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Srinivasa Bala Bharati

# EKALAVYA

*English Translation*

**Chintagunta Subba Rao**



**Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams,  
Tirupati**

Srinivasa Bala Bharati - 138  
(Children Series)

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*Telugu Version*  
**SBS Bhattacharya**

*English Translation*  
**Chintagunta Subba Rao**



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**Executive Officer**  
**Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, Tirupati.**  
**2014**

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*Editor-in-Chief*  
**Prof. Ravva Sri Hari**

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## FOREWORD

If a beautiful garden is to be raised, one needs to take proper care of tender flower plants. In the same way in order to create a good society, great care needs to be taken of young children who are going to be future citizens of India. All their intellectual attainments will be futile if they fail to learn of their culture and its greatness. They need to be told of great men and women of this country so that they are inspired by their ideals. The essentials of our culture should be given to them in the form of simple and charming stories. They will cherish these ideals and be guided by them. They will promote good and they will love the society they live in. They make their families proud and bring great prestige to their country when they grow up into good citizens.

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams have brought out these booklets for children in Telugu under Srinivasa Bala Bharati Series. Although meant for children, they are useful to the elderly too. They have found place in the book shelves of every family. The stories of legendary men and women are narrated in a simple way. We hope that more and more children will read them and profit by them.

I congratulate Dr. R. Sri Hari, Editor-in-Chief, TTD for his efforts in bringing out the English translations of SRINIVASABALA BHARATI SERIES so well. We have received co-operation of many learned men and women in our efforts to popularize this series. I am thankful to them.

In the Service of the Lord



**Executive Officer,**

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams.  
Tirupati.

## **FOREWORD**

Today's children are tomorrow's citizens. They need apt acquaintance with the life-histories of celebrated persons at tender so that they get opportunity to lead their lives in an exemplary way. They will come to know that great things such as Indian culture, basic tenets of life and moral teachings are abundantly available in the life-experiences of great men. It is observed that there is no scope to teach such subjects in school curriculum.

Observing such circumstances the Publication Division of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams has published about hundred booklets in Telugu about the lives of famous sages and great men written by various authors under the editorship of Dr.S.B. Raghunathacharya under "Bala Bharati Series". The response to these books is tremendous and it has given impetus to publish them in other languages also. To begin with, some of the books are now brought out in English and Hindi by T.T.D. for the benefit of boys and girls and the interested public.

These booklets, primarily intended to the growing children and also to the elders to study and narrate the stories to their children, will go a long way to sublimate the aspirations of the children to greater heights.

**R. SRI HARI**  
Editor-In-Chief  
T.T.D.

## **Welcome To Srinivasa Balabharati Series**

The series is the outcome of abundant grace of Lord Sri Venkateswara.

This will be an unfailing source of inspiration to the young.

It enshrines the best of Bharatiya tradition. May this noble endeavour be successful.

India has been known for its culture and civilization, its ethical and dharmic way of life from time immemorial. India has marched ahead with its commitment to dharma, its resistance to adharma, its espousal of life-affirming values and its humane attitude to life as a journey towards God realization. Those who embodied these values in their life have been a beacon of light to us. Their impact is deep on the life we lead. Young boys and girls will find them exemplary and feel proud of their invaluable heritage. They will love their motherland and dedicate themselves to its service.

It is therefore necessary that the young learn about these great men and women so that they will realize their indebtedness to them for their selfless contribution to the enrichment of life. This should indeed be a chief component of true education which ensures the perennial continuity of Indian culture and civilization. SRINIVASA BALA BHARATI SERIES has come into existence to acquaint the young boys and girls with right perspective of Indian life and values through a series of booklets written exclusively for this purpose describing in brief the lives of great men and women.

We welcome you to share our joy in launching these booklets.

**S.B. Raghunathacharya**

Cheif Editor









## **EKALAVYA**

The syllable 'gu' means darkness,  
The syllable 'ru' means its destruction:  
Thus for destruction of darkness  
Is one pronounced a 'guru'.

The syllable 'gu' represents darkness and ignorance and 'ru' represents the force resisting such darkness of ignorance. The teacher who dispels this darkness of ignorance from his disciple, is called a 'guru'.

Guru is Brahma the creator;  
Guru is Vishnu the sustainer;  
Guru is Maheswara the destroyer;  
Guru is the God supreme:  
Therefore do I salute my 'guru'.

To the disciple 'guru' is Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara, all three together. What is more, he is the supreme Godhead, the God of gods. Salutations to this 'guru'.

In this holy land of India, the educator teacher has been assigned a high place. We know the kind of education imparted in today's schools. In by gone ages students used to live with their teacher. The students used to serve their teacher, win his heart, and obtain great skill in the several faculties.

Other than the teacher's instruction there is no noble way of getting educated. Is there any?!

When a person wishes to achieve something, he or she should do so following a proper method. It should not be thought that the end is all important and the means unimportant.

As regards education, rules and regulations are very important. The skills obtained without the teacher's instruction, will not be fruitful. Moreover, it is small wonder even if such skill becomes destructive. The life of Ekalavya may be taken as an example in this regard.

### **Birth**

Once upon a time there lived a king of the bhilla tribe called Hiranyadhanva, in a forest. He used to lead his subjects on the righteous path and was greatly respected by them. This king of bhillas had a son after many long years. The child was named Ekalavya.

Archery was almost an inborn skill for the bhilla-tribe of people. Ekalavya, right from his boyhood, was very kind to gentle animals. He loved hunting the cruel animals that killed the gentle ones.

### **How To Get A Guru or Teacher?**

Those who live in forests do have to protect themselves and also their domestic animals from attacks of cruel animals. In those days, archery was the only skill which could be useful in killing cruel animals from a safe distance. In those days weapons of the kind of gun were not available.

Still today we may see killed archers among the koya or bhilla tribe of the forests.

As Ekalavya grew older his desire to acquire excellence in archery also grew stronger in him. So he began to search for an able guru or teacher who could impart that skill to him.

### **A Good Teacher, Needed**

At that time there was a city called Hastinapura. With this city as his capital, king Dhritarashtra ruled his people. This king had a hundred sons with Duryodhana as the eldest.

King Pandu was the younger brother of king Dhritarashtra. King Pandu had five sons called Dharmaja, Bhimasena, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. These are the Pandavas.

Their grandfather Bhishma tried to get a proper guru or teacher who could teach archery skills of both kinds called sastra and astra to all these princes.

### **A Friend Dishonours**

Drona was the son of Sage Bharadwaja. Drupada was the prince of the Panchala kingdom. Both these come together in the hermitage of Sage Agnivesa. Together they get educated under the instruction of the teacher and become friends.

After completing their education, time came for them to part their ways. At that juncture Drupada spoke

to his friend Drona these words of welcome: "At any time in future, whenever you need help of any nature, you are welcome to me." Drona accepted this invitation.

One was a prince; the other, the son of a sage. Kings might give alms and brahmins might accept it, as per the right ordained to them. Everything went on well till this point.

A few years later Drupada became the king of Panchala. Drona married Kripa, sister of Kripacharya and set up family. The poverty-stricken brahmin Drona found it impossible to feed his wife and children. He was obliged by circumstances to seek the help of his boyhood friend Drupada. And Drona was humiliated in the midst of all the courtiers by Drupada who forgot his boyhood friendship, blinded by his kingly power and affluence. So he was going round several kingdoms in quest of royal patronage. His effort was to get the patronage of a good king by exhibiting his skills of archery.

It was the teacher's nature to get his disciples humiliate his foe.

Drona decided to seek vengeance on Drupada by getting him defeated by one of his disciples. With this end in view he entered the kingdom of the Kurus in the course of his tour of the country.

### **Drona On The Seat Of Guru**

While Kauravas and Pandavas were playing at a ball-game, in their boyhood one day, the ball with which

they played, fell in a well. They tried hard to pull up the ball floating on the well-water. But all their attempts were futile.

Just at that juncture Drona happened to arrive there. He saw the efforts of the boys and affectionately helped them. He shot arrow after arrow into the well, thus built a rope of arrows and with the help of this arrow-rope he pulled out the ball and handed it over to the princes.

Dharmaraja took note of the royal splendor so outspokenly evident in Drona who was by birth a Brahmin. He saluted him thankfully. He took him to his grandfather Bhishma, introduced him and narrated to him all that that had happened.

Bhisma who was searching for a good preceptor, learning the history of Drona, honored him profusely. He prayed him to teach his grandchildren all skills of archery. Drona complied with his request in all joy.

This was how Drona became teacher to the Kuru princes and Pandava princes. The princes were learning all regal arts and sciences from Dronacharya devoutly and earnestly.

### **Ekalavya's Efforts**

Ekalavya came to know about Dronacharya's archery expertise. Immediately he set out on a journey to Hastina with a lot of enthusiasm. Seeing how the

Aachaarya trained the princes in several faculties, Ekalavya's zeal grew twofold. He thought that he was dreaming for precisely that very type of teacher all the time and that he was fortunate enough to meet him and that what now remained was only getting the teacher's kind acceptance.

At the right time and place, Ekalavya approached Dronacharya in all humility and saluted him with his head bent low. He placed pure honey fresh from the honey comb, fruit and flower which he had brought from the forest, at the teacher's feet and prayed to him thus: "Sir! I am called Ekalavya. My father is Hiranyadhanva the bhilla-king. I come desirous of learning from you the skill of archery. Show me kindness by accepting me among your disciples."

Dronacharya was very happy to see Ekalavya, born in a tribal home which had not even a smack of education, come to him with an ardent desire for learning. But in those days social customs were very rigid. It was not easy to overlook or brush aside the social taboos. Therefore Dronacharya said to him in reply softly: "That you are born a bhilla implies a natural skill in archery. So you do not need my instruction." He spoke gently to him and convincingly instead of speaking harsh, and blessed him. Ekalavya was unhappy with the answer but was not discouraged. He took his blessing itself for instruction and reached home.





### **In Front Of Drona's Idol**

Ekalavya moulded an earthen idol of Dronacharya and installed it at a particular place in the forest. He accepted that idol as his teacher (guru), worshipped it sincerely and with devotion, thus progressively earning concentration, and practiced archery day after day.

### **Drona's Boon**

Dronacharya taught all the princes with equal attention, but he developed a special feeling towards Arjuna.

It was not without a reason.

One day Drona called all his disciples together and asked, "Blessed ones! I have a desire unfulfilled for long. Which of you comes forward to fulfil my desire?" While all the others kept silent, Arjuna declared that he would fulfil his teacher's desire. This declaration clearly showed Arjuna's confidence in himself as well as his devotion to his preceptor.

Drona was very much pleased with his courage and devotion to his teacher. He embraced Arjuna affectionately and said in joy, "My child! I shall train you up in a way that the entire world would stand up and say that no other archer equals Arjuna's skill." Thus Drona gave this boon to Arjuna.

He taught Arjuna the use of all those secret skills of archery and initiated him to the use of divinely

empowered missiles called astras, which he did not impart even to his son Aswatthama. Arjuna, with his devotion to his teacher and with his extra-ordinary receptive intelligence and tact, gradually became his teacher's favourite disciple.

It is an all-time fact that the student devoted to both his teacher and his learning, wins unbounded love from his teacher. It is but a natural fact of life.

### **Arjuna's Pride Wanes**

One day the Kuru and Pandava princes together with their preceptor set out on a hunting expedition. In the forest they began to hunt and kill cruel animals.

It so happened that Arjuna, chasing a cruel animal, went in a direction alone. Then a hound also followed him. It indicated to Arjuna the track of the cruel animal by barking aloud and leading the way. The barking hound went silent as its mouth was suddenly blocked by a number of arrows all in an instant.

Arjuna saw the arrows blocking the hound's mouth and looked enquiringly all around. He found none near about. He concluded that some one from a distance heard the barking of the hound and shot those arrows. Aiming his arrow in the direction that the arrows were shot from, he began to move slowly.

Walking some distance, he found a bhilla village afar. He saw an uncivilized bhilla youth with bow and



arrow in hand, practicing archery, on the outskirts of the village. He guessed that this might be the one who shot those arrows on his hound.

Arjuna walked to the bhilla youth and saw the idol of Dronacharya there to his great surprise.

"Are you not the one who shot arrows at my hound?" asked Arjuna.

"Are you the one whose arrow blew off the peacock feather from my head?" rejoined Ekalavya. They looked at each other top to toe. Each could easily guess the other's skill.

The skill that empowers an archer to hit the target by just listening to noise and without seeing it actually, is called shabda-vedhi. Arjuna prided that he was the only one who knew the skill. And this was now shattered on seeing Ekalavya's skill. Then, burning with jealousy, Arjuna went in search of his teacher.

He found his teacher and spoke out his impatience in these words: "Sir! you gave me your word that you would make me the best of archers in the world. I am now sorry to say that the truth of your word stands to test. In this very forest there is an archer whose skill surpasses not only mine but yours as well. What is more, this person is also your disciple."

As soon as he heard about this adept archer, Dronacharya desired to see him face to face. And

immediately he set out to Ekalavya's place, accompanied by his hundred-odd disciples and attendants.

### **Drona In A Fix**

Ekalavya went forth to receive Dronacharya who was approaching him in the company of his heroic disciples. He folded his hands before him in respect and devotion and said to him words of welcome: "Sir! I have this good fortune of seeing you after a long time. This is a memorable day in my life. My life today is meaningful." He then offered him milk and fruit and touched his feet in reverence.

Dronacharya was amazed to see that bhilla youth in a remote corner of the forest, endowed with the splendor of a great hero. Blessings rolled out of his mouth spontaneously. Seeing the idol of his own identity nearby, Drona was overjoyed about the young hero's devotion to him as teacher.

He did not remember Ekalavya. So he asked him, "Dear boy! who are you? And how am I your teacher?" then as Ekalavya reminded him of the happenings in the past, he recalled them and recognized him.

After demonstrating the skills he had acquired in archery before his teacher, Ekalavya said humbly, "All this is your blessing, Sir!" Dronacharya was glad that Ekalavya could learn with self-instruction in the forest

all that he had taught Arjuna over many years and appreciated his inborn abilities. But before long he was subjected to a mental struggle.

It was Dronacharya's strong desire to take revenge on king Drupada who had humiliated him. He had already elected Arjuna, his favourite disciple, to be the instrument of his revenge. He had also taught him all the secrets of archery and the use of divinely empowered missiles.

He had not stopped there but promised that his favourite disciple, would be trained to become the best archer in the world.

Now was Ekalavya standing before him not an equal but a superior to Arjuna. His word should not be falsified. The responsibility of earning for Arjuna the reputation of being superior to all archers in the world, lay with him.

But he was also not ready to lose Ekalavya who, by merely believing Drona to be his teacher and only by worshipping Drona's idol, could become a skilled archer all by himself.

Drona's love for the young man grew deeper and deeper with every passing minute. All the love and affection for Arjuna which had gradually shaped in him over years, flooded Ekalavya in a few minutes.

**For Arjuna**

The prince on one hand and the innocent bhilla hero on the other, both were his disciples. He felt no differentiating partiality for one or the other.

Caught in this dilemma, the brahmin Drona's thoughts turned on the fact that Arjuna, being born in kshatriya clan, would be called on to protect dharma in future.

Drona knew quite well the innermost behavioral tendencies of both kaurava princes and Pandava princes. They were growing up with envy. There was no hope that they would live together when they were grown-ups. When war would flare up between the two parties, both parties attract all the warriors of the world. Wicked Duryodhana might use Ekalavya to destroy the Pandavas.

The world would be safe if knowledgeable persons are self-disciplined. Ekalavya was born in an uncivilized race of the forest. This heroic youth who earned extraordinary skill in archery all by himself without a teacher, might in future become an invincible force!

If Ekalavya surpassed Arjuna, the boon he endowed on him would be falsified.

Beyond all this, Drona was a servant of the king, depending on the king for his livelihood. So he should



champion the cause of the princes as a duty even if it was only in gratitude.

Dronacharya thought so, but he did not expose his thoughts. He looked pleasant as usual.

### **Gift To The Teacher**

Dronacharya with a pleasant smile was watching Ekalavya who desired to honour his teacher with a gift, the traditional guru-dakshina.

He humbly bent his head and said: "Sir! It is by virtue of your blessings that I could gain this much of initiation to archery. You may or may not accept me as your disciple. To me you are the teacher. This is my firm belief. Your visit is a rare honour to my village. In this auspicious context, I have a small request to make. Accept this disciple's gift, guru-dakshina, and bless me. This is my body here; and yonder there is my village. The people of this village are my followers. Choose which of these you would like to have. I shall gladly offer it."

Dronacharya's wish was to render Ekalavya unable to compete with Arjuna. The prayer of Ekalavya came his way like something that he searched for. After deep deliberation he came to a decision.

At times a decision in favour of one person may end up harming another. The good fortune or the misfortune of persons play the key-role in such circumstances.



The guru was very much distressed that he was obliged to pronounce his desire to the disciple who innocently was prepared to offer him all that was his in the name of guru-dakshina.

Ekalavya misconstrued Dronacharya's silence and asked him in humility: "Sir! Are you hesitant to accept guru-dakshina from a low-born like me?" Drona who was already troubled at heart to speak out his mind and was ashamed of himself, did not like to prolong the uncertainty any longer and trouble the young hero.

### **A Historically Unique Wish**

"Live long, my child! You make me proud that I have a disciple of your character. Your name will be for ever cherished in the history of this country. There can be no other disciple like you. I shall accept guru-dakshina from you as you wish. Give me your right thumb as guru-dakshina." So spoke Drona.

Ekalavya was struck dumb by his guru's desire which was like a thunder without lightning. The right hand was the most important limb for a learner of archery. The right thumb was an archer's life. Without the right thumb it was impossible to mount the bow-string and aim an arrow.

He had developed unbounded love for archery right from his boyhood. Because of guru-dakshina which was but a sacrifice, his life's aim, nay, his life itself

goes meaningless. He thought a while whether it would not be rather better to offer his life itself as guru-dakshina.

But in a minute he firmly decided to offer to his guru all that he had, and now should he eat his own word for love of a small part of his body, however valuable that part be? he thought.

Without exhibiting even a trace of dislike, quite happily he cut off his right thumb and placed it as an offering at the feet of his guru.

This was how Dronacharya's boon to Arjuna became a curse to Ekalavya.

### **The Guru Was Ashamed**

Dronacharya's eyes were wet with tears as he looked on the scene. The kuru and Pandu princes were aghast at the daring act of the youth. Arjuna hung his head low for shame as it was for his sake that Ekalavya's valour was wronged.

Dronacharya, with his unclean mind, could not stand in the dignity of a guru before Ekalavya's untarnished devotion to him. He was proud that he had the good-fortune of having such a noble unselfish disciple like Ekalavya. With a lifted hand he blessed him and in an instant left with his disciples and followers to the capital city.



**Ekalavya's Ideal**

The desire for learning is not equally strong in all. In some persons it is average and in some others it is extremely strong.

The student whose desire to learn (called *jijnaasaa* in Sanskrit) is commonplace, will be satisfied with the teacher he gets. He learns to the extent that his opportunity allows him.

The student whose desire to learn is unusually strong searches and waits for an expert teacher, as the Chataka bird waits patiently for rainfall. If his quest is successful he gets fortunately the teacher of his dreams, he will be overjoyed. He hopes to get complete attention of his guru. His efforts would bear fruit only through the kindness of the guru.

When he could not get an expert teacher he desired, he would not be dismayed and disappointed. His love for learning and efforts in the direction do not get dulled but glow with redoubled vigor.

The noble student does not forsake an expert teacher even though he does not favour the student. He implants his teacher in his mind and teaches himself in the belief that his teacher is instructing him. The knowledge and skill so earned through perseverance and sincerity, is very noble and valuable beyond measure.

Ekalavya grew up in the love of archery. He dreamt of becoming adept at it. He searched for a proper guru. He was all joy to hear of Dronacharya. He tried to win his heart. But he did not get his love. Still he was not depressed. He did not find fault with Dronacharya. He took his blessings for valuable instruction and accepted him as his guru.

He moulded his guru's idol with mud and with that idol for his guru, worked hard with unflinching perseverance, and earned expert skill in archery.

He became such a skilled archer as Arjuna himself envied. He lives in history for ever as hero. Ekalavya may be called an exemplary student, an ideal to the future generations.

When fortune favours, one's abilities are in limelight when fortune looks away, even the greatest person with rarest abilities fades unknown, unhonoured. The history of Ekalavya proves this point.

Ekalavya is another name for devotion to guru and perseverant effort.

Devotion to guru and perseverant effort bring any rare skill within one's reach. We learn this truth from the history of Ekalavya.

