liberation, be with the Lord? The answer is two fold. Firstly, it is common to refer to those who have obtained liberation from this world as persons who have attained the feet of the Acharya. Secondly, the Bhagavathas are to be worshipped in preference to the Bhagavan.

भूयो नमोऽपरिमिताच्युतभक्तितत्त्व-

ज्ञानामृताब्धिपरिवाहशुभैर्वचोभिः ।

लोकेऽवतीर्णपरमार्थसमग्रभक्ति-

योगाय नाथमुनये यमिनां वराय ॥ ३ ॥

*Bhooyo namo aparimita achyuta bhakti tattva
janana amritaabdhi parivaaha subhair vacobhih
loke avateerna paramaarth samagra bhakti-
yogaaya Naatha munaye yaminaam varaaya.*

Obeisance again to Nathamuni, the best among those who know and who practise divine love, by whose holy precepts, which are the overflow of the boundless nectarine divine love, the world has benefited.

Sri Alavandar is paying obeisance once again to the crown jewel among the sages ("yaminaam varaaya"). Why? Because, Sri Nathamuni, by his precepts ("Srisuktis) made Bhakti Yoga to shine in this world. These precepts are like the torrential flow of the ocean of divine love, a love which has no limits. A tank, which is full, has the sluice opened so that the bunds may not be breached by the rushing waters. This is called "parivaha". Thus, by calling the holy precepts as "bhakti parivaha", we are being reminded that if we do not imbibe this divine love and if we do not practise it,

then this body which is compared to a tank will be breached (that is, destroyed).

It is believed that the precepts of Nathamuni referred to here are (perhaps) what were recorded by Nathamuni in his great work "Nyaya Tattva" or the Yogarahasya which have become extinct today. (Please see the Introduction, wherein a reference has been made to the works of Sri Yamunacharya). In those days, the works must have been current and Yamuna has made a reference to them.

तत्त्वेन यश्चिदचिदीश्वरतत्स्वभाव-

भोगापवर्गतदुपायगतीरुदारः ।

सन्दर्शयन् निरमिमीत पुराणरत्नं

तस्मै नमो मुनिवराय पराशराय ॥ ४ ॥

*Tattvena yah cid-acid isvara tat svabhaava
bhoga apavarga tad upaaya gatii udaarah
sandarsayan niramimita puraana ratnam
tasmai namo munivaraaya paraasaraaya.*

Obeisance to Sri Parasara, who wrote the gem among the Puranas, the Vishnu Purana, and who in his large-heartedness explained chit, achit, Isvara (the tattva traya), the Jiva's worldly enjoyment, liberation, the method of achieving it and the path taken by the Jivas.

In the earlier slokas, Alavandar had paid obeisance to Sri Nathamuni. Here he pays obeisance to Parasara who retold the Vishnu Purana. Among the 18 Maha puranas, it is a gem ("Purana Ratnam"). It states things with clarity and with lustre. The Tattvatraya-chit, achit and Isvara are explained in the Purana.

Why does Sri Yamuna pay obeisance to Parasara? Parasara was the grandson of Vasishtha. Due to the enmity between Vasishtha and Vishvamitra, Vishvamitra arranged to see that all the one hundred sons of Vasishtha were devoured by rakshasas. When Parasara came to know that his father had been killed by a rakshasa, he went about exterminating all the rakshasas. Vasishtha interceded

and told his grandson that the rakshasas, in general, had not killed his father, that he was showing excessive wrath and that it was only the foolish who displayed their passions in this manner. He advised Parasara that anger eats into one's asceticism and that pious people should show asceticism. Parasara accepted the advice and Vasishtha was gratified. At that time, Pulastya, father of the rakshasas arrived there and blessed Parasara that he would master all the branches of knowledge. Since Parasara had not killed all of his (Pulastya's) sons he conferred a boon. He said that he would be the author of the Purana and Samhitas. Thus, when Maitreya asked Parasara to tell him about the creation of the Universe, Parasara replied that he would completely retell the Purana, that the Universe had sprung from Vishnu, that the creation, maintenance, and destruction of the Universe is done by Vishnu, as Vishnu is the Universe. This is the reason why, Yamuna pays obeisance to Parasara.

माता पिता युवतयस्तनया विभूतिः

सर्वं यदेव नियमेन मदन्वयानाम् ।

आद्यस्य नः कुलपतेर्वकुलाभिरामं

श्रीमत्तदंग्रियुगलं प्रणमामि मूर्ध्ना ॥ ५ ॥

*Maataa pitaa yuvatayas tanayaa vibhutih
sarvam yadeva niyamena mad anvayaanam
adyasya nah kulapater vakulaabhiraamam
srinattadanghri yugalam pranamaami moordhnaa.*

I lay my head, in reverence, at the effulgent feet of Nammalvar, the pristine chief of the line of Prapannas, bedecked with the beautiful "vakula" flowers, whose feet are the all in all, the father, the mother, the wife, the son for all my community, those who came before me and for those who will come after me.

As great as the Vishnu Puranam is the Tiruvaymozhi of Nammalvar-the adherents of Dravida Vedas would even rate it higher than Parasara's work. It contains the essence of the Vedas. While offering salutations to Nammalvar, Yamuna calls him

"adyasya nah kulapateh"-he is the primordial head of our family. Yamuna elevates him to the stage of the gotra sages, who head the various families. For all the "prapannas" (who pin their faith solely on God's spontaneous grace and look upon him as the highest goal as also as the means for attaining that goal), Sri Nammalvar is the shining effulgent head. Who are all the "prapannas"? They are all the Vaishnavas who happened to be born earlier and who are to be born later.

There is also an interpretation, whereunder, the words "adyasya nah kulapateh" are interpreted as referring to the Lord. Since, the feet of the Lord rest on the sathari (Sri Sathagopa), the concluding words "anghri yugalam" refer to Sri Nammalvar. This may also be correct, as there is a reference to "vakula" flowers. Nammalvar is also called as "vakulabharanar".

Sri Yamuna shows his great humility. It is not just obeisance he is offering. He uses the words "moordhna pranamami".--- I offer my salutations by bowing my head. Any one who surrenders, with all his limbs, will undoubtedly reach God earlier.

यन्मूर्ध्नि मे श्रुतिशिरस्सु च भाति यस्मिन्

अस्मन्मनोरथपथः सकलः समेति ।

स्तोष्यामि नः कुलधनं कुलदैवतं तत्

पादारविन्दमरविन्दविलोचनस्य ॥ ६ ॥

*Yan murdhni me sruti sirassucha bhaati yasmin
asman manoratha - pathassakalas sameti
stoshyami nah kuladhanam kuladaivatam tat
paadaaravindam aravinda - vilocanasya".*

I shall now sing the glory of the lotus feet of the Lord, whose eyes possess the glow of the red lotus. The feet of the Lord will adorn my head and will be the crest of the Vedas, the feet whereunto my surging love converges in its entirety and which constitutes my treasure inherited through successive generations, the feet which are the tutelary deity and ultimate destination of our whole clan.

Having paid obeisance to the great ones, Nathamuni, Parasara and Nammalvar in the previous slokas, Sri Yamuna pledges himself to sing the glory of the feet of the Lord. These feet are described as the perennial bliss of the author and his entire clan.

What does Sri Yamuna mean by referring to the feet, which are adorning one's head? When one prays to the Lord, one looks at the feet of the Lord and prays. The feet of the Lord would then rest on the head of the supplicant and would continue to shine. In the same manner, the feet of the Lord adorn the crest of the Vedas, referring to the glory of the Upanishads. Sri Yamuna calls the feet both the 'kuladhanam' and 'kuladaivatam' the treasure which has been inherited through successive generations and the tutelary for families of forefathers.

In this context, we may refer to two stanzas, in two other great works. Sri Vedanta Desika writes in Sloka (2) of Sri Bhagavad Dhyana Sopanam:-

".....the lotus like feet of Sri Ranganatha, which bear the unbounded fragrance of the Vedas, which are saluted by the Brahmas, with their heads bent down, which manifested on the golden banks of the Cauvery, filled with swans and which are lovingly fondled by the lotus like hands of Lakshmi and Bhudevi, are reflected in the well of my thoughts..." While Sri Yamuna says that the feet are the crest of the Vedas, Sri Desika says that they bear the unbounded fragrance of the Vedas.

Sri Narayana Bhattathiri in his 'Narayaneeyam' says in Dasaka 100:

"O Lord, Thou ocean of mercy, O Krishna, O Lord of Guruvayur! May Thy feet which are the most charming of your limbs to the lordly sages, and to Thy devotees, the feet which are the tender sprouts of the celestial tree which showers on them their desired objects grant me, seated as they always are in my heart, the prosperity of complete bliss supreme, dispelling all my distress". Sri Yamuna calls the Lord "aravinda vilochana". He says that the eyes have the glow of the red lotus. In the 'Narayaneeyam', Bhattathiri describes the eyes as follows:

"May Thy pair of eyes, O Lord, be cast on me, who am helpless - those eyes charming with great lustre and of the shape of the wide petals of a red lotus, of very lovely pupils and cooling the world with their charming glances of mercy....." In the Sundara Kanda, Sita is bemoaning her fate. She suffers pangs of agony that she is not able to see Lord Ramachandra while others are able to see Him and have the good fortune to feast their eyes on His eyes, which are like "blossoming petals".

तत्त्वेन यस्य महिमार्णवशीकराणुः

शक्यो न मातुमपि शर्वपितामहाद्यैः ।

कर्तुं तदीयमहिमस्तुतिमुद्यताय

मह्यं नमोऽस्तु कवये निरपत्रपाय ॥ ७ ॥

*Tattvena yasya mahimaarnava sikaraanuh
sakyo na maatum api sarva-pitaamahaadyaih
kartum tadiya mahima-stutim udyataaya
mahyam namo astu kavaye nirapatrapaaya".*

The greatness of the Lord is like an ocean. Even the greatness of a shower particle of a shower of such an ocean cannot be described by Siva, Brahma and sages like Sanandana. Shamelessly, I am venturing to describe in a stotra, the greatness of Sriman Narayana.

In the previous sloka, Sri Yamuna had stated that he is going to hymn the feet of the lotus eyed Lord. He now has a serious doubt. When people like Siva and Brahma as also renowned sages are not able to adequately extol the Lord, would it not be foolhardiness on his part that he is attempting to describe the greatness of the Lord? He says that he is aware of his lack of capability, but that he would still like to do it, because he wants to get a name as a poet. He, therefore, sarcastically states, that he has to salute himself ("nirapatrapaya kavaye mahyama namaha astu").

What does Yamuna mean by saying that even Brahma and Siva cannot adequately describe even a shower-particle of the greatness of the Lord which is like an ocean? One may refer to the

Srimad Bhagavad Gita. Arjuna asks Lord Krishna as to who he is? The Lord, after replying that He is the Universe, says (Chapter 7) "veiled by my Maya, I am not manifest to all. This deluded world does not recognise Me as the unborn and immutable". Lord Krishna explains that His powers are greater than those of Vayu and Indra, that His lustre is more brilliant than that of Aditya and Agni and that He is the cause of all and the Lord of all. A doubt may still linger - He may be greater than Agni, Vayu, Aditya and Indra, but how is it that even Siva and Brahma cannot even describe His greatness? A reference to the Gita is again necessary. Arjuna tells the Lord that he agrees that Krishna is great, but will he show him the Universal Form? The Lord shows the Vishvarupa. Arjuna says (Chapter XI) ".....I behold, O Lord, in Your body, all the gods, and all the diverse hosts of beings, Brahma, Siva, who is in the seers, the lustrous snakes. With manifold arms, stomachs, mouths and eyes, I behold Your infinite Form on all sides. I see no end, no middle or the beginning too of You, O Lord of the Universe, O You of Universal Form...." The Supreme Lord therefore encompassed both Brahma, Siva and the learned sages. Obviously, they are in no position to describe even a shower particle of the greatness of the Lord.

In Skandha II, Chapter 1 of the Srimad Bhagavatham Sri Suka gives a sermon in reply to a question by Parikshit. He advises Parikshit, who is facing imminent death, to meditate on the cosmic Form of the Lord and goes on to describe the Form. In the description, he explains how the Lord encompasses all gods, Brahma, Siva, Vayu, Indra and others. He concludes, ".....He, is the one and only Lord. He enjoys all objects of the world, through the mental modification of all beings. Worship that Lord, who is Truth and Bliss. Do not cultivate attachment for any other...." Hence, no one can really describe the greatness of this ocean that is the Lord. In Sloka 19 of the Mukunda Mala, Kulasekhara Alwar, expresses much the same view. Says he, ".... Once the Lord has been seen, this planet becomes a speck of dust, all the waters of the oceans become mere droplets, fire a petty spark of little consequence, the winds become just a faint sigh, all space but a minute hole, gods like Brahma and Rudra insignificant manifestaitons and

the denizens of the heavens become small insects. Indeed, the magnificence of the Lord transcends all limitations....."

These are the reasons why Sri Yamuna says that when Brahma and Siva cannot adequately describe the glory of the Lord, it is foolhardy on his part to venture to do so.

यद्वा श्रमावधि यथामति वाप्यशक्तः

स्तौम्येवमेव खलु तेऽपि सदा स्तुवन्तः ।

वेदाश्चतुर्मुखमुखाश्च महार्णवान्तः

को मज्जतोरणुकुलाचलयोर्विशेषः ॥ ८ ॥

*Yadvaa shramaavadhi yathaamati vaapyasaktah
staumyevameva khalu, tepi sadaa stuvantah,
vedaaschaturmukha - mukhaascha maharnavaantah,
ko majjatoranukulaachalayor viseshah".*

Yet, in spite of my incapability, I am justified in praising Him to the limit of my capacity and to the best of my knowledge. For, even the Vedas and the fourfaced Brahma who are always engaged in singing His glory, all praise Him in the same manner. What difference is there between an atom and a huge mountain, when both are submerged in a great ocean?

In the previous sloka, Sri Yamuna had deprecatingly referred to his limitations in describing the glory of the Lord. In this sloka, he justifies his attempt to do so, inspite of his limitation. He says that he is aware of his incapability to adequately and fully describe the greatness and glory, but would still do so, to the limit of his capability and to the best of his knowledge ('srama avadhi' and "yatha mati"). Why does he do so? Because, even Brahma and the Vedas do not fully know the greatness of the Lord and are yet extolling Him. Their capability may be much greater, but it does not make a great difference, because

Maha arnava antah - in a big ocean

majjatah - while sinking

Anukulachalayoh - between an atom and a big mountain

Ko viseshah - what is the difference.

In the Gita, the Lord explains to Arjuna how He is present in every thing in the Universe. When Arjuna requests that he would like to see the Form, the Lord says (Chapter 11) "...Behold My forms, O Arjuna, hundreds upon thousands, manifold, divine, varied in hue and shape. Behold the Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, the two Asvins and the Maruts. Behold Arjuna, many marvels not seen before. Behold here, O Arjuna, the whole Universe with its mobile and immobile things centered in My body and whatever else you desire to see...." What does Arjuna see? He saw the Lord ".....with innumerable mouths and eyes, many marvellous aspects, many divine ornaments and many divine weapons. Wearing celestial garlands and raiments, anointed with divine perfumes, full of all wonders, resplendent, boundless and facing all directions. If a thousand suns were to rise at once in the sky, the resplendent splendour may perhaps be like that one". "Arjuna behold the whole Universe with its manifold divisions gathered together in one spot, within the body of the God of gods....."

It is no wonder that Alavandar feels that he cannot adequately describe that glory. But would even Brahma not be able to do so? In Skanda VIII chapter 6 of the Srimad Bhagavatham, at the combined instance of the devas who had been worsted by the asuras, Brahma hymns the Supreme Lord. Says he "....May Thou be pleased to fulfil the object with which we, with all the protective deities of the quarters have sought shelter at Thy lotus feet. Where is the need to represent that object further to Thee, who dwellest both within and without all beings and therefore knows the innermost thoughts of all? We, including Siva, the devas and myself are maintaining a separate existence from Thee, as sparks from fire. What power of understanding have we, limited beings before the Lord". How can he adequately describe the glory of the Lord?

Obviously, if Brahma cannot adequately describe, the Vedas cannot do so either. There is a verse in the Mukundamala (Sloka 25) wherein Kulasekhara Alwar, refers contemptuously to the inability of the Vedas to help a devotee, in contradistinction to the devotion to the feet of the Lord. Says the Alwar, "All glories to Lord Narayana. Without remembrance of His Lotus feet, recita-

tion of scriptures is a cry in wilderness, regular observance of the vows in the Vedas is only a way to lose weight, the discharge of prescribed pious duties amounts to mere pouring of oblations onto the ashes and bathing at holy places is no better than an elephant's bath...." Such is the power of the devotion to the feet of the Lord. Alavandar speaks about the futility of describing such greatness.

किंचैष शक्त्यतिशयेन न तेऽनुकम्प्यः

स्तोताऽपि तु स्तुतिकृतेन परिश्रमेण ।

तत्र श्रमस्तु सुलभो मम मन्दबुद्धेः

इत्युद्यमोऽयमुचितो मम चाब्जनेत्र ॥ ९ ॥

*Kim chaisha sakyatisayena na te anukampyah
stotaapi tu stutikritena parisramena
tatra sramas tu sulabho mama manda-buddheh
ity udyamo ayam ucito mama chaabja-netra".*

O Lord, who confers grace, I deserve Your Grace, not because of the excellence of my poetic efforts, but because of the strain undergone by me in extolling You. Since I am dull, it is but natural that I should undergo a strain in hymning You. To receive Your Grace is therefore appropriate.

A person earns Grace either because of his innate merit or because his condition warrants qualities of pity (mercy). In the previous sloka, Alavandar had said that neither Brahma and others, nor he were in a position to describe the glory and greatness of the Lord, as both were not capable of doing justice to such an effort (except that one may be a mountain and the other an atom). In this sloka, Alavandar highlights another aspect. He says that it may come naturally to Brahma and others to extol the Lord, but he is dull and therefore cannot extol the Lord in a natural, easy flowing manner. He has to do it with strain. He says that his condition is pitiable and therefore there is justification for the Lord to confer grace on him. Alavandar says that it is because of the kindness of the Lord that he is emboldened to write the hymn. How does Alavandar infer that the Lord is kind? He refers to the

Lord as "abja netra" or the Lord whose eyes are like the red lotus. The red lotus is a gentle (tender) flower. The eyes of the Lord are also therefore soft, tender and kind. The glance he directs towards Alavandar has to be necessarily gentle and kind. We must contrast the use of 'abja netra' with the word used in sloka 6 "aravinda vilochanasya".

नावेक्षसे यदि ततो भुवनान्यमूनि
 नालं प्रभो भवितुमेव कुतः प्रवृत्तिः ।
 एवं निसर्गसुहृदि त्वयि सर्वजन्तोः
 स्वामिन् न चित्रमिदमाश्रितवत्सलत्वम् ॥ १० ॥

*Navekshase yadi tato bhuvanaanyamooni
 naalam prabho! bhavitum eva kutah pravrittih?
 evam nisarga suhridi tvayi sarva-jantoh
 svamin. na chitram idam aasrita-vatsalatvam.*

O Lord, if you do not cast your looks at these worlds, they cannot even survive, much less can they develop. O Master, as one naturally interested in the welfare of Your subjects, irrespective of whether they invoke Your Grace or not, it is not strange that You should exhibit special love for those who seek the refuge of Your feet.

In the previous sloka, Alavandar had justified his attempt to hymn the Lord. He had addressed the Lord as "abja netra". He is now sure of the compassion of the Lord. He now goes on to say that it is no strange ("na chitram") that He would cherish those who seek Him.

It is due to the Grace of the Lord that creation takes place. He shows His Grace further on those who deserve to be created. If His Grace were not to be there, these worlds would not be there ("tatah amooni bhuvanaani bhavitum eva na alam"). It is because of his Grace, that these worlds have evolved. Alavandar develops the theme further. He says that as one who is naturally interested in the welfare of His subjects irrespective of whether they involve His Grace or not, it is not strange that the Lord should

have special love for those who seek the refuge of His feet. Alavandar is thereby stating that just as the Lord had shown His Grace even on the other creations, there was nothing surprising in His showering compassion on him, because of which Alavandar is now readying himself to write the Stotra.

स्वाभाविकानवधिकातिशयेशितृत्वं

नारायण त्वयि न मृष्यति वैदिकः कः ।

ब्रह्मा शिवः शतमुखः परम स्वराडिति

एतेऽपि यस्य महिमार्णवविप्रुषस्ते ॥ ११ ॥

*Svaabhaavika anavadhika atisaya eesitritvam
Naaraayana! Tvayi na mrishyati vaidikah kah?
Brahmaa sivas satamakhah parama-svaraditi
Ete api yasya mahimaarnava-viprushaste.*

O Narayana, who is there among the learned adherents of the Vedas, that does not acknowledge Your intrinsic supreme godhood, endowed as You are with unsurpassable excellences? Brahma, Siva, Indra and other Muktas (liberated souls who are not bound by karma) are only a drop in the ocean of Your greatness.

The Vedas proclaim that first was the Parama Purusha (Narayana). He created Brahma and asked Brahma to create the Universe. That is the reason why in this sloka, Alavandar refers to the adherents of Vedas ("Vaidikah") acknowledging His intrinsic supreme Godhood.

"Satamakhah" or the one who performed one hundred yajnas is Indra. Alavandar says that Brahma, Siva and Indra are just drops ("viprushah") in the ocean of the greatness of the Lord. In this connection, the earlier comments in respect of Sloka 8 may please be seen. In the presence of the Lord, Brahma, Siva, Indra and others are mere specks. We may also recall the episode of Ajamila, recounted in the Srimad Bhagavatham. Ajamila had led a licentious life. When he was about to die, out of fear, he called the name of his youngest son, Narayana. The attendants of Yama

came there to take him to the abode of Yama. At the same time, the attendants of Lord Narayana came there and after thwarting the attempts of Lord Yama, they took him away (as Ajamila, just before dying had called the name of the Supreme Lord, albeit accidentally). The attendants of Yama were puzzled and went back to their master as to why the directions of Yama could not be implemented. Lord Yama replied"....Different from me, there is an overlord for this world, with its moving and unmoving beings. In Him, all this world is spread, as a piece of cloth is spread on the warp and woof. From a particle of Him are born Brahma and Maheshvara who create, and dissolve the universe. The whole is held by Him as an ox by its nose-string.....The devotees of the Lord are protected from all fears, including that from myself, the God of Death..."

Alavandar therefore says that Brahma, Siva and other mukatas are but a drop in the ocean of His greatness.

कः श्रीः श्रियः परमसत्त्वसमाश्रयः कः

कः पुण्डरीकनयनः पुरुषोत्तमः कः ।

कस्यायुतायुतशतैककलांशकांशे

विश्वं विचित्रचिदचित्प्रविभागवृत्तम् ॥ १२ ॥

Kas srih sriyah? Parama-sattva-samaasrayah kah?

kah pundarika-nayanah? Purushottamah kah?

kasyaayutaayuta sataika kalamsakamse

visvam vicitra-cid-acid pravibhaga vrittam?

"Who else but You is the source of "prosperity" even for the goddess Sri? Who else is the repository of the quality of Sattva? Who else has eyes which are like the white lotuses? Who is superior to You? This universe, which consists of both the sentient and insentient, is but one part of the crores of parts, the whole of which is you.

The Lord is the resting place for Sri. The episode is well known. As a result of the curse of Durvasa, Indra and the gods are vanquished by the asuras. Extolled by Brahma, the Lord indi-

cates that the devas and the asuras should together churn the ocean for amrita. The ocean is churned and the poison which emerges is swallowed by Rudra. After a few other items emerge, Sri emerged, illumining the three worlds by Her brilliance. She was given various gifts by the devas and others. The Devi, with a floral garland in her hand, looked around for a suitable person, around whose neck she could place the garland. Says the Bhagavatam (Skanda VIII, Chapter 8) "....Rama chose as partner Mahavishnu, who alone was according to her heart. She then put round the neck of Mahavishnu, the most attractive garland, made of choice fresh lotuses surrounded by humming honey beetles, and stood looking at Him, with her eyes blooming, with a bashful smile, as if asking the Lord for His chest as Her residence. The worshipful Lord, the father of the worlds, assigned His chest, the most sublime of regions, as the residence for Sri, the mother of the Universe and the source of all power, glory and prosperity..." Kulasekhara Alwar refers to the Lord (in Sloka 21 of Mukunda Mala) as "Sindhukanyapate". In Sloka 11 of Mukunda Mala, he says "O dull mind, abandon your fear about the torments of Yama. How can your enemies, the sins that you have accumulated even touch you? Your master is Lord Sridhara, the husband of Goddess Sri..." It is to this Sri, Yamunacharya is making a reference---he calls the Lord as Lakshmi for Lakshmi, much as Parasara Bhattar did, when he wrote "Shriyah Shrih ShriRangesa....

After referring to the Lord as the resting place for Lakshmi, Alavandar now turns to the "gunas". The Lord is the repository of "sattva guna". Brahma who is involved in the process of creation of the universe embodies Rajasa qualities, Siva who is quiescent till the dissolution of the Universe symbolises Tamoguna while the Lord who sustains the universe symbolizes the Sattva guna. That is why Alavandar describes Him as "parama sattva samasrayah" the repository of sattva qualities.

Because the Lord is the repository of "sattva" qualities, he has a benign eye on all the supplicants. That is the reason why, Alavandar now describes the eyes as resembling white lotuses.

He is the Supreme Lord. He is unsurpassed. He is not like Indra, Brahma or Siva but a Purushottama. The epithet Purushottama is quite significant. He is superior to all Purushas - the Kshara and the Akshara. The Gita - Chapter 15 (vv 16-18) may be compared with advantage.

While commenting on Sloka 7, we had referred to the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. The Lord encompasses all – the universe and all the gods. Alavandar now puts the idea in a different manner. He says that the universe which consists of cit and acit is but one infinitesimal part of the Lord's infinitely vast splendour.

वेदापहारगुरुपातकदैत्यपीडा-

द्यापद्विमोचनमहिष्ठफलप्रदानैः ।

कोऽन्यः प्रजापशुपती परिपाति कस्य

पादोदकेन स शिवः स्वशिरोधृतेन ॥ १३ ॥

*Vedaupahaara gurupaataka daityapeedaa-
dyaapadvimochana mahishtha phalapradanaaih
ko'anyah prajaa pasupati-paripaati? kasya
paadodakena sa shivah svasirodhritena?*

Who is greater than you? Who had killed the asura who stole the Vedas? Who rid the sin of Siva who severed the head of Brahma? And who saved the people from the evil deeds of Rakshasas? Who is protecting Brahma and Siva? Siva became holy because he bears on his head the waters which had flowed after washing Your feet.

Alavandar first refers to the Lord killing the asura who stole the Vedas. This incident is referred to in different Puranas, with variations. Lord Narayana created Brahma, and taught the Vedas to Brahma. Since the Lord had asked Brahma to create, Brahma was busy with creation. One of the Puranic stories says that Madhu and Kaitabha, two asuras stole the Vedas and hid themselves at the bottom of the ocean. Since Brahma could not retrieve the Vedas, Lord Narayana assumed the form of Lord Hayagriva, dived to the bottom of the ocean, killed Madhu and Kaitabha, and re-

trieved the Vedas. There are some variations of this story in some Puranas. In one of the kalpas, Brahma was resting. An asura called Somaka, stole the Vedas and hid them in the ocean. The Lord assumed the form of a Fish, entered the ocean, killed the asura and retrieved the Vedas. Another variation is that the Vedas were stolen by an Asura called Hayagriva and the Lord killed him (The Vishnu Purana refers to Hayagriva as the brother of the Asura Mura, both of whom were killed by Lord Vishnu when He went to Pragjyotish to kill the asura Naraka). The commonality in the Puranic stories about the Vedas being lost (and retrieved) is that they were stolen from the custody of Brahma by an asura and the Lord rescued the Vedas by slaying the asura. It is to this incident Alavandar makes a reference.

Alavandar next refers to the Lord saving Siva from the sin of severing the head of Brahma. There are many Puranic stories (with variations) of the head of Brahma being severed by Siva. The Vamana Purana tells us that after the night of Brahma, the Lord created Brahma and asked him to create the universe. The Lord created Rudra. Not finding any one, Brahma meditates for a hundred years. Then he sees Rudra. Neither knows the other and they are unable to recognise each other. They speak to each other in a taunting manner. In a rage, Rudra removes one of the four heads of Brahma. The skull, however, gets attached to his palm. He is advised that if he takes a dip in a holy lake, he would be able to get rid of the sin of killing Brahma ("Brahmahatyadosha"). Siva does so but the skull still remained attached to his palm. Siva went round with the "kapala" in his hand and resorted to seeking alms to get rid of the sin. He went to Badari and prayed to Lord Narayana. The Lord advised him to go to Gaya and take a bath in a specific lake there, when the skull would fall. Siva did this and was relieved of the skull. The lake was henceforth known as Kapala Vimocanam. It is to this incident Alavandar makes a reference in this sloka by using the words "gurupataka".

Alavandar next refers to "daityapida" - the difficulties created by the daityas or the asuras. The puranas are full of stories of the asuras troubling the devas, the devas approaching Brahma

and Brahma hymning the Lord to seek his intercession. We propose to refer here only to two mythological stories which refer to Siva being tormented by two asuras, Andhaka and Varika. Lord Narayana saves him on both the occasions. The Vamana purana tells us about a fight between Siva and an asura called Andhaka. Every time, Siva wounded Andhaka, when some drops of blood fell on the ground, some more asuras used to arise from these drops. They would join Andhaka and reinforce him in the battle. Siva was perplexed and approached Lord Narayana for help. The Lord created a "Sakthi" (a force) called Kushakareti. She drank the blood, as the drops fell and the asura was killed. In another mythological story, we are told how Bhasmasura was pursuing Siva, after obtaining a boon from Siva himself. Lord Narayana intervened and saved Siva. It is to these a reference is made by Alavandar when he speaks of "daityapidadi apadvimochana". In the next line, Alavandar asks parenthetically as to who is saving Brahma and Siva ("praja pasupathi paripathi").

In the last line of the Sloka, Alavandar says that Siva was rendered holy by carrying on his head, water issued from the Lord's feet (sva sirodhritena kasya padodakena sa siva). The reference is to the river Ganga. The Vishnu Purana tells us (Part II Section IX) that Ganga issues from the toenail of the big toe of Vishnu's left foot. She removes all sins. Ganga then surrounds the moon, who is increased in lustre by her contact. She then falls on the Mount Sumeru and then flows in different directions as Alakananada, Sita, Chakshu and Bhadra. Alakananda, which flows southwards, is borne on the head by Mahadeva, for more than a hundred years. She then issues from the braided locks of Sambhu. It is to this, Sri Yamuna makes a reference to explain the supremacy of the Lord.

कस्योदरे हरविरिञ्चमुखः प्रपञ्चः

को रक्षतीममजनिष्ट च कस्य नाभेः ।

क्रान्त्वा निगीर्य पुनरुद्गिरति त्वदन्यः

कः केन वैष परवानिति शक्यशङ्कः ॥ १४ ॥

*Kasyodare haravirincha mukhah prapanchah?
ko rakshatheemam? Ajanishtha cha kasya naabheh?
kraantvaa nigirya punarudgirati tvadanyah
kah? Kena vaisha paravaaniti sakyasankah?*

Brahma, Siva and the entire universe are within You. You are the protector of the universe. It is from the lotus in Your navel that the universe has originated. At the time of the pralaya, it is into your stomach the entire universe has been resumed and projected again. All these can be done by You and none else. And who, striding, over all even conjecturally, be said to exist as Your superior?

We have explained in several earlier slokas about Brahma originating from the lotus in the navel of the Lord, the Lord directing him to undertake creation, Brahma meditating on the Lord for a hundred years and then commencing creation. Rudra and several other devas and the rest of creation followed thereafter. We had made a reference to Arjuna's request to Lord Krishna to be permitted to see His Form and Arjuna seeing in the body of Lord Krishna several Brahmas, Sivas, Devas et al. This is what Alavandar refers to when he says that Brahma, Siva and the entire universe are within Him and that it was from the lotus in his navel that the universe had originated ("kasya nabhan ajanishtha").

Alavandar then goes on to ask, parenthetically, who is there in this world who at the time of the deluge hides the universe in his belly and then projects it again ("krantva nigirya punah udgirati tvadanyah kah?) At the time of the pralaya, the Lord resumes the entire universe. Reference may be made to the episode of Markandeya, which appears in Skandha XII Chapter 10 of the Srimad Bhagavatam. Markandeya had hymned Lord Narayana. The Lord was pleased and asked him to choose a boon. Markandeya desires to see the Yogamaya by whose power all the worlds and protective divinities perceive duality in the non-dual being (of the Lord). Shortly thereafter, one evening when Markandeya was meditating, a storm set in, the oceans overran the earth, the world was submerged in water, the deluge drowned

the interstitial spaces also and the sage was also sucked into this deluge. He wandered for what he thought was thousands of years, caught as he was in the Maya of Maha Vishnu. The sage saw a banyan tree and lying on a banyan leaf was an Infant of brilliant lustre. The sage was drawn into the Infant, as if he were a mosquito and the sage saw inside the Infant the entire universe, exactly as it was before the deluge. As suddenly as he was sucked in, he was thrown out, the Infant disappeared and Markandeya was back in his ashrama. While all people sought the boon of being rid of the worldly Maya, Markandeya had sought and been granted, in the infinite mercy of the Lord, the boon of witnessing the play of the Lord. It is to this episode of the resumption and projection of the universe that Alavandar makes a reference in this sloka.

In the third line of this sloka appears the word "krantva". We have translated it as "striding over the world". The reference is obviously to the Trivikrama avatara, when the Lord as Vamana covered the earth in one stride, the heaven in another stride and having nothing else to offer, Bali offered his head as the resting place for the third stride (See Sloka 31, coming later). There is an interpretation that this world refers not merely to the Vamana Avatara, but to the omnipresence of the Lord, abiding in all beings, both within and without, so as to keep one pulsating with life. It is said that this is what is referred to when the striding of the Lord is referred to by Alavandar.

Alavandar concludes that one can have no doubt ("sakyasankah") that any one else has the Supreme Lordship ("paravan") or Rulership of this world.

त्वां शीलरूपचरितैः परमप्रकृष्ट-

सत्त्वेन सात्त्विकतया प्रबलैश्च शास्त्रैः।

प्रख्यातदैवपरमार्थविदां मतैश्च

नैवासुरप्रकृतयः प्रभवन्ति बोद्धुम् ॥ १५ ॥

*Tvam sheelaroopa charithaih parama prakrishta
sattvena saatvikatayaa prabalaischa saastraih
prakhyaata daiva paramaārtha vidaam mataischa
naivaasura prakritayah prabhavanti boddhum.*

You are greater than the greatest. This is known to all, except those of a demoniac nature by i) Your benevolent disposition, ii) by the loveliness of Your Form, iii) by your divine deeds, (iv) by Your exalted Sattva nature, (v) by the accounts in the scriptures which are authoritative because they are Sattva in tenor and (vi) by the precepts of the famous knowers of the supreme truth.

The Lord is the greatest. How is this to be known? The sloka enumerates six reasons, as to how this is to be known. Is this known to all? The sloka says that the Lord can be attained by all except those of an asuric nature. The asuras do not recognise this, because of their arrogance. The examples of Ravana and Hiranyakasipu would suffice. Hanuman had crossed the ocean, conferred with Maithili, had allowed himself to be taken as a captive and had devastated Sri Lanka. Ravana has a meeting with all his counsellors. Vibhishana gives wholesome advice to Ravana that he should sue for peace and return Maithili as Ramachandra is an exalted person. The advice is spurned and he is humiliated. Later on, Malyavan gives similar advice and this is rejected. When Ravana lies dead on the battle field, Mandodari recalls the advice she had given to Ravana, the previous night that Sri Ramachandra should be made an ally and how Ravana had contemptuously rejected it, with the result Ravana lay dead on the battlefield, on the hard ground though he was accustomed to sleep on the softest of silken couches.

In the same manner, Prahlada repeatedly tells Hiranyakasipu that Sri Hari is the most supreme Lord. Hiranyakasipu tortures Prahlada and finally challenges him to prove the presence of the Lord. The Lord appears in a man-lion form and kills him. Thus, the greatness of the Lord (Alavandar calls it greater than the greatest) is known to all except those of an asuric nature ("asuraprakritayah".)

Those of u. who are not of an asuric nature can ascertain the true nature of the Lord by following one of the enumerated methods. The sloka first enumerates "sheela roopacharitaih" (ie) the supremacy of the Lord can be known through His benevolent disposition, an accessible disposition. The Lord is accessible to all, without any discrimination based on birth or riches or community. The instances of Guha, Sabari, Gopikas and Kuchela may be recalled. Guha is a Nishada or a tribal. Sri Ramachandra befriends him. Guha ferries him across a river. The Lord becomes fond of him and meets him on the return journey from Lanka. In the Aranya Kanda of the Ramayana, Sri Ramachandra and Lakshmana come across Sabari, an austere woman and an ascetic, who had been waiting to meet the Lord. The Lord makes enquiries of her and she replies".....my asceticism has become fruitful today and the highest heaven will fall to my lot, now that You, the foremost of the gods, have been worshipped by me, O Rama, the flower of humanity. Hallowed by Your gracious look, O gentle one, bestowing honour on others, I shall by Your grace ascend to realms knowing no decay." Such is the accessibility of the Lord. In the Krishna Avatara, he was easily accessible to all the gopis. They are aware that they are mere cowherdesses and yet the Lord showers His grace on all of them, without distinction, so much so each Gopika felt that the Lord was with her only. It is not related to wealth. The episodes of Kubja and Kuchela highlight this.

The second point made is about the loveliness of Form. In the Sundara Kanda, Hanuman approaches Sita with all humility. She initially welcomes him and then has a doubt whether he is Ravana in another disguise. She asks Hanuman to describe Lord Rama. Hanuman, in an elaborate description begins "...Rama has eyes resembling lotus petals. His countenance resembles the full moon. He is richly endowed with charm from his birth. He vies with the Sun in effulgence, with the earth in forbearance,....." Sri Vedanta Desika in the Varadaraja Panchasat says that the glory of the Lord on the Hastagiri Hill is so indescribable that he has no desire to go even to Vaikuntham. In the same manner, Sri Parasara Bhatta who is so taken in by the beauty of the reclining Lord at

Srirangam, says that he would return to Srirangam if he does not find the Lord in that Form in Vaikuntham.

That the Lord is greater than the greatest is known also from his divine deeds. Krishna, as an infant, had sucked out the life of Putana. When Indra, in his arrogance, had hurled torrential rain, Krishna had lifted the Govadhana mountain and protected the residents for seven days. Hiranyakasipu had received a boon that he would be killed by no man or no animal. The Lord assumed the form of a man-lion so as to destroy the Asura. The Puranas are full of such incidents which speak about the divine deeds of the Lord. This is what Alavandar refers to when he uses the word "charita".

He is greater than the greatest because he has an exalted "satva" nature ("parama prakrishta sattva"). The Lord had created Brahma to create the universe. The Lord had created Siva for the dissolution of the universe while He as Vishnu was responsible for the sustenance of the Universe. Thus, Brahma represents the Rajasic qualities, while Siva represents the Tamasic qualities. It may be mentioned that the 18 Maha Puranas are also divided into Satva, Rajasic and Tamasic Puranas. The Puranas which extol Sri Maha Vishnu are all regarded as Satva Puranas.

One can know the greatness of the Lord by reading the scriptures, which are authoritative because they are Satva in tenor. The greatness can be known also from the precepts of the knowers of the Truth ("prakhyata daiva paramartha vidam mataischa). Vyasa, Parasara, Valmiki, Yajnavalkya and Sanaka, are all knowers of the Truth. One's attention is invited to sloka 17 of Mukunda Mala. Kulasekhara Alwar says ".....Hear my fellowmen, to this remedy for the illness of birth and death, given out by ascetics like Yajnavalkya, who are adepts in Yoga. Within You, there is a Supreme Light, the immortal and immeasurable Krishna. That is the supreme medicine. Take it always. That will confer on you absolute bliss". It is to this Alavandar makes a reference ("daiva vidam").

उल्लङ्घितत्रिविधसीमसमातिशायि-

सम्भावनं तव परिब्रढिमस्वभावम् ।

मायाबलेन भवतापि निगूह्यमानं

पश्यन्ति केचिदनिशं त्वदनन्यभावाः ॥ १६ ॥

*Ullanghita - trividha - seema - samaatisaayi
sambhaavanam tava paribradhimasvabhaavam
maayaubalena bhavataapi niguhyamaanam
pasyanti kechid anisam tvadunanya bhaavaah.*

Your sovereign nature transcends the threefold consideration of time, space and causation. It is not possible to even think of one who is Your equal or superior. Through Your Maya, You may conceal your Lordship, but great ones who have concentrated their mind on You, always offer their salutations to You and are experiencing You.

Sloka 15 had informed us that except those of an asuric nature, others will be able to realize the greatness of the Lord, because of various means. On the other hand, Sloka 16 states that though the Lord may conceal His Lordship, which transcends time, space and causation, the great ones who have concentrated their mind on Him are always able to experience Him.

What is meant by stating that the sovereign nature of the Lord transcends the three-fold consideration of space, time and causation? Simply stated, there are no limitations on the supreme glory of the Lord. It is not limited by time. It is not as if the Lord is approachable at some time and is not available at other times. The story of Gajendra amplifies this. Gajendra had been caught in the jaws of an alligator. The tussle between them went on for a thousand years. When Gajendra was becoming exhausted, he prayed to the Lord. The Lord immediately summoned Garuda and proceeded to the spot to relieve the elephant in distress. The glory of the Lord is not limited by space. The story of Prahlada exemplifies this. When Hiranyakasipu challenges Prahlada to tell him where Lord Hari is to be found, Prahlada says that the Lord is

omnipresent. It is not limited by causation. That is why Sri Alavandar calls this as "trividha seema"-"seema" standing for boundary or limitation.

Because of His Maya, the Lord is not perceived by all, except by those who have concentrated their mind on Him. In the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, the Lord has said in Chapter VIII - "....know that all those states of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas are from Me alone. But I am not in them; they are in Me. The entire universe is deluded by these three states originating from the gunas (of Prakrithi) and fails to recognize Me, who am beyond them and immutable. For, this divine Maya of Mine consisting of the three Gunas (assumed for purposes for sport) is hard to overcome. But those who take refuge in Me (Prapadyante) alone shall pass beyond the Maya.."

One can recall here the hymn of the Vedas which appears in the Srimad Bhagavatham (Skanda X, Chapter 87). "Hail, Hail unto the Supreme Master. Withdraw Thy Maya, constituted of the three gunas, from conquering the knowledge of all Jivas, moving and unmoving, with the pall of ignorance. But in Thee, the controller of Maya, Maya is not the veil of ignorance, as in the Jiva, but thy divine majesty....." The hymn goes on to conclude ".....to practise devotion to Thee and win Thy grace is the way of salvation for man". Alavandar says that this is what the great ones are doing - they are offering their exclusive devotion to the Lord and enjoying the bliss of the glory of the Lord.

यदण्डमण्डान्तरगोचरं च यत्

दशोत्तराण्यावराणानि यानि च ।

गुणाः प्रधानं पुरुषः परं पदं

परात् परं ब्रह्म च ते विभूतयः ॥ १७ ॥

*Yadandam andaantara-gocharam cha yat
dasottaraanyaavaranaani yaani cha
gunaah pradhaanam purushah param padam
paraatparam Brahma cha te vibhootayah.*

The cosmic egg (sphere) consisting of the cosmic worlds, with all their inner contents and the external multiplicity of layers, each of which is ten times bigger than the immediately preceding one, the three gunas, the primordial matter, the individual self, the supreme abode, the Brahman are all the manifestations of Your splendour.

The process of creation has to be understood, for one to get a clear understanding of this. In Skanda II of chapter 5 of the Srimad Bhagavatham, there is a detailed exposition of creation. After the dissolution, the Supreme Person Vasudeva alone remains. He being desirous of manifesting as the many, takes up Kala (Time), Karma (efficiencies of work) and Svabhava (nature) that approached Him, without any effort on His part. Associated with Him, Time became capable of disturbing the equilibrium of the gunas, Nature of evolving into categories and efficiencies of work enabled the emergence of Mahat-tattva. From the Mahat-tattva came egoity (ahankara) which transformed into the three gunas, Rajas, Tamas and Sattva. From these were evolved space, sound, wind, prana, fire, water, earth, mind etc. The categories required for creation were evolved, but remained separate. The Lord activized them and made them into the macrocosmic and microcosmic types. The combination of these categories produced the cosmic shell in the causal waters. The Lord entered into the shell as the Jiva. Breaking the shell from inside, He came out as the Universal Form. Parts of His body below the waist became the seven inferior worlds and parts of His body above the waist became the seven superior worlds. The 14 worlds therefore came out of the Universal Form. The various parts of the Form became wind, smell, Sun, Moon etc. Thus the Universal Form (Virat) comprises all the elements with the Supreme Lord transcending all the manifestations. Brahma emerged from the navel of the Lord and directed by the Lord, created the worlds. The Lord manifests as the universe of a million forms by assuming the Gunas, though the Lord Himself is not subject to the gunas. The primary descent (or manifestation) of the Lord is the Viratpurusha and all things distinguishable from Him are His vibhutis, divine powers and attributes.

The above detailed explanation has been summarized by Alavandar in Sloka 17. It may be recalled that we had explained how the Virat encompasses earth, water etc. The Vishnu Purana, while dealing with Sarga (creation) {Section II} says "in that cosmic egg sprang mountains and islands, oceans, light, deities, asuras and human beings. And, that egg was environed ten times successively with water, fire, air, ether and bhutadi....." This is what Alavandar is referring to as "dasottarani avaranani".

वशी वदान्यो गुणवान् ऋजुः शुचिः

मृदुर्दयालुर्मधुरः स्थिरः समः ।

कृती कृतज्ञस्त्वमसि स्वभावतः

समस्तकल्याणगुणामृतोदधिः ॥ १८ ॥

*Vasi vadaanyo gunavaan rujuh shuchih
mridur dayaaluh madhurah sthirah samah
kriti kritajnah tvamasi svabhaavatah
samasta kalyaanagunaamritodadhih.*

You are, by your own nature, submissive to the will of those that take refuge in you, are large hearted, noble, pure, tender, compassionate, blissful, firm, evenhanded, ever mindful of the services of the devotees and a nectar of ocean of all auspicious attributes.

The Lord is full of auspicious attributes. In this sloka, Alavandar lists out just 12 of them.

The Lord is submissive to those that have taken refuge in Him. We may refer to the Lord acting as the charioteer of the Pandavas, in the war between them and the Kauravas. Prior to that, He acted as their mediator (ambassador). As the charioteer and friend, he permitted great familiarity to Arjuna, who called Him in very casual terms. After Arjuna sees the Form of the Lord, he is frightened and then says contritely (in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita Chapter XI Verses 41-42): "The way in which I have importunately called out, either through intimacy or even through want of thought, "Hey Krishna, Hey Yadava, Hey com-

rade and so on, suspecting not this greatness of Yours, and thinking You only to be a friend, and the way You have been slighted by me in jest...." The Lord had not minded it, because He is submissive ("Vasi") to those that had taken refuge in Him.

The Lord is large-hearted ("vadanyah"). He confers His Grace in abundance and quite often, unasked. He rushes to their help. This is exemplified by Sudama's (Kuchela) episode. Kuchela's wife persuades him to visit his childhood friend, Lord Krishna and request for help, as they are in abject penury. Sudama agrees and carries a small quantity of parched grain with him. Lord Krishna sees him from a distance, when Sudama reaches Dvaraka. He rushes out to embrace Sudama and to receive him warmly. They exchange notes about their gurukula days. Sudama is bashful and does not ask for any thing. Lord Krishna, who is aware of the innermost thoughts of all, understood Sudama's thoughts (Srimad Bhagavatam, Skandha X Chapter 81): "He never worshipped me for wealth. My friend is now coming to meet at the instance of his loyal wife. I shall grant him wealth beyond his dreams". Sudama goes home and finds that the Lord had made him wealthy, beyond what even his wife had desired! Sudama himself was more than happy with the way the Lord had received him. "I have witnessed the Lord's love of holy men, how he regards them as adorable beings. Me, the poorest of the poor, He was pleased to hug to His chest, which is the residence of Sri, where am I, the poorest of the poor and a sinner to boot. And, where is Krishna, the abode of Sri.....The service of the Lord's feet is the source of man's welfare in all respects...." This is what Alavandar calls as "vadanyah".

He is noble (gunavan). He never bothers about His greatness. He mixes freely with people of humble origin. Why human beings alone - He mixed freely with monkeys and bears in His avatara as Lord Ramachandra.

He is pure. There are two types of purity - physical and mental. One who does good to others, without expecting any return is one who has mental purity. Obviously, when the Lord shows His Grace on those who seek Him, He is not expecting any thing in return. He is tender - a tenderness in body ("komalangah"

is how He is addressed) and tenderness in mind and heart. He cannot bear the difficulties of His devotees. A related quality is the quality of being merciful. He is full of bliss. He makes His devotees happy. He is firm - meaning thereby that He firmly holds on to a devotee and does not let go of him. He does not abandon a devotee, because the devotee has some (or many) deficiencies (Later in the stotra we will be seeing how Sri Yamuna pleads that he has all the possible deficiencies and only the Lord can save him). He is even - handed. He does not distinguish people based on accident of birth or based on other considerations. He is self-less, as he does not do any thing for Himself.

Having listed out the above qualities, Alavandar concludes by stating that the Lord is a nectar ocean of all auspicious attributes ("samasta kalyanaguna amritodadhi").

उपर्युपर्यब्जभुवोऽपि पूरुषान्
 प्रकल्प्य ते ये शतमित्यनुक्रमात् ।
 गिरस्त्वदेकैकगुणावधीप्सया
 सदा स्थिता नोद्यमतोऽतिशेते ॥ १९ ॥

*Uparyuparyabja-bhuvopi purusaan
 prakalpya te ye satam ity anukramaat
 giras tvad ekaika - gunaavadhipsayaa
 sadaa sthitaa nodyamato atiserate.*

The Vedic texts attempt to find the limit of Your attributes, by describing in ascending order the bliss of beings higher than the lotus-born Brahma, by using words "one hundred units of such bliss". In spite of constant endeavour, they fail to do so and do not go beyond the first Ananda, because that is itself Infinite.

In the previous sloka, it has been said that the auspicious qualities (attributes) of the Lord are innumerable. In this sloka, it is being stated that it is not possible to indicate the limits of these attributes. In order to find out the limits, the Vedas created a being with incomparable attributes of bliss and thereafter went on describing beings whose attributes of bliss were hundred times of the previously stated bliss. After going on like this, they found that

the bliss computed at the end did not go beyond the first Ananda of the Lord because that itself was infinite. The Ananda of the Lord is therefore inestimable.

The Taittiriya Upanishad consists of three chapters - the Siksavalli, the Anandavalli and the Briguavalli. The chapters are divided into Aranyakas (lessons). Lesson 8 of Anandavalli says as follows "....This is an assessment of Bliss. Let it be supposed that there is a youth, in the prime of youth and that to him belongs the entire earth laden with all riches. We have in him one measure of human joy. One hundred such units of human joy, a sage full of revelation and free from all cravings will possess. One hundred units of such joy will make the joy of the highest gods. One hundred units of such joy is the joy of Indra, and one hundred units of joy of Indra is the joy of Brihaspati. One hundred units of such joy is the joy of Prajapati while one hundred units of such joy is the joy of Brahma. Thus, the bliss of the best man, Gandharvas, Pitrus, Ajanadevas, Karmadevas, Devas, Indra, Brihaspati, Prajapati and Brahma goes on increasing, with the joy of Brahma being billion million times of the joy of the best man. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad also has a description of a similar hierarchy of bliss, leading to the bliss that is Brahman. Alavandar says that the Vedas, inspite of such hierarchical calculations are unable to find the limits of the Ananda of the Lord. Sri Yamuna states that when the Upanishads could not calculate in respect of even one attribute (Ananda) of the Lord, how can the Vedas compute the attributes in entirety ("tvad ekaika guna avadhipsayaya)?

त्वदाश्रितानां जगदुद्भवस्थिति-

प्रणाशसंसार विमोचनादयः ।

भवन्ति लीला विधयश्च वैदिकाः

त्वदीयगम्भीरमनोऽनुसारिणः ॥ २० ॥

*Tvad aasritanaam jagad udbhava sthithi-
pranaasa samsaara vimocanaadayah
bhavanti leelaa vidhayas cha vaidikaah
tvadiya gambhira mano anusaarinah.*

The creation, sustenance and dissolution of the Universe as also the granting of liberation constitute Your play, for the benefit of those who seek refuge in You. And the vedic mandates are in conformity with Your otherwise unfathomable will.

The underlying idea is that the Lord indulges in the repetitive process of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the Universe, not because of any personal desire. He is above any wants of a personal nature. But, He wants to give opportunities to the jivas to turn to Him and to attain liberation.

In the previous sloka it has been stated that the divine attributes of the Lord are inestimable. It would then be pointless to say that while his attributes are numerous, there is no one to attain them. Alavandar therefore hastens to say in this sloka that there are many devotees who are available to take advantage of the immense wealth of the Lord.

An alternate interpretation has also been given to this sloka. Creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe and attainment of liberation are all a play for the mukta purushas, Brahma and others. The Vedic injunctions fall in line with the inclination of Your devotees. What this means is that Brahma and others have been entrusted the assignment of creation of the universe and other activities. It is because of the grace of the Lord they are able to discharge their duties with ease. They are making the sentient beings as devotees of the Lord. They are showing the path to liberation. All these have become a play for Brahma and others. If so, need one say separately about the capabilities of the Lord?

नमो नमो वाङ्मनसातिभूमये

नमो नमो वाङ्मनसैकभूमये ।

नमो नमोऽनन्तमहाविभूतये

नमो नमोऽनन्तदयैकसिन्धवे ॥ २१ ॥

*Namo namo vaang-manasaati bhumaye
namo namo vaangmanasaika bhumaye
namo namo ananta mahaa vibhutaye
namo namo ananta dayaika sindhave.*

Obeisance again and again to you, who are beyond the reach of speech and mind, to You who are the sole object of speech and mind, to You of infinite great powers, to You of infinite mercy.

In this sloka, Sri Yamuna offers obeisance to the Lord, after referring to the greatness of the Lord. The Lord is beyond the reach of speech and mind. The Lord is smaller than the smallest and bigger than the biggest. The Lord Himself has said in the Gita (Chapter X) ".....There is no limit to My divine manifestations...Every such thing as is glorious, brilliant and powerful, know that to be a partial manifestation of My glory." The Lord is therefore beyond the reach of speech and mind.

It may appear, as a first reaction, that there is a contradiction between the first sentence of the sloka which says that the Lord is beyond the reach of the speech and mind and the second sentence which says that the Lord is the sole object of the mind and speech. There is really no contradiction, because in the second sentence what is referred is the "object" (ie) what is sought to be achieved. The glory of the Lord may be beyond description but if the object is the attainment of the Lord it is possible because the Lord can do anything (He is infinitely powerful) including making us attain Him and He is infinitely merciful ("ananta maha vibhutaye, ananta dayaika sindhave"). The Lord himself has said in the Gita (Chapter IX): "Fix your mind on me, be devoted to Me, worship me and make obeisance to Me; thus linking yourself with me and entirely depending on me, you shall come to me..." Again in Chapter X it is said ".....In order to shower My grace on them, I, dwelling in their heart, dispel the darkness born of ignorance, by the shining light of wisdom.....On those ever united through meditation with Me and worshipping Me with love, I confer that Yoga of wisdom, through which they come to Me..."

In this connection, one may peruse sloka 19 of Mukunda Mala which also speaks about the immeasurable transcendence of the Lord. Says Kulasekhara Alwar "Once the Lord has been seen, this planet becomes a speck of dust, all the waters of the ocean become just a faint sigh, all space but a minute hole, gods like Brahma and Rudra insignificant manifestations and the deni-

zens of the heavens become like small insects. Indeed, the magnificence of the Lord transcends all limitations...."

In this sloka, Alavandar uses the words "Namo namo" in every line. This is to emphasise the depth of devotion he has for the Lord.

न धर्मनिष्ठोऽस्मि न चात्मवेदी
 न भक्तिमान् त्वच्चरणारविन्दे ।
 अकिञ्चनोऽनन्यगतिः शरण्य
 त्वत्पादमूलं शरणं प्रपद्ये ॥ २३ ॥

*Na dharmanishthosmi na chaatma vedi
 na bhaktimaan tvachcharanaaravinde
 akinchano ananyagatih saranya!
 Tvatpaadamulam saranam prapadye.*

O Lord, You who are worthy of being sought as a refuge; I am not one who is established in Dharma. I have no knowledge of the Self. I do not have fervent devotion to your lotus feet. I am without any support. I am resorting to You, as You are the protector (of all persons).

In this sloka, Alavandar proclaims the superiority of doing "saranagati" to the feet of the Lord. To attain the Lord, four methods have been indicated by the learned – the Karma marga, the Jnana marga, the Bhakti marga and Prapatti. This sloka says that since the poet has no capability (as is the case with most of us) to follow the Karma or Jnana or the Bhakti marga, the grace of the Lord is to be solicited through "prapatti". Alavandar says that he does not know about Dharma and hence he is not capable of following the Karma marga. Since, he does not have the capability of constantly worshipping the Lord, he is not able to follow the Bhakti marga. Alavandar concludes that since he knows nothing else, and since the feet of the Lord is the refuge of all the seekers, he is resorting to Him, as the sole support.

Though it is very clear to most people, it may be worthwhile to mention, in passing, as to what is the difference between Bhakti

and Prapatti. Bhakti is the practice of the love of God, taking the help of various aids, on the assumption that such aids will help in the attainment of the Lord, which is the end. In the case of "prapatti", both the means and the end are the same, namely the Lord. In the Sri Vaishnava tradition they are illustrated by the Markata - Kisoranyaya and Marjara Kisoranyaya. Markata kisor is the young of a monkey. It clings fast to the mother monkey and is taken from place to place. Marjara Kisoranyaya is the small kitten of a cat. It does not cling to the mother cat. It mews in a helpless manner and knows none else (ananya) than the mother cat. The mother cat it is that catches the small ones in her mouth and transfers them to places of safety. Prapatti refers to this type of surrender, a surrender in utter helplessness, wherein the Lord is sought both as the means and as the end.

There is an interpretation which holds that the Bhagavad Gita itself says at one place that one should practice "prapatti". In chapter 18 verse 66, the Lord says, "Completely relinquishing all Dharmas, seek Me alone for refuge. I will release you from all sins. Grieve not." "Relinquishing all Dharmas" has been interpreted by some to mean the relinquishment of the agency in the practice of Karma, Jnana and Bhakti margas. It must be remembered that for the sastraic persons, the Bhakti marga has to include the performance of some expiatory rites. It may not be possible for some to perform those rites. It is for such people, the Lord has prescribed the "prapatti" method, is the interpretation given by some to this verse in the "Gita".

Before leaving this verse of Yamuna, we may refer also to verse 22 of Kulasekhara Alvar's Mukunda Mala. Says Kulasekhara "O, mortals, please listen to me. I concisely declare unto you, what is supremely good. You are immersed in samsara, rife with severe afflictions and dangerous situations, like successive waves. Keeping aside varied and different kinds of knowledge, start repeating continuously in your mind "Om Namo Narayana". Thereafter, prostrate to the Lord with love".

It may be added that this sloka of Yamuna is recited, as a matter of convention, by the Sri Vaishnavaites, when they go to a temple for the worship of the Lord.

न निन्दितं कर्म तदस्ति लोके
 सहस्रशो यत्र मया व्यधायि ।
 सोऽहं विपाकावसरे मुकुन्द
 क्रन्दामि सम्प्रत्यगतिस्तवाग्रे ॥ २३ ॥

*Na niniditam karma tad asti loke
 sahasraso yan na mayaa vyadhaayi
 so aham vipaakaavasare Mukunda!
 krandaami samprati agatih tavaagre.*

O Mukunda, all those sinful acts which have been denounced by the world have been committed by me thousands of times. When the time to suffer for those deeds has come, I cannot turn to any one and am helplessly crying before You.

In the next seven slokas, we will see a recital of the misdeeds done in this life and the appeal made thereon to the Lord, seeking succour and relief.

The poet says contritely that he has committed sinful deeds thousands of times. He adds that there is no sinful deed that he has not committed. When sins are committed, there may be some atonement to be done, to expiate the sin, in this life itself. But Alavandar says that in his case, the sins are such that even an atonement as above is not possible. The results of the sins have started fructifying ("vipaka avasare samprati"). He has no other support ("agatih"). He is standing before the Lord in sorrow ("tava agre krandani").

This concept of helplessly standing before the Lord as He is the only refuge is reflected in Mukunda Mala also. In verse 34, says Kulasekhara Alavar, "O Supreme Lord, Bhagavan, You are the most compassionate. So, please show me Your favour and bestow mercy upon this helpless soul. You alone can lift me from the ocean of samsara into which I am sinking. O Lord Hari, You are verily the Purushottama".

We may refer in this connection to Sloka 29 in the Daya Satakam of Vedanta Desika. While Yamuna says that he has com-

mitted sinful deeds thousands of times and that there is no sinful deed that he has not committed, Desika says "O Daya, when the foremost among sinners is present here, how are You able to survive on the limited sins of others, which will not be sufficient to fill your stomach"?

निमज्जतोऽनन्त भवार्णवान्तः

चिराय मे कूलमिवासि लब्धः ।

त्वयाऽपि लब्धं भगवन्निदानीं

अनुत्तमं पात्रमिदं दयायाः ॥ २४ ॥

*Nimajjato ananta bhavaaravaantah
chiraaya me koolam ivaasi labdhah
tvayaapi labdham bhagavannidaanin
anuttamam paatram idam dayaayaah.*

O Ananta, I am getting drowned in the great ocean of trans-migratory existence. At last, I have found the end (shores) of the ocean in You. And, You, O Lord, have found in me, a worthy recipient of Your mercy.

In this sloka, Yamuna says that both the saviour and the saved stand benefited. The one to be saved had said in the previous sloka that he is standing before the Lord, crying helplessly. He is drowning in the samsaric ocean. He sees the Lord and finds a shore in the ocean, which is limitless. The Lord finds in the drowning person, one who is fit and eligible to receive His mercy. He has found the most appropriate person to justify his appellation as the Merciful Lord.

Parts of sloka 12 and Sloka 13 of Mukunda Mala may be recalled in this connection. Says Kulasekhara Alwar in the second half of the Sloka 12 "...They struggle in the perilous water of sense indulgence. They have no raft to carry them to any shelter. Lord Vishnu is the only boat which can save them when they surrender to the Lord". And again in Sloka 13: "O mind! Do not be afraid (anxious) as to how you are to cross this ocean of material existence. Devotion to the lotus eyed Lord Krishna, will surely take you to the ocean's shore".

अभूतपूर्वमम भावि किं वा
 सर्वं सहे मे सहजं हि दुःखम् ।
 किन्तु त्वदग्रे शरणागतानां
 पराभवो नाथ न तेऽनुरूपः ॥ २५ ॥

*Abhoota poorvam mama bhaavi kim vaa
 sarvam sahe me sahajam hi duhkham
 kintu tvadagre saranaagataanaam
 paraabhavo naatha na te anuroopah.*

O Lord, I have borne the earlier miseries and I am ready to bear all the miseries that may be visited on me, in future. But it is not becoming of You that those who sought Your refuge should feel frustrated.

Alavandar says in this sloka that he is ready to suffer the miseries, but it is the reputation of the Lord that he instantaneously rushes to the rescue of those who seek His refuge which will suffer.

Alavandar says that he is accustomed to experiencing miseries, as miseries were born along with him. He is also mentally prepared to suffer miseries in the future, having lived amidst miseries. But, Alavandar bemoans that the Lord has a reputation to uphold - a reputation that He rushes to the rescue of those who have sought His protection - as evidenced by the incidents of Gajendra and Draupadi.

Alavandar submits that if the Lord does not save him, he who has sought the Lord's protection after surrendering to him, it is the reputation of the Lord that will suffer. He says that he would not suffer because being made to experience some more miseries would be a normal experience for him!

निरासकस्यापि न तावदुत्सहे
 महेश हातुं तव पादपङ्कजम् ।
 रुषा निरस्तोऽपि शिशुः स्तनन्धयः
 न जातु मातुश्चरणौ जिहासति ॥ २६ ॥

*Niraasakasyaapi na tavaadutsahe
Mahesha! haatum tava paadapankajam
rushaa nirastopi sishuh stanandhayo
na jaatu maatuh charanau jihaasati.*

Just as a sucking baby does not give up clinging to the feet of its mother, even if in anger the mother pushes it away, O Lord, I will not be wanting to give up your lotus feet, even if I am pushed away.

This sloka continues from the previous one. In sloka 25, Alavandar had said that if the Lord does not protect, it is the reputation of the Lord that would suffer. Alavandar now has a doubt. Since the Lord is secure about His reputation and since he (Alavandar) had made a confession of his sins, the Lord may refuse to accept him because of his transgressions. He may push him away. Alavandar brings in the simile of the baby clinging to the mother and says that he cannot be pushed away. Alavandar says that he would not give up clinging to the feet of the Lord, even if the Lord wishes to push him away.

तवामृतस्यन्दिनि पादपङ्कजे
निवेशितात्मा कथमन्यदिच्छति ।
स्थितेऽरविन्दे मकरन्दनिर्भरे
मधुव्रतो नेक्षुरकं हि वीक्षते ॥ २७ ॥

*Tavaamritasyandini paadapankaje
nivesitaatma katham anyadicchati?
sthite aravinde makaranda nirbhare
madhuvrato nekshurakam hi veekshate.*

My mind which is firmly set upon your nectar-yielding lotus feet, cannot desire any thing else. It is well known that when there is a honeyladen lotus flower nearby, a bee will not seek a thorny flower, which has no honey (Ikshuraka flower).

In the previous sloka, Yamuna had said that even if the Lord were to push him away, he would not give up clinging to the feet of the Lord. Yamuna now explains the reason. He says that he would

cling only to the nectar yielding Lotus-feet of the Lord and not desire anything else. He brings in the simile of a bee seeking honey. Will a bee seeking honey, give up a honey laden lotus flower, for a thorny flower?

"Amritasyandi padapankaja" means the nectar laden lotus feet. Really speaking, achieving this is not the object. Liberation or moksha is what is meant here. Liberation can be attained, only by clinging to the feet of the Lord. Hence, it is His feet which are sought as a refuge.

It is the seeking of or clinging to the feet which is important. Kulasekhara Alwar puts this across, forcefully, in Sloka 25 of Mukunda Mala. "All glories to Lord Narayana!. Without remembrance of His lotus feet, recitation of the scriptures is a cry in wilderness, regular observance of the severe vows enjoined in the Vedas is only a way to lose weight, discharge of prescribed pious duties amounts to mere pouring of oblations onto the ashes and bathing at various sites is no better than an elephant's bath."

त्वदङ्घ्रिमुद्दिश्य कदापि केनचित्

यथा तथा वाऽपि सकृत् कृतोऽञ्जलिः ।

तदैव मुष्णात्यशुभान्यशेषतः

शुभानि पुष्णाति न जातु हीयते ॥ २८ ॥

*Tvadanghrimuddisya kadaapi kenachit
yathaa tathaa vaapi sakrit kritonjalih
tadaiva mushnaaty asubhaanyaseshatah
subhaani pushnaati na jaatu heeyate.*

Whosoever, in whatever manner, and at any time folds his palms and offers obeisance to your feet, even once, it rids him of all his impurities, and contributes to his well being at all times.

In the previous sloka, we found Alavandar submitting that he would not let go of the feet of the Lord. In this sloka, Alavandar builds on this base and elaborates the theme. He explains that even if Anjali is done once, and that too in any manner it will rid a person of all impurities. It is not necessary to identify a good day,

a favourable week or a propitious star ("tithi, vara, nakshatra"). It has nothing to do with caste, an accident of birth or with riches, an accident of inheritance or earning. It is not necessary to do it for a lifetime, as one does "Sandhyavandana" or an "agnihotra" (done by a deeply religious ritualistic person). Offering the obeisance by folding one's palms is a simple but an effective expedient. It has only to be sincere and from the heart.

The word "Anjali" can be interpreted as "am" and "jalayati", meaning what makes the Lord melt like water. In this sloka, the ease with which the "anjali" can be offered is mentioned in the first two lines, while its efficacy is mentioned in the next two lines.

We may recall in this context, sloka 20 of Mukunda Mala. Says Kulasekhara Alwar, "O lotus-eyed Lord, may our lives be enriched constantly in this manner, palms of our hands reverently brought together in prayer for your Grace and protection. Our heads bowed down and our bodies thrilled by the fervour of devotion, indicated by the hair standing on end, our voice choked with feelings of deep devotion, our eyes swimming in tears of joy as a result of the delight of the nectar of meditation on your lotus feet". The Anjali tersely referred to by Yamuna is elaborated upon by Kulasekhara.

उदीर्णसंसारदवाशुशुक्षणिं

क्षणेन निर्वाप्य परां च निर्वृतिम् ।

प्रयच्छति त्वच्चरणारुणाम्बुज-

द्वयानुरागामृतसिन्धुशीकरः ॥ २९ ॥

*Udirna samsaara-davaasusukshanim
kshanena nirvaapya paraam ca nirvritim
prayacchati tvat charanaarunaambuja-
dvayaanuraagaamrita sindhuseekarah.*

Just a drop from the nectar-ocean of love to Your feet immediately extinguishes the blazing conflagration called "samsara". Thereafter, it bestows supreme bliss. "Samsara" has been referred

to as a burning conflagration or what is called "davagni" ("dava asu sukshanim"). Fire is put out by water. Hence, the love bestowed on the feet of the Lord is compared to an ocean and is referred to as "amritasindhu". As it is a nectar-ocean, an entire ocean is not required. Just a drop ("sikarah") will do. Just as quantities of water are not required to put out the fire, much time is also not required. The conflagration can be put down in an instant ("kshanena"). After the conflagration put out, there is supreme bliss.

One may, with advantage, refer to Sloka 23 of Mukunda mala. Says Kulasekhara, "The holy formula of Sri Krishna is an unparalleled mantra to cut off everything hostile to one's good. It is the sum total of the mantras consisting of the sacred Upanishadic statements. It is the mantra which rescues one from "samsara". It is the mantra that expels the accumulated darkness. It is the only mantra for the attainment of complete Lordship (freedom and mastery). It is the mantra that completely delivers those who are bitten by the snake of addiction to passions. O my tongue, always chant this mantra so that you may attain the fruition of your life."

विलासविक्रान्तपरावरालयं

नमस्यदार्तिक्षपणे कृतक्षणम् ।

धनं मदीयं तव पादपङ्कजं

कदा नु साक्षात्करवाणि चक्षुषा ॥ ३० ॥

*Vilaasa vikraanta paraavaraalayam
namasyadaartikshapane kritakshanam
dhanam madeeyam tava paadapankajam
kadaa nu saakshaatkaravaani chakshushaa.*

Your lotus feet which measured the earth and the Satyaloka and the feet which get rid of the miseries of those who worship them, which feet are my dearest treasure, when will I be able to see them with these eyes?

In the previous slokas, the easy method of attaining the Lord has been described. In the next 17 slokas, the qualities of the Lord are amply explained.

The present sloka begins by referring to the lotus feet of the Lord which measured the earth and the Satyaloka. The reference is to the episode of Mahabali, which is well known. Since Mahabali had conquered all the devas, they sought the intervention of Lord Vishnu, who assumed the form of a brahmachari Vamana, attended a sacrifice of Mahabali, asked and obtained the gift of land covered by three paces, assumed a Cosmic Form and measured the whole of Bali's kingdom in one step and with the second step covered the whole of heaven covering Maharloka, Janaloka, Tapoloka and Satyaloka (Chapter 20 of Skanda VIII of *Srimad Bhagavatam*). Alavandar refers to these lotus feet which measured the earth and Satyaloka, the feet which get rid of the miseries of those who worship the feet. The *Bhagavatam* tells us that when the Cosmic Form covered upto the Satyaloka with the second step, Brahma rushed there with the sages and the devotees "....who by the contemplation of the Lord's feet through Bhakti have attained to Satyaloka". Alavandar prays to be one of those devotees.

The feet of the Lord are a treasure. They are the feet which are washed by Ganga, which in turn washes away the sorrows of all people. Alavandar is in a hurry to seek the treasure. He says with urgency "when will I be able to see those Feet."

There is another point to be emphasised. Alavandar in his query asks, when will I be able to see them with these eyes. The comparison with the situation in the Gita is obvious. Arjuna has heard the profound words of spiritual wisdom. He has heard about the immortal glory of the Lord. Arjuna then requests the Lord: "If You think that it can be seen by me, then O Lord of Yoga, reveal to me your imperishable Form". The Lord replies "But, surely you cannot see Me with these human eyes of yours. Therefore, I vouchsafe to you the divine eye. With this, you behold My divine power of yoga" (Chapter 11 of the Gita verse 8). Alavandar prays that he wishes to see the Feet (not the Form) with 'these' eyes ("chakshusha kada sakshatkara vani").

कदा पुनः शङ्खरथाङ्गकल्पक-

ध्वजारविन्दांकुशवज्रलाञ्छनम्।

त्रिविक्रम त्वच्चरणाम्बुजद्वयं

मदीयमूर्धानमलङ्कारिष्यति ॥ ३१ ॥

*Kadaa punah sankha-rathaangakalpaka -
dhvajaaravinda ankusa vajra laanchanam
Trivikrama tvat charanaambujadvayam
madeeyamoordhaanam alankarishyati?*

O Trivikrama, when will the pair of Your lotus feet bearing the marks of conch, discus, kalpavriksha (the wish granting heavenly tree), flagstaff, lotus hook and thunderbolt adorn my head?

In the previous sloka, a reference was made to the Form of the Lord which measured earth and Satyaloka in two strides. This is continued in this sloka by invoking Trivikrama. It may be recalled that Indra had lost his kingdom and Aditi had pleaded with Lord Vishnu for the restoration of his kingdom which had been annexed by Maha Bali. Maha Vishnu agreed to be born in the womb of Aditi. When Lord Vishnu was born, "...he was of pure blue complexion, in a form characterized by lotus eyes, yellow wearing cloth and four arms holding the conch, the mace, the lotus and the discus. His hallowed lotus like face shone in the brilliance of the fish marked ear-rings he wore. The Srivatsa mark on his chest, bracelets, armlets, brilliant diadem, girdle and anklets were his other decorations...."(Srimad Bhagavatam Skanda VIII Chapter 18). Mahavishnu appeared in this Form, so that the parents (and others like Brahma) would recognize him. He then transformed himself as Vamana.

There is a slight variation between the description in the Bhagavatam and in the above sloka. While in the Bhagavatam the Form is described, with the Lord carrying the conch, the mace and the discus in his arms, Yamuna poeticaly says that the pair of his feet were bearing the marks of the conch, the discus, the kalpavriksha, the flagstaff, the lotus, the hook and the thunderbolt.

While Yamuna carries forward the theme of the Feet of Trivikrama from the previous sloka, there is a subtle change. In the previous sloka, he had prayed as to when he would be able to see the Feet. In this sloka, he has gone a step(!) further - he wishes to know when he would be able to keep it on his head. Because of this, devout Vaishnavas recite this sloka when the "satari" is kept on their head, after worship is offered in a temple.

विराजमानोज्ज्वलपीतवाससं

स्मितातसीसूनसमामलच्छविम्।

निमग्ननाभिं तनुमध्यमुन्नतं

विशालवक्षः स्थलशोभिलक्षणम् ॥ ३२ ॥

Virajamaanojjvala peetavaasasam

smitaataasee soona samaamalacchavim

nimagna naabhim tanumadhyamunnatam

visaala vakshasthala shobhi lakshanam.

(One) who is beautifully attired in shining yellow clothes, whose splendour is equal to that of a blooming black flower, who is endowed with a slender waist and a depressed navel, the shining Srivatsa mark on his chest (when will I be able to serve you).

From now on, for the next 14 slokas, the Lord is extolled and hymned. In these slokas, the word "bhavantam" has to be read into each sloka and the prayer which appears in sloka 45 has to be presumed to appear in each of these slokas.

In this sloka the splendour of the yellow raiment on the dazzling blue body, the navel (which is the origin of Brahma and thence of the universe), the waist which includes the belly into which the entire universe is resumed at the time of the great deluge (compare the description of the Markandeya episode in the Srimad Bhagavatam and the vision of the cosmic Form granted to Arjuna), the broad chest which is the residence of Lakshmi (when she emerged from the ocean, at the time of the churning by the devas and the asuras) and also the adorning place of the Srivatsa mark are described.

In the first line in this verse, the word used is "virajamarnojjwala". Both the words "virajamana" and "ujjwala" are used because of the yellow raiment is itself a shining piece and in conjunction with the dazzling blue form of the Lord, it makes for a lustrous splendour.

The entire object is to offer worship to the Lord, to serve the Lord. That is why, a reference is made to the lustre of the Lord. The splendour of the Lord is compared to a blossoming flower - not just any flower, not even the tender or bloomed lotus but to a blooming flower (which the Alvars used to refer to in Tamil as "poovaipoo", when they sing about the Lord as "poovaipoo vanna").

चकासतं ज्याकिणकर्कशैः शुभैः

चतुर्भिराजानुविलम्बिभिर्भुजैः

प्रियावतंसोत्पलकर्णभूषण-

श्लथालकाबन्धविमर्दशंसिभिः ॥ ३३ ॥

*Chakaasatam jyaakina karkasaih shubhaih
chaturbhiraajaanu vilambibhir bhujaiah
priyaavatamsotpala karnabhooshana-
slathaalakaabandha vimarda samsibhih.*

You (who) shine with the four auspicious arms which reach upto the knees, which bear the rough scars of the bowstrings, which speak of the contact with Sri and have sweet-smelling fragrance and which are holy (when will I be able to serve You).

In the previous sloka the Lord had been described as one wearing a yellow raiment and His lustre had been described as also His broad chest, which was adorned by the Srivatsa mark. In this sloka, the reference is to his arms. The Lord is depicted as tall and handsome - ajanubaahu. His arms are adorning His sides and extend upto the knee joint. Hanuman crosses the ocean, proceeds to the Asoka vana, remains concealed in a tree, gently recites the story of Rama and introduces himself to Sita. Sita wants to be sure that he is an envoy of Lord Ramachandra and not a rakshasa

who has assumed the shape of a monkey. Sita asks Hanuman to describe the Lord. Hanuman says that He is four cubits tall and His arms extend upto the knees. Says Hanuman "....Sri Rama has eyes resembling a lotus petal. His countenance resembles the full moon. O, daughter of Janaka, he is richly endowed with charm from his birth. He vies with the sun in effulgence and with the earth in forbearance...." It is this long limbed Lord that Alavandar is describing in this sloka. Being long limbed is a sign of Lordship.

The arms bear the signs of friction with the bowstring. Yamuna does not draw a distinction between the Para roopa and avatara roopa. That is why while describing the Lord in the Para roopa, he refers to the marks made by the bowstring in the avatara roopa as Lord Ramachandra or Lord Krishna. Desika says much the same thing in a verse in "Sri Bhagavaddhyana Sopanam" The Lord (Ranganatha) reclines on the serpent. His four hands are handsome and generous, marked by the scars left by bracelets and bowstring are like huge bolts for the mansion of Lakshmi (His own chest)...." One may refer also to sloka 29 in 'Sri Devanayaka Panchasat'.

The goddess resides on the chest (please see above). Hence when She is resting on the arms of the Lord, her ear ornaments and ornaments worn on the head come into contact with the arms of the Lord and leave a mark. It is to this Alavandar makes a reference.

The goddess has bedecked her head with flowers. Hence, when she is resting on the arms of the Lord, the flowers leave their fragrance on the arms of the Lord. Sri Yamuna refers to this - "priya avatamsa utpala karnabhushana suladha alakabandha vimarda samsibih".

उदग्रपीनांसविलम्बिकुण्डला-

लकावलीबन्धुरकम्बुकन्धरम् ।

मुखश्रिया न्यकृतपूर्णनिर्मला-

मृतांशुबिम्बाम्बुरुहोज्ज्वलश्रियम् ॥ ३४ ॥

*Udagra pinaamsa vilambi kundala -
alakaavali bandhra kambu kandharam,
mukhashriyaahnyakkrita poorna nirmala -
amritaamsu bimbaamburuhojjvala - sriyam.*

Whose conch-like neck is adorned by the lustre of the earrings which are extending upto the large and broad shoulders, whose sheen of face surpasses the lustre of the full moon as also the glow of red lotus, in full bloom (when will I serve You and be blessed?)

Alavandar is now describing the shoulders, the curls of hair and the worshipful face. It is regarded as a royal sign to have three lines on the neck. The conch is believed to have three lines. Hence, the comparison of the neck to the conch is descriptive of royal excellence. Hence, Alavandar refers to the neck as conch-like ("kambu"). In the previous sloka, we had referred to Hanuman's description of Lord Ramachandra in reply to a query of Sita. In the same description, Hanuman refers to the Lord having three lines on his neck (and his belly). Desika in Sloka 28 of 'Sri Devanayaka Panchasat' says "...O Lord of the divine, my mind blooming beautifully entwines your conchlike neck like the Vanamala garland, which is darkened by Your lustre and which clearly bears the charming impressions of Sri's bangles."

The shoulders of the Lord are, as is to be expected, broad and large. The Lord is wearing ear rings. These extend upto the shoulder and have a great shine, a great lustre.

Alavandar describes the sheen of the face as surpassing the lustre of the full bloom ("amritamsu bimba" and "amburuha"). Alavandar compares the face of the Lord to both the moon which is spotless ("nirmala") and to the blooming lotus because they both have an appeal of their own. The moon conveys a sense of serenity, peace and hence of subdued joy while the lotus conveys a sense of tenderness and charm. Desika also has a like statement, while referring to the curls and the face, "...O Lord of the celestials! This night in the Form of Your curly forelocks, through association with your moonlike face, with its beautiful nectar like pleasant

smile becomes fit for our contemplation to remove the fever of transmigratory existence..." (Sloka 17 of 'Sri Devanayaka Panchasat').

प्रबुद्धमुग्धाम्बुजचारुलोचनं
सविभ्रमभ्रूलतमुज्ज्वलाधरम् ।
शुचिस्मितं कोमलगण्डमुन्नसं
ललाटपर्यन्तविलम्बितालकम् ॥ ३५ ॥

*Prabhuddha mugdhaambuja chaarulochanam
Savibhrama bhrulata mujjvalaadharam
Suchismitam komalagandam unnasam
Lalaata paryanta vilambitaalakam.*

Who has eyes which are beautiful like a lotus, who has graceful creeperlike brows, shining lips which have a half-smile, soft cheeks, prominent nose, curls hanging upto the forehead (when will I serve You and be blessed?)

In the previous sloka, the prayer was addressed to the Lord, describing the whole of the face. In this sloka, the reference is to parts of the face - the eyes, the eyebrows, the cheeks, the lips and the nose. The eyes are compared to a fully bloomed lotus ("prabhuddha mugdha ambuja"). The eye brows are graceful as creepers ("savibhrama - bhrulata"). The lips of the Lord are shining and He has a half-smile. In addition, the smile is pure ("suchi smitam"). But then, which part of the Lord is not pure? What is sought to be highlighted here is that the smile has no duplicity (unlike the smile of a king, who always practises duplicity). Or, the word "suchi" meaning "white", we can take it as referring to the whiteness of the smile, by way of poetic convention.

In the previous sloka, the curls were described as extending upto the big and broad shoulders. In this sloka, we are told that the curls are hanging down the forehead. ("lalata paryanta vilambitalakam"). The description in this sloka is of the frontal view.

स्फुरत्किरीटाङ्गदहारकण्ठिका-

मणीन्द्रकाञ्चीगुणनूपुरादिभिः ।

रथाङ्गशङ्खासिगदाधनुर्वरैः

लसत्तुलस्या वनमालयोज्ज्वलम् ॥ ३६ ॥

*Sphurat-kirteetaangadahaara kanthikaa
maneendra kaancheeguna noopuraadibhih
rathaanga sankhaasi gadaa dhanurvaraih
lasattulasyaa vanamaalayojjvalam.*

(You) who are wearing a shining diadem, bracelets, a garland of pearls, a necklace, the kaustubha gem, the girdle and anklets, who has the five weapons, the conch, the discus, the sword, the club and the bow, who is wearing a garland of basil leaves (when will I be able to serve you and be blessed?).

In this sloka, the description is of the garlands, jewels adorning the Lord and the weapons of the Lord. The jewels are all shining ("sphurat"). What are they? Alavandar begins with the glorious crown ("kireeta") and then refers to "angada". This is what is popularly known as the "Keyuoram". He then refers to the "haara", "kanthika" (the neck adornment or the necklace), the kaustubha and the girdle ("kanchiguna"). The effulgent Lord can only be dazzling with all these adornments.

The sloka then goes on to describe the weapons of the Lord. They are the discus (poetically described as "Rathanga"), the conch ("sankha"), the sword ("asi"), the club ("gada"), and the bow ("dhanus").

The Lord is not just having the items of jewellery and holding the weapons. He is wearing a garland of basil leaves ("thulasya vanamalaya). Alavandar calls it the shining ("lasat") garland. It is to highlight the fact that when the Lord wears a garland, even the garland shines, as it does not ever fade.

चकर्थ यस्या भवनं भुजान्तरं

तव प्रियं धाम यदीयजन्मभूः।

जगत् समस्त यदपाङ्गसञ्चय

यदर्थमम्भोधिरमन्यबन्धि च ॥ ३७ ॥

*Chakarthā yasyā bhavanam bhujaantaram
tavapriyam dhaama yadeeya janmabhooḥ
jagat samastam yadapaanga samsrayam
yadarthamambodhiramanthi abandhi cha.*

Who has made His chest the abode of Sri, whose (Sri's) birthplace is your beloved abode, in whose side-glances the entire universe takes refuge and for whose sake the ocean was churned and bunded (when will I be blessed to serve You?).

From sloka 32 to sloka 36 the Lord has been described. These slokas have to be read along with Sloka 46 (as already mentioned) wherein the anxious query is raised as to when the Lord may be served and the poet is to be blessed.

Slokas 37, 38 and 39 describe Sri. The episode relating to the advent of Sri is well known. Indra and the devas had been defeated by the asuras. The devas approach Brahma, who submits their representation to Lord Narayana. The Lord replies that the time is not propitious to the devas, advises them to cooperate with the asuras, and invites them to together churn the ocean, so that nectar may be obtained. Though this was mentioned, the real purpose of the Lord was to obtain Sri. Our acharyas have given the interpretation that the real purport was to enable Sri to be born. When Sri emerged, there were many among the gods who desired that she may choose them. Sri looked only at Lord Narayana and chose the broad chest of the Lord as her permanent residence. That is why the Goddess is described as "Hari Vaksha Sthalalaya" and "Vishnu Vaksha Sthalalaya" and "Vishnu Vaksha Sthala Sthitha". As the Goddess emerged from the ocean, she is referred to as "Sindhukanya". In this sloka, while addressing the Lord, Alavandar exclaims "bhujantaram bhavanam" meaning the chest being the residence. Since the goddess emerged from the ocean, which milky ocean is the ocean on which the Lord rests, Alavandar says that her birthplace is his fond living place ("janmabhuh tava priyam dhaama").

The entire universe is under her benign glance. That is why in the Lakshmi Ashottaram, there is a description of the goddess as "Srimanmanda Kataakshalabdha Vibhava brahmendra gangaadharam" meaning that it is only due to the grace of the Goddess Lakshmi that Brahma, Siva and Indra regained their powers. This has been put in a slightly different manner in this sloka. Alavandar says that the entire universe is under the sovereignty of Her benign glance ("samastam jagat yad apanga samsrayam").

A similar sloka appears in the "Sristuti" of Vedanta Desika. Says Desika in Sloka 2, "How can people of trivial intellect praise you of innumerable virtues, who appeared from the milky ocean and from the sacrificial ground; whose abode is a forest of lotuses and the chest of Vishnu and whose wealth is the entire universe and the highest abode (Vaikuntha)?"

स्ववैश्वरूप्येण सदानुभूतयाऽपि

अपूर्ववद्विस्मयमादधानया ।

गुणेन रूपेण विलासचेष्टितैः

सदा तवैवोचितया तव श्रिया ॥ ३८ ॥

*Svavaishvaroopyena sadaanubhootayaa
apyapoovavadvismayam aadadhaanayaa
gunena roopena vilaasa cheshtitaih
sadaa tavaivochitayaa tava shriyaa.*

Although You enjoy the bliss of perpetual communion with Sri Mahalakshmi through your cosmic form, yet Sri surprises you with her ever fresh attributes, personal charms and sportive enterprises. She is your inestimable fortune, she never leaves you and provides fitting complementarity in your forms like Para, Vyuha, Vibhava and Archa (When will I be able to serve you and be blessed?).

This sloka continues from the previous sloka and describes the greatness of Goddess Lakshmi. The Lord is not ever separated from the Goddess. The Lord has the bliss of perpetual communion with the Goddess. Yet, she surprises him by the

everfreshness of her qualities - her ever-fresh attributes, personal charms and sportive enterprises. One should turn to line (3) in the sloka "gunena, rupena, vilasa chestitaih". The word "gunena" refers to attributes like compassion. The principle of intercession is central to Vaishnavite philosophy. The Lord is like the father. When a transgressor appears before Him, He is inclined to inflict a punishment. The Goddess is like the mother. She shows extreme compassion. She intercedes with the Lord and the ever merciful Lord extends protection. It must be remembered that the innate nature of the Lord is mercy and compassion. Vedanta Desika has written 108 slokas on the compassion of the Lord, titled *Daya Satakam*. Says Desika (as stated in this line of Alavandar) in slokas (23) and (24):

"O Daya, just like coolness which is intrinsic to the ocean, you are the innate nature of the Lord of Vrishasaila. You control the devastating dance of destruction of His angry glances and convert it into a gentle dance of grace.

O Daya, the anger of the Lord of Vrishachala becomes your servant by uprooting the enemies of those who bow down, just like removing weeds in a field".

There is a subtle difference. In the *Daya Satakam*, the quality of compassion is personified as a goddess and the eulogy is authored while Alavandar refers to the quality of compassion which is inherent and ever dominant in the Goddess.

What else surprises the Lord? Alavandar uses the word "Rupena" (ie) the divya mangala form of the Goddess or the eternally holy and divine Form. The word "chestita" refers to the quality of extending protection to those who sought it. We may once again quote Sri Vedanta Desika. Says Desika in slokas 27 and 48:

"O Daya, the Lord of Vrishna mountain often gets infuriated with those who transgress His commands. But then, by certain acts (like atonement) borne out by forgiveness which are subservient to you, He forgives them."

"O Daya, due to your grace a person may come to the Vrishagiri and casually utter the words "Lord! Protect" and then

lapse into sleep. Before such a person, the Lord, desiring to obtain your (appealing) side-glances manifests Himself in the company of Sri, with the reply "Om" which is the opening word of all the Vedas (OM also means Yes)".

Why does Yamuna use the word "Vismaya" (ie) "surprises You"? Does the Lord not expect these qualities in Sri? The parents know that they have a gifted child. Yet, every time the child does well, it amazes the parents. The Lord is aware that Sri has all these and more qualities. But, just as a diamond sparkles, the more one sees the different facets, the Lord is surprised by these qualities.

The words used in the last line are "tavaiva uchitaya" meaning, fitting you alone in every respect. The Goddess has all the qualities that the Lord possesses. There is a sloka in the *Sri Stuti* (Sloka 9) of Desika which says all follows:

"Some say You are the supreme, some say that Your beloved is the supreme. What is the use of these arguments which are vitiated by mutual contradictions and which come up some times and go down some other times? It is to please you that Lord Hari is sporting in the presence of the Vedas. For us, of course, O Goddess, You, the couple constitute the Supreme Godhood". That is why Alavandar says that the Goddess is fitting in every respect.

The Goddess does not leave Him at any time ("tava shriya"). In all the Avatars of the Lord, the Goddess is always present. In the Rama Avatara, she is born as Vaidehi. In the Krishna Avatara, she is born as Rukmini. Even in the Vamana Avatara, it is believed that though Vamana is a brahmachari, the Goddess is inseparably associated with him, covered as she was by the deer skin on his chest.

तथा सहासीनमनन्तभोगिनि

प्रकृष्टविज्ञानबलैकधामनि ।

फणामणित्रातमयूखमण्डल-

प्रकाशमानोदरदिव्यधामनि ॥ ३९ ॥

*Tayaa sahaasinam anantabhogini
Prakrishta vijnaana balaika dhaamani
Phanaa manivraata mayookha mandala -
Prakaasamaanodara divyadhaamani.*

(You who are) seated along with Sri, on the great serpent Ananta, who is the sole seat of excellent knowledge and great strength, in the divine abode in Vaikuntha, the inside of which is illumined by the rays emanating from the cluster of gems in the hoods (when will I be able to serve and be blessed?).

In this sloka and the next one, Ananta on whom the Lord is resting along with the Goddess is described. Adisesha is called in this sloka as "Anantabhogini". Even if the gandharvas, the apsaras and the siddhas become one, they cannot estimate the limit of His qualities. Hence, He is called "Ananta". "Bhoga" refers to the hoods (the thousand headed Ananta). One who has these is the Bhogi and hence the description as "Anantabhogi".

He has been described as "prakrishta vijnaana balaika dhaaman". He has great knowledge of the six sastras and is "the abode" of knowledge (vijnaana dhama). He is able to bear the Lord who is resting on him. He has to have great strength. Hence he is "balaika dhaama".

Adisesha is reputed to have sparkling gems in his hoods. These gems are shiny and have such lustre that they are lighting up the whole of Vaikuntham. That is why the description has been given as "prakasamaana phanaamanivraata". On such an Adisesha, the Lord and Sri are resting on the middle portion.

निवासशय्यासनपादुकांशुको -

पथानवर्षातपवारणादिभिः ।

शरीरभेदैस्तव शेषतां गतैः

यथोचितं शेष इतीरिते जनैः ॥ ४० ॥

*Nivaasa sayyaasanapaadukaamsuko-
padhaana varshaatapa vaaranaadibhih
sareerabhedhais tava seshataam gataih
yathochitam sesha itiri (rya) te janaih.*

(You who are resting on Sesha) who has been aptly called by the devotees as Sesha, on account of the different forms he assumes for serving you as a residence, as a couch, as a throne, as sandals, as a pillow and as a shelter from the sun and rain (when will I be able to serve you and be blessed?).

"Seshatva" means not caring for oneself and doing good for others, always. Since he is serving the Lord at all times as a couch, as a seat, as a throne, as a pillow, as an umbrella etc., he is called Sesha. Since he is first among those who render service, he is called Adisesha. One may not entertain any doubt as to how Adisesha functions as a divine abode ("nivasa"), as a couch ('sayya), throne ("asana") but one may wonder how he is useful as the foot rest or as the umbrella. When the Lord gets off Adisesha, He steps on the coils of Adisesha and then only gets off. When, the Lord is resting, Adisesha spreads out the hood and protects Him. There is a description in the Srimad Bhagavatam. When the Lord is born to Devaki in the middle of the night and Vasudeva is directed to carry the newborn babe across the river, Adisesha walks behind Vasudeva, with the hoods spread out to protect Krishna from the pouring rain. Adisesha is therefore, both the couch and the canopy of the Lord.

Just as Yamuna has described the Lord as resting on Adisesha (who doubles up as manifold other items), Kulasekhara has a picturesque description of the Lord. Says he in, Sloka 39:

"Obeisance to Lord Madhava,
 enemy of the asura Madhu
 His beautiful form lying on the couch of the serpent Ananta,
 Is sparkled by the shower of spray from the waves of the
 milk ocean,
 Making him bedecked by a cluster of stars".

दासः सखा वाहनमासनं ध्वजः

यस्ते वितानं व्यजनं त्रयीमयः ।

उपस्थितं तेन पुरो गरुत्मता

त्वदङ्घ्रिसंमर्दकिणाङ्कशोभिना ॥ ४१ ॥

*Daasah sakhaa vaahanam aasanam dhvajo
yas te vitaanam vyajanam trayeemayah
upastitham tena puro garutmataa
tvad anghri-sammarda-kinaanka sohibina.*

You having Garuda as Your servant, Your friend, Your vehicle, Your seat, Your banner, Your canopy to protect You from the rain and the sun, who is shining as a result of the scars received from the contact with Your feet, whose form is made up of the Vedas (when will I be able to serve You and be blessed?).

Just as in the previous sloka, Adishesha was described, Garuda Alwar is described in this sloka. The sloka begins with the words "daasah" and "sakhaa". They refer to a dependent person and to a friend. Garuda is both a dependent person and a friend. He is a dependent person because it is the Lord who saved him and subsequently accepted him as a mount. He is also a friend. In the Rama avatara, Ramachandra is felled by the Nagastra. It is Garuda who comes there and frees Ramachandra from the nooselike bonds of the serpents. Ramachandra required to be freed, because he had adopted a human form in this avatara.

Adishesha renders service to the Lord, when the Lord is in Vaikuntham. As stated in the previous sloka, he is the seat, the throne and the canopy. In the same manner, Garuda is the seat, the vehicle and the banner when the Lord is on the move. The Lord has to move here and there in response to the appeals of the devotees. He has to rush to their rescue. Since both render service and provide a seat, the words "daasa" and "asana" have been used in respect of both Adishesha and Garuda.

When the Lord is coursing through the skies, He should not be exposed to the sun and rain and He should also feel comfortable. That is why Garuda provides a canopy ("vitanam") and also provides a fan ("vyajanam") in the form of the flapping wings. Garuda is addressed as "trayimayah". He symbolizes the Vedas. The Yajurveda has a sloka to this effect.

Garuda has some shining scars. This is because, the Lord rushes to the rescue of those who beseech Him, as in the case of

Gajendra. Though Garuda is taking the Lord with great speed (to which we will make a reference a little later), the Lord, out of compassion for the supplicants who are beseeching him, wants Garuda to fly faster still and nudges him with his feet. These leave some scars ("tvadt anghri sammarda"). These scars are themselves shining.

What Yamuna has succinctly put in one sloka has been elaborated by Desika into several slokas in his two stotras "Sri Garuda Dandaka" and "Sri Garuda Panchasat". In sloka 1 of *Sri Garuda Dandaka*, Desika eulogizes Garuda as "I praise Garuda who is seated in the nest of the Vedas, whose shoulders have become the seat for the powerful Lord Vishnu...." While in sloka (2) he refers to Garuda (among other things) by saying "your greatness is established by ascending the victorious banner of the enemy of the demons (that is the banner of Lord Vishnu)..."

Yamuna had said that Garuda symbolizes the Vedas. Says Desika in Sloka (2) of *Sri Garuda Panchasat*: "May that Mantra of Garuda in which Garuda (embodying the Veda) manifests himself within and without along with his import (ie., Lord Vishnu) protect us..." In sloka (3) he says that the Vedas proclaim that the eye of Garuda is the Gayatri-sama, his name the Yajurmantras, his limbs are the metres etc. Yamuna had said that Garuda fans the Lord. Says Desika in Sloka 14 (ibid) that the wind produced by the flapping of the wings was capable of throwing the stars around like cubes of ice and divide the ocean into two halves (Sloka 33) so as to enable Garuda to dive into the nether world. Yamuna has described Garuda as the friend and banner. Says Desika (Ibid, Sloka 46) that Garuda is Lord Vishnu's speedy canopy, the befitting fan, the victorious flag, the friend who decimates enemies and an indispensable servant. While Yamuna says that while Garuda was moving fast, the Lord nudges him with the feet to make him move faster still, Desika puts it differently. Says Desika (Sloka 47, Ibid) "May the magnanimous Lord of Birds, who went ahead of the mind of Lord Vishnu, who was worried at the thought of the elephant in the grip of the crocodile, destroy our predicament of falling into hell...."

त्वदीयभुक्तोज्झितशेषभोजिना

त्वया निसृष्टात्मभरेण यद्यथा ।

प्रियेण सेनापतिना न्यवेदि तत्

तथानुजानन्तमुदारवीक्षणैः ॥ ४२ ॥

*Tvadeeya bhuktojjhita seshabhojinā
tvayā nīsrīṣṭātmabharena yad yathā
priyena senāpatinā nyavedī tat
tathāanujaanantam udaara veeksanaiḥ.*

(O Lord) Your Commander-in-chief, Vishvaksena, who eats the left overs, after You have taken your food, he who is beloved of You, who enjoys his power only because of You, who secures Your assent through Your lofty glances and significant looks, for the submissions made by him (when will I be able to serve and be blessed?).

In the previous two slokas, Adishesha and Garuda had been eulogized. In this sloka, the reference is to Vishvaksena. Though all the Nityasuris are equal, it is only in this sloka, the word "priyena" (the one who is beloved of you) is used. Maybe for this reason, it is said that Parasara Bhattar often used to give discourses on this sloka alone.

Vishvaksena is the commander-in-chief of the army. He is delegated with authority by the Lord. He accordingly exercises his powers. On occasions, he may have to seek the approval of the Lord, either for what he has done or for what is proposed to be done. On such occasions, the Lord would accord his approval by a mere glance ("udaara veeksanaiḥ") when the proposal was submitted to him ("nyavedi").

Vishvaksena is referred to as one who eats what is left by the Lord. What is the significance? Any devotee more so a Nityasuri will only eat whatever is the residue, after the food (naivedya) is offered to the Lord. Since among the Nityasuris, he enjoys a special position with the Lord, being "priyena", this point of "seshabhojana" is emphasised. Vishvaksena eats what is left by

the Lord and exercises the power given by the Lord (tvaya nisrishta atmabharena).

हताखिलक्लेशमलैः स्वभावतः

त्वदानुकूल्यैकरसैस्तवोचितैः ।

गृहीततत्तत्परिचारसाधनैः

निषेव्यमाणं सचिवैर्यथोचितम् ॥ ४३ ॥

*Hataakhila klesa malaih svabhaavatah
tvad aanukoolyaikarasaih tavochitaih
grheeta tat-tat-parichaara saadhanaih
nishevyamaanam sachivaih yathochitam.*

You are attended on by a host of Nityasuris, who by their nature are untainted by afflictions and blemishes, and who by their singular devotion are fully equipped to serve you in the most appropriate manner and are best suited to attend on you (when will I be able to serve you and be blessed?).

In the previous slokas Ananta, Garuda and Vishvaksena had been hymned. Alavandar now eulogizes the Nityasuris - those who are always attending on the Lord at Vaikuntham. These people are not contaminated by afflictions - attractions and repulsive things, caused by and through worldly contacts. They seek pleasure only by and in serving the Lord. Yamuna seeks the Lord, who is attended on by this retinue.

The Nityasuris do not have (have lost) "klesha" and "malaih", that is sorrows and sins. They are free from afflictions like Avidya (ignorance), Ahankara (ego), Raga, Dvesha (likes and hatred). The sloka has the word "svabhavatah" as a word preceding the above, meaning that the Nityasuris are naturally free from the afflictions, as the Nityasuris have never been contaminated with the sins of "samsara", while on the other hand, the "muktas" or the liberated souls have only through an effort succeeded in liberating themselves from the samsaric bonds. Hence, the use of the word "svabhavatah".

These nityasuris are singularly (ekarasaih) devoted to serving the Lord (tvat anukulya). They are fully equipped for serving

the Lord (tattat parichara sadhanah). "Equipped" here should be interpreted to mean that they have the fan, the whisk etc., for offering service to the Lord.

अपूर्वनानारसभावनिर्भर-

प्रबुद्धया मुग्धविदग्धलीलया ।

क्षणाणुवत् क्षिप्तपरादिकालया

प्रहर्षयन्तं महिषीं महाभुजम् ॥ ४४ ॥

*Apoorva naanaarasa bhaava nirbhara
prabuddhayaa mugdha vidagdha leelayaa,
kshanaanuvat kshiptaparaadi kaalayaa
praharshayantam mahimsheem mahaabhujam.*

You, who are of long arms, exhilarate Sri with lovely and skilful sport, which consists of diverse and new sentiments and emotions as to make aeons of time pass quickly, like brief moments.

In slokas 37, 38 and part of 39, the reference was to Sri alone. In this sloka, Alavandar is hymning the Lord sporting with Sri. In a sense, this sloka is complementary to sloka (38). In sloka (38), it was mentioned that the Lord enjoys the bliss of perpetual communion with Sri and that Sri surprises the Lord with her ever fresh attributes. In this sloka, the reference is to the "leela" (plays) of the Lord. They are fresh and many ("apoorva" and "nana"). They are to make the Queen ("mahishim") the goddess, in this case, happy. What is the duration of these "leelas"? Two words are used "para" and "adi". The word "para" refers to the lifetime of Brahma while the word "Adi" refers to the lifetime of crores of Brahmas. Though the "leelas" may be for an eternally long time, it appears as if it was for a fraction of a second ("kshana anuvat").

अचिन्त्यदिव्याद्भुतनित्ययौवन-

स्वभावलावण्यमयामृतोदधिम् ।

श्रियः श्रियं भक्तजनैकजीवितं

समर्थमापत्सखमर्थिकल्पकम् ॥ ४५ ॥

*Achintya divyaadbhuta nitya yauvana-
svabhaava laavanya mayaamritodadhim
shriyah shriyam bhaktajanaika jeevitam
samartham aapatsakham arthikalpakam.*

(You) who are the nectar ocean of natural beauty, who have perpetual (eternal) youth, beyond all comprehension, You who are the fortune of the goddess of Fortune herself, are the sustaining force of the devotees, are the great helper in adversity and are a veritable wish-yielding tree to the supplicants (when will I be able to serve you and be blessed?).

The qualities of the Lord are enumerated - His eternal youth, sustaining force for the devotees, the one who helps at all times, and gives all that the supplicants seek. In this sloka we see a description of the divya-mangala-vigraha and the divya-atma-svaroopaa, that is a description of both the physical and psychic aspects of the Lord.

The Lord is the nectar ocean of natural beauty. What this means is that the beauty of the Lord has the appeal of nectar. There is no satiety and one feels like quaffing it, again and again. This is partly because the Lord is eternally handsome and in appearance is perpetually youthful. ("nitya yauvana"). We have used the words "partly because" in the above sentence, as it is not just the youthfulness or the handsome features which makes us to feast our eyes on him. It is an innate and inherent quality of perpetual appeal.

The Lord is beyond comprehension. He is beyond description. One may recall the Vishvaroopaa darsana, sought and had by Arjuna. Arjuna was petrified when he saw in the Lord hundreds of Brahmas and the Lord had an effulgence equal to many Suns.

The Lord is the sustaining force for the devotees ("bhaktajana ekajivitam"), the great helper in adversity ("aapat sakham") and the veritable wish/yielding tree to the supplicants ("arthi kalpakam"). It may be noticed that there is a graceful set up in the above three descriptions. He sustains the devotees at all times, whether they are prosperous or not. When adversity strikes, He helps the devo-

tee, to tide over the difficulty. The devotee or the supplicant seeks something, which the Lord grants immediately. These are so well depicted in the episodes of Prahlada and Gajendra.

The Lord is the fortune of the goddess of Fortune ("shriyah shriyam"). The goddess gives refuge to all the supplicants. The Lord gives refuge to Sri Herself. It may be recalled that in sloka 12, Yamuna had written "kah Srih sriyah - who else but you (is the source of prosperity even for Sri) the resting place for Lakshmi". It may be mentioned that in Sloka (11) of *Mukunda Mala*, Kulasekhara Alwar says ".....How can your enemies touch you, your enemies being the sins that you have accumulated, when your master is Sridhara, the husband of goddess Sri...." Parasara Bhattar has expressed identically "Shriyah Shri Rangesayah".

While describing the Lord, in line 4, the word "samartham" (capable) occurs in isolation. What is he capable of? The answer is what is the Lord not capable of? The Lord is capable of making the common devotees experience what Nitya Suris are experiencing.

भवन्तमेवानुचरन् निरन्तरं

प्रशान्तनिःशेषमनोरथान्तरः ।

कदाऽहमैकान्तिकनित्यकिङ्करः

प्रहर्षयिष्यामि सनाथजीवितः ॥ ४६ ॥

*Bhavantam evaanucharan nirantaram
prashanta-nissesha manorathaantarah
kadaaham aikaantika nitya kinkarah
praharshayisyaayami sanaathajeevitah.*

Constantly waiting on you alone, having turned away from all other desires, not having any one other than you and serving you alone, having you alone as the Lord, when will I be blessed (when will I reach you?).

What is begun in Sloka 32 is concluded in Sloka 46 with the word "bhavantam" (More on this word later in the note on this sloka). The seeker, the beseecher has been constantly or eternally

("nirantaram") waiting ("anusaran") on the Lord. He has not sought or pursued other desires ("prashaanta nissesha manorathantharah"). He has been serving only the Lord ("Aikantika nitya kinkarah"). It may be noted that both the words have been used --- waiting on the Lord and serving only the Lord. Apart from the emphasis to be conveyed, it is possible to wait on one and still manage to serve another also. Yamuna makes it clear that he has been serving only the Lord.

Yamuna uses also the word "sanathajivita". He has become an orphan, essentially due to the lack of grace of the Lord. This orphanship can be cured only by the will of the Lord to shower His Grace on the hapless devotee.

The concluding words "bhavantam praharshayishyami" needs a special comment. Translated literally this means, "when will I make you happy?" (and not when will you make me happy). Where is the question of the devotee making the Lord happy? Is it happiness for the beseecher or the One who blesses when the devotee attains the Lord? Sampradaya tells us that the reclamation of the jiva gives greater happiness to the Lord as it is a gain for the Svami. The pleasure or happiness which the Lord derives from such reclamation makes the jiva also happy, but the source of such happiness is the Lord.

धिगशुचिमविनीतं निर्दयं मामलजं

परमपुरुष योऽहं योगिवर्याग्रगण्यैः

विधिशिवसनकाद्यैर्ध्यातुमत्यन्तदूरं

तव परिजनभावं कामये कामवृत्तः ॥ ४७ ॥

*Dhig asuchim avineetam nirdayam maam alajjam
paramapurusha! yo'ham yogivaryaagranyaih
vidhi-shiva-sanakaadyaih dhyaatum atyanta dooram
tava parijanabhaavam kaamaye kaamavrittah.*

O Supreme Lord, even the foremost among the Yogis like Brahma, Siva, Sanaka and others cannot, even in their thoughts,

attain You. I who am not holy, am sinful, merciless and shameless, am seeking to be Your immediate attendant (that is seek You) deserve to be condemned.

In the previous sloka, Alavandar has said "when will I be able to make you happy", by enabling You to reclaim me. But then, serious doubts assail him. He has begun to think of his limitless ineligible qualities. Where is the Lord and where is he? Is it appropriate for him to even contemplate attaining to the Lord? To describe his ineligibility four words are used - asuchim, avinitam, nirdayam and alajjam. "Asuchim" means impure, having a nature opposed to doing service (kainkaryā) to the Lord; "avinitam" means not having good conduct or not having humility, not having humility even while having an acharya; 'nirbhayam' means not having fear (there are some who feel that the word to be used here is nirdayam and not nirbhayam. Nirdayam would mean not having mercy or pity like one who mixes poison with amrita (nectar) which is the bhoga for parama bhagavatas); 'alajjam' means not having shame.

Alavandar says that he does not have the above feelings. Why should he have them in the first instance? He should have them because the Lord cannot have any desire or wish for service from such a person like him, when the nitya suris like Adishesha, Garuda and Vishvakṣena are constantly attending on Him. Such a thought of an ineligible person wanting to serve the Lord will not cross the mind of people like Brahma, Siva, Sanaka and other sages. He says that for this reason, he needs to be condemned.

The pitiable condition of the aspirant does not admit of delay. To express his overwhelming eagerness and anxiety to attain the Lord, the hymnologist is indulging in self-deprecation. Actually, Sri Yamuna equals the Nityasuris in his eligible qualities. This line is really intended for the vast number of persons who are ineligible and are seeking to attain the Lord. This is most relevant for all of them, of largely ineligible qualities, who are seeking the Lord, of exemplary qualities.

अपराधसहस्रभाजनं

पतितं भीमभवार्णवोदरे ।

अगतिं शरणागतं हरे

कृपया केवलमात्मसात् कुरु ॥ ४८ ॥

*Aparaadha sahasra bhaajanam
patitam bheema-bhavaarnavodare,
agatim saranaagatam Hare!
kripayaa kevalam aatmasaatkuru.*

Out of Your sheer grace, please make me Your own - me who am fallen into the depths of the terrible ocean of worldly existence and who being unable to resort to any one else, have sought refuge at your feet.

In a sense, this sloka continues from sloka 23 and 24. In sloka 23, it had been said that all the sinful acts had been committed hundreds of times and when the time to suffer for these had come, he is crying helplessly before the Lord. In sloka (24), it had been said that when he was drowning in the ocean of samsara, he had found the Lord. In sloka 47, Alavandar had piteously cried that he is ineligible to receive the grace of the Lord and needs to be condemned for his various bad qualities. For this reason, is he to stand aside, so that he may be passed over? No. Instead, he appeals to Hari. Who is Hari? As the name itself symbolizes, He is One who washes off the sins of the sinner, provided he approaches the Lord and does "saranagati" so that the Lord may make him as His person.

He appeals to Hari. Please see the third line in the sloka. He confesses that he has committed hundreds of sins ("aparaadha sahasra bhajanam"). He has fallen into the middle of the fierce ocean called samsara ("bhima bhava arnava udare patitam). He does saranagati and seeks the grace of the Lord ("kevalam kripaya") to make him the Lord's man ("atmasat kuru"). It is part of Vaishnava sampradaya to recite this sloka, when one goes to a shrine to offer worship.

One may refer here to sloka (9) of *Mukunda Mala*. Says Kulasekhara. "I plunge in the sacred lake called Hari....the depth of the lake is unknown; but the very touch of its waters is most refreshing. I plunge in this lake and drink of the divine light that is its water and leave aside the long drawn weariness of my wanderings in that vast mirage of a world".

अविवेकघनान्धदिङ्मुखे

बहुधा सन्ततदुःखवर्षिणि ।

भगवन् भवदुर्दिने पथः

स्खलितं मामवलोकयाच्युत ॥ ४९ ॥

Aviveka ghanaandha-dingmuke

bahudhaa santata-duhkha-varshini

Bhagavan ! bhava-durdine pathah -

skhalitam maam avalokayaachyuta!

I who have lost my sense of direction and moved away from the path of rectitude, bewildered by the cloudy day, called samsara, enveloped in dark dense clouds of ignorance and beaten continuously by ever expanding miseries, O Achyuta, please look on me.

This sloka elaborates what was said in sloka 22. The Lord is both the 'upaya' and the 'upeya'.

The day when the shining sun is not seen is a gloomy day. "Samsara" has been compared to a gloomy day ("bhava durdine"). Ignorance is like a cloud ("aviveka ghana"). This cloud of ignorance is covering the rays of the Sun, called knowledge. The rain which is coming down due to the cloud (ignorance) is the samsaric sorrow ('santata dukha varshini'). Because of all this, he has lost the way. Alavandar is praying to the Lord to show him the way, to him who has lost his way due to "samsara" (pathah skhalitam maam avalokaya").

Alavandar is addressing the Lord - bhagavan. The Lord alone is capable of giving him liberation. He is further addressed as Achyuta - one who remains steadfast by His devotees. Alavandar

wishes to reinforce his prayer by reminding Him that He is Achyuta and therefore does not address Him by the other names. He calls Samsara as a gloomy day (bhava durdine) to emphasise that it is what is opposed to the salvation of the individual. It is this same samsara which has made him to lose his way meaning that it is what made him to stray from the path of dharma. What does he seek from the Lord? He calls on the Lord to look ('avalokaya'), meaning to have mercy on him, to shower His grace on him so that he gives up his 'aviveka'.

न मृषा परमार्थमेव मे

शृणु विज्ञापनमेकमग्रतः ।

यदि मे न दयिष्यसे ततो

दयनीयस्तव नाथ दुर्लभः ॥ ५० ॥

*Na mrishaa paramaartham eva me
srinu vijnaapanam ekam agratah,
yadi me na dayishyase tato
dayaneeyah tava naatha durlabhah.*

O Lord, listen to my prayer that is genuine, and without a trace of falsehood. If You do not take pity on me, it will be difficult to find one more worthy of compassion.

Alavandar had said in sloka 24 that the Lord had found in him a worthy recipient for his mercy. He had said in sloka 25 that it is not becoming of the Lord if those who had sought Him were to become frustrated. It is possible that the Lord may tell Alavandar that there are many others in this position, like him and that being so, how is he different and how is his seeking compassion, to be treated differently. Alavandar anticipates this question of the Lord and replies in the sloka.

Though there may be many who need to be saved by the Lord, for the person who is seeking the grace of the Lord, the Lord alone is the saviour. In this sloka, it is being said that the Lord would not find one who has more deficiencies. That being

so, if the Lord were to now ignore him, then the grace of the Lord would be wasted. Saving him is the immediate duty of the Lord, as the Lord would find it difficult to locate one on whom He can show grace, if He passes over the hymnologist.

This concept of the protectee submitting to the Lord that he is the most eligible sinner has been used by Desika in several slokas. Says Desika in *Daya Satakam*:

"O Daya, when I, the foremost among sinners, am present here, how are You able to survive on the limited sins of others, which will not be sufficient to fill Your stomach?" (Sloka 29).

"O Daya! I am the emperor among sinners and You are the empress of all virtues. O knowledgeable one, knowing this situation, You, of Your own accord, come and place me at the feet of the Lord" (Sloka 30).

Again, says Desika in *Saranagati Dipika*,

"O Master! Every moment I do things which are not to be done, as if they are to be done. I give up things which are to be actually performed by me, as if they are to be avoided. There is also a host of other violations (done by me). May Grace, the empress among your qualities, take the place of means (of saving) in my case: (Sloka 44)

"O Lord, long ago you yourself had said that compassion to those who seek refuge is the highest virtue. Because you are the One who gives refuge, you are now being reminded by me. Indeed, these undertakings of yours are meant for people like me. Is it not?" (Sloka 45).

"O Bhagavan, enough of Your going on thinking about me. I, the bold one, bear the name of a prapanna. Therefore, make me the object of Your grace, so as to avoid Your getting a bad name (Since You have already promised to protect a person who even entertains the idea of doing prapatti)". (Sloka 50)

तदहं त्वदृते न नाथवान्

मदृते त्वं दयनीयवान् न च ।

विधिनिर्मितमेतमन्वयं

भगवन् पालय मा स्म जीहपः ॥ ५१ ॥

Tadaham tvadrite na naathavaan

madrute tvam dayaneeyavaan na cha

vidhinirmitam etam anvayam

Bhagavan! Paalaya maasma jeehapah.

Lord, without You, I am lost and without me, You lose a worthy recipient for your compassion. This relationship of Your Lordship and my (state of) pitiableness, needs to be preserved. This has been ordained by fate.

This sloka takes forward the plea made in the previous sloka (sloka 50) wherein it was stated that if the Lord did not save him, He would find it difficult to find another ('tatah tava dayaniyah durlabhah'). The plea now is that there is none other than the Lord and for the Lord there is none else who better deserves compassion. He says that there is no other lord (ananthavan) for him and for the Lord there is none else ("madrute") to shower His compassion. One who deserves the compassion of the Lord is one who is struggling because he has committed sins. One who most deserves the compassion of the Lord is, by the above logic, one who is greatly suffering because he has committed limitless sins. Alavandar says in this sloka that if the Lord were to leave him, he would not find one who better deserves compassion. He says that there is always this connection for him there is none else than the Lord and for the Lord there is none else than him.

Alavandar goes on to say that this relationship of Protector - Protectee is fated ("vidhinirmitam"). This raises a question. Apart from the Lord, is there such a thing called "fate", for it to be said that this relationship is fated?. Here, the word 'vidhi' or fate is not as is commonly understood. It is not destiny. It is the Divine Grace which forges the mutual bonds between man and God.

In the previous sloka, we had quoted from Vedanta Desika to explain how he had also expatiated on the theme of the beseecher being the most sinful person. Since this sloka of Yamuna carried forward the same theme, we may once again, with advantage, quote from Desika. Says Desika in "Sri Devanayaka Panchasat": "O Vibudhanatha, having obtained me, who is an ocean of ignorance, leader of the wrong doers, breaker of commands and emperor among the destitute, why do You, the omniscient, think of any one else as the proper recipient of your compassion?" (Sloka 49).

Says Desika in *Nyasa Dasakam*:

"O Divine Lord, Remover of the distress of those who bow down! Forgive every thing – my doing forbidden things and not doing things that ought to be done". (Sloka 9).

वपुरादिषु योऽपि कोऽपि वा

गुणतोऽसानि यथा तथाविधः ।

तदयं तव पादपद्मयोः

अहमद्यैव मया समर्पितः ॥ ५२ ॥

*Vapuraadisū yo' pi ko'pi vaa
gunato asaani yathaataathaavidhah
tad ayam tava paadapadmayoh
aham adyaiva mayaa samarpitah.*

Whatever might be the nature of the body and my organs, with which I am endowed, according to the Gunas of Prakriti, I am offering them this very moment at Your lotus feet, as also what is denoted as I in me.

Alavandar had stated in the previous sloka that the Lord needs to protect the relationship between the Lord and himself. The Lord asks Alavandar that for quite some time now there has been a discussion between Alavandar and himself as to whether he belongs to himself or to the Lord and that this has not been resolved. That being the position, how can the Lord accept the proposition of Alavandar pertaining to the protector and protectee? It is this

question which Alavandar answers in this sloka. He says that there is no such discussion as to whom Alavandar belongs. He belongs to the Lord only. Hence he makes an offering of himself - of his body and organs. In this context sloka 10 may also be seen.

In the fourth line of the sloka the word "aham" is used. This is to be taken to mean "atma". The 'atma' has been said to be different things by different persons. Some say that the body is the atma; some say that the prana is the atma; some say that it is intelligence. Alavandar does not wish to enter into any such intellectual disputation. He says that in the opinion of the Lord whatever form 'atma' assumes, Alavandar is willing to submit at the lotus feet of the Lord that 'aham' ("Ayamham tava padapadmayoh adya eva maya samarpitah"). In effect, what Alavandar is saying is that what is important is servitude.

Alavandar is submitting to the Lord that he is giving up his attachment to the organs, to the body and not being able to realise the self, he is solely depending on the feet of the Lord and that the Lord should save him (as He did save Gajendra and Draupadi).

मम नाथ यदस्ति योऽस्म्यहं

सकलं तद्धि तवैव माधव ।

नियतस्वमिति प्रबुद्धधीः

अथवा किन्नु समर्पयामि ते ॥ ५३ ॥

Mama naatha! Yad asti yo asmy aham

sakalam taddhi tavaiva Maadhava!

niyatasvam iti prabuddha dhih

Athavaa kim nu samarpayaami te?

O Lord, whatever I have and whatever I am, all these are yours. What shall I then offer You? O Madhava, being awakened to the consciousness that all these are Your inalienable property, there is nothing else left for me to offer.

In the previous sloka, Alavandar had said that he is offering the body and the 'aham' at the feet of the Lord. But having realized that he is in servitude, Alavandar entertains a doubt. When

he is already in servitude, is it appropriate for him to offer the body and the organs, as if he is independent? He therefore, hurriedly, clarifies the position. He says that whatever he has and whatever he is, is already that of the Lord ("niyatasvam"). He has nothing else to offer.

In this sloka, the Lord has been addressed as "Madhava" to signify his eternal Lordship. We are all dependent on the goddess Sri and She is dependent on the Lord.

अवबोधितवानिमां यथा

मयि नित्यां भवदीयतां स्वयम् ।

कृपयैवमनन्यभोग्यतां

भगवन् भक्तिमपि प्रयच्छ मे ॥ ५४ ॥

*Avabodhitavaan imaam yathaa
mayi nityam bhavadeeyataam savayam
kripayaivam ananya bhogyataam
bhagavan! bhaktim api prayachcha me.*

Just as You have awakened in me the consciousness of being eternally Yours, O Lord, grant me, out of compassion, that devotion which consists of enjoying You alone.

Alavandar had said in sloka (52) that he is offering at the feet of the Lord his body and organs. In sloka (53), he had said that whatever "I have is yours and what then, shall I offer you?" Thus, the knowledge that he is eternally that of the Lord has been awakened. Since the knowledge has been awakened, the Lord seems to ask what he would like to have in this world. Alavandar's gratitude is encapsulated in this sloka.

He begins by stating that the Bhagavan has himself awakened in him ("avabodhitavan") the consciousness of being eternally ('nityam') His. The Lord should, in the same manner, give him the devotion to enjoy Him alone ('ananya bhogyatam').

Alavandar does not wish to have any other enjoyment and specifically so prays to the Lord. A question may be asked that a supplicant can seek liberation, but is it correct to make a specific

plea to the Lord, more so for Alavandar? It has been laid down that devotees cannot seek food, water, wealth, clothes, a house and longevity from the Lord, even in times of acute distress. But it is permitted to seek liberation or to seek devotion to the feet of the Lord.

In this connection, the episode of Kuchela may be recalled. Kuchela comes home and finds opulence every where. He prays to the Lord that though the Lord had given him, unasked, extreme wealth, he should never forget his devotion to the feet of the Lord. Seeking such devotion is in order. Kulasekhara Alwar says similarly in *Mukunda Mala* (sloka 15):

"O let me not look at those hapless creatures who do not turn their thoughts to Your feet. I will not listen to stories other than those relating to Your pastimes, which stories are worth hearing. O Lord of the universe, let me pay no attention to those who avoid thinking of You. Let me be able to serve You, birth after birth". Thus, while Kulasekhara concludes by praying that he wishes to serve the Lord, birth after birth, Yamuna concludes that he wishes to have that devotion which consists of enjoying Him alone.

तव दास्यसुखैकसङ्गिनां

भवनेष्वस्त्वपि कीटजन्म मे ।

इतरावसथेषु मास्म भूत्

अपि मे जन्म चतुर्मुखात्मना ॥ ५५ ॥

*Tava daasya sukhaika sanginaam
bhavaneshvastvapi keetajanma me
itaraavasatheshu maasma bhoot
api me janma chaturmukhaatmanaa.*

May I be born even as a worm in the houses of those who are solely devoted to the joy of serving You. But, let me not be born even as the four faced Brahma in the houses of those who are not Your devotees.

In the previous sloka, the prayer was only for the enjoyment of devotion to the feet of the Lord. Is this enough? No. That devo-

tion has to increase. For this to happen, it is necessary to be in the community of devotees and not of non-devotees.

Those who render service to the Lord are "bhagavathas". To render service to those who are rendering service to the Lord is the first step in devotion (it would also be the ultimate step, because more than service to Him, the Lord prefers service to His devotees). To render service to the devotees, one has to be in that group or be born in the houses of those who are serving the Lord. How significant or insignificant such a birth is, is immaterial. That is why Alavandar says that he would prefer to be born even as a worm, an insect ('kita janma') in the houses of those who are solely devoted ('ekasanginam') to the joy of serving the Lord ('dasyasukha'). In this connection, apart from sloka (15) of *Mukunda Mala* to which we made a reference in the previous sloka, we would make reference also to sloka (27) in *Mukunda Mala*. Says Kulasekhara,

"O slayer of Madhu and Kaitabha, O lord of the Universe, the fruition of my life and the most cherished mercy You could show me would be for You to consider me the servant of Your servant....." Kulasekhara prefers to be a servant, seven degrees removed. Yamuna prefers to be an insect in the house of the devotees.

In sloka (2) of chapter (2) of the Srimad Bhagavatam, there is an excellent summarization of one who is not devoted to the Lord. Says Sage Saunaka:

"A man has really lived, only during those moments of his life, that have been spent in the thought of the Lord. Vain are the lives of the rest, their lifespan being merely food for time to swallow through its jaws of sunrise and sunset. Do not trees live their lifespan? Do not bellows take in and set out air? Do not animals, wild and domestic, eat and mate? Alas, what is human life worth, if it fulfills only these very same functions? He who into whose ears, the Lord's name has not entered, he is a man in form, but only an animal - a dog, a pig, a camel, an ass or the like. That ear into which words dealing with the Lord's excellences have not entered is a mere cavity and nothing more...the eyes that are not

accustomed to see the images of the Lord and holy men, are as purposeless as the eyes in the centre of the feathers of a peacock....a man whose heart is unmoved, whose eyes shed not tears and hairs stand on end when the Lord's names are uttered - he verily is possessed of a heart of stone...."

That is why Yamuna says that he does not wish to be born even as the four faced Brahma in the houses of ('avasatheshu') of persons who are not the devotees.

सकृत् त्वदाकारविलोकनाशया

तृणीकृतानुत्तमभुक्तिमुक्तिभिः ।

महात्मभिर्मामवलोक्यतां नय

क्षणेऽपि ते यद्विरहोऽतिदुः सहः ॥ ५६ ॥

Sakrit tvadaakaara vilokanaasayaa

trineekritaanuttama-bhukti-muktibhih

mahaatmabhir maam avalokyataam naya

kshanepi te yadvirahotidussahah.

Make me an object worthy of the benign look of great souls, who with the object of having a single glance at You, have even given up the highest enjoyments and liberation. Separation from such great souls is unendurable to You.

In the previous sloka, the prayer was to be with the devotees and not to be with the non-devotees. The Lord may ask what he hopes to achieve? The answer is in this sloka.

The prayer is that those great people from whom separation is unendurable for the Lord, should cast a benign look on him. What have these great people done? They have rejected (the word used is "trinikrita", that is treated as a blade of grass) even the highest enjoyment ("bhukti") and liberation ("mukti") so that they may have a glance at the Lord ("akara vilokana asaya").

Why should separation from such devotees be unendurable to the Lord (yad virahah te kshanepi ati dussahah)? It is for the simple reason that the Lord resides where the bhagavathas reside. Hence, He cannot bear separation from them.

There is a difference between the previous sloka and this sloka. In the previous sloka, the prayer was that he should be born in the house of the devotees whereas in this sloka the hymnologist only seeks that such great souls should glance ('avalokyatam') at him.

न देहं न प्राणान् न च सुखमशेषाभिलषितं
 न चात्मानं नान्यत् किमपि तव शेषत्वविभवात् ।
 बहिर्भूतं नाथ क्षणमपि सहे यातु शतधा
 विनाशं तत् सत्यं मधुमथन विज्ञापनमिदम् ॥ ५७ ॥

*Na deham na praanaan na cha sukham asesaabhilashitam
 na chaa atmaanam naanyat kim api tava seshatvavibhavaat
 bahirbhootam naatha! Kshanam api sahe yaatu satadhaa.
 vinaasam, tat satyam madhumathana vijnaapanam idam.*

I shall not tolerate, even for a moment, any thing which is beyond the domain of Your service, be it this body, life or the happiness which is desired by all beings or soul or anything whatsoever. Let them all be destroyed into thousand bits. Oh, slayer of Madhu, this submission of mine is true.

In the previous sloka, the fulfillment by the Lord of Alavandar's desires, was prayed for by him (Ishta prapti). In this sloka, what is prayed for is the elimination of the undesirable things (anishta nivarana). He begins by saying that he will not tolerate even for a moment the body which separates him from the 'kainkarya' to the Lord ("seshatva vibhavaat"). Similarly he will not tolerate even for a moment ("kshanam api) the life, the happiness which is sought by everybody ('asesha abhilashitam'), the soul or any thing which does not enable him to render service to the Lord. He will break them into hundred bits ('sathadha vinaasam'). What is being conveyed here is that a 'mumukshu' should give up all those things which do not assist him in the service of the Lord.

The Lord has been described as "Madhu mathana". Just as the asura was killed, so should all the impediments in the way of rendering service to the Lord be broken into bits and annihilated.

We had earlier quoted sloka (15) of Mukunda Mala. It has relevance here also. Says Kulasekhara:

"O Madhava, I cannot look at those who do not have even for a moment devotion to your feet. I will not listen to stories other than those relating to your pastimes, which are worth listening. O Lord of the Universe, let me pay no attention to those who avoid thinking of you. Let me be able to serve you, birth after birth."

दुरन्तस्यानादेरपरिहरणीयस्य महतः

निहीनाचारोऽहं नृपशुश्रुभस्यास्पदमपि ।

दयासिन्धो बन्धो निरवधिकवात्सल्यजलधे

तव स्मारं स्मारं गुणगणमितीच्छामि गतभीः ॥ ५८ ॥

*Durantasyaanaader apariharaaneeyasya mahato
niheenaacaaro aham nripashurasubhasyaapadam api
dayaasindho!bandho! niravadhika vaatsalyajaladhe!
tava smaaram smaaram gunaganam iteechaami gatabheeh".*

I am a beast, without any standard of conduct. I have all the vices and am cruel. I am fated for an eternal and calamitous destiny. Yet, I am free from fear, as I am remembering You, again and again - You who are an ocean of mercy and parental love and innumerable virtues of a similar nature.

We may recall sloka 47. In that sloka it had been said that though he is not holy, though he is sinful, merciless and shameless, he is seeking to attain the Lord. Lest the Lord ask, as to how he, who was so ineligible was aspiring to attain him, the reply is given in this sloka. The hymn says that he is a vile beast ('nihinaachaarah nripashuh'), that he is of sinful conduct but yet he is not afraid, as he is remembering again and again ('smaram smaram') the endless ocean of auspicious traits ("niravadhika vaatsalya jaladhe").

There are two adjectives used to address the Lord - "dayasindho" and "vatsalya jaladhe". They are to specially signify that the listed demerits would be drowned in the ocean that is the Lord. Kulasekhara, in one sloka, calls the Lord as

"kripajalanidhe" (as compared to the word "dayasindho" used here).

अनिच्छन्नप्येवं यदि पुनरितीच्छन्निव रज-
 स्तमश्छन्नश्छन्नस्तुतिवचनभङ्गीमरचयम् ।
 तथापीत्थंरूपं वचनमवलम्ब्यापि कृपया
 त्वमेवैवंभूतं धरणिधर मे शिक्षय मनः ॥ ५९ ॥

*Anichan apyevam yadi punar iteecchanniva rajah
 tamas channa-chadma-stuti vachana bhangeemaarachayam,
 tadaapeetthamroopam vachanam avalambyaapi kripayaa
 tvamevaivambhootam Dharanidhara! me sikshaya manah.*

I am enveloped in Rajas and Tamas. I am incapable, but I pretend to be capable and have composed this text of feigned praise. Atleast making this as the reason, please save me. O Dharanidhara (sustainer of the universe), make my mind to give up other thoughts and discipline it, so as to think of You alone.

Alavandar says that he is surrounded by passion and inertia. He is guilty of singing praises, which are not coming from the heart. He uses the words "false praise" (chadma stuti). He wants them to be taken at their face value (that is make it the base or authority, "avalambya api") and the redemptive grace of the Lord extended to him, so that his mind is disciplined ("me manah sikshaya").

Two points are spelt out in this sloka. One is that if the Lord is worshipped by non-sattvic people, their sins also will be washed away by the grace of the Lord. The second point that is made is that if the name of the Lord is repeated, even casually or facetiously, the sins would get obliterated. The second of the above two points is clearly borne out by the story of Ajamila, given in the Srimad Bhagavatam. The Bhagavatam tells us that the efficacy of the Name, which a man obtains by abstract meditation in the Krita Age, by sacrifice in the Treta Age, by adoration in the Dvapara Age, he obtains in the Kali Age by reciting the names of Narayana. Slokas 23 and 24 of *Mukunda Mala* need to be recalled in this context. Says Kulasekhara:

"The holy formula of Sri Krishna is an unparalleled mantra to cut off everything hostile to one's good. It is the sum total of the mantras consisting of the sacred Upanishadic statements. It is the mantra which rescues one from "samsara". It is the mantra that expels the mass of accumulated darkness. It is the only mantra for the attainment of complete Lordship. It is the mantra that completely delivers those who are bitten by the snake of addiction to passions. O my tongue, always chant this Mantra, so that you may attain the fruition of your life". (Sloka 23)

"The medicine in the form of the divine name of Sri Krishna cures ignorance and discrimination. It inspires sages to engage their minds in meditation and it torments the demons. It is the medicine for restoring the three worlds to life and for bestowing unlimited blessings on the devotees of the Supreme Lord. Indeed, it is the only medicine that can destroy one's fear of material existence and lead one to the attainment of supreme good". (Sloka 24)

Alavandar prays for the mind being penalized ("shikshaya") or disciplined. What is this disciplining which is spoken of here? Having said that the utterings have not come from the heart, the obvious prayer is that there should be no duplicity in the supplication. The related offshoot is that the mind should be disciplined so that the thoughts are centred only on the Lord.

The Lord is addressed as "Dharanidhara". He is the Sustainer of the Earth. He absorbs all the sins and absolves the true seeker. One should recall the episode in the Srimad Bhagavatam. Mother Earth complains to the Lord that she is unable to bear the weight of the sinners, as they have increased greatly in numbers. The Lord assures her that He will manifest Himself to rid the earth of the sinners. The Lord bears all this weight. One should also recall the Varaha Avatara. The Lord playfully held up the earth, as if it was a ball to be played with by Him.

पिता त्वं माता त्वं दयिततनयस्त्वं प्रियसुहृत्

त्वमेव त्वं मित्रं गुरुरसि गतिश्चासि जगताम् ।

त्वदीयस्त्वद् भृत्यस्तव परजिनस्त्वद्गतिरहं

प्रपन्नश्चैवं सत्यहमपि तवैवास्मि हि भरः ॥ ६० ॥

*Pitaa tvam maataa tvam dayita-tanasyas tvam priyasuhrit
tvam eva, tvam mitram, gururasi gatischasi jagataam,
tvadeeyas, tvad bhrityah tava parijanah tvadgatihaham
prapannaschaivam satyahamapi tavaivaasmi hi bharah.*

For all the worlds, You alone are the father, mother, the beloved son, the dear friend, the confidant, the preceptor and the sole refuge. I am Yours, Your servant, Your attendant and Your protectee who has sought Your refuge. The responsibility for my welfare rests solely on You.

In the previous sloka, Alavandar had said that he had composed the text which was "chadma stuti", that is, it had not come from the heart. That being the case, the Lord may well ask why he should take to heart the pleadings of Alavandar which had not come from his heart. Alavandar replies in this sloka that the relationship between the two of them cannot be pushed aside. The Lord is the father, the mother, the son, the friend, the confidant and the sole refuge. He (the hymnologist) is the servant, the attendant and the "prapanna" who has sought the Lord as the sole refuge. Hence the Lord has to save him ("bharah asmi hi").

In this connection, one may recall sloka (5). While paying obeisance to the effulgent feet of Nammalwar, Alavandar had said that the feet constitute to all Vaishnavites at all times "the aggregate of all worldly relations, such as mother, father, wife, sons, daughters and wealth in general".

In the sloka, two words are used which apparently look similar - "priya suhrit" and "mitram". We have translated them as confidant and a friend. There is a subtle difference between the two. A friend is one where the relationship is on a reciprocal basis while a confidant is one in whom we confide, a person who works for and helps one, without expecting any thing in return.

जनित्वाहं वंशे महति जगति ख्यातयशसां

शुचीनां युक्तानां गुणपुरुषतत्त्वस्थितिविदाम् ।

निसर्गादेव त्वच्चरणकमलैकान्तमनसाम्

अधोऽधः पापात्मा शरणद निमज्जामि तमसि ॥ ६१ ॥

*Janitvaaham vamse mahati jagati khyata yasasaam
 sucheenaam yuktaanaam guna-purusha tattva sthithividaam
 nisargaad eva tvat-charana-kamalaikaanta manasaam
 adho adhah paapaatmaa saranada! nimajjaami tamasi.*

O refuge of all, though born in the exalted lineage of those of world renown, who are pure and ever abiding of You, who know the real nature of matter and spirit, who by their very nature have their minds solely devoted to Your lotus feet, I, being evil minded, am sinking deeper and deeper into the darkness of ignorance.

Thinking that the Lord may say that Alavandar is born in a good family, with a good lineage and that this is itself sufficient to attain the Lord, why then does he have to depend on the Lord? Alavandar replies that though he has an excellent lineage, he is a sinner. The poet describes the lineage - those of world renown ("jagati khyata"), those who are pure ("suchinam"), those who cannot bear to be separated from the Lord ("yuktanam"), those who know the qualities of matter and spirit ("guna purusha tattvasthithi vidam") and those who naturally have their minds devoted to the lotus feet of the Lord ("tvat charana kamala ekanta manasaam"). But then, he is a sinner. He is sinking into the darkness of ignorance. Since he is sinking deeper and deeper, into the abyss of 'tamas' called ignorance, the Lord, by His mercy has to redeem him.

Three descriptive phrases have been used to describe the worth of the lineage - those who are unable to bear separation from the Lord, those who know the difference between matter and spirit, and those who are devoted to the feet of the Lord. Alavandar thereby is referring to the Karma, Jnana and Bhakti Yoga knowledge of his ancestors.

This prayer of Alavandar to save him from sinking into the abyss of ignorance (samsara) is similar to sloka (34) in *Mukunda Mala*. Says Kulasekhara:

"O Supreme Lord, Bhagavan, You are the most compassionate. So, please show me Your favour and bestow Your mercy upon

this helpless soul. You alone can lift me from the ocean of samsara into which I am sinking. O Lord Hari, You are verily the Purushottama, the Supreme Person! (Sloka 34)

अमर्यादः क्षुद्रश्चलमतिरसूयाप्रसवभूः

कृतघ्नो दुर्माणी स्मरपरवशो वञ्चनपरः ।

नृशंसः पापिष्ठः कथमहमितो दुःखजलधेः

अपारादुत्तीर्णस्तव परिचरेयं चरणयोः ॥ ६२ ॥

*Amaryaadah kshudrah chalamatir asooyaaprasavabhoooh
kritaghno durmaani smaraparavaso vanchanaparah
Nrisamsah paapisthah katham aham ito dukkhajaladheh
Apaaraad utteernas tava parichareyam charanayoh.*

I have been a transgressor (of the Sastras), an evil person, fickle minded, the home for envy, lascivious, deceitful, cruel and most wicked. How may I, crossing the boundless sea of misery, serve Your lotus feet?

In the previous sloka, the word "paapaatma" had been used. Alavandar now elaborates all the bad qualities he is guilty of having in himself. He is a 1) heretic having no respect for scriptural injunctions (amaryadah) 2) an evil person ("kshudrah"), 3) a person with an unstable mind ("chalamatih"), meaning one who does not think of sastras, 4) the home for jealousy ("asuya prasavabhuh"), 5) one who forgets the good done to him, one who is ungrateful ("kritaghnah"), 6) one who is arrogant (durmaani), 7) one who is a slave to cupid ("smara paravasah"), 8) a deceitful person ("vanchanaparah"), 9) a cruel person (nrisamsah) 10) a wicked person ("papisthah"). He wants to know how he should get ashore from this unfathomable and boundless ocean of miseries and serve the Lord's feet?

One must record here that once Sri Parasara Bhattar recited this sloka in the shrine of Ranganatha at Srirangam and said that he was in the same position as the hymnographer. There was a Vaishnava, a contemporary of Parasara Bhattar, who was jealous of the growing popularity of Bhattar and his own declining popular-

ity. He was present in the shrine at the same time. Out of jealousy he burst out that Bhattar was not only guilty of the above sins, but that he was guilty of several more. All present there were shocked. Parasara Bhattar completed his worship and presented his gold ring to the jealous Vaishnava after covering him with a shawl. The Vaishnava was ashamed and nonplussed. Bhattar said that he was grateful to the Vaishnava for opening his (Bhattar's) eyes to the several sins about which he was not aware of himself. So great was the humility of Bhattar. It was this sloka which Bhattar had recited. Actually, Alavandar is not even remotely guilty of the above deficiencies. This sloka is intended for a majority of us and we are expected to recite it, with humility, before the Lord and purge ourselves of our sins.

Self-deprecation while worshipping the Lord is a common device used by the great Vaishnavite hymnographers. We had, in this work, quoted several such slokas from the works of Sri Vedanta Desika. We will quote two more. Says Desika in *Saranagati Dipika*:

"Though I am more sinful than a hundred Ravana's put together, I have understood the declarations made by You on the seashore and on Arjuna's chariot, that You would offer refuge to all beings. So I realize that You have offered protection to me, for Your own sake." (Sloka 53).

"After making me say these unique and unvolitional words "I am yours, I have to be protected by you", You should not, like others, stand helplessly before Your queens, with Your virtues, overcome by my sins...." (Sloka 54).

रघुवरं यदभूस्त्वं तादृशो वायसस्य

प्रणत इति दयालुर्यच्च चैद्यस्य कृष्णा ।

प्रतिभवमपराद्धमुग्ध सायुज्यदोऽभूः

वद किमपदमागस्तस्य तेऽस्ति क्षमायाः ॥ ६३ ॥

Raghuvara yad abhoostvam taadrisho vaayasasya

pranata iti dayaalur yacha chaidyasya krishna!

Pratibhavam aparaaddhur mugdha! saayujyado abhooh

Vada kim apadamaa-agas tasya te asti ksmayaah.

O Lord, as Raghuvara, you were compassionate to Kakasura, merely because he had sought You, though he had committed a transgression which could not be tolerated. As Sri Krishna, you had pardoned Sisupala, and granted him the Supreme bliss of attaining You, despite his having wronged You, birth after birth. So then, tell me, whether there is any crime, which is excluded from the scope of Your clemency?

In the previous sloka Alavandar had said that he is the worst sinner. Lest the Lord ask him as to how he, a transgressor hopes to be redeemed, Alavandar reminds the Lord of the episode of Kakasura and of the episode of Sisupala, to remind the Lord that transgressors have all been redeemed by the Lord. He asks the Lord what transgression is there that the Lord will not forgive ("kshamayah apdam agah kim asti")?

The story of Kakasura, the crow, is well known. It appears in the Sundara Kanda of the Ramayana. Hanuman has seen and conversed with Sita. He asks for a token so that he would be able to convince Rama that it was indeed Sita he had seen. Sita gives a jewel as a token of remembrance and additionally recounts the story relating to the pardon of Kakasura, which incident is known only to Rama and Sita. Sita was resting on the lap of Rama, when a crow made a bold attack on her. Rama woke up and angry as a five headed cobra saw the bloodstained talons of the crow. He released the Brahma astra against the crow. The crow circumambulated the world, but the arrow pursued it. None could save the crow. On the advice of Brahma, the crow sought the refuge of Lord Ramachandra and sought forgiveness. The Lord, in His compassion granted life to the crow, but took away its eye, as the Brahmastra cannot be rendered ineffective. Hence, even the transgressor who had directly transgressed and committed an 'apachara' against the Lord, when he approaches Him and seeks His grace, the Lord will grant the grace.

The episode of Sisupala is well known. It is chronicled in the Srimad Bhagavatham. Jaya and Vijaya, the attendants of the

Lord, at Vaikuntha, had prevented the Kumaras from having an audience with Lord Vishnu. The sages cursed them that they should eternally be asuras, after being born in the world. On the intervention of the Lord, the curse was modified. They were to be born as asuras, but thrice and in all the births they were to meet their death at the hands of the Lord. Though they were in constant conflict with the Lord, in each birth, their thoughts were always centred on the Lord. In succession they were born as Hiranyakasipu and Hiranyaksha, Ravana and Kumbhakarna, Sisupala and Dantavakra. In all the cases, they were killed by the Lord. The manner of death of Sisupala was as follows. In a Rajasuya Yaga conducted by Yudhishtira, all the kings including Krishna, from Dwaraka, had been invited. A question arose, as to whom 'agrapuja' was to be done. Sahadeva suggested that it should be done to Krishna, who had stood by the Pandavas and was a respected elder statesman. Sisupala opposed this and made contemptuous remarks against Krishna, both because of past enmity and because of jealousy. When, in addition to the abusive speech, Sisupala sought to attack Krishna, the Lord beheaded Sisupala with his disc. Says the Bhagavatham (Skanda X Chapter 74) "while all the world looked on, a centre of brilliance, coming out of the dead body of Sisupala, was found to reach Krishna and get absorbed in him, like a meteor falling on the earth. Continuously communing in confrontation with the Lord as his enemy, during three births, he attained to his being. For, continuous contemplation turns one into the nature of one contemplated upon....."

It is to these two episodes that Alavandar makes a reference and states that there is no transgression that the Lord will not forgive - one has to turn to Him with concentration. He then becomes the refuge.

ननु प्रपन्नः सकृदेव नाथ

तवाहमस्मीति च याचमानः ।

तवानुकम्प्यः स्मरतः प्रतिज्ञां

मदेकवर्जं किमिदं व्रतं ते ॥ ६४ ॥

*Nanu prasannah sakrudeva naatha !
Tavaahamasmeeti cha yaachamaanah
Tavaanukampyah smaratah pratijnaam
Madekavarjam kimidam vratam te.*

I have sought Your refuge. You had promised that if one surrenders but once to You, You will protect that person. I have also done so. Does your promise exclude me?

Since Alavandar had, in the previous sloka, made specific reference to the episodes of Kakasura and Sisupala, the Lord may state that the grace of redemption is only extended on individual-specific basis and is certainly not applicable on a general basis. Alavandar therefore states in this sloka that he is a "prapanna", and he had sought the refuge of the Lord. He reminds the Lord that he has made a vow ("pratijnam") that if a person surrenders but once ("sakrudeva") to the Lord, He would protect the person. Alavandar says that he has also sought the grace. Does the vow ("vratam") of the Lord exclude him alone ("mad ekavarjam kim")?

One should recall here the episode of Vibheeshana in the Ramayana. After Hanuman leaves Lanka in a shambles, setting fire to half the city, Ravana calls for a meeting of his counsellors. Vibheeshana gives wholesome advice. He asks Ravana to sue for peace and return Vaidehi. Ravana treats him with contempt. Vibheeshana with four of his followers goes to Lord Ramachandra and seeks his refuge. Angada, Sugriva and others suggest that Vibheeshana should be imprisoned and not given refuge. Rama quotes scriptures and citing Sage Kanva says "...In the name of humanity, one should not strike even an enemy who has arrived at one's door and is piteously soliciting protection with joined palms. Even an enemy who has come for protection should be protected, even at the cost of one's life. If from fear or folly or even from desire, a man does not justly protect a refugee according to his capacity, the sin incurred by him is despised in the world..." Lord Ramachandra gives refuge to Vibheeshana.

The hymnologist has this episode in mind and therefore says that if a person surrenders but once to the Lord, the Lord has

extended His protection. The Lord may well say that this was individual - specific, that this was made applicable to Vibheeshana only and how does he expect it to be extended to him? Alavandar has in mind Lord Ramachandra's statement that even if Ravana were to seek his refuge, he would make it available. That is why Alavandar asks, am I alone excluded ("mat ekavarjam kim")?

In this sloka, the words used are "...if one surrenders but once to you..." We do not wish to go into a religious discussion as to whether a 'prapanna' should do 'saranagati' only once or again and again. We will leave it to the Vaishnavite theologians to discuss this. We will, however, quote one sloka from 'Daya Satakam'. Says Desika, "The Lord of Vrishachala does not abandon you even in anger, like the ocean which does not lose the quality of coolness, even after being heated. O Daya, You do not like Prapatti done a second time. Please touch me with the sporting lotuses, that is, the glances of the Lord". (Sloka 98).

We have quoted several slokas of Desika on the subject of 'Prapatti', 'Saranagati', during the course of this work. We will quote two more slokas from *Saranagati Dipika*. Says Desika:

"O Lord, long ago you yourself truly said that compassion to those who seek refuge is the highest virtue. Because You are the one who gives refuge, You are now being reminded by me. Indeed, these undertakings of Yours are meant for people like me, is it not? (Sloka 45)

"O Lord, Your forgiveness which was established as true in the case of Kakasura, Siva and others and which always devours the sins of those who try to say 'protect me' should not exclude me among beings" (Sloka 46)

अकृत्रिमत्वच्चरणारविन्द-

प्रेमप्रकर्षावधिमात्मवन्तम् ।

पितामहं नाथमुनिं विलोक्य

प्रसीद मद्दुत्तमचिन्तयित्वा ॥ ६५ ॥

Akritrima tvachcharanaaravinda -

prema-prakarshaavadhim aatmavantam

*pitaamaham Naathamunim vilokya
praseeda madvrittam achintayitvaa.*

Keeping in view the pure and guileless love of supreme devotion to your lotus feet by my grand father Nathamuni, the truly enlightened one, at least for his sake, please bless me, overlooking all my lapses and shortcomings.

In the first three slokas, obeisance had been offered to Nathamuni. In the last sloka, again a reference is being made. Alavandar says that the devotion displayed by Nathamuni is pure and gentle. It is abiding, unlike in the case of Alavandar. In sloka (62) Alavandar had submitted that he is fickle minded. His devotion may therefore not be constant and abiding. Alavandar pleads that atleast for the sake of Nathamuni, he has to be blessed without looking at his shortcomings. He says, without looking at his conduct (mad vrittam achintayitva), to please accept him ('praseeda').

This sloka underscores the fact that service to the feet of the Acharya is a sure pathway to liberation.

Conclusion:

The *Stotra Ratna*, the hymn of 65 slokas, is a bench mark in Vaishnavite literature. It greatly influenced Bhagavan Ramanuja. This stotra brings out the essential teaching that the Lord is the means, the end and the goal of human endeavour. It also brings out the significance of the Dvayamantra. The sloka brings out clearly the efficacy of 'prapatti' in attaining liberation. The supremacy of Lord Vishnu is highlighted in many a verse, including indicating how the entire universe evolves out of him and is absorbed by him. The sovereignty of the Lord is impressed on us by highlighting His compassion, His beatific form and His eternally benevolent activities. This hymn is the centre piece of the concept of the Supreme Being and the concept of Surrender to him.

"Alavandar Thiruvadigale Saranam"

"Stotra Ratna" of Sri Yamunacharya is a very rare jewel among devotional poems. This exquisite poem of 65 slokas contains the essence of the Visishatadvaita philosophy. Sri Yamunacharya, also known as Alavandar, elucidates the fundamental concepts regarding God and the soul and describes the qualities of the Lord and His unparalleled glory. Above all, this splendid stotra sets forth the concept of prapatti or wholehearted surrender to Lord Sriman Narayana most appealingly and authentically.

Dr. M.S.Rajajee who translated this magnum opus of Sri Yamunacharya was a distinguished officer of Indian Administrative Service. He has also excelled himself as an erudite writer and author. ' Mukunda Mala ' translated by him was published by TTD.

YATHIRAJA VADIRAJA'S THEERTHA PRABANDHA



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