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(Digest of pp.1015 -1027)

The very beginning of the *shloka* “*tvayA hRtvA*” brands *ambaa* as a ‘thief! You have already appropriated half of His body. And you were not satisfied. Now You have appropriated the other half also.

The gymnastics of words is delightful. In ‘*apari-tRptena*’ there is an ‘*apari*’. This is in the first line. In the second line there is ‘*aparam*’. This latter means ‘other’. But ‘*apari*’ is the opposite of ‘*pari*’. ‘*pari-tRptena*’ means: by one who is fully satisfied. The ‘*pari*’ stands for ‘fully’. So ‘*apari-tRptena*’ means: by one who is not satisfied fully. Having taken only half the body how can She have a ‘full’ satisfaction? She had only a partial satisfaction ! That is what is indicated by the ‘*apari-tRptena*’.

It is the left side of the Lord’s body that belongs to *ambaa*. This is the age-old tradition. That is how the Acharya expected to see *ambaa* when he sought Her darshan. But what did he see? He expected to have a darshan of Father and Mother in the ardh-a-nArishvara form. But what he saw was the Mother’s form, including the right side. Father is crystal-white and Mother is crimson-red. But what he saw was “*sakalam aruNAbham*” – fully crimson-red. He expected to see a masculine form on the right side, but what he saw was “*kuchAbhyAm-Anamram*”. So the Acharya concludes -- in poetic fancy, of course – that the other (right) half of Shiva’s masculine body also has been taken over by *ambaa*. Note that Shiva Himself is described in the vedas as “*taskarANAm patiH*” – the head of all the thieves! But *ambaa* has executed a theft on Himself, by stealing the other remaining half of His body – though She had been, with great condescension, given half of His body (the left side) already!

And it is delightfully interesting to note that the poet in the Acharya does not say that “the other half of the body has also been captured”. He dares not, even in poetic fancy, make that charge assertively against *ambaa*. He only says “*shangke*” – ‘I suspect’!

Let us analyse it still further. When one says ‘I suspect’, one should give reasons. He has already given two reasons: ‘Wholly crimson-red’ is one; ‘the features of the chest’ is another. But this is not enough. To support his charge further, he gives two more, which clinch the issue. These are the two features: “*trinayanam*” (three eyes) and “*kuTila-shashichUDAla-makuTam*” (crown that includes the half moon in it). These two are exclusively the features of Lord Shiva. His name, even according to the vedas is ‘*tryambaka*’. In the preliminary *mantras* to the *rudra-prashna*, the *dhyAna-shloka* beginning with “*ApAtALa-nabhasthalAnth...*” the second line describes Him as “ *jyoti-sphATika-linga-mouli-vilasat-pUrnendu ..*” which means that as the *shiva-linga*, He has the full moon on His top. When the same *devatA* is figured anthropomorphically as a Person, He would have on His head, only a half moon . Thus the three eyes and the crescent moon ‘belong’ to the Lord. But when the Acharya had the *darshan* he saw both these in *ambaa* Herself!

In fact the *darshan* he had was of *KAmeshvari*, the *devatA* of Soundaryalahari. *KAmeshvari* has a third eye in Her forehead. In the meditating *shloka* of LalitA-sahasranAma, the *shloka* begins with ‘*sindhUra-aruna-vigrahAM*’. The *sindhUra* colour ascribed to the form here is the crimson-red colour, indicated by ‘*sakalaM aruNAbhaM*’ in our current *shloka*. Following that, the *dhyAna-shloka* goes on next to “*trinayanam*” (three eyed). Thus the red colour and the three eyes are natural to the form of *Kameshvari*. But in the present *shloka* (#23) the Acharya takes the stance, in his poetry, that the former (namely, the red colour) is naturally Hers, whereas the latter (namely, the three eyes) has been appropriated from the Lord’s form!

Continuing the *dhyAna-shloka*, we have the expression “*tArA-nAyaka-shekharaM*” meaning, ‘who has the Moon on Her head’. This the Acharya has used in his *shloka* as ‘*kuTila-shashi-chUDala-makuTAM*’.

Thus the Acharya has made a *ninda-stuti* (Praise by pointing out faults) of *ambaa* by using the same four characteristics which *ambaa* has, according to the *dhyAna-shloka*, namely, red colour, three eyes, crescent moon on the head and the feminine form. But two of them he says *ambaa* has appropriated from the Lord. In fact it is the Acharya who has appropriated two of the four all of which rightfully belong to Her, by accusing Her of appropriating those two from Her Lord.

It is not that the Acharya did not know. He certainly would know that all four are natural characteristics of *LalitAmbA*. “*trinayana*” (‘The three-eyed’) is one of Her names occurring in the LalitA-sahasranAma. “*chAru-chandra-kalAdhara*” is also another. In *ShymALA-danDaka* of Kalidasa, we have him addressing Her as “*chandra-kalAvatamse*” (She who has ornamented Her head with the Crescent Moon). Thus *ambaa* does have these two characteristics as Her own. In pictures of olden times I have myself seen Her being depicted thus. But the ordinary common-folk still think that the concepts of ‘three eyes’ and ‘crescent moon on the head’ are exclusively those of Lord Shiva. And, the Acharya, in his poetic excitement, joins the common-folk and creates a ‘*ninda-stuti*’!

There is still another angle! The *shloka* under discussion revels in the idea of *ambaa* having appropriated the Lord’s characteristics and also his right half. But the poetic world knows that it is the other way round. It is the Lord who has appropriated Her characteristics and legitimately what is due to Her!

In the *ardha-nArishvara* form the third eye is common to both the masculine and the feminine forms. It is by the third eye He consumed Manmatha, the God of Love, to ashes. So the credit of that consumption should go half and half to both the Lord and *ambaa*. But who is known as *Kama-dahana-mUrti*? It is He. Similarly when *KAla*, the God of Death, was attempting to get the Shiva-devotee MarkanDeya into his death-noose, he was vanquished by the left leg of the Lord, and thus He

has earned the name '*Kala-samhAra-mUrti*' and known as such as the world over. But the left leg in the *ardha-nArIshvara* form actually belongs to *ambaa* and so the credit for vanquishing *KAla* should go wholly to *ambaa*. Thus on both counts it is He that should be faulted for appropriation and not She!

Well, we could go on like this. But the final essence of all this discussion is that there is no appropriation on either side. It is all One form and One Supreme. The Lord's form is totally in Her and Her form is totally in His. LalitA Herself is '*Shiva-shakty-aikya-rUpiNI*'; this advaita is the bottomline of the whole thing.

[At this point the Paramacharya becomes silent and starts talking in a measured low voice]

Alright, the form is totally red; it is *ambaa*. But if one begins to look at the form in its various parts, amidst the redness, there is visible only the third eye and the crescent moon at the top. That reminds us of the Lord. But if you look for Him He is not there. Nothing except those two characteristics of His are visible. It is probably this experience that prompted the Acharya to say:

[Now the Paramacharya resumes his normal voice]

“ Oh! You got half the body as your own; and now you have taken over the whole body”!

None can partition the Shiva-experience. You cannot have it piecemeal; you have to have the whole of it. This is what *ambaa* has done!

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(Digest of pp.1028 -1032)

*japo jalpaH shilpaM sakalam-api mudra-virachana
gatiH prAdakshhiNya-kramaNam ashanAdy-Ahuti vidhiH /
praNAmaH samveshaH sukhaM akhilaM AtmArpaNa-dRsha
saparya paryaAyaH tava bhavatu yan-me vilasitaM // 27 //*

(The word-by-word meaning comes out in the Paramacharya's explanation itself; so it is not given separately)

Whatever actions we do must all be in dedication to *ambaa* – this is the sum and substance of this *shloka*. Worship, *japaM*, showing *mudrAs* by the fingers of the hand, circumambulation, prostration, offering in the fire with the chanting of *mantras* in propitiation of *ambaa* – all these are usually done in honour of *ambaa* by Her devotees. Yes, all these have to be done. But the matter should not end there. Doing all this for a portion of the time, and then for the rest of the time getting fully immersed in material matters of the world, is exactly what should be avoided. It is not like 'A few hours for *ambaa*; and the rest of the time for me and my worldly activities'. All the time everything should become a worship, everything should be a *japaM*, a *homaM* and an offering. That

is how we should change our life style. Not only the devotees, but all should be able to do this.

But how is this possible? Is this feasible? Don't I have to bathe? Don't I have to eat, sleep, mix with people, do my work in the world? I hear you are all raising these questions immediately. You may say that even the great so-called *jnAnis* (enlightened ones) are certainly doing all these routine activities of worldly life. So what is wrong?

Let it be. She as the Divine Mother has to perform Her *leelA*. That is alright. But how is it that the *jnAnis*, who know it is all Her *leelA*, are still working in the mundane world? You should also be like those *jnAnis*. Be in the world, not of the world. Maybe it is not possible just immediately. But gradually, you can train yourself to be so. Effort and constant practice are needed. For the present, start convincing yourself that your bathing, eating, talking, sleeping, walking, and all these ordinary activities are all happening because of Her *Shakti* – without which by yourself you cannot do a single thing. Constantly tell yourself that this is so. Slowly keep widening this belief for every action of yours.

When you recognize that you are eating because of the power She has given you to eat, you would not have the heart to send rubbish into your stomach. When the belief settles in that it is *ambaa* that makes you walk, you will hesitate twice before wasting it on going to the races or the movies. When you know that it is by Her Grace you are talking, you would not waste it on gossiping or scandalising another or discussing disgusting material. When we are aware of the fact that hands and feet are working because of Her, we would stop using them for doing wrong things.

Gradually, in due time, this conviction has to spread to your mental activities also. In other words, the egoistic thought of 'I am planning this or that' will give way to the thought 'Let Her get this done, if She wishes'. This change in the thought processes is important because it is through the mind all the *mAyic* changes and troubles of the world emerge. And they prevent the nullifying of the mind and the entry into *jnAna mArga*. Once we transfer the responsibilities to the Divine Mother, the impact of the mind will slowly disappear. Thereafter, whether She keeps us talking, walking or eating or She keeps us without any of these, in any case, we would be peaceful at the bottom of our heart. It is to reach that state, to pray for that state to be possible, that this *shloka* has been given to us by the Acharya.

“*japo jalpaH*”: ‘*jalpa*’ means talk, whether it is meaningful or not. So all this talk should be a *japaM*. In other words, it is the state of whatever we talk becoming an offering of *japaM* for Her.

There are several *mantras* like ‘*BalA*’, ‘*ShhoDashI*’, and ‘*panchadashI*’. All these *mantras* are done in a *japa* form. We are not saying that they should not be done. But ultimately, the *japa* as a

separate activity has to disappear and the conviction should occur that whatever we talk is a *japa* offering to Her.

“*sakalaM shilpam-api mudra-virachana*”: Whatever I do by my hand, let it be a *mudra* that one does in Your *pUjA*. Here ‘*shilpaM*’ must be taken to mean any kind of work. Unfortunately the tamil word ‘*shilpaM*’ means only sculpture. Maybe because Man produces forms just as the Creator creates human beings.

“*gatiH prAdakshhiNya-kramaNaM*” : Whatever movement I do let it be a circumambulation of You. Wherever I go let me have the feeling that I am doing a *pradakshhiNa* of You.

“*ashanAdi*” : food, etc. Since the ‘etc.’ is there it means not only food that is eaten, but food that is consumed by the other senses like eyes and ears. So all sensual experiences are covered.

“*Ahuti vidhiH*” : Let them be the offerings given to the sacred fire lit for You.

In fact all eating is done only after giving the first five morsels to the five *prANas*. In the Gita also, the Lord says that He it is who digests the food by being VaishvAnara as ‘*JATHarAgni*’ in the stomach. Once we have the conviction that it is He that is sitting inside and consuming what we send through the mouth, then we would not be sending in wine and meat for His consumption. The same logic applies to the sensual consumption by eyes, ears, skin, and nose. Everything is experienced by Him and so let us not dare send in undesirable stuff.

“*praNAmas-samveshaH*” : Let my very sleeping be a *namaskAraM* done to You. Once we realise that our lying down for rest is nothing but a *namaskAraM* at the feet of *ambaa*, that would itself give us total peace and relaxation.

Why carry on this list in detail? It is not necessary to do special *japa*, *homa*, *namaskAra* and such rituals. Whatever we naturally do , let it be our *pUjA* to You – this is the meaning of “*sukham akhilaM AtmArpaNa-dRshA saparya paryAyaH tava bhavatu yan me vilasitaM*”. Here “*saparya*” means *pUjA*. “*paryAya*” has many meanings, one of which is ‘substitute’. So this gives the meaning: Let whatever I do be a ‘substitute’ for the *pUjA* to be done to You.

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(Digest of pp.1033 – 1037)

Note the words “*sukham-akhilaM-AtmArpaNa-dRshA*” in the third line of *shloka* #27.

“*sukham*” means ‘without strain’, ‘naturally’. The word is very significant here. Since our mind is not in our control, it becomes a great strain to make it subscribe to a moralistic routine. But if we train our mind to think that everything is the work of *ambaaL*, the attempt to become moralistic slips into a natural frame wherein the goal is attained effortlessly. Because, when we have surrendered everything to Her, the

mind starts doing what is natural to it, namely, it behaves like a pure mind. And that is the road to eternal happiness.

The words “*AtmArpaNa-dRshA*” is the life-line of this *shloka*; not only of this *shloka*, but of all Hindu scriptures. This is the *Atma-nivedanaM*, the last of the nine-fold *bhakti* methodologies enunciated in the Bhagavatam. It is also the complete Surrender described in all *Bhakti* literature and particularly in the Bhagavad-Gita. The expression literally means: “By the attitude which is ready to lay one’s life at Her feet”. Only when that attitude is present, all talk becomes a *japa*, all action becomes a *mudra*, and so on for the rest. Let things become like this through the attitude of “*Atma-samarpaNaM*” (laying one’s life at the feet). The word “*bhavatu*” in the last line stands for this plea. A person who can do this surrender, would have his whole life sanctified as a *pUjA* to Her Almighty.

An exactly analogous thought almost in the same words has been given in “*Shiva-mAnasa-pUjA*” by the Acharya himself.

*AtmA tvaM girijA matiH sahaCarAH prANAH sharIraM gRhaM
pUjA te vishhayopa-bhoga-racana nidra samAdhi sthitiH /
sancAraH padayoH pradakshhiNa-vidhiH stotrANi sarvA giro
yad-yat karma karomi tat-tad-akhilaM shambho tavA-rAdhanaM //*

You Lord Shiva are my *AtmA*; my mind is *ambika*, the daughter of the Mountain; my five *prANas* are the *GaNas* that serve you; my body is your temple; all my involvement in sensual experience is your *pUjA*; my sleep is the *samAdhi* state; my wanderings on my feet constitute Your circumambulation; whatever I talk shall be your praises; whatever I do O *Shambho*, all that shall be a propitiation of You.

Such a dedication of everything at the feet of the Lord is what is prescribed by the Lord in the Gita:

*Yat-karoshhi yad-ashnAsi yaj-juhoshhi dadAsi yat /
Yat-tapasyasi kaunteya tat-kurushhva mad-arpaNaM // IX -27*

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in the *homa*-fire, whatever you give away, whatever intense concentration you do – all that should be offered to Me.

“There is nothing that I do” “Good or bad, Am I the doer?” – Such expressions of total surrender are everywhere in the works of Nayanmars, Alvares and also the saints of other religions. It is this kind of total surrender that gives the destination of one’s birth, namely, *jIvan-mukti*.

What is talked of as ‘the cessation of mind’ in the path of *jnAna* becomes the ‘total surrender’ in the path of *bhakti*. Both are “*AtmArpaNaM*” only. Both have the same result, namely, *jIvan-mukti* – Release (even) while alive!

To sum up, the body does what it does because it is being made to do so by the *jIva* within it; so also what all this *jIva* does is because it is being made to do so by a Supreme *jIva-Shakti* behind it and that is the Mother Goddess. For that *Shakti*, not only this *jIva* is the body but all the *jIvas* – nay, in fact the entire Universe is the body. So whatever happens in the Universe is because of Her. Once this idea settles deeply in our minds then there will be no problem of ‘laying our lives at Her feet’ (*Atma-samarpaNaM*).

The concept that *ambaaL* is pervading the whole universe immanently is elaborated in two *jshlokas* (#34, 35) by the Acharya.

sharIraM tvaM shambhoH shashi-mihira-vakshhoruha-yugaM
tavAtmAnaM manye bhagavati navAtmAnaM anaghaM /
atah sheshhas-sheshhI-ity-ayam-ubhaya-sAdhAraNatayA
sthitas-sambandho vAM sama-rasa-para-nanda-parayoH //34//

Bhagavati : Oh Goddess,

Manye : I think

tvaM : You

shashi-mihira-vakshhoruha-yugaM: (who) have the Sun and the Moon as your breasts,

shambhoH sharIraM : (are) the body of Shiva,

anaghaM : (and) the spotless

navAtmAnaM : (*Ananda-bhairava*, i.e. Shiva) who has nine facets (of presentation)

tava AtmAnaM : (as) your *AtmA*.

ataH : Therefore

ayam sambandhaH : this relationship

sheshhaH sheshhI iti : of ‘the accessory’ and ‘the principal’

vAM : between You two

sama-rasa-parAnanda-parayoH : who are *ParAnanda* and *ParA*, the enjoyers of the same Infinite Bliss

sthitaH : is poised

ubhaya-sAdhAraNatayA : as a mutual common factor.

“You are the body of Lord Shiva, O Goddess” – thus begins the verse. Earlier it was said that the whole body of the Lord has been appropriated by Her. But now are we talking of the ‘crimson-coloured body with a crescent moon and a third eye’? No. We are talking of this vast cosmos of million universes which together constitute His *virAt-svarUpa* (cosmic form). That cosmic body is *ambaaL*, says the verse. The life-giving force for that entire cosmos is the Absolute Reality, the *para-Brahman*.

Mark it! What is being said here seems to be contrary to what was declared in the very first *shloka* “*shivaH shaktyA yuktah* ...”.Without

Shakti, Shiva cannot even move – that was the statement there. So it appeared as if Shiva is an inert body and *ambaaL* is the life-giving force. Here it is being said that She is the body and ...” !

No contradiction is intended or implied. There are two viewpoints.

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(Digest of pp.1038 -1044)

The first *shloka* says that She is the soul and He is inert without Her presence. This *shloka* (#34) says that He is the soul and She is His body. There are two viewpoints here.

I must have myself said – in interpreting the first *shloka* – that He is inert without Her. To be precise, it is not “He is inert without Her”, but “He is inert-like without Her”. The Shiva that we spoke of in *Shloka* #1, is the actionless, attributeless, nameless *Brahman*. That *Brahman* can never be called something that is inert, devoid of ‘*cit* or Consciousness. But it is something to which we cannot attribute the act of cognizing itself. In that sense there is no ‘awareness’ of being ‘complete-in-itself’. It is in this sense, the word ‘inertness’ is used when talking of *Brahman*. So it is ‘as good as inert’. The ‘as if’ part here is the punchline. The *Brahman*, that ‘does not know(!) itself’ -- this to become the *Brahman* that ‘knows’ itself is due to the *jnAna-shakti* and that is *ambaa*. It is this *jnAna-shakti*, that now brings its own *icchA-shakti* and *kriyA shakti*, and the process of Evolution starts. So the *nirguNa-Brahman*, until it ‘knows’ itself, is ‘inert’ and the *shakti* that makes it, as it were, know itself, is its soul – it is in this sense the first *shloka* talks of ‘He is inert without Her’!

Shloka #34 is talking about ‘*kArya brahman*’. *Ishvara* is *SaguNa-brahman*. When *Shakti* as *KAmeshvari* prompts Him, He creates the entire Universe and is involved in the cosmic functions. It is in this context the entire Universe is His body and the soul within is the *kArya-shakti* that is *Ishvara*. The *icchA shakti* that is *KAmeshvari* prompts the Fundamental Reality that is *Brahman*.

The contention of advaita however is: It is *Brahman* that, through *MayA*, becomes *saguNa Brahman* which transacts its cosmic functions. There is no separate *chaitanyaM* (life, consciousness) for *mAyA*. It is inert. It gets a *chaitanyaM* from *Brahman*, hides *Brahman* and projects the universe instead, in *Brahman*. The administration of this universe takes place by the same *Brahman* but now as *Ishvara* coupled with *mAyA*.

Brahman is *ShivaM* and *ambaa* is *mAyA* – I have already told you so. It is because of *mAyA* that the Universe exists. So one can speak of the Universe itself as *mAyA* and therefore the form of *ambaa*. That *mAyA* is inert; it shines because of *brahma-chaitanyaM*. Therefore *ambaa* is spoken of as the body and the Shiva who is in the place of *Brahman* can

be spoken of as its soul. This is why “*sharIraM tvaM shambhoH*” – You, Mother, are the body of Shiva!.

In Sankhya school of philosophy, it is almost the same. ‘*Purushha*’ is the basic Truth behind all *jIvas*. ‘*PrakRti*’ is the basic cause for the Universe. The two are like body and soul, according to Sankhya. Scholarly opinion holds that the contention of *shloka* #34, namely, that *ambaa* is the body of the Lord and the universe itself is *ambaa* (through the words ‘*shashi-mihira-vakshhoruha-yugaM*’) is more akin to Sankhya than to advaita. The reasoning goes like this:

Brahman is hidden by *mAyA*. Brahman appears as the universe and this is the projection of *mAyA*. Of these two things, it is the ‘hiding’ part that is dominant whenever we talk of *mAyA*. Even in ordinary parlance, we say ‘the thing disappeared like *mAyA*!’. On the other hand ‘*prakRti*’, instead of being associated with the ‘hiding’ part, is usually emphasized in the case of what appears as Nature. *PrakRti* gets the dominant emphasis whenever we talk of the universe appearing in the place of Absolute Reality. In Sankhya, the 24 *tattvas* like the five elemental fundamentals, *pancha tanmAttras*, and then the senses, etc. all are focussed on the Universe and its constitution (=make-up). Even advaita *shAstras* have accepted the 24 fundamental *tattvas* more because of the importance given to it by traditional scholars. In advaita *sAdhana*, these have no recognized place. In the practical *sAdhana* of an advaitin, knowing about the 24 fundamentals is neither advantageous nor disadvantageous. The transformation of *prakRti* into the Universe and its living beings is important only in *Sankhya*.

Though the beginning of this *shloka* (#34) takes us back to Sankhya and advaita, the later ideas take us to the two traditions in *ShAkta* school, namely, the *Kaula* and the *Samaya*. In fact even the idea that *ambaa* is the body of the Lord and the Universe itself is *ambaa* -- has also a basis in the *ShAkta* scriptures. *KaulaM* is the tradition wherein one does external worship with yantram, deity and all. *SamayaM* is that which does the *pUjA* esoterically in the heart-space (*hRdayAkAsha*).

Irrespective of any of these philosophies, what is important to note in this *shloka* is the Acharya’s refusal to forget the motherly love inherent in the Mother Goddess. Though *ambaa* is depicted as the cosmic Form of the Lord, the Acharya does not have the mind to leave it as an inert ‘form’ or ‘body’. He keeps thinking about the Mother as the Mother of the Universe and its beings and therefore Her breast-feeding of Her children is hinted at by the mention of ‘*shashi-mihira-vakshhoruha-yugaM*! That the Sun and the Moon are the life-givers of everything in the universe is a scientifically accepted fact. Therefore the Mother who protects us as *anna-poorNeshvari* also feeds our lives through the Sun and the Moon. Poetically, in the language of *Bhakti*, they are the ones who feed us with

life-sustaining breast-feed and that is why they are the two breasts of the Cosmic Form that is *ambaa*.

It is customary to talk of the Sun and the Moon as the two eyes of the Lord. In Soundaryalahari itself, *shloka* #48 says that “Your right eye is the Sun that brings out the day; and your left eye is the Moon that creates the night”. In Lalita Sahasranama *ambaa*’s ear-ornaments are said to be the Sun and the Moon. But over and above all this, it is this *shloka* that touches us most, because it makes us the Mother’s children who are breast-fed by the Sun and the Moon as Her breasts.

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(Digest of pp.1045 -1050)

We have not yet done with *Shloka* #34. The *Sheshha-SheshhI-bhAva* (The Principal and the Accessory concept) that comes in the third line of the verse has tremendous conceptual significance.

“*sharIraM tvaM shambhoH*” indicates that *ambaa* is the body and Shiva is the soul. Since the body is usually taken as ‘containing’ the soul one should not think that soul is a property of the body. It is not like ‘the purse is in my pocket; so the purse is my property’. By thinking like that one commits the foolishness -- as the Acharya himself mentions in his *ShaTpadI-stotra* – of thinking that “the Ocean is the property of the Waves; the Wave is not the property of the Ocean!” The fact that the waves are the only thing visible from the outside and the calm water beneath is not visible, does not mean that the waves ‘possess’ the ocean beneath them! So also with ‘body and soul’. If the soul (life) leaves the body, the body becomes rotten and decays. The soul goes and takes another body. Therefore it is the body that is ‘possessed’ by the soul. The soul is the possessee and the body is the property of the possessee. In Sanskrit the word ‘*svaM*’ indicates the possessed property. It is from this word ‘*svaM*’ the word ‘*svat*’ and the Tamil word ‘*sottu*’ (meaning ‘property’ or ‘possession’) are derived.

When ‘*svam*’ is the possessed property, the possessee is ‘*svAmi*’. It is the Lord who is the ‘*svAmi*’ for the whole universe, because everything is His, in His possession, His property. The possessor-Lord is called ‘*SheshhI*’. ‘*Sheshha*’ is the one ‘owned’ by the *SheshhI*. Soul is the *sheshhI* and body is *sheshha*.

This concept of *jIvas* and Universe as the body and the Lord as the soul and on the same basis as *sheshha* and *sheshhI* is an important tenet of the vishishhTAdvaita school of *ShrI*Ramanujacharya.

If the Lord is taken to be the *nirguNa Brahman* as per advaita, then *ambaa* was first said to be the I-consciousness of the Lord, by the Acharya. The first half of the very first *shloka* meant only that. Then in *shloka* #7, explicitly *ambaa* was said to be ‘*Aho-purushhikA*’. In this kind of thing, there is no distinction between *sheshha* and *sheshhI*; the shiva and *shakti* are in indivisible unison. But looking at the phenomenal

world of duality, the talk arises about the divine Triad, and the divinities in charge of the five cosmic functions. And in this state they are able to function only with the help of a fragment of Her *Shakti*. Just by the dust of Her feet they are able to do what they have to do (*shloka* #2). Or by just the winking of Her eyes (*shloka* #24). These *shlokas* point to the fact that She is the Mistress of the whole show; in other words, She is the *SheshhI*; and these divinities are the *sheshhas* who do Her bidding. Even the alternates of Shiva, namely, *Rudra*, Maheshvara and *SadAshiva* who belong to the same category, are also *sheshhas* and She is the *SheshhI* for them too.

Over and above all this, from the minutest earthworm all the way up to the Cosmic Divinities of the five functions, all of them have been created and given life by the presence of Her *Shakti* within. So She is the *SeshI* to all of them. In other words all of us are *Sheshas*, accessories, for that *SheshI*, the principal.

This *shloka* also tells us in its second line how She is the *SheshhI* and He is the *Sheshha*. *Ishvara* is nine-faceted – these nine facets starting with Time and ending with *jIva*.

[Note: The nine facets referred to here are:
KAla, Kula, nAma, jnAna, citta,
nAda, bindu, KalA and jIva]

That is the *navAtmA* that is mentioned in the *shloka*. For all of these the life giving *shakti* is *ambaa*. So She is the *SharIrI* or *SheshhI*. And *Ishvara*, who has the nine aspects, is *Sheshha*.

Now change the viewpoint. You will see that He is the *SheshhI* and She is the *Sheshha*. For, She being *Shakti*, Energy, Power, there must be someone who wields that *Shakti*, Power and Energy. That is the Lord Shiva! Even when He is the *saguna-Brahman* or the *kArya-Brahman*, He is the *Ishvara* who is the soul of everything in the universe as the First Cause. The effects, namely, all that is animate and inanimate, are His body, that is, *ambaa*. So She becomes the *Sheshha*.

The simple meaning of *SheshhaM* is 'Remainder'. So the original, which ought to be far more than the *SheshhaM*, is the *SheshhI*. That is the *paramAtman*. From that fullness of the *paramAtman* all this world has emerged, which appears to be infinite and full. After emerging from fullness, what has emerged seems to be full. And even after the emergence, the original is still full. This is what the upanishadic *mantra* (*pUrnamadaH pUrnamidam*) says. In other words it only tells us that the *paramAtman* is the *SheshhI* and we are all his *Sheshha*. *Ambaa* is manifesting as all the multitudinous universe and the life within is the *Shambhu-Brahman*. Therefore "*sharIram tvam shambhoH*". *Ambaa* is the *sheshha* and He is the *Sheshhi*.

Thus the Acharya here does not make any distinction between the different viewpoints of *ShAktaM*, *ShaivaM*, *VishishhTAdvaitam*, *SAnkhyam* and *advaitam*. The universe that is discardable as *mAyA* in *advaita* is here talked of as the body of the *paramAtman*. When you think

of *nirguNa-Brahman*, the question of soul and body, *sharIrI* and *sharIra*, *sheshhI* and *sheshha* does not arise. But in the phenomenal world when we view things from our mundane angle, the universe is said to be the body and the indwelling *paramAtman* the *sharIrI* – very much as in vishishhTAdvaita philosophy.

The Acharya says in this *shloka* that this *Sheshha-SheshhI bhAva* is equally the characteristic of both. Already the “*samaya*” school of *ShAktaM* talks of five equalities between Shiva and *Shakti*.

[See Section – 7]

And here the Acharya has added one more equality, namely the *Sheshha-SheshhI bhAva!*

Just as the universe is visible so also the body is visible. So long as the mind is there both the body and the universe will certainly be visible. When the mind is inactive as in sleep, or in sedation or in *samAdhi*, there is no universe, body or activity of the senses. Where is the distinction in that state, between body and its life or soul, who is the *sharIrI*, what is the *sharIra*, who is the *SheshhI*, who is the *Sheshha*? In sleep and in sedation, there is no duality because nothing is cognized. For the *jnAni* who is in the *samAdhi* state, again there is no universe or phenomenal activity because of the absence of mind. There is no *jIvAtmA* being ‘monitored’ or ‘enlivened’ by the *ParamAtman*. To comprehend the presence of these two, function of the mind is necessary. Is it the state like sleep or sedation where there is nothing? No. That is not a state of complete void; it is a state of One-ness, namely the presence of the One without a second! This is how advaita has been established by the Acharya.

But other than that *jnAni*, the experience of every one else has to see everything – starting from the mind and going all the way to the five fundamental elements – as pervaded by *ambaa*. And that is what the Acharya is training us to do. As a beginning for this perception he says *Brahman* (*shivaM*) is the soul and the universe (*ambaa*) is the body.

And he goes on to say in this next *shloka* (#35), that mind itself, which is the cause for all duality, is *ambaa*.

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(Digest of pp.1050 -1055)

*manas-tvaM vyoma tvaM marud-asi marut-sArathir-asi
tvam-Apas-tvaM bhUmis-tvayi pariNatAyAM na hi paraM /
tvameva svAtmAnaM pariNamayituM vishva-vapushhA
cid-AnandA-kArAM shiva-yuvati-bhAvena bibhRshhe //35//*

“*manaH tvaM*” – You are the mind. Mother, it is this mind that is responsible for all the truant behaviour and all the consequent troubles; but even that mind is You yourself. ‘I may ask you, O Mother; Who are

you?’ – even this question is rising only in my mind and that again is You!

In the path of *jnAna*, they talk of the destruction of the mind. But here we are told that the mind itself is *ambaa*. The advantage in convincing oneself that the Mother Goddess Herself is our mind, is that it paves the way for stopping all further truant behaviour and thus inviting further troubles. It is by such practice one ends up with the void where there is no mind; it is actually not void, but is called *jnAna-AkAsha*, that is, Knowledge-space. Maybe it is not visible now. So what? Right now what you are able to see is the blue vast sky; learn to see that it is also *ambaa*.

“*Vyoma tvam*” -- You are Space. Not only just Space. You are the five elements. The thing next to *AkAsha* is air; and that is also You. “*marud-asi*” – air are you. “*marut*” means ‘air’ (*VAYu*). Hanuman is called ‘*MARuti*’ because He is the son of ‘*marut*’.

At the next level there is *agni*, fire. That is also your another form. Even the Veda says: “*agni-varnam, tapasa jvalantim*”, -- ‘of the colour of agni, shining by the fire of penance’. Fire travels the way the wind blows, therefore it is called ‘*marut-sArathiH*’. Fire has *marut* (Wind) as its pilot!

“*tvam ApaH. tvam bhUmiH*” – You are Water. You are the Earth.

Ambaa is in the form of the five fundamental elements and so manifests Herself in the five *chakras* in the body, from *mULAdhAra* to *Vishuddhi*.

Where is the need for elaboration one by one? There is nothing where You are not manifest. “*tvayi pariNatayAM na hi param*”. The ‘*pariNatAyAM*’ means that *ambaa* Herself has become all this. ‘*na hi param*’ shows that there is nothing more supreme (*param*) than Her.

All that was said so far constitute the first two lines of the *shloka*. In the latter two lines, it says: “In order to make yourself pervade the whole universe, You Yourself as the consort of Lord Shiva manifest in the form of Knowledge-Bliss’.

The fullness is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss (*sat-cid-AnandaM*). Shiva is not only just ‘*sat*’ (Existence), but also Knowledge and Bliss. As Knowledge it ‘knows’. As Bliss it is ‘blissfully happy’. This knowing and being happy are the effects of *ambaa*. That is why She is called ‘*cid-Ananda-lahari*’ (*Shloka* 8). What is the reason for this expression of Knowledge and Bliss? The third line of the *shloka* answers this.

“*tvam eva svAtmAnaM pariNamayituM vishva-vapushhA*” – meaning, ‘For the purpose of your pervasion as the entire universe, You took the Knowledge-Bliss Expression in the role of the consort of Shiva’.

‘The *brahman* knowing itself and revelling in the Bliss of that Knowledge does not just end there; the expansion as Knowledge and Bliss is for the purpose of manifesting itself as the Universe’ – This is the kind of thought in this *shloka*. It is out and out a *ShAkta* doctrine. It is not there in advaita. When advaita school dwells on Creation, they say:

“It is all because of *mAyA*; the questions of How and Why do not lead us anywhere. The whole business is to discard this *mAyA* and rest in the base, the substratum . So where is the need for research about How this came and for what purpose?’ On the other hand, in the traditions of Bhakti, like *ShAktaM*, they give you reasons for Creation – that the same *Cit* (that is, Supreme Consciousness) manifests as several fragments of consciousness and the same *Ananda* (that is, Supreme Bliss) manifests as several fragments of Bliss, and that Creation is enable us to watch the play of that Universe. According to them it is that drama that we take to be wholly real and we consequently are immersed in that *mAyA*. ‘Even in this *mAyic* universe what flows is only that Consciousness-Bliss (*cidAnanda-rasam*); in the same way as the substratum of existence being called ‘*shiva-yuvati*’. If only we realise that all this creation of universe is to make us enjoy Her play, Her drama, Her expansion, then we can delight in that blissful view of the miracle, and in turn, be immersed in that *CidAnanda*.

Note that the word ‘*pariNAmA*’ (transformation) has been used twice. There is no ‘transformation’ concept in advaita. In advaita, Brahman does not get transformed, as milk does into curd. The changeless *brahman* appears as the universe through *mAyA* – that is the advaitic contention. It is *SAnkhyaa* that talks of the universe as the transformation of *PrakRti*. Even there they don’t say that it is the transformation of the Purusha, but it is so only of *PrakRti*. Our Acharya has adopted that tenet here and used the form of that tenet as given by the *ShAkta tantra*.

It will be interesting to research into how much the Acharya condescends to stray away from advaita in order to accommodate the various tastes of people with the purpose of lifting them up. One may question: ‘Could he do such things, ever?’. The only answer could be: ‘Only a compassionate one such as the Acharya can!’

There is a branch of *Kaula* called *uttara-kaula*. They interpret ‘*shiva-yuvati*’ as follows. ‘*Shiva-yuvati*’ does not mean ‘the consort of Shiva’. It is Shivam itself that encompasses the Shiva-*tattva* within itself and manifests as the ‘*yuvati*’, the feminine consort. The SahasranAmam also has ‘*svAdhIna-vallabhA*’ which means ‘She who has her husband in her control’. A little stretching of that meaning will indicate that She has Him within Herself. And this will help us to be confirmed of the Acharya’s words ‘*na hi paraM*’ (there is nothing other than Herself) in this *shloka*.

I was saying how the Acharya is helping us to keep Her *sarva-
vyApakatvaM* (Her pervasion of everything) always in our memory.

Memory is in the mind. And he has begun this *shloka* (#35) with the words “*manas-tvaM*” (You are my mind). All our problems arise in the mind and so mind is the source, origin of all our troubles. But if we start thinking that Mind itself is *ambaaL*, then we have nowhere else to go! We have got it! Mind has now to be turned to what is within. It is not necessary to ‘kill’ it root and branch. Even if it turns outside and looks at the world, we now know that all the five elemental fundamentals are nothing but *ambaaL*. “*vyoma tvaM*” - Space is You; “*marud-asI*” - Air is You. ... “*tvayi pariNatAyaM na hi paraM*” - There is nothing that is not a transformation of Yourself. Thus we see everything as *ambaaL*. And the mind which sees and enjoys these sights is also the same Mother.

If one trains oneself to this way of viewing everything as The Mother, in due course, we will obtain the same Knowledge-Bliss experience even in this play of Creation. Our little little pleasures - sensual or otherwise - and our fragments of knowledge all merge in that supreme Bliss and Knowledge. And we become the *cid-Ananda svarUpa* itself. We become one with the *Shiva-yuvati*, the Reservoir of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss itself. What else is there beyond that?

In the museum of the former Baroda state, there is a manuscript which has a picture for every *shloka* of Soundaryalahari. One copy of it is in the Philadelphia Art Museum. I have already told you of this in another connection. A Professor from the University of Pennsylvania sent three pages from that collection to our Professor in the University of Madras and asked for clarification. In it there is a remarkable picture even for this *shloka* (#35), which obviously would not seem to admit any pictorial representation.

To wind up let me give you the gist of the two *shlokas* #s 34 and 35. It is *ambaaL* who is the body of *Ishvara*. Body here includes both the gross and the subtle. The gross body is mentioned in the “*sharIram tvam*” *shloka*. The subtle body is referred to in “*manas-tvam*” *shloka*. This mind could be our own mind or the supreme Mind called *Mahat*, which is the origin for all the five elemental fundamentals. It is from that *Mahat* all the five elements originated, until they finally became this universe. That is why “There is nothing other than You”. Though You are called the body of the soul called ‘*shambhu*’, You are the one who is indistinguishable between soul and body; You yourself have expanded as this universe.

There is a little echo here of the *siddhAnta* of *ShrI* Ramanuja, in the concept of the body and soul, applied to the universe (*Shakti*) and the Ultimate (*Shambhu*). However, finally the *shloka* winds up with the words ‘*cidAnandAkAraM*’, thus ending up with advaita. The *ambaaL* is the Knowledge source (*cin-mUlaM*); She is also the Bliss source (*Ananda-mUlaM*). But these two cannot be separated from the Existence source (*san-mUlaM*). None of the three can be kept in isolation; just as in a sweet dish we cannot separate the form, the taste and the smell. So the

cit and *Ananda* cannot be separated from their base, the *sat*. To manifest to the world this Knowledge and this Bliss, the One Reality appears as two and takes the posture of “*shiva-yuvati*”. This is only a *bhAva*, an attitudinal posture.

After the “*manas-tvaM*” *shloka*, there follow five *shlokas* (#s 36 to 40) which depict how the divine couple take their seats in the *kunDalini chakras* representing *AkAsha*, Air, Fire, Water and Earth (mentioned in the order of evolution from the subtle to the gross). In each *chakra* they have a distinct name, different function, and unique characteristics. But the one characteristic that is common to all of them is the Supreme Compassion. In #36, they shine (in the *AjNA chakra*) with the effulgence of millions of Suns and Moons and lift up the devotee to a status higher than the Sun, the Moon and the Fire. In the next, (in the *vishuddhi chakra*) they radiate, from their pure crystalline source, the infinite coolness like some supreme moonlight thus eradicating the obstacle of an inner darkness. Just as the mystical bird ‘*cakora*’ consumes moonlight, the devotees enjoy that mystic coolness.

In #38, residing in the *anAhata chakra* the couple is now in the form of a *hamsa* couple. The ‘*hamsa*’ word should indicate the ‘*parama-hamsa*’ characteristic of a *sannyAsi*, a *jnAni* of advaitic enlightenment. It is that seat from which the *praNava mantra* “*OM*” generates by itself. It is the *praNava* that is the source of all words. It is the dialogue of this divine *hamsa*-couple that is the source of all eighteen *vidyAs*. And they swim in the *mAnasa* lake (that which pertains to the mind) drinking the honey of *brahmAnanda* (Bliss of *brahman*) oozing out from the lotus of Knowledge. The traditional ‘*hamsa*’ has the unique characteristic of being able to separate water from milk. In the same way this unique divine *hamsa* couple separates the bad things that we do, takes only the good things and blesses us with their Grace.

The couple has been depicted as doling the same thing together in the three *chakras* above. But when we come to the *svAdhishhTana chakra* (*shloka* #39), the superior compassion of the Mother dominates. This *chakra* corresponds to the Fire element. This is where the Lord opens his Third Fire Eye and completes his Dissolution function. While the flames of the angry *Rudra* destroy the universe, with Her “*dayArdrA dRshTih*” (the look that is wet with Compassion), through the gracious and cooling effect of that glance She comforts the whole universe. We may wonder here: “Can the Father be ever equivalent to the Mother?”. As if to answer our question the poet uses the word “*samayA*” here to refer to the Mother Goddess – confirming thus the principle that, though the two might appear to be different for the outside world, in essence they are one and the same.

But the Lord Himself (*shloka* #40) in the *MaNipUraka-chakra* is the dark blue rain cloud that pours cool showers on the universe – thus quelling the Fire that He Himself raised and thus preparing for a further

creation. And it is then that *ambaal* brilliantly lights up by Her lightning.

And thus we come to the last (#41) of the part called *Ananda-lahari*.

*tavAdhare mUle saha samayayA lAsya-parayA
navAtmAnaM manye nava-rasa-mahAtANDava-naTaM /
ubhAbhyAm-etAbhyAM udaya-vidhim-uddishya dayayA
sanAthAbhyAM jajne janaka-jananImat jagad-idaM // 41 //*

manye : I meditate

mUle AdhAre : in the *mUlAdhara chakra*

tava : of Yours

navAtmAnaM : the form of Shiva called *Ananda-bhairava*, with his nine facets

nava-rasa-mahA-tANDava-naTaM : [nine-rasas- grand style -*tANDava*-dance] that is, who dances in a grand style the *tANDava* dance (peculiar to the masculine world), incorporating the nine rasas,

samayayA saha : along with *samayA*, another equivalent form of You

lAsya-parayA : (who is) involved in the dance '*lAsya*', peculiar to the feminine world.

idam jagat : This universe

jajne : becomes

janaka jananImat : endowed with Father and Mother

etAbhyAM ubhAbhyAM : by this couple,

sanAthAbhyAM : who mutually resonate with each other

uddishya : aiming at

udaya vidhiM : the regeneration rule

dayayA : with compassion.

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(Digest of pp.1061 - 1071)

Shloka #41 is the last *shloka* of *Ananda-lahari*. It propitiates *ambaal* along with Lord Shiva in the lowest *chakra*, that is, *mUlAdhAra*. It is remarkable to note that this *shloka* as well as *shloka* #34 have both mentioned "*navAtmAnaM*" for Lord Shiva. From #34 to #41 the topic has been the divine couple. With this *shloka* the discussion on the *chakras* is completed. So in addition to interpreting "*navAtmA*" as the nine-faceted (starting from Time etc.) Shiva, we can also interpret it as "six *chakras* plus the three *granthis* (knots)- together making a set of nine, for which He is the Atman".

"*lAsya*" is the dance that is characteristically feminine. It is delicate, gentle and polished. On the other hand the masculine dance

“*tANDava*” would be noisy, forceful and aggressive. In ‘*tANDava*’ what is important is ‘*nRttaM*’ in which the assemblage of beats (*tALa*) and nuances in the pace (*gati*) and march (*jati*) of the dance dominate. In ‘*lAsya*’ it is the *bhAva* (face expression of mental states) that dominates. Hence the traditional association of words like ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ with these dance forms.

Lord Shiva is called ‘*mahAnaTaH*’, the great dancer. ‘*mahAkAlo mahAnaTaH*’ is part of the list of names of Shiva in *amara-kosha*. Without His dance there cannot be any movement in the world. Even when the world is to dissolve, He has to do the ‘dance’ of destruction! Since the first *shloka* has already said that His very movement itself is due to Her, it follows that every movement in the Universe is because of Her. She lets Him do the magnificent dance and She also joins with her *lAsya*. It is this ever-lasting dance of this divine couple that is the reason for the multifarious movements that we beings make with our physical bodies, or the varied physical reactions that our nerves exhibit in concordance with the attitudinal expressions that invade us through anger, sorrow, or lust. When we are engulfed in sorrow, why should the eyes twitch? When we are invaded by anger why do the lips twitch? It is all because the Lord is within us and He goes through His dance covering all the nine *rasas*, that are expressed by the *lAsya* of *ambaa*. All these are related to the varying attitudes that engulf us.

There are also dances without the attitudinal expressions. All the world is making periodic revolutions. The planets are going round the sun. The wind blows. Everything is a dance. The fire is a dance of the flames. Water is dancing through its floods. These are ‘*tANDava*’ without ‘*bhAva*’. But they cause various *bhAvas* in us. When the breeze blows past us we feel happy. But the same wind when it blows fiercely as a storm, we feel the *bhAva* of fear. And so on. This is what has been said in this *shloka*. *Ananda-bhairava* (the Lord) and *Ananda-bhairavi* (*ambaa*) are doing this *tANDava-lAsya* dance. And we meditate on this scene in *mUlAdhAra-chakra*. ‘*Ananda-bhairavi*’ is the name of a *rAga* in music. But here it goes also with dance.

“*maheshvara-mahAkAlpa-mahAtANDava-sAkshhiNI*” is one of the names of *ambaa* in *LalitA-sahasranAma*. There it is the *tANDava* dance of the Lord at the time of Dissolution, that She is watching as a witness. But the *tANDava* dance described in this *shloka* is the dance of Creation. So She joins in it with Her *lAsya*.

‘*Ananda*’ – joy, happiness, bliss – usually goes with excitement and dance. The divine couple are dancing with the fullness of *Ananda* in them. But we should not think therefore we can take liberties with them. That is why the disciplining *bhairava* name is associated with their names. ‘*bhairava*’ indicates anger, fear and the like. All for disciplining us. But the *bhairava* nature is only temporary. It is *Ananda* that is

permanent. And the greatest *Ananda* is universal compassion. Hence the word '*dayayA*' in this *shloka*.

The word '*dayA*' means compassion. Where do they show the '*dayA*' in this dance of creation? The very creation is the compassionate act. For without creation how do we, with all our baggage of sins behind us, ever reach Him ultimately? It is to help all the souls to have opportunities of redemption that a creation starts after every dissolution. This greatest act of compassion is done by the Dance of Creation of this divine couple. Hence '*dayayA*'! '*udaya-vidhim uddishya*' means 'with the purpose of regulated creation'.

The divine couple therefore is the Father and Mother of the universe. '*janaka-janani*'. Let the world not feel that there is no one visible to take care of it. There is an invisible father and mother. The world (*jagat*) has become *janaka-jananImat*, endowed with a father and mother and therefore also '*sanAtha*', that is, (endowed with) a 'care-taking Lord'. In fact our children feel that if even one of the parents is not there, they are '*anAtha*' (orphaned). So when both of them are there we are not '*anAtha*' but '*sanAtha*'.

But wait. There is a greater subtlety. The word '*sanAtha*' used in the *shloka* is not about our being '*anAtha*' or '*sanAtha*'. The word actually used is '*sanAthAbhyAM*' that goes with '*ubHAbhyAM etAbhyAM*'. Therefore '*sanAthAbhyAM*' refers to the divine couple. In other words it is they, each one of them individually, who needs a '*nAtha*' (care-taking overlord), because they have nobody 'above' them. But if you carefully read the *shloka* the correct meaning will spark; it is not somebody else who is taking care of them as their Lord – there is nobody – but it is they themselves, namely Shiva the Lord and *ambaaL* the *Shakti*, who are taking care of each other. Each is a '*nAtha*' for the other. There is no Shiva without *Shakti*; and no *Shakti* without Shiva. In one viewpoint, He is the *Sheshhi* (the Principal) and She is the *Sheshha* (the Accessory); in another viewpoint, She is the Principal and He is the Accessory. When He drinks the poison She protects Him and when She is in the form of the daughter of Daksha and later the daughter of the Mountain King, He protects Her. This mutual support and protection that this divine couple give each other is the mysterious divine symbiosis that all the Shiva *Agamas*, and *mantra shAstras*, and the Tamil Tirumandiram talk about eloquently. Tirumandiram verse No. 333 says "By the grace of the *ShaktimAn*, *Shakti* dispenses Her Grace and by the grace of *Shakti*, the *ShaktimAn* dispenses His Grace".

In the Trichinopoly Rock Fort Temple dedicated to the Lord, His manifestation there is '*TayumAnavar*' .

(Tamil word meaning, He who became also the Mother – there is a whole story behind it, wherein He appears at the right time as the Mother-nurse who helps a lonely woman-devotee deliver her baby)

But though He has become the mother, the temple dedicated to Him has also a *sannidhi* for *ambaa*, the Mother. It is in the precincts of this temple that all the *shlokas* of ‘*Anandalahari*’ have been engraved on the walls.

Thus with the auspicious account of the divine couple becoming the Father and the Mother of the whole universe, the *Ananda-lahari* portion of Soundaryalahari ends.

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(Digest of pp.1072 - 1085)

(Note: At this point the Paramacharya looks back on the Anandalahari portion and describes in the form of an overview how Shiva and Shakti have been dealt in different relationships within this first part of Soundaryalahari).

The capability of ‘moving’ the immovable impregnable Father of the Universe is Her greatest glory. Soundaryalahari starts with that glorious idea in the very first *shloka*. He is the executor of the Dissolution Function of the Universe. But even that function could be done only by the power of the dust of Her feet, says the 2nd *shloka*. His relationship with Her is like our relationship to Him. In other words She is in the place of a Goddess for Him, as is confirmed by the word “*ArAdhyAm*’ in the first *shloka*. A little later (in #7) She is His Self-awareness personified – *Aho-purushhika* . In the next *shloka* He is Her equal, She as *KAmeshvari* sitting on the lap of the *KAmeshvara* form of Shiva (“*parama-shiva paryangka-nilayAM*”). This is where they are together the twin form of *saguNa-brahman*, as King and Queen of the ‘five cosmic functions’. *Shloka* #9 (“*sahasrAre padme saha rahasi patyA viharase*” – You are revelling with your husband in the *sahasrAra*-lotus) depicts Her as the *saguNa-brahman* coalescing within Him, the *nirguNa-brahman*. Another *shloka* (#11) depicts how they are situated in unison in the *Shri-chakra*. And in the next *shloka* it talks of how as an ideal *pati-vrata*, She reveals Her full form only to Him. But after twelve *shlokas* later, (*shloka* #23) She has not only taken half His body but has captured the remaining half also.

The next *shloka* (#24) needs more than a passing mention.

[*Shloka* 24 is not quoted by the Paramacharya but since he deals with it in detail, I am giving the *shloka* below without the word-by-word meaning. These meanings automatically come forth in his explanations. V. K.]

jagat-sUte dhAtA harir-avati rudraH kshhapayate

*tiraskurvan-netat svam-api vapur-Ishas-tirayati /
sada pUrvas-sarvaM tadidam-anugRHNAti ca shivaH
tavAjnAm-Alabhya kshhaNa-calitayor-bhrUlatikayoH //24//*

It begins in the style of *shloka* #2 where the Trinity is spoken of as doing their work only with Her grace. “*jagat-sUte dhAtA*” – Brahma originates the universe. “*hariH avati*” – Vishnu protects and maintains it. “*rudraH kshhapayate*” – *Rudra* destroys. Not stopping here, it goes on to talk also about the remaining two cosmic functions and the deities in charge of those functions. One of them is *Ishvara* who carries out the ‘*tirodhAna*’ aspect. “*Ishas-tirayati*” is what the *shloka* says: The Lord Isha deludes by His *mAyA*. And all this happens by mandate (“*tava AjnAm-Alabhya*”) from *ambaaL*. “*kshhaNa-calitayoH bhrU-latikayoH*” – by the subtle movement, for a second, of Her eyebrows! The absorption by *mAyA* is not only of the universe and all creation but of the Trinity also: Brahma, Vishnu and *Rudra*. Not only that; He himself disappears into the fifth functionary namely *SadAshiva*. “*svam-api vapuH Ishas-tirayati*” – *Isha* makes His own body disappear.

“*sadAshivaH*” is the name of the fifth cosmic functionary. The *shloka* names him “*sadA-pUrvaH shivaH*” meaning, ‘shiva with a prefix of *sadA*’.

At this point, one should note how a funny situation is implied here by the poet. The five cosmic functionaries are lower in hierarchy to *ambaaL* and her *pati* Lord Shiva. But one of those functionaries, namely the One who dispenses Grace has the name which means ‘Always Shiva’. And in order that the meaning should strike us in the face, the poet, instead of using the straight word ‘*sadA-shiva*’, uses the construction ‘Shiva with a prefix of *sadA*’.

Shloka #24 therefore shows the Lord as *Rudra*, *Ishvara* and *SadAshiva* in the relationship of functionaries under the suzerainty of *ambaaL*.

In the next *shloka* (#25) the Trinity is considered to be at the feet of *ambaaL*, but by that very reason, they are also worshipped; because, those who propitiate *ambaal* offer their flowers in obeisance at the feet of the Mother and the flowers do fall on the crowns of the Trinity, which are in prostration at those divine feet. In #25, by using the expression “*trayANAM devANAM triguNa-janitAnAM*”, they can be considered as born of *ambaaL* and therefore She is their *jananI*.

In #26, when everybody meets their end, even at the time of the Grand Dissolution (*mahA-samhAra*), the Lord is depicted as sporting with Her. The Grand Dissolution, seemingly a negative mode, is actually a great *anugraha* from the Almighty to the Universe; for, the millions of *jIvas* are brought back from their *karmic* whirl into the fold of the Supreme. “*mahA-samhAre asmin viharati sati tvat-patirasau*” : Here the key word is ‘*viharati*’. It means ‘plays in joy’, generally; but it also means

‘destroys’.The sanskrit words ‘*haraNaM*’, ‘*apaharaNaM*’, ‘*samharaNaM*’, ‘*viharaNaM*’, ‘*apahAraM*’, ‘*samhAraM*’, ‘*viHArAm*’ – all of them can be used interchangeably. So taking the words ‘*tvat-patiH viharati*’, we have to interpret it as ‘Your husband is engaged in Destruction’.

This interpretation leaves *ambaaL* out of the business of Destruction. He does it and She watches it. The authority for this interpretation comes from Lalita-sahasranAmam where She gets the name: ‘*maheshvara-mahAkAlpa-mahAtANDava-sAkshhiNI*’. I have already mentioned this in my explanation of *shloka* #41. The interesting point here is that She is the *sAkshhi* and He is the actor – in the action of *mahA-samhAra*. A similar *sAkshhi* status for Her is given in the great pilgrimage centre of Chidambaram, where the Lord performs the *tANDava* dance of Creation, while the *ambaaL* there, is a silent witness!

But in *shloka* #9, as we have seen just a little while ago, the word ‘*viharasi*’ is used for *ambaaL* herself. In the context there, it is the union of Shiva and *Shakti*. This is the last stage of Involution. It is the union of *jIvAtmA* and *paramAtmA*. There is no negative of Destruction there. There is only the flooding of nectar in fullness in the *jIva*. It is actually a delightful experience for the *jIva* when the *kunDalinI* reaches the sahasrAra. So the word ‘*viharaNaM*’ for *ambaaL* is quite apt with the meaning of joyful play.

Among the various relationships of Shiva and *Shakti*, there is also the *guru-shishhya* relationship.

-55-

(Digest of pp.1086-1091)

Almost all the *Agamas*, *tantras* and *Sam hitas* are supposed to have been taught by the Lord to *ambaaL*.

[Note by Ra. Ganapati: Generally, rites of worship follow the Agamas, Tantras and Samhitas according to the deity that is being worshipped – Shiva, Devi or Vishnu]

This *guru-shishhya* relationship – with the Lord as *guru* and *ambaaL* as *shishyaa*, comes in *shloka* #31.

[I am giving shloka 31 here along with its translation, though the Paramacharya does not do so, but still discusses it in detail. V.K.]

*catuH shhashhTyA tantraiH sakalam-atisandhAya bhuvanaM
sthitat-tattat-siddhi-prasava-paratantraiH pashupatiH /
punas-tvan-nirbandhAd-akhila-purushhArthaika-ghaTana-
svatantraM te tantraM kshhiti-talaM avAtItarad-idaM //31//*

pashu-patiH – Lord Shiva

sthitaH - remained as if fulfilled
atisandhAya – after having deceived
sakalaM bhuvanaM– all the world
catuH-shhashhTyA tantraiH – with the sixty four tantras
tattat-siddhi-prasava-paratantraiH. – (that that – result – generating -- worldly fulfillments) which expound practices that result in one or other of various psychic powers and worldly fulfillments.
punaH – But again,
tvan-nirbandhAt – by Your insistence,
avAtItarat – (He) revealed
kshhiti-talaM – (to the) world
idaM – this
te tantraM – Thine own tantra,
svatantraM – independent (of all the others)
akhila-purushhArthaika-ghaTanA – (which is) capable of conferring all the *purushhArthas* (by itself)

The Lord taught the various 64 *tantras* (means or strategies for attaining an end) to the world. But each one of them can give a certain type of worldly benefit, not more. In some sense this is a curtain of delusion thrown on the people of the world. The four *purushhArthas* (objectives of life) are *dharma*, *artha*, *kAma* and *mokshha*. All these can be had in one stroke by resorting to the *Shri VidyA tantra*. The Lord knew this. Then why did he not teach that also to the world? In fact the *Shri VidyA tantra* not only gives the worldly benefits but also takes one to the level of Brahman-realisation, because it makes all worship internal and focusses the entire physical and mental body toward that Ultimate goal of *brahman*-experience. So the Mother Goddess insisted that the Lord should teach this also to their worldly children.

The word '*nirbandhAt*' is very aptly put. It was She who involved the actionless *brahman* somehow into being the cause of the Cosmic World-play. But what happened? The play became so involving that it became a cosmic dance for Him. The dance of the five cosmic functions; then the *samhAra* dance, where the *parA-shakti* is only a non-participating witness! And then there are the seven different dances called *ajapA*-dance, *kukkuTa*-dance, and so on. In addition to this there is the nine-fold dance mentioned in *shloka* #41. Over and above this there are the 64 *leelAs*, like *bikshATanaM*, *tripura-dahanAm*, and *jalandhara-vadha* – not to speak of the 64 *leelAs* particularised in the temple-city of Madurai, where Meenakshi reigns. Not only he is involving himself in a pluralistic capacity, but He has also manouvred to distract the populace into the 64 *tantras* that give worldly benefits and retained the supreme *Shri VidyA Tantra* which could give the advaitic realisation to them.

It is at this point *ambaaL* decided to insist that they be taught the *Shri VidyA tantra*. It is of course the worship of *ambaaL*. But instead of Herself propagating it, She wanted this husband of Hers, this guru of Hers, to bring it to the world. This shows three characteristics of the Mother Goddess. Firstly, Her conjugal devotion to the '*pati*'; secondly Her respect for Her guru; and thirdly Her infinite compassion on Her children, the people of the world. It need not be emphasized it is the third quality, the motherly affection, that shows uppermost here.

The *Shri VidyA tantra* has several greatnesses of which one is the fact that it is the most concordant with the vedic route. Of course all the tantras can be adapted to the vedic route; but some of them do present obstacles to such vedic adaptation. So there is a necessity to speak of tantras which are concordant with vedic practices and which are not. It was our Acharya who established the pure vaidic *pUjA* and instilled life into it. It is true that even this *pUjA* contains some of the *mantras* which owe their origin to the tantra way. When he initiated the vaidic *pUjA* rituals in connection with the *upAsana* following the *Shri VidyA tantra*, he followed only the samayAchAra discipline.

It is this *tantra* that he calls '*te tantraM*' (Your tantra). In other words it is Hers, and She got it initiated into the world by the Lord Himself by insisting on it ('*nirbandhAt*'). And again, it is interesting to note that in all those other tantras, very often only a lower hierarchical position is given to Shiva. On the other hand, it is in this tantra which is deliberately called '*te tantraM*', that there is a perfect equality ('*samaya*') between Shiva and *Shakti*!

Looking back at the *Ananda-lahari* portion we see that Shiva and *Shakti* have been represented in several different roles – Shiva, as Her Majesty's most obedient servant; as Husband with an equal role; as a functionary so positioned by Her; as Husband only in name; as Guru; as devotee ; even as a son. And again, *ambaaL* has been depicted severally, as half of His body; as one who has appropriated even the other half of Shiva's body; as life-saver; and as the motive force who moves Him.

In spite of all this, what is most important in this *Ananda-lahari* section are the two *shlokas* 32 and 33 where the esoteric nuances of the *Shri VidyA tantra* are mentioned. The later part of the hymn is a description of the physical form of the Goddess; whereas the first part is the representation of that form through the *akshharas*. Any deity for that matter has two forms – one physical and the other, the form of sound. This *Ananda-lahari* part is the sound-form (*shabda-svarUpa*) of *ambaaL*. The physical form is a vision for the eyes. The sound-form is to be heard by the ears, articulated by the tongue through speech. In fact the physical form actually emanated from the sound. Only by the *japa* of the sound the other form becomes visible. Of course the same thing also means that it is the physical form that is the goal and the *japa* of the sound or the *akshharas* is only a means for that end. And thus we come

to the end of *Ananda-lahari* looking forward to that goal of viewing the delightful physical form of *ambaal*.

The Acharya ends the *Ananda-lahari* portion with the mention of “*janaka-janani*” – the Father and the Mother, of the whole universe. So the philosophical part is going to be set aside now and we go on to see the physical form of the Mother in all its infiniteness of Grace, Compassion and Beauty.

56

(Digest of pp.1091- 1098)

“*Vaidarbhi rIti*” and “*Gaudi rIti*” are two styles in Sanskrit poetry. The former conveys delightful thoughts by very gentle words, flowing like a river of honey. The latter, which originated in Bengal, has not only difficult thoughts, but they are also expressed in a high-sounding noisy style. The Acharya has used both the styles in Soundaryalahari. He has just finished the *Ananda-lahari* portion with the mention of ‘*janani*’, thus bringing the Goddess as near as a Mother to us. But, lest that should make Her very familiar and simple for us, and lest that might make us under-estimate Her majesty and grandeur, he starts the Soundaryalahari portion, with a bang, through the 42nd *shloka*, with a complicated thought and with a torrent-like flow of language.

The subject is the description of *ambaal*’s head. We see in the *shloka* the dazzling shine of the bright hot sun and the cooling comfort of gentle moonshine, through the poet’s imagination and his language.

*Gatair-mANikyatvaM gagana-maNibhis-sAndra-ghaTitaM
kirITaM te haimaM himagiri-sute kIrtayati yaH /
sa nIDeyac-cchAyAc-cchuraNa-shabalaM chandra-shakalaM
dhanuH-shaunAsIraM kim-iti na nibadhnAti dhishhaNAM // 42 //*

himagiri-sute : Oh Daughter of the snow-capped mountain

yaH : Whoever

kIrtayati : describes

te : your

haimaM kirITaM: golden crown

sAndra-ghaTitaM: studded densely with

mANikyatvaM gataiH gagana-maNibhiH: the (twelve) suns that have become the precious ruby stones (on the crown)

kim saH na nibadhnAti dhishhaNAM: why would he not record the idea (that)

chandra-shakalaM: the crescent moon (on the crown)

nIDeyac-cchAyAc-cchuraNa-shabalaM : (bird’s nest –shadow –reflected shine – enveloped - variegated colour) which reflects the variegated colours from the shadows of the (gems) in that nest (of the crown)

dhanuH-shaunAsIraM iti : is (nothing but) Indra’s bow (rainbow)?

The whole metaphor pours like a torrent from the heavens as Ganga did on Shiva's head. Once this description of Amba's crown on the head is done in this *shloka*, the style changes from the next *shloka* to a softer one. '*Chandra-sekhara*' is a name of the Lord, because the half moon is on His head. Already in *shloka* #23 *devI* was described as having the Moon on Her hairdo. So She is also '*Chandra-sekhari*'. Shiva has also the name '*Surya-sekhara*' because in many of the Shiva-*kshhetras*, there are certain days on which the rising Sun's rays directly fall on the linga in the sanctum sanctorum. Here we have also a *Surya-shekharI*, because not just one Sun but twelve Suns are supposed to be sitting in the form of ruby gems on the crown of *devI*. The very first line of the *shloka* thus brings before us the grandeur of Her enthralling form with the blinding dazzle of twelve suns radiating from the gems of Her crown.

The use of the word '*hima-giri-sute*' is significant. '*hima*' means 'snow'. So '*hima-giri-suta*' means 'the daughter of the snow-capped mountain. The first line has brought the heat of twelve suns in the picture. As a contrast the second line cools it off and brings in the coolness of '*hima-giri*'. Also the daughter of 'hima-giri' that is Parvati is said to be of cool greenish colour. It is *Sati*, the daughter of Daksha who immolated herself in the Fire of Daksha-yajna; and the same *Sati*, immediately after that heat of the immolation, was born in Her next birth as the daughter of the Himalayas, fresh as green, in the form of *hima-giri-suta*, called Parvati. In modern times in the time of *jnAna-sambandhar*, the argument with the Jain saints ended up only after the palm leaves of his devotional songs (*tevAraM*) survived the heat of the fire into which they were placed, and they emerged as green leaves with the writing unscathed.

The crown on the head of *devI* is made of gold. '*hema*' means gold. '*haimam*' means 'made of gold'. In Kenopanishat, the Goddess appears as *Brahma VidyA* and teaches the divines led by Indra. There the word used for the Goddess is '*haimavati*'. Our Acharya interprets it in two ways: one, as '*hima-giri-suta*', namely Parvati and the other as, the One who shines with the shine of '*hema*', that is 'a golden shine'. It is perhaps his intention to show the connection with the Upanishad that the Acharya in the very first *shloka* of the *Ananda-laharI* portion, uses both the words '*hima-giri*' and '*hema*'. To boot, let us remember that in the Upanishad, Her disciple was Indra; and here also '*Indra-dhanus*' is mentioned as '*dhanuH shaunAsIraM*', the rainbow.

The golden crown is studded with 'suns' as gems. So the 'suns' are specks on the crown; but on the crown there is the big crescent moon. In the real world the Sun is far far bigger than the Moon. Here it is the other way. The moon pours out nectar as well as the cool snow. So its cool downpour from the moon are the snowflakes on the crown. The bright light from the sun-gems falls on them and gets refracted as a multi-coloured rainbow: This is the '*nIDeyac-chAyAcchuraNa-shabalam*'. This

extraordinary poetic imagination -- that the self-effulgent moon's rays receive the sun's light and thereby the rainbow appears -- beats all scientific understanding. That, of course, is the privilege of poetic liberty.

In the very first *shloka* that starts describing the beauty of *ambaaL*, the idea of white light being refracted into the several constituent colours of the rainbow is brought in, as if to indicate esoterically that the *nirguNa brahman* manifests itself as the varied multiplicity of the universe by the magic of *parAshakti*.

But why imagine refraction? One can also imagine it to be reflection. Instead of taking that the light of the Sun falls on the cool rays of the moon and in that flow of cool snow it becomes the multicoloured rainbow, one can also imagine that there are several suns whose lights are in various colours and they get reflected in the mirror-like crescent moon and produces the rainbow effect.

In fact the poet here implies that it is not just his imagination; this is what anybody would say if he wants to describe the multicoloured radiance from the gems of the golden crown on the head of the Goddess. Another point which comes out here is the modesty of the Acharya in underplaying himself and speaking so highly of others who might be in his position of describing the *devI*'s glory. The modesty with which he begins this very first *shloka* of the Soundaryalahari part goes on till the very end.

57

(Digest of pp.1107- 1114 of Deivathin Kural, 6th volume, 4th imprn.)

tanotu kshhemaM naH tava vadana-soundarya-lahari
parIvAha-srotaH saraNiriva sImanta-saraNiH /
vahanti sindUraM prabala-kabari-bhAra-timira-
dvishhAM bRndaiH bandhIkRtam-iva navInArka-kiraNaM //44//

[Since the word-by-word meaning is automatically coming out of the Paramcharya's explanations, it is not given here separately.]

This *shloka* has an added significance since it has contributed to the title of the *stotra* '*soundarya-lahari*'.

"*naH kshhemaM tanotu*" : Let there devolve auspiciousness on all of us. Thus begins the *shloka* auspiciously. What is supposed to devolve the auspiciousness?

"*sImanta-saraNiH*" : The line of the parting of hair (on the head). '*SImanta*' is the parting of hair. '*saraNiH*' means path, route, line, wave, flow. The particular meaning will depend on the context. Here it is 'line'. The word '*SImanta-unnayanaM*' denotes a special ritual that is done for pregnant women for the benefit of the foetus. The ritual consists of

drawing a line along the *sImantaM* of the woman with the chanting of certain *mantras*. This is good for the foetus. The word *sImantaMM* is a union of '*sImA*' and '*antaM*'. *SImA* means boundary, here, the boundary that parts the two sides of the hair. Its '*antam*' is the end of that boundary. Technically it should have been '*sImAntaM*' but the middle long '*a*' has been shortened. This is actually an exception to the usual grammatical rule. A similar exception, but in the opposite direction, takes place in the name '*VishvAmitra*' where it should have been only '*Vishvamitra*', thus meaning, friend of the world. On the other hand as '*VishvAmitra*' ('*Vishva*' + '*amitra*') it now means 'the enemy of the world'. Again this is an unusual grammatical exception.

So '*sImantaM*' means 'the end of the boundary or border'. Of what is it the border or boundary? For a human body there are two boundaries. One is the foot and the other is the head. In the boundary that is the head, the line of parting of the hair goes up to the position of '*brahmarandra*' and ends there. So it is called 'the end of the boundary' or '*sImantaM*'.

Goddess Mahalakshmi permanently resides in five places. A lotus, the frontal lobe of an elephant, the hind part of a cow, the spine on the back of a bilwa leaf, and the *sImantaM* of a *sumangali*.

It is interesting to note that the Acharya has used "*vadana-soundarya-lahari*" (waves of beauty of the face) in this *shloka* and this has become the title of the whole *stotra*. We do not know who made it the title, but what we may conclude is that it is quite apt. What is further interesting is the fact that this beauty-wave occurs in the *shloka* where the *sImantaM* of the *devI* is talked about. It is this flood of facial beauty that should bring us the auspiciousness that we need. '*tanotu kshhemaM naH tava vadana-soundarya-lahari*'.

Now let us find out what is so special about the *sImanta* here. "*vahanti sindUraM*" : It (the *sImantaM* : the parting in the hair) bears the vermilion. The word '*sindUraM*' also means 'red lead' which is used for medicinal purposes in *Siddha* medicine. In North India almost all Ganesha deities would be totally soaked in this *sindUraM*. And in the same way they would do it for the Anjaneya deity also. Maybe the indication is that the beginning and the end are the same!

In traditional books, *kumkumaM* is spoken of as *sindUraM*. The *Veda-mAtA* (Mother Goddess representing Shruti) bows down in obeisance to *ambaa*. It is the *kumkumaM* from the *sImantaM* of *Veda-mAtA* that has sprinkled itself on the feet of *ambaa*. This idea occurs in LalitA-sahasranAma. '*sImanta-sindUri*' is the expression there. It is in the parting of the hair that *kumkumaM* is applied. On the forehead however, that is, between the eyebrows where one applies the '*tilakam*' what is applied is '*kastUri-tilakam*' -- this is what one gathers from the sahasranAma. Recall the name: "*mukha-chandra-kaLankAbha-mRga-Abhi-visheshhaka*". It says, just as there is a spot (*kaLanka*) on the disc

of the moon, so also is the *kastUri*-dot on the face of *ambaa*. This name occurs (in the *sahasranAma*) between the name that describes the forehead (*aLika-sthala*) and the name that describes the eyebrows (*cillika*). Therefore it is clear that the name '*mukha-chandra-kaLankAbha- ...*' describes the centre of the eyebrows. So *kumkumaM* at the parting of the hair (*SImenta-sindUri*) as well as the *kumkumaM* at the centre of the eyebrows – both are called '*sindUraM*' by the Acharya.

According to the *shAstras*, the place where sumangalis (women with living husbands) have to adorn the *kumkumaM* is the parting of the hair, at the place where it starts from the forehead. The practice of adorning the centre of the eyebrows is only a cosmetic addition. It is at the centre of the eyebrows where one concentrates the Supreme. It is in that manner one wears the *vibhUti* or sandal-paste, etc. at that spot; so also *kumkumaM* is also applied there. Whatever it be, the characteristic of a sumangali is only the *kumkumaM* at the parting of the hair. Women of olden days applied the *kumkumaM* first at the parting of the hair and then only on the forehead between the eyebrows.

The location of the central parting of the hair is a kind of residential address of the Goddess Bhagya-lakshmi of Prosperity. Goddess *ambaa* has the *kumkumaM* along the entire parting of the hair. That is what this *shloka* says. '*SImenta-saraNI*' means only that. In fact as the *shloka* goes, it appears that there is a round spot of *kumkumaM* at the point where this '*saraNI*' (the path) starts at the top of the forehead and thereafter along the path of the parting, it goes as a streak of red. There is no greater bliss than the pleasure of visualising *ambaa* with this *SImenta-sindhuram*. In other words the place of residence of mahAlakshmi has been decorated with *kumkumaM*. In fact there is much more in this.

58

(Digest of pp.1115 -1119)

[Note : The delightful commentary in Tamil of the Paramacharya on this shloka, #44, has been really a difficult one for me to present in English (in Sections – 57, 58 and 59). The superb majesty of the discourse of His Holiness should be enjoyed in the original]

In the Assembly of *ambaa*, on both sides of Her, Lakshmi and Saraswati are said to be fanning Her. This is what the name "*sa-cAmara-ramA-vANI-savya-dakshhiNa-sevita*" says in the Lalita-sahasranAma. Instead of having them as Her assistants, She has them both as Her very eyes – this is what the name "*kAmAkshhi*" means. "*kA*" means Saraswati and "*mA*" means Lakshmi. And "*akshha*" means 'eye'. So "*kAmAkshhi*" is the One who has '*kA*' and '*mA*' as Her eyes!

Later, *shloka* #64 says that Saraswati dwells in Her tongue. In fact, the grace of *ambaa* in bestowing power of expression to devotees is well known. That is why Saraswati is spoken of as dwelling in Her own tongue. And the poet in the Acharya plays gymnastics with the word *japa* in that *shloka*, where it says: Your tongue defies the *japa* (hibiscus) flowers in its redness because it is constantly engaged in the Japa (*mantra*-repetition) that gives expression to the glories of Lord Shiva; the redness of Her tongue is so intense that the Goddess of Speech, Saraswati, who dwells therein, gets Her crystal-like white complexion changed into the colour of a ruby (noted for its reddishness). We already saw in *Shloka* #16 that poets have spoken of Her as ‘*shRngAra-laharI*’ in Her form as the ‘red’ Saraswati (*aruNa-saraswati*).

Thus, of the two fanning divines, one of them, Saraswati, is elevated to the position of residing in the divine tongue of *ambaa*. So, the other of them, namely Lakshmi, is now elevated in this *shloka* (#44), to even a higher position, namely, the top of the divine head itself. Lakshmi resides in the *sImanta* of *ambaa*; and it is that Lakshmi who is decorated with the kumkuma-ornamentation of redness.

So the parting of the hair goes like a white streak amidst the jet black forest of hair (‘*cikura-nikurumbaM*’ of *shloka* #43) which looks like waves of blue-black on either side of it. It is the whiteness of the *sImantaM* (parting line) that is usual; but here *ambaa*’s *sImantaM* has been made reddish by the *sindUraM*. So the blackness of the locks of hair on either side and the redness of the parting line make the imagination of the poet run riot. Many of us do not appreciate such poetic licence, because of our preoccupation with the utilitarian value of everything we see or experience. But a poet does not just see beauty; he invents original analogies and that is what makes us enjoy both the poetry and the devotional sentiment built into it.

‘*prabala-kabarI-bhAra-timira-dvishhAM bRNdair-bandhIkRtaM iva navInArka-kiraNaM*’ -- these are the words.

‘*arka*’ is the Sun. ‘*arka-kiraNaM*’ means the Sun’s ray. ‘*navIna*’ is new. So ‘*navIna-arka-kiraNaM*’ means the rays of the rising Sun. Certainly it is reddish. Only when the Sun comes up higher and higher it loses its redness of appearance and becomes pure white. But at the point of rising it is red. The Acharya sees the *sImanta-sindUraM* on the divine head as one of the red rays of the rising Sun. At the beginning of the parting, namely at the top of the forehead, the *sindUraM* is a big dot (red) and so is the Sun itself (rising) and the *saraNi*, namely the line of parting, is the red ray emanating from that Sun.

‘*prabala-kabarI-bhAra-timira-dvishhAM bRNdair-bandhIkRtaM*’. Does this not sound like a clattering chatter of teeth? Why this hard construction ? The very words speak of a thunderous noise of battle. Who is battling with whom? The talk is about the *sImanta-saraNi*. Then who is warring with it?

'kabarI-bhAra-timiraM' means the darkness shown by the jet black dense hair. The adjective *'prabala'* prefixed to it, indicates a further strength to that darkness. When something is 'strong' it can be expected to be aggressive also, in the worldly ways of thinking. So whom will this darkness challenge or contest? Only Light. What is opposed to darkness is light. It is the sun which dispels the darkness of the night and brings the day. It is not even just the sun; it is the morning sun that night considers as the harbinger of its doom. Because darkness never 'sees' the full Sun. As soon as the first ray of the morning sun appears, darkness has to wind up and run.

And here, while darkness is in the form of *ambaa's* hair, the morning sun has appeared in the form of the *sindUraM* on the top of the forehead. It is the crimson ray of the morning sun that is represented by the *sindUraM*-coloured parting of the hair. And it is this parting that prevents the darkness on either side to become one large mass of darkness. Further, it is the darkness of the hair that has been pampered by oil, shampoo, and flowers – as has been indicated by the words *'ghana-snigdha-shlakshhNaM'* (luxuriant, soft and oily) in *shloka* #43. Because it has been 'pampered' it has become *'prabala'* (exceedingly strong) now. And that gives it the courage to dare challenge the redness of the *sImantaM!*

59

(Digest of pp.1122 -1128)

Darkness of night is the dominating factor all night. But the moment the rising sun with its crimson rays shows up, darkness has to flee. It has always been the unfulfilled ambition of 'darkness' to settle this score with the young sun. And here is *ambaa* having all the world's darkness, as it were, collected in her hair. But She has also brought the young sun in the form of the *sindUra*-spot right in the midst of this dark forest of hair. It is a life-time opportunity for darkness. With gusto it swallows all the rays emanating from that sun, for once. But still there is one single ray of crimson which goes straight across the centre of all this dark hair. It is that crimson which gives a decorating hue to the black hair. And it is the jet black background which brings out the majesty of the crimson parting of hair.

Thus we can see darkness having vanquished all but one ray of the bright rising sun. Why did it not go all the way by its challenge and overpower that one remaining ray also? But for that single ray remaining in its place, how would it be established that darkness had vanquished the bright sun and its rays? It is the one remaining ray of the sun that tells us that the other rays have been vanquished.

[Note : Though the Paramacharya did not say this, I can hear him saying: "Don't you remember, in the Sundara Kanda, every time Hanuman vanquishes an entire army, he spares one person,

so that he may go back to Ravana
and say what happened in the battle”]

“*dvishhAM bRndaiH*” means ‘by the gangs of enemies’. It is from the root ‘*dvishh*’ that the word ‘*dveshha*’, meaning ‘hate’ is derived. “*bRndaM*” means a crowd, a gang. The crowd of hair on *ambaa*’s head flows wave after wave and so looks like armies of black ready for fight. “*bandIkRtam-iva*” means ‘as if imprisoned’. It is the rising sun in the form of the *sImanta-sindUraM* that is imprisoned here by the armies of black hair. The word “*bandIkRtaM*” is significant. Not only have all the crimson rays of the rising sun been vanquished, but even that one remaining ray has been imprisoned by the dark army surrounding it on either side so densely that it cannot move this way or that way!

Incidentally, if one wants divine presence, the parting of the hair has to be straight in the centre – not this side or that side – of the hair on the head. And the *sindUraM* has to come from pure turmeric, not from any other artificial source.

Among the many meanings of “*bandhaM*” one is ‘imprisonment’. The meaning of “*bandIkRtaM*” is ‘be imprisoned’. The difference is between the active and the passive. So here ‘*bandIkRtaM iva*’ means ‘as if imprisoned’.

Well, what has all this – fight between darkness and light -- to do in the devotional *stotra* “*soundarya-lahari*”? In *shloka* #43, it was said that Her black braid of luxuriant locks of hair itself will eradicate the dense darkness of ignorance in us. In the same way he says in this *shloka* that the *sImantaM* (parting of hair) which in a sense has been imprisoned by the black forest of hair on either side, will grace us with all prosperity. In fact the *sImantaM* is the residence of Lakshmi the Goddess of Prosperity. Its ‘imprisonment’ is only an imagination; ‘*bandIkRtam-iva*’ – as if imprisoned – is the word. Now we shall see the other side of this *sImantaM*. We shall indeed see its greatness. I began with what appeared to be its negative side because I wanted to end up this *shloka* with the positive side. The Acharya of course begins this *shloka* only with the positive.

Now look at the first two lines:

tanotu kshhemaM naH tava vadana-soundarya-lahari
parIvAha-srotaH saraNiH iva sImanta-saraNiH /

Great poets do not waste their words. So when our Acharya uses ‘*lahari*’, ‘*parIvAhaM*’, ‘*srotas*’ and ‘*saraNI*’, which all convey more or less the same meaning ‘flood’, there should be something deeper in it. Yes, there is a deeper point. There are shades of differences in the meaning. ‘*lahari*’ is the bubbling, wavy and noisy water-flow. ‘*parIvAhaM*’ is the real flood of water which simply marches forward. ‘*srotas*’ could even be a silent rivulet. ‘*saraNI*’ is a straight flow of water, like that in an artificial canal. What starts as a ‘*lahari*’, widens up into a ‘*parIvAhaM*’ and then

flows like a controlled river ‘*srotas*’ between two banks and finally is channelised into a canal ‘*saraNI*’.

This is how *ambaaL*’s beauty starts from Her face as a *laharI* and spreads like a *pravAha*. When it touches the top of the forehead it becomes a *srotas*. The banks on either side of this *srotas* is the hair on either side of the *sImantaM*. Actually the flood of beauty cannot be dammed by the forest of hair. What is the greatness of *ambaaL*’s beauty if one can dam it by holding it between two banks? ‘*vaktra-lakshmi-parIvAhaM*’ (the flood of beautiful brilliance) says *lalitA-sahasranAmaM*. The brilliance starts from the face and overflows as a flood into the locks of hair on the head but is contained in the form of a ‘*saraNI*’ – *sImanta-saraNI* – between the dense forest of hair on either side. It is this brilliance (*lAvaNya*) of the Mother Goddess that bestows prosperity and happiness to all Her devotees. And since it all starts from the face, he calls it ‘*vadana-soundarya-laharI*’. And legitimately, the whole work has been named – we do not know by whom – *Soundarya-laharI*.

This *shloka* ‘tanotu kshhemaM naH’ properly meditated on, will bring us divine help in controlling our mind and all its evil tendencies – ‘*dvishhAm bRndaiH*’ – by which we are all imprisoned – ‘*bandIkRtaM*’.

60

(Digest of pp.1130 -1140)

Here comes one *shloka* (#46) where the Acharya has done delightful innovation with the simple idea of the ‘moon-like divine face’.

*lalATaM lAvaNya-dyuti-vimalaM AbhAti tava yat
dviIyaM tan-manye makuTa-ghaTitaM candra-shakalaM /
viparyAsa-nyAsAd-ubhayam-api sambhUya ca mithaH
sudhA-lepa-syUtiH pariNamati rAkA-himakaraH // 46 //*

‘*lalATaM*’ is the forehead. ‘*lAvaNya-dyuti*’ is the beautiful Light. ‘*vimala*’ means faultless. “*AbhAti*”, shines. So the first two lines mean: The forehead that shines in the pure brilliance of its divine beauty may be thought of (‘*manye*’ – I think) as the second form of the crescent moon of your crown. ‘*makuTa-ghaTitam candra-shakalaM*’ means the crescent moon that ornaments the crown. In other words what is said is that there is the crescent moon on *ambaa*’s head.

Traditionally, we all know that both *Ishvara* and *Ambaa* have only the third day moon on their head, not the half moon or *ashhTami-candra*. In all images of both these deities we could have noticed that the third day moon (the figure of the moon on the third day of its appearance) embedded in their head, would be showing the sharp corners of the curves on both sides as two dots. If it is the *ashhTami-candra* (the half moon) that is depicted, we would also see the diameter

joining those end points. In a crescent moon this diameter would not show nor would the remaining portions of the moon – though we can imagine the full figure of the moon by mentally completing the crescent into a full moon. It requires quite an imagination to visualise this. But the key to this is the pair of sharp corners in which the crescent ends.

On the other hand the semi-circular forehead of *Ambaa* is actually a half-moon. No portion of the half-moon is missing here. In the sahasranAma also it is said of her forehead (*aLika-sthala*) : “*ashTami-candra-vibhrAjad-aLika-sthala-shobitA*”.

Thus we have a crescent moon above, and also below it in the form of the forehead the half moon. Now comes the fun in the third and fourth lines:

“*ubhayam api*” – these two. The half moon in the crown and the half moon in the forehead.

“*mithaH*” – mutually, with respect to each other.

“*viparyAsa-nyAsAt*” – joined in the reverse order. “*viparyAsa*” means ‘the opposite order’.

They have to be joined in the reverse order because, the half moon in the crown is in the form of the lower half of a full moon and the half moon of the forehead is of the form of the upper half of a full moon.

So we have to join them in the reverse order. “*sambhUya*” means ‘attached’. What is the means of attaching them? It is the “*sudha-lepa-syUtiH*” of the moon itself. “*sudha*” means ‘nectar’. “*lepa*” is ‘paste’ or ‘gum’. “*syUtiH*” means stitching or sewing. In fact the English word ‘sew’ comes from ‘*syUtiH*’ of Sanskrit. Thus if one attaches the half moon on the head of *ambaa* and the half moon of her forehead, with the former as the lower part and the latter as the upper part, and use the nectar which oozes out of the moon for pasting them then the full moon itself shines! “*rAkA himakaraH pariNamati*”!

The next *shloka* (#47) is more complicated. But it is the complication and the poetic inventiveness that make us stay long at the *shloka* and therefore longer in the thought of *ambaa*.

*Bhruvau bhugne kimcit bhuvana-bhaya-bhanga-vyasanini
tvadIye netrAbhyAM madhukara-rucibhyAM dhRta-guNaM /
dhanur-manye savyetara-kara-gRhItaM ratipateH
prakoshhTe mushhTau ca sthagayati nigUDhAntaram-ume // 47 //*

“*bhruvau kimcit bhugne*” : ‘frowning a little’. ‘*bhruvau*’ means the pair of eyebrows. When the eyebrows are contracted either in anger or in thought, we are said to frown. Incidentally, the Sanskrit word ‘*bhrU*’ must have originated the English word ‘brow’ and also the tamil word ‘*puruvaM*’, all meaning ‘eyebrow’! Here we are talking about the eyebrows of *ambaa*. If the frowning is complete, the natural bend in the eyebrows disappears and they align themselves in a straight line. Here *ambaaL*’s

eyebrows are not contracted in anger, but they are more 'bent' than normal; that is why, the word '*kimcit*' is used. She is frowning in the thought of encountering a fear for Her children, namely, us, the people of the world.

The words '*bhuvana-bhaya-bhanga-vyasanini*' mean 'sorrowed (by compassion) with the worry of the need to destroy the fear (of samsara) of all the world'. She is a flood of bliss, certainly – *Ananda-lahari*. But She is constantly thinking about how to redeem this world from its endless misery of ignorance and consequent suffering in samsara. It was Her snap-of-the-finger decision once that created the five Cosmic functionaries for the good of the world; cf. "*kshhaNa-calitayoH bhrU-latikayoH*" - 'by a movement of Thy creeper-like brows' - of *shloka* #24.

Of course it is not explicitly stated that Her frowning is because of Her worry about the world. It could even be because of Her alertness at the onset of a '*bhaya*', danger to Her beloved children of the world. If She is intending to eradicate the fear from people even before the danger occurred, then '*bhuvana-bhaya-bhanga-vyasanini*' does not fit here. Only when the situation is confronted with a danger, and a consequent fear in the people, only then the '*bhanga*' (destroying) of that '*bhaya*' makes sense. We can go on analysing the verse-line in this manner endlessly. That is the beauty of the poetry in this *shloka*!

But note, whether it is sorrow or anger that is the cause of the frowning, it is not a thing for enjoyment; on the other hand, the Acharya here seems to be enjoying the scene with all his heart. So the contracting of the eyebrows is not the usual kind. It is more profound than that. And that is the content of the other three lines of the *shloka*. In short, the words '*dhanur-manye*' of the third line are the key to this puzzle. 'I think it is the bow', says he. That is, the two eyebrows are thought of as one bow. But the wonder here is that both the eyebrows are considered not as two bows but one single bow. '*dhanur-manye*' –in the singular. Then what about the gap between the two eyebrows, where there is no growth of hair? Actually there should not be; for, as a Tamil proverb goes, if the brows meet, it harbingers destruction of everything – "*kUDina puruvam kuDiyai-keDukkuM*".

So then how come, the two eyebrows are compared to a single bow? Whose bow? Is it just a comparison? What is great about all this except some poetic gymnastics? We shall see.

61

(Digest of pp.1141 - 1151)

The Acharya does not see the two eyebrows of *ambaa* as two bows. He conceives of both of them as one bow – not as one arc from bottom to top, but as two arcs of the same bow. It appears as if a skilful archer is at the point of stringing his arrow through the bow, everything is in

tension, and one can see even the little vibration as a wave of the two arcs. Thus the two eyebrows together constitute a single bow. But mark it! At the centre, there is a gap. Between the eyebrows, just above where the nose begins, there is a gap in what appears as the bow. Not only there is this gap in the bow, but the bow string also has a gap; for in the same *shloka* the Acharya is saying in the second line that the two honey-beetle-like black eyes of *ambaaL* and their brilliance constitute the bowstring. And this bowstring has a gap in the middle because there is the nose-ridge that is dividing it. **If both the bow and the bowstring have gaps right in the middle, then where is the bow, where is the string?** Then the whole analogy will crumble.

So we have to probe a little more deeply. The bow is Manmatha's bow – “*ratipateH dhanuH*”. What is the authority or rationale for thinking of it as Manmatha's bow? The rationale is:

“*tvaDIye netrAbhyAM madhukara-rucibhyAM dRta-guNaM*”.

dRta-guNaM: with the bow-string held

tvaDIye netrAbhyAM: by Your eyes

madhukara-rucibhyAM: that shine and move about like honey bees

The two black honey-bee-like eyes of *ambaaL* are radiating a brilliance, which is not static, but is superlatively dynamic; they are moving this side and that side fast enough to cover all the beings in the world so that the *dRshhTi* of *ambaaL* may shower grace and compassion on them. This fast movement of the honey-bees (eyes) gives the visual illusion of an infinite line of black sparkling dots and that is what makes the bowstring! And remember, only Manmatha has such a bow-string made up of honey-bees. And that is why ‘*ratipateH dhanuH*’ is not unreasonable in this context. And whom is he (manmatha) aiming at by this bow and arrow? Obviously Lord Shiva. Any time He is prone to go away and sit in isolation as Dakshinamurti. Then who will be there with Mother Goddess to look after the world? It was She who put Him in this seat of ‘One of the Triad’, with a specific duty and also as *Ishvara* and Sadashiva with duties of *anugraha* and *tirodhAna*.

We are still to untangle the problem of the bow and bowstring not falling apart in the middle since they appear to have gaps in the middle. The solution of the riddle is found in the words (fourth line and part of the third line):

“*savyetara-kara-gRhItaM prakoshhTe mushhTau ca sthagayati nigUDhAntaraM ume*”

‘*prakoshhTa*’ is wrist. ‘*mushhTi*’ is clenched fist. ‘*sthagayathi*’ means ‘hides’. ‘*nigUDHa*’: ‘not visible’. ‘*antara*’: interspace. So far we have arrived at the following meaning: “By the wrist and clenched fist is hidden an interspace, that is (therefore) not visible.”

Let us now visualize the imagery which the poet is bringing before us. An archer (here, it is Manmatha) is holding the bow. The hand holding the bow will have its clenched fist in the middle of the bow and thus it is the fist that is hiding the middle of the bow. Similarly the other hand will have its wrist in front of the middle of the bowstring and thus will hide that middle. Thus if we do not further think about it, both the bow and the bowstring will have a vacant space in their middle. And a little more observation will tell us that it is the wrist and the fist that are filling up the corresponding hidden space and so neither the bow nor the bowstring is in two pieces. This is how the pair of eyebrows of *ambaaL* with the vacant (browless) middle and the two eyes with the nasal ridge in the middle exhibit a bow and bowstring with their middle hidden by the fist and the wrist respectively.

Now we have to further enquire which hand is doing what. The words “*savya-itara-gRhItaM*” (meaning, held by the other-than-right hand) tell that story. Even in the very next *shloka* which talks about the right and left eyes of *ambaa* as the Sun and Moon respectively, “*savya*” is used for ‘right’, though “*savya*” also means ‘left’ in most other places.

Incidentally, there are some Sanskrit words which have valid contradictory meanings for the same word. “*chhAyA*” stands for both shadow and light. “*nyAsa*” means ‘abandonment’ as well as ‘seizure’. “*shiti*” means both ‘black’ and ‘white’.

In this *shloka* it is important to understand which hand is holding the bow and which hand is ready to shoot off the arrow. Recall also that Manmatha is also capable of shooting arrows with left hand just as Arjuna is. But if he is shooting the arrow with the left hand the bow will be in his right hand. We are watching this, standing before *ambaaL*.

First understand that Manmatha has to be in a horizontal lying posture a little below the level of the eyebrows of *ambaal* to shoot the arrow upward; because the line of eyes (bowstring) is below and the central stem of the bow (line of eyebrows) is above. Now **if Manmatha is holding the bow (of eyebrows) in his right hand and we are looking at it from his left** (because on his right is *ambaal*’s face, so we cannot be looking from that side), the two things that are in our view at the middle portion of the whole system are: one, his right fist closing in on the middle of the bow and two, his right forearm on the farther side from us. What we see of the fist is only the fingers closing in on the middle of the bow, but they cannot completely hide the bow as much as they would if we were seeing from the other side. From the other side we would have seen only the back portion of the palm and that would have completely hidden what he is holding. Again, coming to the right forearm hiding the middle of the bowstring, there is no chance at all for such hiding, for the forearm is on the farther side.

On the other hand, if he were holding the bow by his left hand the back portion of the clenched fist would be completely, really completely

hiding the middle of the bow; not only that, the forearm (the *prakoshhTa*) being between us (the viewer) and the bowstring, would be completely hiding the middle of the bowstring. And this is exactly what is happening. The interspace between the eyebrows of *ambaal* is hidden – in the poet’s imagery, by manmatha’s *prakoshhTa* (forearm and wrist) – and the nasal ridge causing the discontinuity in the line of the moving eyes – in the poet’s imagery, this is hidden by the *mushhTi* (clenched fist). This, I think, is what the *shloka* depicts in the last two lines of this four-line verse! But don’t think that it is all only poetical gymnastics only. There is a great significance for this *shloka* beyond the gymnastics of its imagery.

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(Digest of pp.1152 - 1158)

Among the several great achievements of *ambaal* is the fact that She gave life to Manmatha who was earlier burnt to ashes by the Lord Himself. She did it so that the play of Creation could go on. But then She also was concerned about the welfare of the created world. The waywardness and indiscipline of people of the world, did bother Her. As the Mother of the Universe She wanted the Father also should join Her in the activity of redeeming the millions of the world. Instead of helping Her in this direction He, the Lord, had the propensity to retire into seclusion for penance. *She knitted her eyebrows at the thought of this.*

That very frown of Hers became an encouraging factor for Manmatha who was now alive by Her Grace. Making Her own knitted eyebrows his bow, He came to Her help. He assured Her that he (Manmatha) will keep the bow (of Her eyebrows) in readiness so that the very moment Lord Shiva shows any propensity to retire into aloofness, he can release his arrow and change His mind. During that earlier occurrence when he tried this he was burnt to ashes by the Lord; this happened because He was at that time trying it on his own, with a great air of confidence built by his own ego. But now, in all humility, he says that he will take refuge in Her own face and use Her own eyebrows and eyes for his equipment of bow and bowstring. By the very fact that it is now Her own divine act, it won’t result in failure as in the earlier case!

Thus it is the frown of the eyebrows that causes everything. It is at the control of that frown that the entire Universe and its divine functionaries are all functioning. *No doubt therefore, that if we take refuge in the same eyebrows by meditating on them, the bad influence of manmatha will not be on us!*

Now the Acharya comes, in the description of *ambaal* from head to foot, to Her eyes. In the previous *shloka* (#47) itself, there was a casual mention of the black honey-bee-like eyes. But in that *shloka* the dominant factor was the eyebrows. Now we come to the eyes proper. This

shloka #48 talks about the three eyes of *ambaal* and the importance of the third eye.

*ahas-sUte savyaM tava nayanaM arkAtmakatayA
triyAmAM vAmaM te sRjati rajanI-nAyakatayA /
tRtIyA te dRshhTiH dara-dalita-hemAmbuja-ruciH
samAdhatte sandhyAM divasa-nicayor-antaracarIM //48 //*

tava: Your

savyaM nayanaM: right eye

sUte: causes

ahaH: the day

arkAtmakatayA: it being of the form of the Sun, (or) possessing the definitive characteristic of the Sun

rajanI-nAyakatayA: Being of the form of the Moon (the Lord of night)

te *vAmaM* (*nayanaM*): Your left eye

sRjati: creates

triyAmAM: the night.

te: Your

tRtIyA dRshhTiH: third eye

dara-dalita-hemAmbuja-ruciH: (which resembles) the red golden lotus slightly in bloom

samAdhatte: beautifully generates

sandhyAM: the two sandhyAs, i.e. the two twilights

antaracarIM: which come in between

divasa-nishayoH: day and night.

The eye-balls of the right and left eyes of *ambaal* are like black honey-bees. The third eye however is different; it is crimson-red like melted gold. This is the *agni-netra* of the Mother. The first two eyes are, according to all *shAstras* and *purANas* – except of course the *Purushha-sUkta* – the Sun and the Moon. The central eye, usually referred to as '*lalATa-netra*' is agni, Fire.

The first line says: Because your right eye is of the form of the Sun, it generates the day-time. Note that the word '*savyaM*' is used here for '*right*' as opposed to '*vAmaM*' for left (see the second line).

'*hemAmbuja*' is golden lotus. The Meenakshi temple in Madurai has the sacred tank called the tank of the golden lotus. It is *ambaal*'s third eye that is the golden lotus there.

It is interesting to note that while the two eyes denote the progenitors of 'day' and 'night', the third eye – which is between the two eyes – must generate the intervening time (*sandhyA*) between day and night. And, incidentally, this *shloka* therefore establishes that *ambaal* is Time itself; '*kAla-svarUpiNi*'.

The Mother does not stop by just creating ‘day’, ‘night’ and the two *sandhyAs*. The three Cosmic Functionaries who take care of the triple acts of creation, protection and dissolution, are created by Her (*shloka* #53). Without distinguishing between the colours of the three eyes, the lines of red, white and black are depicted as *rajas*, *satva* and *tamas* and these originate the three functionaries, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, who, at Her bidding, do the acts of creation, protection and dissolution.

But *Shloka* #55 presents the Compassionate aspect of the Mother and compensates for the possible impression of Her as the ultimate progenitor of Destruction at the Dissolution time. “If You close Your eyes, the world gets destroyed. And when You open them, the world is created again. The presently created world should not be destroyed – that is what Your Mother instinct feels. That is why perhaps, Oh Mother, You are not winking Your eyes” says the Acharya in the 55th *shloka* – thus echoing the general understanding in the Hindu world that the divines don’t wink their eyes at all.

In another *shloka* #54, the three colours white, red and black which stand for satva, rajas and tamas are presented from a different perspective. The river Ganga is white. It comes from Shiva’s matted hair. Yamuna river is black, because it has an inseparable relationship with Krishna. The third one is Saraswati which is invisible but flows under Ganga and Yamuna as an underground current. In stead of Saraswati, the Acharya takes the Sone river, which is red. The meaning of *SoNA* is red. If Ganga is taken as Shiva and Yamuna is taken as Vishnu, then the *SoNa* river is to be taken as *ambaaL*. It is *ambaaL*’s favourite son Vighneshvara who presents Himself as the red Sona-bhadra stones that are available in plenty in the Sone river-bed. The three lines, white, black and red, in *ambaaL*’s eyes represent the Triveni of Ganga, Yamuna and *SoNA*. Therefore it is ‘*anaghA*’ that is, sinless. The *dRshhTi*, glance that emanates from that ‘sinless’ confluence of the three great rivers will eradicate all our sins. “Let it sanctify us”, winds up the Acharya, as a prayer that benefits, in his usual style, not only the one who says this but all of us!

63

(Digest of pp.1159 - 1163)

Here is a *shloka* which combines, by a poetic artifice of metaphorical meanings, the divine glance of *ambaaL* with several (actually, eight) meritorious locations (*kshetras*) in the land of Bharat.

*vishAlA kalyANI spuTa-rucir-ayodhyA kuvalayaiH
kRpAdhArA’dhArA kimapi madhura”bhogavatika /
avantI dRshhTis-te bahu-nagara-vistAra-vijayA
dhruvaM tat-tan-nAma-vyavaharaNa-yogyA vijayate // 49 //*

te dRshhTiH : Your eye-glance
vijayate : excels in glory (with qualities of being ---)
vishALA: broad,
kalyANI : auspicious,
ayodhya kuvalayaiH : invincible (even) by the blue lilies
spuTa-ruciH : (in) brilliant clarity,
AdhArA kRpAdhArA :the basis for the flood of compassion,
kimapi madhurA: indescribably sweet,
bhogavatika: pleasurable,
avantI : protective, and
bahunagara-vistAra-vijaya : with victories spread over several cities,
tat-tan-nAma-vyavaharaNa-yogyA : well befitting the names of cities indicated by those qualities,
dhruvaM : certainly.

Of these, the four names ‘*ayodhya*’, ‘*dhArA*’ (Bhoja’s capital), ‘*madhurA*’, ‘*avantI*’ (Ujjain) are well known as the names of cities. ‘*VishALA*’ (coming at the beginning of the verse) is also one such; it is the other name of Badrinath. Recall the slogan-cry of devotees: ‘*Jai bhadri-vishAl!*’ In the Valmiki Ramayana when Rama and Lakshmana are taken by Vishvamitra to Mithila, on the way they pass through the city of ‘*VishALA*’.

In the Kannada region, there is a ‘*KalyANi*’ in the district of Bidar. In the days of the Acharya that region was called ‘*Kuntala*’, with its capital at Kalyani. In later days when the Chalukya dynasty of Vatapi came to an end, but again emerged as a powerful influence, it came to be known as the ‘Kalyani Chalukya dynasty’.

Bhogavati is another city. This is known as ‘*kambath*’ in Gujarat. The Englishmen called it Cambay. That is why the name of ‘Gulf of Cambay’ came up.

Vijaya is another city. It is not the Vijayanagar of Hampi in Bellary District of Karnataka. Nor is it the Vijayanagaram of Srikakulam District of Andhra, where the famous *Gajapati* kings ruled. In order to distinguish these two Vijayanagara’s, the Hampi Vijayanagara was called ‘Vijaya’ and the Andhra Vijayanagara was called ‘Viziya’ by later English Historians. It was the Hampi Vijayanagara that became the seat of the famous Vijayanagara Empire in later days; because the city was named ‘VidyA-nagara’ by Bhukkaraya. But that was in the 14th century. Neither this nor the Andhra Viziya was there at the time of the Acharya. So the ‘Vijaya’ that he has immortalised in this verse must be something else, probably the Kurukshetra of the Mahabharata. The last *shloka* of the Gita says: “Where there are Krishna and Arjuna, there rules *Vijaya* also”!. It may be this Vijaya is referring to Kurukshetra. It is interesting to note that Arjuna was himself also known as ‘*Vijaya*’.

These eight cities are not ordinary places. The relationship of *ambaal* to them all is because of the fact that Her eye-glance (*dRshhTi*) while falling on the entire universe fell in addition with an extra force on these eight places. And, to boot, the meanings embedded in the names of these eight cities, also fit as a characteristic of the *dRshhTi* of *ambaal*. This is shown by the extra meaning imbedded in these words in addition to them being simple proper names of cities.

The Commentators wax eloquent on the precise meanings of '*vishALA dRshhTi*', '*kalyANI dRshhTi*' and so on for all the eight epithets for the glance of *ambaal*. I do not remember them all. But let me now tell you generally what all this means.

At this point, Ra. Ganapathy, the writer of these records, supplies the following footnote.

"Lakshmidhara's bhashya on Soundaryalahari describes these eight kinds of eye-glances thus.

'*vishALA dRshhTi*' shows an inner satisfaction.

'*kalyANI*' shows the miraculous nature of the *dRshhTi*.

'*ayodhya*' is the smile shown by the very eyeballs.

'*dhArA*' is that enchanting glance of the lover.

'*madhurA*' is what is shown by contracted eyes.

'*bhogavatI*' is the glance shown by friendly affection.

'*avantI*' is the innocent look.

'*vijayA*' is the side glance emanating from the position of the eyeball moving to the extreme corner of the eye".

The breadth of coverage of the glance of *ambaal* is vast and so it is *vishALA*. It also generates auspiciousness for the whole world; so it is *kalyANI*.

Now let us come to '*ayodhyaA*'. This name could have come to the capital of the state ruled by the Ikshvaku kings by one of two reasons. Their headquarters must have been so well protected by moats and fortresses that they were invincible. Or perhaps, they were considered so invulnerable that nobody came to fight with them. On both contacts their place is '*ayodhyaA*'! But the point here is, in what way the name fits *ambaal*'s eye-glance? First of all, *dRshhTi* itself is a word for 'eyes'. Poetic liberty with 'eyes' compares it with blue lilies. Going one step higher, poetic licence even plays havoc with the roles of '*upamAna*' (example) and '*upameya*' (that which is exemplified); thus they interchange the roles of '*upamAna*' and '*upameya*'. In the current context, it is not uncommon to say 'the eyes which belittle the blue lilies'. And then one gets to be more aggressive and says 'in the war of comparison, the eyes are the winners over the blue lilies'. It is in this strain the Acharya says 'eyes which are invincible by the blue lilies'. And this invincibility is what is built into the word '*ayodhyaA*'!

It is *ambaal*'s eye-glance that bestows the rain of compassion, that is, it is the basis ('*AdhArA*') for the rain ('*dhArA*') of compassion ('*kRpA*'). Therefore it is '*kRpA-dhArA AdhArA*', thereby doubling the use of the sound '*dhArA*' which is the name of the famous capital of Bhoja. And does it not indicate also the generosity of King Bhoja whose awards

always excelled in their profusion because they were always given with both hands rather than a single hand, thus doubling the size of the benefaction?

64

(Digest of pp.1164 -1174)

Sweetness is the innate characteristic of *ambaal*'s form. So how sweet would be her *dRshhTi*, in particular! Therefore it is '*madhura*'. The corresponding city in North India is Mathura. But here it is the 'Madhura' of the Tamil region.

'*Bhogavati*' is said to be a place in Prayag (modern Allahabad). But the *shloka* talks about '*nagaras*' only. So a part of Prayag cannot be what he is referring to. Also Bhogavati is also the name of a city in the nether-world and also the name of Ganga which flows in the three worlds. But the Acharya is talking here only about cities on Earth, none of these would be the Bhogavati that he is referring to. So it must refer to only Cumbath in Gujarat, which has however lost its good old name of Bhogavati!

Well, how does that name fit as a description of *ambaal*'s eye-glance? The word means 'deserving of experience'. If only *ambaal*'s glance can fall on us, what greater experience can we think of, other than the bliss such a glance will bestow on us?

'*avanti*' means that which protects. It is *ambaal*'s eye-glance that is a great force of protection for us. The city named Ujjain also has the name '*avanti*'. In fact the name once belonged to both the city as well as the kingdom of which it was the capitol. Later, in order to avoid confusion, the kingdom continued to be called '*avanti*' while the capitol was named 'Ujjain'. Later it appears that the capitol was also called '*VishALA*'.

A final observation. *Ambaal*'s *dRshhTi* certainly falls on the whole universe and therefore on all the cities of the world. But these eight have been highlighted because the divine glance has all the qualities indicated by the names of these cities; and that is what makes the poet in the Acharya express his delight through this *shloka*.

The next *shloka* (#50) makes a direct connection between poetic talent and *ambaal*'s eyes, by bringing in a comparison between Her third eye and the other two eyes:

kavInAM sandarbha-stabaka-makarandaika-rasikaM
kaTAkshha-vyAkshhepa-bhramara-kalabhau karNa-yugalaM /
amuncantau dRshhTvA tava nava-rasAsvAda-taralau
asUyA samsargAd-alika-nayanaM kimcid-arunaM // 50 //

dRshhTvA: Having seen

tava: Your

kaTAkshha-vyAkshhepa-bhramara-kalabhau : (side-glance – pretext – honeybees – young) two eyes resembling the young of honey-bees, on the pretext of (casting) side-glances

amuncantau: not leaving

karNa-yugalaM : the two ears

sandarbhā-stabaka-makrand-aika-rasikaM : (poetry – bouquet – honey – exclusive – tasting) which enjoy the exclusive taste of honey dripping from the bouquet of poetic sentiments

kavInAM : of the poets

nava-rasa-AsvAda-taralau : and eager in tasting the nine *rasas*

alika-nayanaM : the third eye (on the forehead)

asUyA-samsargAt: out of jealous hostility

kimcid-arunaM : (has become) slightly reddish.

The key word here is ‘*asUyA-samsargAt*’. Where came this hostility? Why? To whom? These are the interesting subtleties of the Acharya’s composition in this *shloka*. The redness of the third eye is usually attributed by poets to the traditional association of agni (fire) with the third eye, just as the other two eyes are associated with the Sun and the Moon. But the eye that goes with the Sun should then be associated with heat and the other eye with the coolness of the Moon. That way there will be a distinction between the two eyes. The Acharya naturally wanted to *deviate* from this stereotyped analogy of the three eyes to the Sun, the Moon and agni. He assumes therefore that all three eyes were naturally of the same colour originally, but now because of the feeling of jealousy on the part of the third eye towards the other two eyes, it became red!

And, he gives a legitimate reason for this jealousy. The word ‘*sandarbhā*’ means ‘opportunity’ or ‘circumstance’. In the context of this *shloka* it means that kind of exquisite poetry which coordinates characters, events, circumstances, words, flight of imagination, metre, and everything connected with poetry. When poets make a bouquet out of such excellent poetry, all the nine sentiments – *rasas* – flow out like honey. This is the honey that is exclusively enjoyed by the ears of *ambaaL*. Her eyes are themselves long and when the side glances are there, the ends of the eyes reach the ears! And that is how the eyes partake of the poetic honey that has already been poured into those ears by poets. Enjoying this taste of honey the eyes would not leave the ears (‘*amuncantau*’). Since the eyeballs are so fascinated by that enjoyment, they do not come off from the ears; they are compared to the young ones of honey-bees which get stuck in the depths of the honey-full stems of flowers!

But here, in the poet’s imagination, *ambaaL* is playing a trick with Her devotees. She has a duty of pouring out compassion and grace on the people of the world. If She is only enjoying the flattering *stotras* poured into Her ears to such an extent that even Her eyes get stuck in extending their side-glances up to the ears, then She will be failing in Her duty of compassion to the rest of the world. Hence the use of the words ‘*kaTAkshhavyAkshhepa*’. On the pretext of a side-glance She is allowing Her eyeballs to move sideways up to the ears. This side-glance pretext is for the world to be blessed with Her infinite compassion. In other words She is achieving both by Her side-glance – one is pouring out Her Grace on the world and two, the eyes themselves are sharing with the ears the honey-taste of the poetic fancies that reach the ears.

What are these poetic fancies? They are all about the Lord. But this idea is not there in this particular *shloka*. By sheer habit I just used the words ‘about the Lord’. But it is not all mine. In *shlokas* 60 and 66, where Saraswati Herself is singing praises and Mother Lalita is listening with enjoyment, it is said ‘*vividham-apadAnaM pashupateH*’, meaning ‘the varied *leelAs* of Lord Shiva’.

Another *shloka* which talks about the fact that Mother Lalita is enjoying the music of Sarasvati is *shloka* #60. There are two “*lahari*’s” in this *shloka*. “*sarasvatyAs-sUktIH amRta-laharI kaushalaharIH*” are the beginning words. We have already seen various “*lahari*’s”: *Ananda-lahari*; *Soundarya-lahari*; *cidAnanda-lahari*; *shRngAra-lahari*. In this *shloka* (#60) though it looks like there are two “*lahari*’s”, in actual fact there is only one, namely, “*amRta-lahari*”. The other one, “*kaushala-hari*” is not a “*lahari*”. It means that which captivates the “*kaushala*” (talent). The content of the first line of *shloka* #60 is to say that the words (actually, prayers – *sUktis*) of Sarasvati capture even the flooding flow of nectar (*amRta-lahari*). Earlier in *shloka* #50, it was said that the ears store up the honey of praises from poets. Here the same ears are said to be the small receptacles (*chuLuka-pAtraM*) of those prayers given out by no less than the Goddess of Learning Herself. When the ears are so personified, the clang of the ear ornaments (*kuNDala-gaNah*) when Mother Lalita nods Her head in appreciation, is said to be the cries of ‘hear hear’ of those ears in appreciation of Sarasvati’s praises.

65

(Digest of pp.1174 -1179)

After having described how the eyes enjoy the nine *rasas* poured out by poets into the ears of the Mother, now the Acharya tells us how the eyes themselves show the dance of the nine *rasas*:

*Shive shRngArArdrA tad-itara-jane kutsana-parA
saroshhA gangAyAM girisha-carite vismayavati /
harAhibhyo bhItA sarasiruha-soubhAgya-janani
sakhIshhu smerA te mayi janani dRshhTis-sakaruNA // 51 //*

It is the eyes that can show all the different *rasas* that reflect the status of the mind. The ears are simply of no use for this task. The lips of course can reflect anger (by twitching in a certain way) and sorrow (by twitching in a different way). Sometimes they also show happiness by showing a slight movement peculiar to a smile. But the one organ in the body which shows out all the attitudes that exist internally is the eye. Whether it is love, disgust, anger, wonder, fear, courage, comic mirth, compassion, or serenity, for all these the eye is the indicator. In dramatics the *rasa* of compassion is also shown by the sorrowful eye, but the *rasa* of divine compassion (*karuNA*) is recognised in dance forms only by the eye. The artist when bringing to life his picture or painting, takes the greatest care on his depiction of the eyes for it is through them that he brings out the state of mind of his subject. A slight alteration in the presentation of the eyeballs will change the entire *bhAva* of the painting. Equal care has to be taken of the eyes by the actor or actress in a play. All this world is a play of the Mother. And She showers all the *rasas* through Her eyes. And that is what is taken up in this *shloka*.

In what context is the *shRngAra rasa* (the sentiment of Love) dominant? Naturally in Her relationship with the Lord. ‘*Shive*

shRngArAdrA: The eyes are wet by the *rasa* of Love towards Shiva. His crystal whiteness is flooded by Her redness and thus draws Him into the *shRngAra rasa* – as is talked about in *shloka* #92.

The expression of Love is something that attracts. The opposite of this is not the fear or terror (*raudra rasa*) that is generated by anger. Anger has always a reason. Love is blind. So Love has no reason or rhyme. The opposite of it is the *bhIbatsa rasa* (the sentiment of disgust) that also has no reason. We have many things in us that are disgusting – both physically and mentally. But *ambaa* the Universal Mother takes all of us in Her arms. How can She have any *rasa* of disgust? Yes, She has – when some male other than Her Lord, comes to Her not as Her child, but as an adult. Even Lord Shiva came to Her in disguise once, with tales of blame on Shiva and that is the time when She exhibits the *bhIbatsa rasa* as exquisitely described by Kalidasa. By just closing the eyes also, She may exhibit the disgust.

“*tad-itara-jane kutsana-parA*”: “*tad-itara*” means ‘other than He (Shiva)’. ‘*kutsana-parA*’ means ‘full of disgust’. ‘*jane*’: in the people. ‘*kutsana*’ is the same as ‘*bhIbatsa*’.

When does She show Her ‘*raudra*’ *rasa* – the *rasa* of extreme anger? “*saroshhA gangAyAM*”. ‘*rosha*’ and ‘*roudra*’ are the same. When the Lord is keeping another woman right on the top of His head – that is what Shiva is doing with GangA – She is naturally angry. He gave Her only half His body; whereas the other woman is sitting on his head! She is not angry with Him; She is a *pati-vratA*. But She shows Her anger on GangA! By a poetic ruse the Acharya here gives Her the feeling of an ordinary human female!

‘*adbhuta*’ is another *rasa*. It is the wonder expressed at something extra-ordinary. “*girisha-carite vismaya-vat*”: ‘*vismaya*’ is wonder. ‘*GirIsha*’ and ‘*Girisha*’ are both names of Lord Shiva. ‘*GirIsha*’ is ‘*Giri-Isha*’, that is, the Lord of the Kailas mountain. ‘*Girisha*’ means the One who resides in Kailas mountain. His history is full of wonders and miracles. The destruction of Tripura, the burning of Manmatha, the vanquishing of GajAsura, the silencing of Kala, the killing of the asura ‘*andhaka*’, the consumption of the *HalAhala* poison, the roaming about as a mendicant (*BikshhATanaM*), the *tANDava* dance of Nataraja, and the 64 *leelAs* in the *kshhetra* of *HalAsya* (Madurai) – all these and many more! That the Actionless (‘*nishh-kriyaH*’) Ultimate got involved in all these numerous actions was itself due to *ambaa* -- that is why the Soundaryalahari started. She wonders at the *leela*-actions of the Lord and we wonder at Her miraculous prompting that made Him do all the actions!

The next is ‘*bhayAnakaM*’, the *rasa* that expresses fear. She as the Universal Mother is ‘*abhaya-vara-pradA*’, the dispenser of abhaya, fearlessness and vara, boon. How can She have fear? Yes, She has. The poet in the Acharya says She is ‘*harAhibhyo bhItA*’ – afraid of the snakes

on the person of the Lord! Actually the very snake depicted around a Shiva-linga is Herself – in the form of the *kunDalinI* in every *jIva*. And still She is 'afraid' of Shiva's snakes! This is another divine play!

The *rasa* of '*vIra*', that is, courage, is certainly visible in Her great *leelAs* of the destruction of MahishhAsura and BaNDAsura, where She could be seen as the very personification of '*vIraM*'. But the Acharya could not possibly bring himself to link Her *vIraM* with such destructive episodes. Instead he says '*sarasIruha-soubhAgya-jananI*' – the One who generates the brilliance of the lotus. Lotus-brilliance is red. Redness indicates the *rasa* of '*vIraM*'. In fact he could have said that She excels the brilliance of the lotus. For he does not want even that slight hint of a competition or battle implied in the word 'excels'. So he says She 'generates' (*jananI*) the brilliant redness of the lotus.

One more observation about the word '*jananI*'. There is also an alternate reading as '*jayinI*'. This means 'the One who wins'. Her eye certainly wins the brilliance of the lotus. In this reading, the concept of 'winning' is explicitly stated. Whether it is winning or generating, what is significant here is that it is the very eyes of the Mother that do these actions directly. So far the '*rasas*' that we have seen earlier – like anger, fear, wonder, etc. – are all only shown as a reaction to something else by the eyes. Whereas, this '*vIra rasa*' is not a reaction by the eyes, it is an action performed by the very eyes!

"*sakhIshhu smerA*" -- humorous among Her friends. The mischievous look that She would exhibit in Her humorous conversations with friends is what is enjoyed by the Acharya here.

The remaining of the nine *rasas* are: '*shoka*' that is sorrow which is also exhibited as '*karuNA*' (divine compassion) and '*shAnta*' that is serenity.

The next *rasa* is *karuNa-rasa*, that is, the *rasa* of pitiability and miserability. This is also called *shoka-rasa*, the *rasa* of sorrow and misery. But the Acharya does not want to depict *ambaa* in this *rasa*. Earlier in *shloka* #47 also, when he used the words "*bhuvana-bhaya-bhanga-vyasanini*", though She was shown to have had feelings of sorrow ("*vyasanini*") for the people of the world, it was more because of Her *karuNA* (divine compassion) that She was sad, than because of the '*bhuvana-bhaya*', the horror of *samsAra* of the people. She wanted to help them rid of this '*bhuvana-bhaya*' and so She was intent on '*bhuvana-bhaya-bhanga*', namely the destruction of the fear of the world; and thus it was more an expression of *karuNA* (compassion) than *karuNA* (=shoka, sorrow). In the same way here also it is the *karuNA-rasa* that

exhibits itself; thus the *shoka-rasa* is only shown by implication from the *rasa* of divine compassion, that comes out of the words “*te mayi janani dRshhTis-sakruNA*” – meaning, Oh Mother, Your glances that show different *rasas*, are full of compassion when falling on me.

Note the use of the word “*mayi*” (on me), here. All along the Acharya was using the word “*naH*” (to us, on us), whenever he was asking for the Grace or blessing to descend from the divine. But now the matter is so personal that he makes himself the representative of the entire world, and asks for the Grace to descend on him, and through him to every reader of this *shloka*. All the other *rasas* can be objectified as operating on a third person, but the *KaruNA-rasa* has to be received as a divine blessing by each and every one.

The *shloka* is over. But we have covered only 8 *rasas* so far. Where is the ninth *rasa*, *shAntaM* – that of peace and serenity? The *rasa* that is a unification of all these eight *rasas* into one is the *shAnta rasa*. It is the basic *rasa* from which all others emerge! It is the Shiva *rasa*. The first word “*shive*” in this *shloka* denotes that. In the beginning of Soundaryalahari, in the very first *shloka*, we were told that without *Shakti*, *ShivaM* is nothing but *shAntaM*. This *shloka* begins with “*shive*” and thereby indicates that it is that *shAnta* state that became dynamic and evolved into the other eight *rasas*. The whole stotra of Soundaryalahari depicts *ambaaL* as the ‘*kArya-brahman*’; so the *shAnta* state of Hers where there is no action has been only subtly indicated here.

Another interesting observation!. The stotra itself begins with ‘*Shiva*’. This *shloka*, which is exactly in the middle of the whole stotra – it is the beginning of the 51st *shloka* – begins with ‘*shive*’. Thus *Shakti* occurs in the very centre of the whole stotra, just as the *shiva* mantra occurs in the middle of the four vedas.

There is another tradition in the science of ‘*alankAra*’ however on the concept of *shAnta-rasa*. According to this tradition, there are only eight *rasas*. *ShAntaM* is not a *rasa* at all. Experience, experiencer, feeling, excitement – all these and their original sources together constitute what is called a *rasa*. But in the state of *shAnta*, all these have no place; for they are all dormant therein. Then how can we call it a *rasa*? But there is quite an opposite tradition in the same ‘*alankAra*’ school of experts. They have detailed in their writings what originates the *shAnta rasa*, what would be its background, what are the symptoms, and what are the accessories for this *rasa* and so forth. They call *shAnta rasa* the ‘*rasa* of all *rasas*’!

But the argument about there being only eight *rasas* doesn’t seem to be acceptable to the Acharya; for he has used the words “*nava-rasAsvAda-taralau*” (*shloka* 50), “*nava-rasa-mahA-tANDava*” (*shloka* 41).

There is also a tradition where not only *shAntaM* is the ninth *rasa* but there is one more *rasa* added to the list, namely '*vAtsalya*'. Acharya's words "*mayi janani dRshhTis-sakaruNA*" (May your glance, Oh Mother, be on me!) remind us that She is the Mother Supreme and this manner of the Acharya making himself a child of the Mother, is exactly what brings the *vAtsalya rasa* also! Thus the Acharya has explicitly mentioned eight *rasas* and implicitly brought in the other two *rasas* – all in reference to that single organ, the eyes of the divine!

There is a lot of beauty implicit in Soundaryalahari. One of these is the mention of 'Meenakshi'. This also concerns the 'eye'. 'Meenakshi' itself means the 'fish-eyed'. Her very fame from ancient times has always been centred upon the beauty of her eyes. Of such a great Devi, apparently neither of the two great works on *devI* have spoken. These two are Lalitasahasranama and Soundaryalahari. But this is only a first impression. If we carefully look into these works, we would come to know there is no necessity to default them for this.

For, though there is no explicit mention, Meenakshi is implicitly mentioned in Lalitasahasranama. In fact it is this very implicitness that adds a greater importance to that. "*vaktra-lakshmi-parIvAha-calan-mInAbha-locana*" is one of the names in the sahasranama. '*vaktra-lakshmi*' means the brilliance of *ambaa*'s face. It is like a great flood (*parIvAha*). When the dalliance of the face runs as a flood of water, there ought to be fish in that flood! Where are the fishes? The long long eyes of *ambaa* are the fishes. '*locana*' means 'eye'. ('*lokana*' means 'sight' or 'glance'. By the very fact that it is 'seen', the world is called '*loka*'). The '*locana*' that resembles 'a fish' generates the word '*mInAbha-locanaM*'. Instead of saying '*MinAkshhI*' explicitly, it is mentioned as '*MinAbha-locana*'. Well, that takes care of one 'default'!

In Soundaryalahari, where the *shloka* #49 talked about the relationship of Her eyes to various cities, '*madhura*' occurs. So by giving the name of the city of Minakshi, we may take it Minakshi has been mentioned. In addition to this there is *shloka* #56.

67

(Digest of pp.1186 -1188)

The first two lines of Shloka #56 are:

tavAparNe karNe japa-nayana-paishunya-chakitAH
nillyante toye niyatam-animeshhAH shapharikAH /

tavAparNe has to be broken as *tava aparNe*. *aparNA* is the name of *ambaa*. The name *aparNA* means 'She who did not even eat the leaves'. In her manifestation as the daughter of the Mountain King, when She

was doing penance in order to be wedded to Lord Shiva, She adopted such a terrific self-discipline, wherein, She did not even have the fallen leaves as Her food.

aparNe: Oh Goddess, who has the name *aparNA*,

niyataM : certainly,

shapharikAH: the female fishes

nillyante : hide themselves

toye: in water

japa-nayana-paishunya-chakitAH: (talking – eyes – tell-tale – trembling) trembling in fear that Your eyes (that extend up to the ear) are perhaps carrying tales of slander (about them)

tava karNe: to Your ears.

Why do fish never swim in the upper regions of the ocean and instead always stay in deep waters? The Acharya here imagines an interesting reason. They see *ambaal*'s eyes which extend up to Her ears. She is always rolling Her eyes on all sides in order that not a single being in the universe misses Her blessed glance of protection. And so they now and then reach the extremities of the eye and appear as if they are touching the ears! And the fishes think that is when the eyes say something secretive into the divine ears. They think defensively that the *devI*'s eyes are perhaps telling tales about them (the fishes); because they always think that the fish-eyed looks of the *devI* are only competing with them as rivals in terms of fast movements. And naturally they are afraid the *devI* might take it on them and therefore they stay in deep water! They know that if they are really put to test they will lose in competition with *ambaal*'s eyes both in the beauty as well as in fast movement.

In the Meenakshi temple at Madurai, there is the tank called 'The tank of the Golden Lotus'. There are no fishes in that tank. The folklore is that they don't come there because they know they cannot compete with the beauty of the eyes of Goddess Meenakshi. Thus the Acharya in making a comparison of *ambaal*'s eyes with fishes and in painting a picture for us of the fishes not wanting to show up before Her, has really subtly hinted to us of Goddess Meenakshi in this shloka!

This takes care of the other 'default' – namely, that in Soundaryalahari, where is the mention of Meenakshi?

One more observation on this *shloka* before we move on . This is about the word '*animeshhAH*'. It means 'without winking the eyes'. By the way, the word '*nimeshha*' means a unit of time equal to about one-fourth of a second. The Tamil word '*nimishhaM*' meaning 'a minute' must have come from this '*nimeshha*'. That *ambaal* does not wink Her eyes was effectively used by the Acharya in just the previous *shloka* (#55). There he says that Creation and Dissolution take place just during the winking of Her eyes. And so in order to prevent this universe (that has

been created at the opening of Her eyelids) from dissolution She does not wink Her eyes at all !. Here the general traditional belief that the divines do not wink their eyes has been used by the Acharya as a remarkable expression of Her protective feeling towards the whole universe. But we can also look at it in another way. The fraction of a second during which the winking takes place may deny the Compassionate Divine Glance to Her children of the world; and maybe that is why She does not wink Her eyes!

But how can the same non-winking of eyes apply to fish? Of course there is the traditional belief that fishes by nature don't sleep. But again this belief has been elevated to a poetic imagination by the Acharya visualising that the fish don't wink because they, being afraid of the effect of slander about them by Her eyes, want to be alert all the time against any 'attack' by Her even while they hide themselves in deep water!

Next comes one of the most touching shlokas (#57) of Soundaryalahari. Here we have to melt our hearts in prayer. Maybe this particular *shloka* was done by the Acharya when He was overcome by Her *KaruNA* in all its fullness. But the Acharya shows his humility even here. Instead of saying "Your Grace has descended on me with all its overflowing fullness", he says, in talking of Her Grace, "Would it not also reach me?" Look at the humility of our Acharya in spite of his being at the apex of Bhakti, JnAna, Spiritual Power and Poetic Excellence!

Indeed all the great nAyanmars, and Alwars, when they sing about their love of God vie with each other in expressing the sentiment of humility coupled with grief and self-pity. "Oh Lord, Would you not condescend to shower your grace on this poor little devotee of Yours?" – this is the running theme in many of their compositions. Our Acharya also does this. My own opinion is this. These great giants of devotion do not have to belittle themselves so much. They are all already realised souls. But they sing in this strain because they want us ordinary folk to be able to appeal to the Almighty in that strain. Ignorant as we are, we lack that humility and we don't even know how to pray. And that is why they give us the very words to pray with that kind of humility. And here, in this *shloka* #57, *ambaal* has prompted our Acharya to pray to her in that style with superlative humility!

68

(Digest of pp.1190 - 1196)

*dRshA drAghIyasyA dara-dalita-nllotpala-ruchA
davIyAmsaM dInaM snapaya kRpayA mAm-api shive /
anena-ayaM dhanyo bhavati na ca te hAnir-iyatA
vane vA harmye vA samakara-nipAto himakaraH //57 //*

“*dRshA*” denotes ‘by the eye’ as also ‘by the glance’.

“*drAghIyasyA*” means ‘longer than anything’. The comparison is with any thing else in the world. Therefore the expression ‘*dRshA drAghIyasyA*’ connotes the eye-glance that can outreach any distance. In other words *ambaal*’s glance falls on those even in the farthest corners of the universe. And naturally it does not distinguish among them; it falls on all of them equally.

“*dara-dalita-nIlotpala-ruchA*” : Usually ‘*ruchi*’ is taken to mean the taste that the tongue feels. But the feeling of ‘light’ that is associated with the eye-sense is also called ‘*ruchi*’. In *shloka* #48 earlier, the Acharya used ‘*dara-dalita-hemAmbuja-ruchiH*’ – the ‘*ruchi*’ corresponding to the golden lotus slightly in bloom – for *ambaal*’s third eye. Thus the light of fire that comes from the third eye is the golden lotus and the other two eyes are blue water-lilies (‘*nIlotpala*’). The two sounds of ‘*la*’ in ‘*nIlotpala*’ give the soft gentle touch of sweetness to the description. It befits the deity whose name itself – ‘*lalita*’ – contains the same two soft sounds of ‘*la*’. Just as an expert jewel-maker chooses the right colour and nature of the gem-stones to be studded in his jewels so as to maximise the attractiveness and majesty of the jewel that he makes, the poet in the Acharya chooses his words meticulously to fit the subject and produce the delightful sound effect!

The *nIlotpala* radiates cool beauty. The coolness compares to the compassion that radiates from the graceful eye-glance of *ambaal*. And it permeates the whole universe. This radiation is not the eye-blinding brilliance of the golden lotus (*hemAmbuja*) – which belongs to the third eye. The Lord’s opening of the third eye is known to radiate terror. We have no instance of *ambaal*’s opening of Her third eye. So what is prayed for here is the *nilotpala*-glance of the right and left eyes.

Then there is the qualification ‘*dara-dalita*’ for the *nIlotpala*. When the waterlily is fully closed but ready to blossom, the cool shine of the moon falls on it and it starts to open up. ‘*dalita*’ indicates the just-opened state of the petals of the lily. ‘*dara*’ – meaning, ‘a little’ -- indicates that the blossoming is not full but very little. If the lily opens out fully, it won’t give the eye-shape. Nor is it totally a bud. Only a closed eye would look like a lily-bud. And we know that *ambaal* never closes her eyelids! She has to cast Her glance on all the world all the time!

Nor can we say Her eyes are fully open. Actually such a fully open look from the eyes would not radiate compassion; only in anger the eyes will radiate such a full stare. In a compassionate look, the eyelids are half closed and half-open. In complete *shAnta* (Peace) state the eyes will be almost closed though a little of it is visible. So when *ambaal* casts Her graceful compassionate glance, the eyes have the half-blossomed state of the *nIlotpala*. It is in this state that the flower also has a subtle attraction, for what is inside is not visible, but what is inside is also

showing a little! A poet also enjoys and revels in such a state where he dares not say something explicitly but still is not totally implicit.

When you look at a *nIlotpala* petal, it shows up as blue in the outer fringes but as you look more and more inside and follow it up to its base, the blue colour fades and brightens up into white. This happens even in the petals of a red lotus. Thus when a *nIlotpala* flower shows up as a silken blue with a polished oily surface, with no other colour spoiling the blueness, then it must be only in its half-blossomed state. When it has fully blossomed, the white colour at the bottom will begin to show up. Hence the words '*dalita*' (just blossomed) and '*dara*' (only a little). What an accurate matching of words!

Now let us go to the second line of the *shloka*:

“*davIyAmsaM dInaM snapaya kRpayA mAm-api shive*”

Note that the first line had a number of words sounding with '*da*'. '*dRshA*', '*drAghIyasyA*', '*dara*', and '*dalita*'. And the same flooding of words with '*da*' continues even in the second line: '*davIyAmsaM*' and '*dInaM*'. And again the sound effects of '*drAghIyasyA*' and '*davIyAmsaM*' are the same. All this is of course gymnastics of words. That is only the tip of the iceberg. The gymnastics of the contents of the words is thousand times more superb.

'*davIyAmsaM*' is also a word denoting a degree of comparison just as '*drAghIyasyA*' was in the first line. '*davIyAmsaM*' denotes 'farther than anything'. So it indicates the person who is praying is farthest removed from Her. '*dInaM*' indicates lowliness, pitiability, worthlessness, and a state of total fright. All these meanings are together applicable here. The Acharya has put in this word so as to have all its meanings relevant here.

Such a lowly person is to be bathed (*snapaya*) in the rain of compassion from the Mother Goddess. But where is the rain of compassion supposed to come from? It is not 'from'; it is 'by'. By Her glance. By Her '*kaTAkshha*' – glance of grace.

But if you look at the first line there doesn't seem to be any need for such a prayer. For '*drAghIyasyA*' is the nature of Her eye-glance; that means it is far-reaching and covers the entire world. Not only it covers universally every one, but it does not also make any distinction from person to person. So there is no reason to assume that somebody has been left out.

Why then is this prayer '*snapaya kRpayA*' – meaning, please deign to bathe (this devotee) in Your compassion?

“*snapaya kRpayA mAm-api shive*” – ‘Bathe even me by Your grace, Oh Mother’ : Why this prayer, when the first line of the *shloka* has

already assured us that *ambaal*'s compassionate glance is '*drAghIyasyA*', that is, it reaches the farthest corners and extends to every one without any distinction? That is because this 'lowly one' (*dInaM*) is *davIyAmsaM* (far removed even from the ordinary range of people – in that sense, the lowliest). And the Acharya's stamp of humility comes out not only in these two words, but in the additional word '*mAM api*' – meaning, 'even me'. He asks for *ambaal*'s grace 'even on this poor me'.

The whole thing implies "My Mother! You have probably kept me so far removed from you, because I do not deserve the universal *kaTAkshhaM* (divine glance of grace) that you bestow on all. I am probably of such poor spiritual merit. But now I pray to you. Would you not deign to cast your glance even on me?"! "Please do not just glance, but really bathe me by a downpour of your grace" (*snapaya kRpayA*).

Why this poor self-estimation? Obviously, the Acharya is praying for all of us. We usually do not deign to rise to this pedestal of humility when we pray to God. Because our ego prevents us from becoming so humble. But the Acharya is teaching us how to pray. It is said that Jesus took all our sins on himself and got himself crucified on the Cross. [Here the Acharya is speaking for us and taking on himself all our faults as if they are his and pleads for Divine Mother's Grace to descend on him \(for us\) in the fullest sense!](#)

The Acharya usually prays for all of us; he uses the word "naH" (cf. Shlokas 7 and 44). But in *shloka* #51, where he was referring to the nine *rasas* oozing forth from Her eyes, he used "mayi" (on me), which was a little puzzling to us. But the explanation for that comes here. The Compassionate Glance mentioned there happens to be the subject of this *shloka* #57. By itself Her divine glance is '*dRAghIyas*', that is, reaches the farthest. Therefore nobody need pray to Her for that Glance. But here the speaker (the Acharya) considers himself the lowliest of all; so he has to pray for that divine benefit of Her Glance. And that is why in *shloka* #s 51, 57 he uses "*mayi*" !

[Note : In shlokas 22 and 51 also, the Acharya uses the word "mayi". But the Paramacharya's explanation fits there also !]

The followers of the tradition of *ShrI* Krishna Chaitanya, who follow the dvaita-bhAva bhakti, are well known for their attitude of extreme humility in their prayers to God. But in that kind of modesty our Acharya excels them here!

"Well ! You have yourself accepted that you have been banished from My Grace and that too deservingly, by your own admission. Then why do you still pray to Me?" – *ambaal* might ask. And the Acharya, as if anticipating this possible rejoinder from *ambaal*, puts in the third and fourth line of this *shloka*:

anena ayaM dhanyo bhavati na ca te hAnir-iyatA
vane vA harmye vA sama-kara-nipAto hima-karaH //

Though I am undeserving according to *shAstraic* rules and regulations, where comes a rule or restraint when pure love is the principal matter? There are things which have an equanimous relationship with everything else irrespective of norms and regulations. In fact this kind of equanimous view is what the Gita raises to the sky. There have been people of that kind; and there are things of that kind. Take for instance the moon. It is always '*hima-karaH*' – that which makes everything cool. The moon does not make any distinction as to which place on earth should receive its cool moonlight. Does he make any discrimination between a high tower *and a low pit? Whether it is a forest ("vane vA") or a mansion ("harmye vA")* he pours his moonlight equally. Neither does he pour more of it in the quadrangle of the king's palace nor does he pour less of it in the shrubs of the thorny forest. He is "*samakara-nipAtaH*" – that is, one who falls equally everywhere. In the same way, can you not Oh Mother, dispense your cool Grace on me, even though I am covered by the rough and tough dirt of worldly sins!

In other words, all this argument is to say that the Mother Goddess should not take into account my quality; She should have '*sama-dRshhTi*'!

But then it appears the *ambaal* raises another question. "Suppose the weight of your sins boomerangs back on my "*kaTAkshha*" (divine Graceful Glance) itself? And the Acharya replies: "*na ca te hAnir-iyata*". '*iyata*': by this. '*te*': for you. '*hAniH na*': there is no loss. The additional word '*ca*' makes the '*te*' as '*te ca*', meaning, for you too.

Your *dRshhTi*, glance, will not be affected by the object on which it falls. Just like the moon. Its light falls on all and sundry; but the moon itself is not affected by any such object on which its light falls. When the moon itself is not affected by the object that benefits by it, what to speak of Your compassionate Glance. On whomsoever it may fall, even though it be a faulty object such as me, how can it affect Your *dRshhTi*? "*na ca te hAnir-iyata*" – By this you are not affected either.

When it is said that 'for you too' there is no loss, then there should be something else mentioned which has necessitated that word 'too'. Just as "you too" there has to be a 'me' on the other hand. The answer is in the expression "*anena ayaM dhanyo bhavati*" – This person (namely, I) also becomes blessed.

The moment Your compassionate Glance falls on someone, that someone is blessed with infinite bliss. You also do not lose anything. I get everything. That very undeservingness which removed me farthest from you has now been more than compensated by the beatific of Your *dRshhTi*.

The Acharya has composed this *shloka* only for us to get that treasure of beatification of Her Grace. We all live in this world seeking to decorate ourselves with fame, honour, position, power and what not. But

all this ‘*alankAra*’ (=decoration) is nothing before what that ‘*alankAra*’ of Her benign Grace that can bring in the ultimate jnAna to us in no time.

The *shloka* ends with ‘*samakara-nipAto himakaraH*’. By this he pleads with *ambaal* for her equanimous view of all. It is this very *sama-darshana* – that is the view which sees everything as brahman along advaitic lines – that the poet MUka praises in Shloka #48 of his ‘*AryA-shatakaM*’. Just as this Soundaryalahari *shloka* talks of moonlight falling equally on the forest as well as the mansion, MUka *kavi* compares ‘*vipinaM*’ (forest) and ‘*bhavanaM*’ (House) and says that one who has *ambaal*’s graceful glance will consider both of these equanimously. Three things bother man. Lust, Anger and Fear. Fear disappears by *ambaal*’s Grace; even the forest becomes a home for him. Friend and Foe become equal to him. In other words the anger in the enemy disappears. And thirdly even an inert stone is not any lower in esteem than the sweet lips of an young girl; in other words, lust flies away from him. The bathing in Her Grace drives away all these three and gives one the treasure of advaita. The *dhanya* (blessedness) that this *shloka* talks about is the one who has obtained the *dhana* (treasure) of that advaita.

Oh What a beautiful *shloka*! Deserves to be meditated on over and over again!

70

(Digest of pp.1205 -1210)

There is a subtle matter of yoga-shAstra in *shloka* #61. In the order of description of the divine form from head to foot, the next, after the eyes, is the nose.

asau nAsAvamshaH tuhinagiri-vamsha-dhvaja-paTi
tvadIyo nedIyaH phalatu phalam-asmAkam-ucitaM /
vahaty-antar-muktAH shishira-kara-nishvAsa-galitaM /
samRddhyA yat-tAsAM bahir-api ca muktAmaNi-dharaH // 61 //

tuhina-giri-vamsha-dhvaja-paTi : (Snow-mountain - lineage – flag) Oh Flag of the House of the Mountain of Snow,

asau tvadIyaH nedIyaH nAsAvamshaH : this nose of Yours, which is more like the hollow bamboo staff of that flag --

phalatu : May it bestow

asmAkAM : on us

ucitaM phalaM : the appropriate fruit.

vahati : (it -- that is, the staff-like nose --) contains

antaH : in its inside,

muktAH : pearls.

yat tAsAM samRddhyA : for it is out of their abundance

bahir-api ca : that even on the outside

muktAmaNi-dharaH : (there appears) a nasal pendant, in the form of one pearl,

shishira-kara-nishvAsa-galitaM : (moon-cooled – outgoing breath – pushed out) pushed out, as it were, by the moon-cooled breath of the left nostril.

It is natural for the bamboo to be hollow. *Ambaal*'s smooth nose has also the hollows of the nostril. And it is natural for *ambaal* to have nasal pendants. Here we are talking of pearl pendants – cf. *muktAmaNi-dharaH*. In Madurai and Kanyakumari, the diamond nasal pendant of the Goddess is famous. “*tArA-kAnti tiraskAri nAsAbharaNa-bhAsura*” is one of the names in Lalita Sahasranama. It means She excels even the lustrous light of the stars by means of the dalliance of Her nasal ornaments. A star radiates light of all colours. The light of the star is also of the diamond-type. So the ornament that is spoken of here in the Lalitasahasranama must also be a diamond nasal ornament. A pearl never radiates several colours. The tradition of “pearl nasal pendant” (*muthu-mookuthi* – in Tamil) always associated with *ambaal* shows that perhaps at one time it was the pearl pendant that must have been dominantly in vogue.

The fullness of both masculine and feminine beauty is usually talked about in respect of Lord Krishna. So the deities of Krishna always show a nasal pendant. There is a famous *shloka* starting with the words “*kasturi-tilakaM* ...” praising Krishna, in which you get the words “*nAsAgre nava-mouktikaM*” – ‘brand new pearl ornament at the tip of the nose’.

Here the Acharya’s citing of pearl pendant as the nasal ornament for *ambaal* contributes well to the metaphor of the bamboo flag-staff. When a bamboo is of an excellent variety, there is an ancient tradition (handled as such by poets respectfully) that such a bamboo contains pearls inside it. A similar belief is there with respect to the frontal globe (*mastakaM*) of an elephant and also with respect to sugarcane. Indeed in *shloka* 74 of Soundaryalahari the Acharya tells us that *ambaal*'s chest is adorned with a necklace made of pearls got from the frontal globe of Gajasura, slain by the Lord. In the present *shloka*, *ambaal*'s nose which is, as it were, the hollow bamboo staff, is visualised to contain pearls as per the tradition about the bamboo.

But wait! Tradition says there are pearls within the bamboo, not outside it! Here the nasal pendant of *ambaal* is outside the nose. Isn't it a flaw in the analogy?

The Acharya takes care of this beautifully. It is through the hollow of the nose (bamboo) that *ambaal* is exhaling her breath. When air passes through the hollow of a bamboo there results the music of the flute. Here the nasal breath exhales the pearls that are inside and pushes them out as a nasal pendant! It is the breath of the Almighty that

is said to constitute the Vedas. The ultimate content of the Vedas is Mukti, the final Release. ‘*Mukti*’ and ‘*mukta*’ (pearl) are handled by poets for purposes of rhyme. Here the Acharya says that it is the *mukti* that is exhaled by *ambaal* in the form of the *mukta*!

There is a further play of words in the use of ‘*vamsha*’. This word means ‘bamboo’. Recall the *shloka* beginning with the words ‘*vamshI-vibhUshhita-karAt*’ in praise of Krishna. It means that His hand is adorned by the flute of the bamboo. The same ‘*vamsha*’ also means ‘lineage’. So *ambaal* is addressed as the flag of the lineage of the Mountain King – ‘*tuhina-giri-vamsha-dvaja-paTi*’.

Now let us take up the Yoga matter, hidden in this *shloka*. The breath that comes out of *ambaal*’s nose and that brings the pearls outside is spoken of as coming out of the ‘left nostril’. But there is no word in the *shloka* which directly means ‘left nostril’. The only words are ‘*shishira-kara-nishvAsa-galitaM*’.

‘*nishvAsa*’ is exhalation;

‘*uchvAsa*’ is inhalation;

‘*galita*’ means ‘expelled (out)’.

‘*shishira-kara*’ is what indicates the left nostril, though its direct meaning is just ‘the moon’. Note that ‘*shishira*’ and ‘*hima*’ mean the same thing, namely, ‘cold’. Whenever the Acharya talks of the moon in relation to *ambAl*, he uses ‘*hima-kara*’ or ‘*shishira-kara*’ meaning that which gives a soothing of cold. Thus ‘*shishira-kara-nishvAsa-galitaM*’ means that which is exhaled by the ‘moon-exhalation’. How this becomes the ‘left-nostril-exhalation’ is the hidden secret of Yoga in this *shloka*.

According to *yoga-shAstra*, when the mind is drawn towards desire or anger or the like, the inhalation is by the left nostril and exhalation by the right. On the other hand, when the mind stays deep in noble thoughts, the inhalation is by the right nostril and exhalation by the left. When there is no thought passing through the mind the breath stays as *kumbhaka* without exhalation or inhalation. *Ambaal* is always engrossed in the most noble thought of compassion. So She inhales by the right nostril and exhales by the left!

Now the *chandra-nishvAsa* (moon-exhalation) of *ambaal* is explainable from Yoga. There are three *nADis* in the human body through which the spiritual current passes. On the right of the spinal column there is the ‘*pingala*’, on the left there is the ‘*iDA*’ and the central one is ‘*sushhumnA*’. Since there is identity between *JivAtmA* and *ParamAtmA*, the names ‘moon’ for the left eye, ‘sun’ for the right eye and ‘*agni*’ for the third eye translate into the names ‘moon channel’ for ‘*iDA*’ on the left, and ‘sun channel’ for ‘*pingala*’ on the right. Hence the meaning of ‘*shishikara-nishvAsa*’ is exhalation by the left nostril!

71

(Digest of pp.1211 -1217)

*Smita-jyotsnA-jAlaM tava vadana-candrasya pibatAM
cakorANAm-AsId-ati-rasatayA canchu-jaDimA /
atas-te shItAmshor-amRta-laharIm-Amla-rucayaH
pibanti svac-chandaM nishi nishi bhRshaM kAncika-dhiyA // 63 //*

This is another *shloka* of poetic charm, now dealing with the charm that flows from *ambaal's* smile. Earlier in *shloka* 42 She was said to have the moon in Her crown. Now Her face (*vadanaM*) itself is the moon (vadana-candra). *VadanaM* also means 'mouth'. The root word '*vad*' is 'to speak'. '*Satyam vada*' – Speak the truth. Therefore one can say that the primary meaning of '*vadana*' is 'mouth'. But here it is '*vadana-candra*' – the moon-like face. There is no expression like 'moon-like mouth'!

Moonshine flows from the moon-like face. The moon in the sky displays a dark spot on it. But *ambaal's* face-moon (*vadana-candra*) has, in its centre, arrays of sparkling teeth.

tava: Your

Vadana-candrasya : moon-like face

Smita-jyotsnA-jAlaM : (smile – moonlight – luminous sweep) luminous sweep of the moonshine of your smile

In other words, it is the smile that illuminates as moonlight from your face. Now what happens to this moonlight? The *cakora* bird drinks it. There is a tradition in Sanskrit literature that the *cakora* bird feeds on the nectar flowing from moonlight rays.

pibatAm cakorANAM : of the *cakora* birds which drank

Here the *cakora* birds have drunk the moonlight flowing from *ambaal's* face. What then happened to the *cakora* birds? They became insensitized by saturation of the sweetness of the drink.

ati-rasatayA: by the extreme sweetness

canchu: the peaks

cakorANAM : of the *cakora* birds

jaTimA AsIt : became numb (were numbed).

Now how to correct this? The *cakora* birds were intelligent enough to make the correction themselves.

ataH: Therefore (i.e., because of the numbness of their peak)

te : these *cakoras*

Amla-rucayaH: (seeking to have) a taste of the sour

bhRshaM : heavily

pibanti : drink

nishi nishi : night after night

amRta-laharIM : the wave of nectar (i.e., the moonlight)

shItAmshoH: of the cool-rayed moon,

svacchandaM : to their heart's content

kAncika-dhiyA : taking it to be the sour antidote (for the satiation of sweetness).

Usually it is the privilege of Sanskrit poets to take great pride in fancying that the *cakora* birds drink the nectar flowing from moonlight for their very sustenance. This certainly makes the category of *cakora* birds unique among all birds or beings, because they are the only ones which live on just moonlight. But our Acharya soars higher, in his poetic fancy, over all other poets. He makes the *cakora* birds even higher on the scale by saying that they drink the grandest nectar that flows from *ambaal's* smile. That makes the ordinary moonlight nectar pale into insignificance because it is, as depicted here, a sour drink when pitted against the divine drink of moonlight flowing from the smile of *ambaal's* moonshine-face.

In the first part, *Anandalahari*, it was said that Lord Shiva is the only one who survives even the pralaya whereas these divines who partook of the nectar would all be consumed by that pralaya. And the reason was said to be that *ambaal* Herself is the Nectar of Consciousness, far superior to the material nectar and it is the eternal association with Her that protects Him. Now we know that, even superior to that material nectar churned out of the milk ocean, there is the Nectar of the smile from Her moonshine face. So higher than the Nectar of Consciousness (*chaitanya-amritam*) is the nectar of Her Beauty (*saundarya-amRtam*), which is Her form, nay, Her face; not even that, it is Her smile from that face.

All this the poet in the Acharya could have said simply that Her smile is more fascinating in beauty than moonlight. On the other hand he brought in the *cakora* bird, made moonlight the tasteful food for the *cakora* and pronounced *ambaal's* smile sweeter than that taste. Putting together all these ideas, we see that it is the wave of Consciousness (*chaitanya-laharI*) that becomes a tasty food for the eyes by becoming the wave of *ambaal's* beauty (*Soundarya-laharI*) and becomes also a tastier-than-nectar object for the tongue. Thus *Chaitanya* (Consciousness), *Soundarya* (Beauty) and *Madhurya* (Tasteful excellence) – all of these are in essence Her shower of Love. It is that moonlight shower of Love that we should be consuming, in the form of *cakoras*, deliciously relishing the moon light-food!

Maybe we are not able to ‘eat’ moonlight like the *cakora*. But we take delight in eating our own food under moonlight, especially on a full moon night. The moon then cools the very atmosphere that surrounds us and makes it very pleasant to us. The full moon is certainly very pleasant to all of us. But the Sun of Wisdom is not so pleasant. Ignorance is darkness; wisdom is light. Though the wisdom is given by *jnAna-sUrya* (the Sun of Wisdom), it may also be unpleasantly hot, because it is the Sun that is giving it. On the other hand the moon gives both light (of wisdom) and pleasant experience. The Goddess of *jnAna* (*JnAna-ambaal*) removes our Ignorance while at the same time being pleasant. In the *Purushha sUkta* we are told that mind arose from the moon. So the mind should be both cool and pleasant. That is why *ambaal* who is most pleasant to us is always associated with the moon. She Herself resides in the region of the moon. ‘*Chandra-maNDala-madhyaga*’ says the *sahasranAma*. And that is again the reason why the Pournami (full moon) day is important for *ambaal* and we do special *pUjA* for *ambaal* on that day.

She wears the Moon on Her head. In the head of the Yogi She descends as the full moon and pours out the nectar. For us laymen also, our Acharya has brought to us the moonshine of Her smile. May we cherish and remember it for ever. May we become the little *cakoras* drinking to our heart’s content the nectar-shower of Her Grace!

72

(Digest of pp.1218 -1221)

*raNe jitvA daityAn-apahRta-shirastraiH kavacibhiH
nivRttaish-caNDAmsha-tripura-hara-nirmAlya-vimukhaiH /
vishAkh-endro-pendraiH shashi-vishada-karpUra-shakalA
villyante mAtas-tava vadana-tAmbUla-kabalAH //65 //*

caNDAmsha-tripura-hara-nirmAlya-vimukhaiH: (Chanda’s share - Shiva – leavings –looking away) : Rejecting the offering-remnants of Shiva as the share of the devotee Chanda,

vishAkh-endro-pendraiH : the celestials KumAra, Indra and Vishnu

jitvA : after having conquered

daityAn : the asuras

raNe : in battle,

nivRttaiH : return to you

mAtaH : Oh Mother,

apahRta-shirastraiH : with their head-dresses (helmets, etc.) removed

kavacibhiH : but with their armour-jackets on,

tava vadana-tAmbUla-kabalAH : (eager to receive) as Your gracious gift (Prasada) the betal rolls used by You

villyante : and chew them

shashi-vishada-karpUra-shakalAH : (until) they dissolve along with the moon-white pieces of refined camphor contained in them.

Just in the previous *shloka* (#64) the Acharya has said that Goddess Saraswati who dwells on the tip of Her tongue, gets Her crystal-like white complexion changed into the colour of a red ruby because of the ruddiness of the tongue that defies the *japa* (hibiscus) flowers in its redness. I have already told you about this.

(Note : See Section 58)

Here this *shloka* talks about the symphony of red and white that the betal-chewing gives to *ambaal's* tongue. You may ask wherefrom comes this whiteness. Betal-chewing only produces a reddish tinge.

I take resort to the words “*shashi-vishada-karpUra-shakalAH*”. Maybe the Acharya thought : “We only talked about the white Saraswati at the tip of *ambaal's* tongue becoming red. But while writing bhashyas, and while composing stotras we have been propitiating only *ShArada* the white Goddess. Then why not bring Her whiteness into *ambaal's* tongue that dwells on the betal rolls?”!

That the mouth is full of betal rolls is a characteristic attribute that we use in all our descriptions of a sumangali. Even the Sahasranama says of Her: “*tAmbUla-pUrita-mukhI*”, meaning, “The One whose mouth is full of chewing betal”. *Ambaal*, who is Auspiciousness personified should always be visualised by us only this way.

There is nothing that can excel the leavings of her “*tAmbUla*” (betal roll). It is called ‘*tAmbUla-ucchishhTaM*’ (betal-leavings). Only we humans have to consider another human’s food-leavings as something demeaning. That of *ambaal* is sacred. Our body is nothing but meat. But the divine body is akshhara. It encompasses all from “a” to “*kshha*”. That is why it is called ‘*akshhara*’, which also means ‘immutable’. The divine body is nothing but all the mantras personified; because no mantra goes outside of “a” to “*kshha*”. Over and above all that, it is Love personified. And hence it is that Her betal leavings are most sacred.

And who is receiving it? Not just a devotee, a poet or a rishi. Her own son, KumAra; Her own devotee, Indra, who received Brahma-vidya from Her (refer Kenopanishad); and Her own masculine form in the form of Vishnu. The Acharya has woven a really marvelous dramatic scene in which these three receive Her betal leavings.

“*senAnInAM aham skandaH*”, says Krishna in the Gita. “I am KumAra among the warriors of the world”. His trident (‘*Vel*’, in Tamil) is victorious, wherever it appears. Its very name is *Shakti*. It is nothing but parA-*Shakti* Herself. And it was this KumAra who went as the chief of all the divine forces to wage war with the enemies of the divines. Naturally the King of the divines, Indra, goes along with Him. Vishnu has another name Upendra – because He was born as a son (VAmAna) to the same parents that bore Indra. Thus these three, VishAka (KumAra), Indra, and Upendra (Vishnu) are returning to Mother Goddess after their victory

over the asuras. The first thing that they look for is the gift of *ambaal's* betal leavings.

Earlier to the birth of KumAra, once the divines did win over all the asuras. That was when they were all puffed up with pride. They thought it was their own Power (*Shakti*) that brought them the victory. The *parA-shakti* made them realise how incomplete their Power was, in each one of them. She put before them a piece of straw which stood like a rock before all their might. This story of their becoming just a speck of dust in the presence of the supreme *Shakti* is told very graphically in Kenopanishad. It was only after this that Indra, among them all, immediately became very humble and he was taught the Brahma *VidyA* by *ambaal*.

KumAra, Indra and Vishnu very modestly want to offer their victory over the asuras, at the feet of *ambaal* and partake as prasad, of Her betal leavings. *Ambaal* usually revels in feeding others rather than enjoying the food Herself. Different varieties of sweet dishes are usually accepted by Her as offerings, not for Her own sake, but for the sake of Her devotees. For Herself She is content with the betal rolls!. But then, who eats all that food in Her house? It is the Lord!—so that He may not go ‘begging’ for food in His style as a ‘*BikshhATana*’ (the roaming mendicant). When the three divines return from their victorious war, it was just the time when the Lord had finished His dinner. But they (the celestials) did not care for the Prasad of Lord Shiva – because they were heading towards *ambaal* for Her betal leavings!

And the Acharya excels here, by ascribing a reason to this action of the three celestials.

73

(Digest of pp.1221 – 1226)

The three celestials – KumAra, Indra and Vishnu – did not care for Shiva’s *prasAdaM*, because they were heading towards *Ambaal's* betal leavings. The Acharya excels here by ascribing an enjoyable reason for this action of theirs. “*chaNDAmsha-tripura-hara-nirmAlya-vimukhaiH*” – not having their mind on Shiva’s *prasAdaM* ‘because it is the share of ChanDa’!. (‘tripura-hara’ is Shiva). The first *prasAdaM* of food left over by Shiva belongs rightfully to ChanDa (ChanDikeshvara). This is the rule. All the world considers this offering of Shiva’s *prasAdaM* first to Chandikeshvara as our foremost obligation and privilege. It is remarkable that ChanDa was born in this human world just like us all, but rose later to become the fifth deity after the primal four, namely, Shiva, Parvati, Vighneshvara and Subrahmanya. In all Shiva temple festivals these five deities are the ones that are taken out in procession. To receive Shiva’s *prasAdaM* after it has been offered first to this saintly devotee, ChanDa, is truly a great blessing to all of us.

But to KumAra, the very offspring of Shiva Himself, to Vishnu who shares half the form of Shiva in the manifestation as Shankara-Narayana and to Indra the king of all the divine world, it must be demeaning to receive Shiva's *prasAdaM* after it has been offered to a human, ChanDa, however saintly he may be. All this is built into the expression "*chaNDAmsha-tripura-hara-nirmAlya-vimukhaiH*". Here '*vimukha*' can also be interpreted to mean 'turning their faces away from'.

Next comes their dress while presenting themselves before *ambaal*. The head dress worn on the field or when they are on duty, by the soldiers in the army, are usually taken off when they want to show respect. Here the three celestials take off their head dress before they enter the presence of *ambaal*.

But the question arises: Why did the Acharya say in *shloka* #25 that the crowns of Brahma, Vishnu and Indra are doing the neerajana ceremony to Her divine feet at which they were prostrating.? Why again did he say in *shloka* #29 that when She started in haste to walk over to welcome the homecoming Lord, She ran the risk of tumbling over the crowns of Brahma, Vishnu and Indra, who were then prostrating at Her feet? The situation in both cases is clear that they were prostrating with the crowns still on their heads.

Well, the only explanation could be that in their intense mood of devotion that overwhelmed them at those times, they just forgot (!) the formality of the obligation to remove their crowns from their heads in the august presence of *ambaal*.

Let us now come to the "*tAmbUla-ucchishhTaM*" – the betal leavings. It has only been said that these three celestials consumed or swallowed the betal *prasAdaM* of *ambaal*. There is no mention, however, of the fruit of such an action, or about what fruits will accrue to the chewing of the betal leavings. Of course we can infer that, to these war-lords who have come back victorious after a war with the asuras, more victories are bound to accrue in the future by the blessing of *ambaal*.

On the other hand, that the fruit of taking the '*tAmbUla-ucchishhTaM*' of *ambaal* gives extraordinary poetic talent, is borne out by the fact that three great poets – Kalidasa, Kalamegar, and Mukar -- became great poets only by the power of the '*tAmbUla-prasAdam*' from *ambaal*. It was the mahAkAli of Ujjain, AkhilAnDeshvari of Jambukesvaram and KamAkshhi of Kanchi, respectively, who blessed these three. Our Acharya himself has composed a stotra called '*ambAshhTakaM*' ,

[I am not able to locate this stotra. - VK]

wherein he says that ambal's betal leavings will endow one with poetic talent that will ride higher than the stately gaits of a high-class race-horse. The very style of that *shloka*, such as:

*"kavitva-paripATI koTI-kulA-dadhika-tATImudhara-
mukhavITI-rasena tanutAM"*

mimics the beat of the hoofs of the racing horse!

Whereas according to Soundaryalahari, what bestows the poetic talent is (in *shloka* #75) Her breast milk, or (in *shloka* #98) the water that has washed Her feet. Nowhere is it mentioned that the '*tAmbUla-ucchishhTaM*' of *ambaal* would bestow poetic talent. In *shloka* #98 it is said that the poetic talent that is usually granted by the '*tAmbUla-ucchishhTaM*' of Saraswati is already bestowed by the '*charana-tIrtha*', the water that has washed the feet of *ambaal*. In that sense the '*charaNa-tIrtha*' is placed higher in the ladder of spiritual benefaction. The red paint on the feet makes the water that washes it reddish as the betal juice. "*kalita-alaktaka-rasam*" : the water that gets mixed up with the deep red of lac. '*alaktaka*' is lac. '*lAkshhaa*' is also lac. Both sanskrit words could very well be the source of the English 'lac'. And again '*alaktaka*' is what becomes '*arakku*' in Tamil.

'As a student when will I have the opportunity to drink that *charaNa-tIrtha*?' , wails our Acharya in that *shloka*. The words '*prakRtya mUkAnAm-api*' (meaning, even for those who are dumb by nature) indicate that even the dumb (*mUka*) ones can become great poets by that '*charaNa-tIrtha*'. The Acharya here is perhaps seeing into the future, when one day there would exactly be such a *mUka-kavi*!

74

(Digest of pp.1226 -1236)

*vipanChyA gAyantI vividham-apadAnaM pashupateH
tvayArabdhe vaktuM calita-shirasA sAdhu vacane /
tadIyair-mAdhuryair-apalapita-tantrI-kala-ravAM
nijAM vINAM vANI nichulayati cholena nibhRtaM // 66 //*

There is a whole dramatic scene here. It takes place in the very presence of *ambaal*. *Ambaal* is sitting totally relaxed and listening to a music performance. Whose music? That of Saraswati Herself! The word '*VANI*' meaning, Saraswati, occurs in the fourth line of the *shloka*. She is playing on the Veena. Simultaneously She is also singing. The very Goddess of Arts, Music and all Knowledge is performing. One can only imagine the infinite grandeur of the sweet richness of such a performance.

'*VipanchI*' means Veena. '*ParIvAdinI*' also means Veena. The Veenas belonging to particular celestials have particular names. Narada's Veena is called '*mahatI*'. That of Tumburu is '*KalAvatI*'. Saraswati's is 'KacchapI'. The word '*kacchapa*' means tortoise. The drum of Saraswati's Veena is in the shape of a tortoise. Hence it is called '*kacchapI*'. Prof.Sambamurti (of Madras University) says that even today we can see it in the Phillipines, where they call it '*katjapI*'. In Lalita Sahasranamam we have the name: '*nija-sallApa-mAdhurya-vinirbhatsita-kacchapI*'. It means 'One whose speech is more melodious than *kacchapI*, the Veena of

Saraswati'. It is the idea contained in this single line that has been elaborated by our Acharya in a full *shloka* (#66) of Soundaryalahari and transformed into a fascinating dramatic scene!

VipanchyA gAyantiI: playing on the Veena.

But I translate it as 'playing on the Veena and vocally accompanying it also'. Why do I make this rendering? Because of the words:

Vividham-apadAnaM pashupateH : Variegated anecdotes pertaining to Lord Shiva.

How can these anecdotes be also performed by Saraswati without being vocalised? The surest way to please *ambaal* is to sing the praise of Her Lord. And the Glory of the Lord is endless. Saraswati is singing and praising the infinite glories of Lord Shiva. Naturally *ambaal* is enjoying both the music of the Veena and the singing of the Lord's glories.

Now let us come to the second line of the *shloka*.

Calita-shirasa : by the nodding head. Now and then She nods Her head in approval and appreciation. A nodding of the head (*'shirah-kampaM*) can show more delicacy of appreciation than by an applause of the hand (*karaH-kampaM*). Whether it is in music, or in writing, or in studies or in sports, one requires appreciation. And reciprocally, it is the appreciation of the audience or the respondent that provides further inspiration to the musician, writer, student or sportsman. The same thing is happening here. *Ambaal* is enjoying in appreciation and Saraswati is going on playing on the Veena and singing.

tvayA-Arabdhe vaktum sAdhu vacane : When you started speaking appreciative words.

It appears *ambaal* suddenly, instead of silently nodding Her head, also began to applaud orally by saying a few appreciative words: '*sAdhu, sAdhu*'. These words mean 'Good, Good'. They are the Sanskrit equivalent of the English usage: 'hear, hear'. But as soon as these words were spoken by *ambaal* something dramatic happened. This is the punchline of the story. It is in the third and fourth lines of the *shloka*.

tadIyair-mAdhuryair-apalapita-tantrI-kala-ravAM : (By their – sweetness – degraded – strings –music) Before the sweetness and melody of those words the sweet sound of the Veena paled into insignificance.

Just one or two words only must have come from *ambaal*. '*tvayA Arabdhe*' means 'just when you began to speak'. In our own way of thinking there could be nothing sweeter and more melodious than the music of Saraswati's Veena; for She is the Goddess of Music. If there could be something more pleasant it must be Her own voice. But now the few words that stemmed forth from *ambaal*, have transformed all that into nothing. Saraswati stopped her singing when She realised the overpowering sweetness of *ambaal's* voice. Not only that. Her Veena-music also has been over-powered. What did She do to Her Veena?

nijAM vINAM vANI niculayati cholena nibhRtaM :
vANI: Saraswati
niculayati : hides
nijAM vINAM : Her own Veena
cholena : by (its) cover, (in its case)
nibhRtaM : so that it will not show up.

Saraswati draws the cover on Her Veena and hides it! In other words She accepts that Her Veena is nothing before the sweet voice of *ambaal* and stops it then and there.

Ambaal, though She had all the musical sweetness in Her own voice, intended to honour Saraswati by nodding Her head all along and also saying the appreciative words ‘*SAdhu*’. But instead of encouraging the performer to perform more, it resulted in the performer bowing down and stopping the performance. This incident brings into focus the greatness of both Saraswati and *ambaal*. Saraswati hung down Her head in shame and stopped singing. But what does the Veena do? Even after being stopped, the music of the Veena has a characteristic reverberation (*anuraNanam*, in Sanskrit; *rIngAram* in Tamil), due to the resonating vibrations of the strings. So Saraswati quickly silences it by hiding it under its own cover (*cholena nibhRtaM*).

We can go on thus enjoying the scene by visualising it in various ways, scene after scene in this drama.

Maybe it was different. Maybe *ambaal* was not appreciating the music but was nodding Her head to the ‘*vividham-apadAnaM pashupateH*’ -- the different stories of the glories of Lord Shiva -- maybe that was what was being enjoyed by Her in appreciation. Suddenly Saraswati might have realised this, at the time when *ambaal* opened Her mouth to say ‘*SAdhu*’.

There could be no end to such speculations of ours on the scene. On the whole the *shloka* brings out the melodious sweetness of Her voice, in addition to all the beauty of form that the other *shlokas* have been revealing all along. There can be no doubt that by meditating on this *shloka* one gains excellence both in music and the composition of it.

75

(Digest of pp.1236 -1243)

gale rekhAs-tisro gati-gamaka-gItaika-nipuNe
vivAha-vyAnaddha-praguNa-guNa-sankhyaA-pratibhuvaH /
virAjante nAnAvidha-madhura-rAgAkara-bhuvAM
trayANAM grAmANAM sthiti-niyama-sImAna iva te // 69 //

The intensive knowledge in music and musical technicalities of the Acharya is manifest in this *shloka*. The words ‘*gati*’, ‘*gamakaM*’, ‘*gItaM*’

and '*grAmam*' are technical words understood well only by musicologists. One should actually refer to the latter part of Bharata's '*nATya-shAstra*', '*SangIta-ratnAkaraM*' of Sarangadeva and '*caturdaNDi-prakAshika*' of Venkata-makhi. I have only an incomplete knowledge of these.

'*Gati*' is procedure or path. It denotes one of two kinds: '*deshi*' and '*mArgaM*'. The former is more regimented like a train on its rails. The latter keeps changing with the times and caters to latest tastes.

'*GamakaM*' is undulation. It has five subtly different varieties in it.

'*GItaM*' of course is song. But it is not just the text (*sAhitya*) of the song; it also includes the *svaras*.

'*Eka-nipuNa*' is unequalled excellence. So *ambaa* is the '*Gati-gamaka-gItaika-nipuNA*' that is, unequalled Mistress of the musical technicalities of '*gati*', '*gamakaM*' and '*gItaM*'.

'*GrAmam*' –the word occurs in the fourth line of the *shloka* – means the three-fold classification of rAgas, according to the *shadja*, *madhyama* and *gAndhAra svaras*. As music arises in the voice box of the body and as the voice box is situated in the neck, the Acharya is saying that these three '*grAmas*' are manifesting themselves as the three lines in the neck of *ambaal*. Of course all women would have these three lines or folds in their neck. But that is because originally *ambaal* is having these three lines in Her neck! Men have 'Adam's apple' in their neck, which is absent in women. The western story is that the original man ate the Eden Garden apple and that started his involvement in the *samsAra* of the world. The Indian story is that the Lord swallowed the *KAlakuTa* poison which was, according to *ambaal's* request, stifled at the position of the throat of the Lord and that is why the bulge is showing in all male human necks. Both the stories only go to show that we all have the same origin and we are all brothers born of the same Father, irrespective of the religion we may profess. In one case the very nutritious apple that 'keeps the doctor away' becomes the original source of this dreadful *samsAra*. In the other case the dreadful poison sits there in the throat of the Lord without harming anyone. Both are cosmic mysteries.

All forms of men are nothing but the Lord and all forms of women are just *ambaal*. This is what the Adam's apple of the male neck and the three lines in the female neck tell us.

The great saint Appar has sung a song beginning with the words '*mAdar piRaikkaNNiyAn*' in the *kshetra* of Tiruvaiyaru. He saw the male and female forms of the elephant, chicken, peacock, swan and parrot and had the spiritual experience of visualising all of them as the divine couple, Shiva-*Shakti*. '*kaNDen-avar tiruppAdam, kaNDaRiyAdana kaNDen*', says he – 'His divine feet did I see; things that had never been visualised, did I witness'. If we care to use our intelligence and look for the Divine around us with intense Bhakti we can also have this darshan of Shiva-*Shakti* always and everywhere.

Shiva is white; *Shakti* is red – that is the way we have explained how the changeless White Shivam (Cause) sprouted out as the Red Kameshvari (Effect). Just like this Shiva-Shakti, the white-red coexistence can be seen in many of our worldly matters. In fact once we begin to recognize this spectacle in all matters of this world as well as of the other world, we would be amazed as if we have had the very darshan of Shiva-Shakti. Particularly, what pertains to the male is white and what pertains to the female is red – this principle will help us get into the spiritual sAdhanA of witnessing Shiva-*Shakti* all around us.

The '*tejas*' of man is called '*shuklaM*' (white) and that of woman is called '*shoNitaM*' (red). What he wears on his forehead is white '*vibhUti*' and what she wears is red '*kunkumamM*'. In the '*nAmaM*' of the Vaishnavas, it is the white part that belongs to the Lord, whereas the red part is that of the Mother Goddess. In fact that is why it is called '*Shri-chUrNaM*' – the powder of the Goddess. What man dons is white '*veshti*' and what she does is the saree, which is '*kusumba*' (red). The word '*kusumba*' means saffron. That is the ideal colour for the wedding saree (*kUraip-puDavaI*). '*aruNaruNa-kausumbaM*', where *ambaal*'s saree is described as the reddest of the red.

Again, in this interplay of red and white, we have our own blood which has both red cells and white cells. Just as in *ambaal*'s red, the white of Shivam is merged, so also the red corpuscles of the blood dominate the whiteness of the white corpuscles and show the colour of blood as red!

In the ordinary decorative drawings (*kolam*, in Tamil) in front of the house or the deity, though the *kolam* is in white, it is usually bordered by red. For the same reason the markings on the outside walls of temples are in red and white. Even though the inside deity may be a Vishnu deity (whose colour is blue), the outside walls are striped only with white and red.

If it is an *abhishekaM* of the deities, we have milk and honey. If it is the fragrance we have '*pachaik-karpuram*' (which is green) and saffron. If it is offering of flowers through an archana, we have jasmine (white) and '*arali*' (red). If it is food that is offered, we have curd rice (called *dadhyannam*) and '*sarkaraip-pongal*'. Even with the ordinary white idli, we combine the red chili powder or sambar!

Here the *idli* is bland and peacefully white; whereas the chili powder that goes with it is fearfully red! White is Peace and Red is Power and Action. So when we want to stop a war we show the white flag. A revolutionary activity is manifested by a red flag. Thus Shiva-*Shakti* is all around us in the forms of Peace and Rajas (activity). But again, nor should we separate Shiva and *Shakti* as two different entities; and that is what exactly is shown by the symbiosis of red and white corpuscles in the blood. The white corpuscles fight with the invasion of disease and the

red ones nurture us with oxygen. When there is bloodshed in a battle, it is the red cross that brings relief and cure!

Even in the ordinary colour spectrum, it is red that shows up first on the side of white. The opposite colour that is violet is on the other extreme. It is this violet (linked with blue) that is the direct opposite of the peaceful Shivam, that goes with Vishnu who denotes Vishnu-mAyA sharing the colour with Vishnu-DurgA and MahA-kALi. It is the Shiva-kAmeshvari that has contact with both the Peace of Shiva on the one side and the dynamism of MMaya on the other side. For the same reason, in the apex work of philosophy called '*pAdukA-mantram*', the Light that is the Cause of all that is gross as well as subtle is called '*traipuram mahas*' and when one talks of the unfoldment of the same as Jiva and the Universe it is mentioned as "*rakta-shukla-prabhA-mishraM*" -- red and white confluent effulgence – thereby indicating both the outward dynamism of the Effect and the inward Peace of the Cause.

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(Digest of pp.1243-1248)

The Shiva-factor and the *Shakti*-factor that are respectively manifest in the male and the female, are most explicitly manifest in the bulge of Adam's apple in man and the three lines on the neck of woman. These are the three lines that are referred to as "*gale rekhAs-tisraH*" by the Acharya. The verse also allows us to interpret it as showing that She is expert in all the three facets '*gati*', '*gamakam*' and '*gItam*' of music. In addition to this implicit indication, he explicitly says in the fourth line of the *shloka*: The boundaries between the different 'grAmas' based on the '*shadja*', '*gAndhAra*' and '*madhyama*' in music are what is shown by the three lines on Thy neck – "*trayANAM grAmANAM sthiti-niyama-sImAna iva te (gale rekhAs-tisro virAjante)*".

Recall "*trayANAM devAnAM triguNa-janitAnAM*" from *Shloka* #25. [See DPDS-45]. The triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra were said therein to have originated from the three guNas. Here the '*trayANAM grAmANAM*' also mentions along with it the three guNas in line 2.

What is stated in line 2, namely, "*vivAha-vyAnaddha-praguNa-guNa-sankhya-pratibhuvaH*" that is, "A reminder of the strands of the auspicious string made by twisting several threads and well tied round the neck at the wedding ceremony". This refers to the most auspicious wedding of Goddess Parvati and the Lord. The direct meanings however are:

vivAha-vyAnaddha : wedding – tied well.

guNa-sankhyaA: consisting of a certain number of guNas.

praguNa : noble guNas.

pratibhuvaH: that which authenticates, guarantees.

These direct meanings do not add up to an easily understood message. The “*guNa-sankhya*” refers to the number three, coming from the three *guNas* satva, rajas and tamas. But when it comes to “*praguNa*” he is talking of ‘strands of string’, because *guNa* also means ‘strand’. And ‘*praguNa*’ means ‘auspicious strands’. And this is what brings in the ‘*mangala-sUtra*’ (auspicious marriage thread) that is tied at the time of the wedding ceremony. In other words, it means that three noble strands of string have been twisted to make the *mangala sUtra* for the Goddess. And it is these three strands that are recalled – ‘*pratibhuvaH*’ – by the three lines on the neck of *ambaa*. Of course, in addition, we can also interpret that the three lines implicitly stand for the three *guNas* also.

There are those who say that the ‘*pANi-grahaNaM*’ (holding of the hand) is the deciding religious rite for the wedding. The tying of the *mangala-sUtra* may not be the tradition in many areas. But the very fact that the Acharya has mentioned it here in connection with the wedding of God and Goddess, gives it a unique importance. The ‘holding of hand’ is an event that does not leave any trace of itself after the event. On the other hand it is the *mangala-sUtra* that permanently stands out as a distinguishing mark of married status to women and is also respected by all as such. At the time when the solar months of Aquarius (*mAshi*, in Tamil) and Pisces (*panguni*, in Tamil) coalesce, it is the *mangala-sUtra* that is greatly and duly worshipped by women. Even in the Lalita Sahasranama, we have “*kAmesha-baddha-mAngalya-sUtra-shobhita-kandarA*” – She whose neck is adorned with the *mangala-sUtra* fastened thereon by Her consort Kameshvara.

Another point. The Acharya says only ‘*guNa*’ meaning ‘strand of thread’. In modern times, women replace the marriage thread by a golden chain and a heavy *tirumangalyam* and rolling balls (*kuNDu*, in Tamil) on either side of it. It is very inappropriate. The alleged plea is that the string becomes dirty in due course of time. If you coat it with turmeric every day it won’t become dirty.

There is a five-fold (*pancakaM*) mention of triads in this *shloka*: The three lines on the divine neck, the three musical nuances “*gati*, *gamakaM* and *gItaM*”, the three *guNas*, the three ‘*grAmas*’ of music and finally, the three strands of *mangala-sUtra*.

A sound musical tradition aims at the preservation of its age-old purity. The classification in terms of ‘*grAmas*’ is not supposed to be mixed up. It is to show the distinctness of the three ‘*grAmas*’ that the three lines on the divine neck are so distinct, says the Acharya. All this emphasizes the need for a certain discipline in following the music traditions.

When music is performed as “*nAdopAsana*” (a dedicated worship of ‘*nAda-brahman*’) with *bhakti*, then that music itself will lead to Self-Realisation. When one merges in the disciplined musical confluence of

shruti and *laya*, that merger itself becomes the merging in the Atman. ‘*Entaro mahAnubhAvulu*’ -- sang Tyagaraja, the great ‘*nAdopAsaka*’ (the worshipper of ‘*nAda-brahman*’) and he was one such great soul-experiencer (*mahAnubhAva*) of the musical trinity. All three of the trinity were great souls who attained this Self-Realisation through the path of Devotional Music. Interestingly, all these three flourished in the same time frame within the past one and a half centuries.

Incidentally, I have added a sixth triad to the five-fold triads (of this *shloka*) that I spoke of earlier!

Though the three qualities of *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are only three in number they give rise to an infinite number of quality-combinations in the worldly characters that we experience. So also, just from the seven svaras of music, with various permutations and combinations according to the three ‘*grAmas*’, the musical world has generated numerous *rAgas*. This is what is mentioned in the *shloka* as “*nAnAvidha-madhura-rAgAkara-bhuvAM*” – meaning, ‘those which generate the mine of multifarious melodious *rAgas*’. Here the word ‘those’ goes with ‘of the three *grAmas*’ (“*trayANAm grAmANAM*”) in the fourth line.

The word ‘*rAga-Akara*’ is significant. Just as a mine gives out gold and gems as you dig deeper and deeper, so also the subtleties of the seven svaras yield numerous different *rAgas* as you delve deep. The word “*Akara*” means ‘mine’. The ocean yields gems (*ratnas*) and that is why it is called ‘*ratnAkara*’. The commonly used words “*karuNakara*” and “*dayAkara*” should mean only ‘a mine of compassion and grace’ rather than ‘one who shows compassion or grace’.

Again the word ‘*madhura*’ in “*nAnAvidha-madhura-rAga-bhuvAM*” is also significant. ‘*madhura*’ means sweet and melodious. What is not sweet or melodious should not form part of music. All this meticulous use of words in this verse show how knowledgeable the Acharya is in the subtleties of music and its understanding. Obviously he was himself a ‘*gati-gamaka-gIta-eka-nipuNaH*’ – Master of the musical technicalities of the procedure, undulations and song of music!

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(Digest of pp.1252-1265)

Shloka #75 says further about the breast milk of *ambaa*. It generates, says the *shloka*, everything superlatively noble – like wisdom, compassion, beauty, knowledge, and the arts. “*sArasvatam iva*”, meaning, everything for which Sarasvati is the source. They all flow like a flood from the heart – “*hRdayataH payaH pArAvAraH*”. It was that milk of wisdom, Oh Mother, that you fed to that child of the Dramila country. And that child became a noted poet among great composers – “*kavInAM prouDhAnAM ajani kamanIyaH kavayitA*”.

“*prouDha-kavi*” means a poet rich with poetic talent. The feminine word “*prouDhA*” denotes a girl who has attained puberty. Just as the physical *tejas* attains maturity, a person whose poetic talent has attained perfection and maturity is called a “*prouDha-kavi*”. Ironically, a “*prouDha-kavi*” is also prone to be proud! And in the poetry that flows from such a one there is likely to be a mischievous air of superiority. It may not appeal to the heart. But the milk of wisdom, which flows like a flood from this ocean of ‘*Sarasvata*’, generates poetic inspiration that captivates the heart. By using the words “*payaH pArAvAraH parivahati*” – the milk ocean flows like a flood – the Acharya has added one more ‘*lahari*’, namely, the *lahari* of breast milk that represents all that is great in the Mother, to the various *lahari*’s mentioned in Soundaryalahari -- *cidAnanda-lahari*, *shRngAra-lahari*, etc. When this ‘*kshhIra-lahari*’ (the flood of milk) is tasted by the *dramila-shishu* (Tamil child), the latter becomes a poet who composes captivating songs that make him distinguished among even ‘*prouDha*’ composers!

Now who was this ‘*dramila-shishu*’? The immediate feeling is that it should be the well-known Sambandar, also known as ‘*JnAna-sambandar*’ of the Tamil region, who flourished in the seventh century A.D. But the Acharya’s time was in the sixth-fifth century B.C., approximately.

[Here the Paramacharya takes for granted his own elaborate thesis-like discussion on the date of Shankara, that runs to hundreds of pages, in his earlier discourses. These have been recorded by Ra. Ganapati in the 5th volume of his book ‘Deivathin Kural’.]

The story about the child *JnAna-sambandar* is that the Mother Goddess fed her breast milk to the three-year old child and the child burst into ecstatic singing glorifying Lord Shiva and Parvati. Commentators on Soundaryalahari opine that a similar incident did happen in the case of the Acharya himself when he was a child and therefore conclude that the ‘*dramila-shishu*’ refers to the Acharya himself! Instead of saying ‘I have that experience’ he is saying it in third person, in all modesty. But even here one can ask: How come the Acharya talks about his own poetic talent in such superlative terms? Is this in keeping with his well-known modesty? Well, the point to note here is that the matter is not about poetic talent. The significant point is the glory of the milk of wisdom that flows from *ambaal*. Actually the Acharya has talked about himself as ‘the farthest of the lowly’ (*daviyAmsaM dInaM*) in *shloka* #66. And the significance now is that even such a ‘lowly’ person has reached poetic heights of excellence by the divine milk of wisdom.

On the correct interpretation of ‘*dramila-shishu*’ there have been controversies from very early times. Several commentators have debated this issue. No definite conclusion has been accepted by all. But let us not stay on that issue. What we need is not the correct meaning of

‘*dramila-shishu*’ but the truth that we should seek that wisdom that flows incessantly like milk from *ambaa*’s grace!

*shrutInAM mUrdhAno dadhati tava yau shekharatayA
mamApy-etau mAtaH shirasi dayayA dhehi caraNau /
yayoH pAdyaM pAthaH pashu-pati-jaTA-jUTa-taTinI
yayor-lAkshhA-lakshhmIH aruNa-hari-cUDamaNi ruciH // 84 //*

mAtaH : Oh Mother,

yau tava caraNau : Those feet of Yours (which)

shrutInAM mUrdhAnaH : the crests of the vedas (namely, the Upanishads)

dadhati : bear

shekharatayA : as (their) head ornament,

yayoH : for which (feet)

pashu-pati-jaTA-JUTa-taTinI : the river (Ganga) in the matted locks of hair of Lord Shiva

pAdyaM pAthaH : (become) the water-offerings at the feet,

yayoH : for which (feet)

aruNa-hari-cUDamaNi-ruciH : the red brilliance of the diadem of Vishnu

lAkshhA-lakshhmIH : (becomes the brilliance of red lac,

dhehi : please condescend to keep

etau : such feet

mama shirasi api : on my head, too

dayayA : out of compassion.

The description of Mother Goddess from head to foot finally comes to the divine feet. The divine feet are requested to be placed on this devotees’s (The Acharya’s) head. This is a kind of ‘*Guru DikshhA*’, that is, spiritual initiation by the Guru. But it is not openly said to be so. Because, such initiations always have to be guarded as secret. Kenopanishad details how the Mother Goddess appeared to the devas and gave spiritual initiation to Indra, their King. The words ‘*umA*’, ‘*haimavatI*’, ‘*strI*’, ‘*bahu-shobhamAnA*’ used in that narrative are the only instances where the Absolute is specifically mentioned as manifesting as Guru in the vedas. The deities ‘Shiva’ or ‘Vishnu’ are never mentioned in the Vedas in the capacity of Guru. The two times Shivam and Vishnu are mentioned are in Mandukyopanishad and Kathopanishad; but in both cases it is a state that is described and not a Person. It is therefore in the fitness of the wisdom of the vedas that the Acharya here describes the divine feet of *ambaa* as the head ornament of the Upanishads!

The praise of the divine feet goes on for several *shlokas*. In *shloka* 88, the Acharya asks: Mother, How did thy Consort, Lord Shiva, with all His softness (“*dayamAnena manasa*”) towards You, have the heart to place them with his hand on a hard granite grinding stone at the

marriage rite? -- “*upayamana-kAle, bAhubhyAm AdAya dRshhadi nyastaM*”. The word “*upayamana*” stands for a marriage ceremony. Just as ‘*upanayana*’ stands for the rite that initiates a boy into the spiritual path, by initiating him into the Gayatri, so also the ‘*upayamana*’ stands for the rite that initiates a girl into married life. In this rite the bridegroom places the feet of the bride on a granite pasting stone as a part of the rite. The Mother Goddess Herself is considered here by the Acharya as an ordinary bride going through the same marriage rite.

The act of placing the feet on a granite stone attains a spiritual significance in the context of *ambaal*. For this we have to go to Shivaananda-lahari *shloka* #80 where the Acharya asks: “Oh Lord! Why are You dancing on this hard granite? On the auspicious day of *Pradosha* why can’t You dance on a softer surface, in fact made up of flower offerings? Is it because you have anticipated that I will be born with a hard heart on this earth and You have to dwell and dance in that hard rock-like heart?” Taking cue from this we can now interpret this *shloka* #88 of Soundaryalahari as saying: “Oh Mother, the Lord is having compassion towards You and wants to train You to dance along with Him in the hard hearts of people of this earth. That is why He is placing Your soft feet on the hard granite as a preview for Your feet”!

It is those divine feet of *ambaaL* that have to be meditated on by us for melting our hearts. There is no other way! Particularly it is our ego that stands solidly like a rock between us and mokshha. And that is why, for our sake, the Acharya has put in the words “*mama api*” in *shloka* #84.

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(Digest of pp.1265-1283 of Deivathin Kural, 6th volume, 4th imprn.)

The *shloka* # 91 also is in the same trend of praise of Devi’s feet. Usually poets describe the gait of their heroic women as ‘*hamsa-gati*’, the gait of swans. But in #91, the Acharya reverses this analogy. He says that it is the swans that learn their gait from the beauty of *ambaal*’s gait! In compassion with the swans Her divine feet actually ‘demonstrate’ how to produce that graceful gait, but in the act of this demonstration they (the feet) indeed ‘teach’ the swans the theory of this gait! “*teshhAM shikshhAM AcakshhANaM*”, says the *shloka*.

And how is this ‘teaching’ done? She is having anklets on Her feet, studded with precious gems. “*subhaga-maNi-manjIrac-chalAt*” – the auspicious jingling of the gem-studded anklet, is the pretext of teaching! The jingling of the gems is poetically extolled as the words of the teaching. Earlier in *Shloka* #60, it was said that the clang of her ear ornaments, as She shakes Her head in appreciation of Sarasvati’s speech, seem to be appreciative words spoken by Her. Thus the jingling of the ear ornaments of *ambaa* was the appreciation of Sarasvati in #60

and here in #91, the jingling of the gems of Her anklet turns out to be the teaching of the swans, which are the *vAhanas* of Sarasvati!

Having described and praised in his inimitable poetry all the different parts of the divine body and thus having immersed us in the waves (*lahari*) of beauty (*soundarya*) of *ambaaL*, the Acharya finally comes to the seat on which that Fullness of Form is seated. This is *shloka* #92. Therein he also mentions the crimson glory (“*rAga-aruNatayA*”) which the entire body emanates. In Lalita sahasranama, the description of the *devI* begins with “*udyat-bhAnu-sahasrAbhA*” – the effulgence of thousand rising suns –and then goes on to describe the form from head to foot. Here for a change, the Acharya first describes the form from head to foot and finally ends up with the composite Glory of the whole Form. The crimson redness of *ambaal* makes even the assumed whiteness of Lord Shiva appear as the ‘red’ *KAmeshvara*. The redness indicates creation just as the rising sun is the harbinger of activity. The Mother-Father role for the whole universe has to be taken up and that is why *KAmeshvara* becomes overpowered by ‘redness’ and becomes, as it were, the embodiment of erotic sentiment. (“*sharIrI shRngAro rasa iva*”).

But once the world is created it needs all the infinite compassion of the Mother. In fact the very purpose of creation seems to be to manifest that Compassion. The *brahman*, without a second, cannot show any compassion or love because there is no second. When it manifested as Shiva-*Shakti*, as partners in a *sati-pati* relationship, the love that arose is called ‘*shRngAra*’. When the same love directs itself to the created world, it is called ‘*karuNA*’ (Compassion). So the *shRngAra rasa* of *shloka* #92 becomes the *karuNA-rasa* of *shloka* #93. And this is proclaimed with a poetic gymnastics of words:

“*jagat trAtuM shambhor-jayati- kAcid-aruNA*”

jagat trAtuM : For the purpose of protecting the universe,

karuNA : the Compassion

shambhoH: of Shivam, the Immutably white

kAcid-aruNA : as the indescribable redness, that is, *ambaaL*

jayati : shines gloriously.

Thus the Shiva-*Shakti* advaitam is established.

The Acharya has a motherly affection towards all humanity in the sense that they should never succumb to the lower instincts of man. Having talked about the *shRngAra* (Love) of the divine couple, the Acharya wants to issue a warning to posterity, lest mankind may slip into an error. This error could be of two kinds. One might take liberties with the worship of the divine through yantras and *mantras*, emphasized in the *Ananda-lahari* part; and, because, the divine has been said to be

the Mother and Father of the universe, one might construe it as a licence to take liberties with that Universal Parent-couple.

Yes, you can treat them as your Mother and Father and worship them as you like, pouring forth all your love. But in that case there should be no *yantras*, nor should you bring in any *mantras* for invoking them. *Mantras* and *Yantras* have to be used only with the proper ritualistic sanction and discipline. When these latter are absent, just go about your worship by doing Soundaryalahari as a devotional recitation and no more. In fact I know many of you do only that. There is nothing wrong in it. And I am constrained to say ‘many of you’ and not ‘All of you’. For there are people who get into such spiritually advanced scriptures for curiosity, for academic research, or for enjoyment of literature, without observing the need to control their sensual distractions. Such failure to follow ethical and religious discipline is the second potential error, of the two errors that I talked about.

Obviously the Acharya does not want his beautiful poem on the beauty of the divine to end with the whimper of a mundane rude warning to the public not to be swept into the profane. He issues the warning, however, in the subtlest terms. Instead of saying: “Whatever you do with this *stotra*, do it with great discipline of mind and control of the senses”, he indicates, in *shloka* #95, what awaits those who approach Her without the necessary self-discipline and regulatory mind. In modern times I see some people write without any sense of shame at the fact that they are only fanning the fumes of basal instincts of man. Not only that, they seem to justify such writing and use alibis like ‘Realism’. When one provokes another to fall down in ethical and moral standards, the provocateur accrues more sinful discredit to himself than the one who has been provoked into sin. And that is why, as an author, the Acharya takes great care to see that his readers do not fall into any trap of sin. So in *shloka* #95 he paints what happens if you fail to follow discipline.

purArAter-antaHpuram-asi tatas-tvac-caraNayoH
saparyA-maryAdA tarala-karaNAnAm-asulabhA /
tathA hyete nItAH shata-makha-mukhAH siddhim-atulAM
tava dvAropaAnta-sthitibhir-aNimAdyAbhir-amarAH // 95 //

asi: You are

antaHpuraM : in the inner apartments, (as Consort)

pura-arAteH : of the Destroyer of the cities (that is, of Lord Shiva)

tataH : and therefore

saparyA-maryAdA : the proper regimen and privilege of worship

tava caraNayoH : of Your feet

asulabhA : (is) difficult to attain

tarala-karaNAnAM : for those with fickle senses, or of unregenerate mind.

tathA : Thereby

ete shata-makha-mukhAH amarAH : these deities headed by Indra

nItAH hi: are led, indeed, (only up to)

atulAM siddhiM : an unparalleled achievement

aNimAdyAbhiH : by the psychic powers like *aNimA*, etc.

dvAropAnta-sthitibhiH : who are stationed in proximity to the gates (which are only peripheral to Your mansion).

This *shloka* employs a negative compliment to those of fickle senses, who are said to reach '*atulAm siddhiM*' (matchless *siddhi*). But Who is giving them this achievement? Only those who stand at the Gates of the Royal mansion, far removed from the sanctum sanctorum of *ambaa*'s inner apartments. These are the attendants of *ambaal* stationed in the outermost rounds (*AvaraNas*) of Her *navAvaraNa* mansion (the nine – round *Shrichakra*). In fact they stand even outside the outermost round. They are the ten *devatas*, eight of them representing the eight *siddhis* (the psychic powers) *aNimA*, *mahimA*, etc. So the deities who propitiate them have to stand only at the same outer rounds of the Devi's mansion and naturally get only what these attendant devatas can give them. And the Acharya satirically calls, almost in contempt, what they bestow to the seeker, as '*atulAm siddhiM*' (matchless psychic power). Thus indirectly the Acharya is saying that we should aspire to reach not these siddhis, which are given by the '*dvAropAnta-sthitAH*' – those who guard the gates -- but we should aim far beyond.

Shiva-*Shakti* couple, in their inner apartments, have to be understood in the esoteric sense. The right understanding will not come to those who are still imprisoned by their minds. Even the poetic descriptions in the *stotra* should not draw us to the state in which the very celestials like Indra find themselves only just at the gates of the mansion and not inside! Only those who honour and welcome the mental discipline and the strict regimen required for a valid entry into the Royal Mansion, beyond what the fickle-minded celestials can reach, should ever attempt to do the *Shri Chakra* worship. Once that welcoming desire is planted in the mind, naturally *ambaal* will lead us to the understanding and following of all the rules of the rituals that constitute the *Shri Chakra Puja*. This is the message of this *shloka*. What a beauty that the Acharya has driven it all so nicely and softly into us, without a single harsh word about the consequences of unregulated and indisciplined worship!

*girAm Ahur-devIM druhiNa-gRhiNIM Agamavido
hareH patnIM padmAM hara-saha-carIM adri-tanayAM /
turIyA kApi tvaM duradhigama-nissIma-mahimA
mahAmAyA vishvaM bhramayasi para-brahma-mahishhI //97//*

Agama-vidaH : Those who know the scriptures

AhuH : declare (You)

girAM devIM : as the Goddess of Speech,

druhiNa-gRhiNIM : the wife of Brahma the Creator

padmAM : (as well) as Lakshmi,

hareH patnIM : the wife of Lord Vishnu

adri-tanayAM : (and as well) as Parvati, the daughter of Mountain-King,

hara-saha-carIM : the Consort of Lord Shiva.

tvaM : (But) You, (on the other hand),

turIyA : are the fourth (higher than the other three),

kA api : not to be delimited as This or That,

duradhigama-nissIma-mahimA: of unique glory that is both unfathomable and limitless,

para-brahma-mahishhI : (in fact) the Queen-Consort of the Absolute *brahman*

mahA-mAyA : (being) the great Cosmic *mAyA*

bhramayasi : revolving and compering

vishvaM : the entire universe.

The distinctive keyword in this *shloka* (#97) is the unusual expression “*para-brahma-mahishhI*”. All along, the Soundaryalahari has been saying that the parA-*Shakti* is the highest with sovereign power. In order to show to the world their Father and Mother, that *Shakti* brought in a *KAmeshvara* and gave him the status of a husband to Her. That was our understanding. Here the words “Queen-Consort of the Absolute *brahman*” have significant connotations. It means that the para-*brahman* is the sovereign and *ambaal* is next to him, as his wife. The word “*mahishhI*” means Queen-Consort. One who herself rules is not called a “*mahishhI*”; she would be called “*mahA-rAjnI*” or “*cakra-vartinI*”. ‘*rAjA*’ and ‘*rAjnI*’ have the same connotations, except one is male and the other is female. So also ‘*chakravarti*’ and ‘*cakravartinI*’. But there is no pair of words ‘*mahishha*’ and ‘*mahishhI*’; the King is not called ‘*mahishha*’. Actually ‘*mahishha*’ is an asura who was in the form of a buffalo! ‘*MahishhI*’ is a unique word used for the Queen-consort, the second in command, of a King. Corresponding to that meaning of ‘*mahishhI*’ there is no male word ‘*mahishha*’!

The *stotra* began with saying that it is She who makes Him move. And at several places we have been told that it is She who is the Agent-Provocateur for every action in the world. She is the One who takes care of Him even at the time of dissolution. After all this, when he comes to

the end of the *stotra* the Acharya winds up with Her as the dutiful '*patni*' of Him who is the all-in-all. In fact She Herself would like it only this way. Is She not the One who is writing all this poetry through the pen of the Acharya?

Now let us go to the rest of the *shloka*. Though the last word is "*para-brahma-mahishh*", earlier he mentions Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati – the Consorts of the Trinity of Divines –and then only brings in the *ParAshakti* that is *KAmeshvari*, the 'consort' of the *turIyaM* that is *brahman*. Just in the previous *shloka* (#96), he had said: "There are those who have courted and attained Sarasvati though She is the wife of Brahma. There are all the rich who are called '*ShrimAn*', because *ShrI*, that is Lakshmi, resides with them, though She belongs to Lord Vishnu. But nobody can fault You as having deserted your husband. Therefore You are the greatest in chastity!" There is an implied let-down here of Sarasvati and Lakshmi. The Acharya clears himself of this let-down, in the present *shloka* #97. The Teacher of advaita that he is, he cannot afford to make distinctions between deities. He is the one who gave all importance to the name of Sarasvati, by creating *ShArada Pitham* and Sringeri where all the worship is for *ShAradambAl*. The dasha-nAmi classification of renunciates has two of the categories named as '*Sarasvati*' and '*BhArati*'; note that no other deity gets into the names of the dashanAmi's. In the same way, he was the one who composed the famous '*kanaka-dhAra-stavaM*' on Lakshmi. In fact it was his first composition!

So the very first thought of the *shloka* is to clear any distinction between deities. It is to *ambaa* he says "You are the One who is known as Sarasvati the Goddess of Speech, and You are the One who is also known as Mother Lakshmi". This is not a casual statement from him, says he. The knowers of the Vedas themselves say so ("*AgamavidaH AhuH*"), he adds humbly. And then it is You who is also Parvati, the wife of Rudra. All are *parAshakti*. And this is nothing but advaita. And this advaita prompts him to mention the *turIyaM*, the Fourth.

According to *ShAkta* philosophy and also according to Shaivism, there are Divinities for the Five Cosmic Functions. The Absolute Truth is beyond. Not like this in advaita. Vedic authentication of advaita comes from Mandukya Upanishad. The dream state of every *jIva* is Creation, the waking state is *Sthiti* (Sustenance) and the sleeping state is Dissolution; and that which is still awake even in that sleep state is the Fourth, that is *brahman*. In the same strain, in this *shloka*, the Acharya goes to the '*turIyaM*' after mentioning the three *Shaktis* of the Trinity; he does not go to the other two of the cosmic functions.

The '*Shakti* of *brahman*' is not specially talked about by him in advaita. Nor can we say it is never talked about. Right in the commentary of the very first *sUtra*, in *Brahma-sutra-bhAshhya*, The Acharya, detailing the '*lakshaNa*' of *brahman* in the words "*nitya-*

shuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhavaM , he adds “*sarvajnaM*”; by this addition it is therefore accepted that this ‘One’ (*ekaM*) also admits of ‘*sarvaM*’ (a multiplicity) and all that is ‘known’ by This. Later, more explicitly, he adds another *lakshaNa*: “*sarva-shakti-samanvitaM*” (possessing all powers). Further in the commentary on II-1-30, “*sarvopeta ca tad-darshanAt*”, the duality status is recognised and he says *brahman* has a varied *shakti-yoga*. Here ‘*shakti-yoga*’ means that which coexists with *Shakti*. This is what becomes the “*para-brahma-mahishhI*” in the language of *ShAktaM*, as in this *shloka* of Soundaryalahari.

One direct disciple of the Acharya was SarvajnaAtman. He was the last disciple. He is one of the leading exponents of advaita. Listen to him in ‘*Samkshhepa-ShArIrakaM*’ III-228, 229. “In *Shuddha-advaita* there is nothing like *Shakti*, *leela* or creation. However, even for those with such faith, there is a place for *karma* and *upAsana*. Seen from that *vyavahAra* perspective, the *cit* (Brahman, Consciousness) takes a role of *Shakti* and with its inert *mAya-avidya* power, creates the universe”. Yet, in the advaita works of the Acharya the aim is not to direct attention to this dance of *Shakti*. Without giving any importance to Brahma-*Shakti*, he always discards creation as the work of *mAya* and calls on us to think of the *turiya-brahman* beyond. Mostly he does not even refer to the *Shakti* or energy that is beyond a gender specification. When that is so, what to talk of Her as the ‘*patni*’ of *brahman*!

But the same Acharya, the teacher of *brahma-vidya*, now talks as the teacher of *Shri VidyA* and shows the way to those who have a taste in this direction. And the way is *KAmeshvari*, the ‘*para-brahma-mahishhI*’. The *Shri VidyA tantra* also has the same aim as advaita-*sAyujyaM*. Thus he combines the *turiya* at the goal of the *jnAna* path of advaita and the Shiva-*Shakti* concept in the Bhakti path.

Incidentally when he says ‘*turiya*’ in the feminine, not only does that mean the *parAshakti* beyond the three of Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati, it also means that ‘*turiya*’ is the *patni* of the ‘*turiyaM*’ that is *brahman*.

Notice that there is a unification of advaita Vedanta with *ShAktaM* here. The *parAshakti* of the *ShAkta* philosophy is identified with the *mAya* of advaita Vedanta. When it is spoken of as ‘*duradhigama-nissIma-mahima*’ (of unfathomable and boundless glory) the language is of *ShAktaM*. For in advaita *mAya* is considered to be ‘*tuchhaM*’ and therefore to be discarded as an incomprehensible *anirvacanIyaM*. But here it is the glorious *parAshakti*!

Our Acharya is matchless when it comes to his role as a spiritual teacher. In Soundaryalahari he has talked both advaita and *Shri VidyA* and has made a beautiful symbiosis of the two philosophies so as to be palatable, enjoyable and adaptable to both the Vedantins and the *Shri VidyA* followers. And this has been possible because, as I have told you

in the beginning, *Shri VidyA* is nearest to advaita, among all schools of thought.

In the beginning he talked about the capability of *Shakti* making the first prompting that makes Him move. And now at the end he makes the same *Shakti* as the prime mover of everything in the universe: “*vishvam bhramayasi*”. Naturally this compering and revolving includes all the motion of the universe. Krishna in the Gita talked only of the movement of the living when He said: “*bhrAmayan sarva-bhUtAni*”. By that He meant only the movement of the minds of living beings. But here the Acharya has included the movement of not only the living (*cetana*) but also of the non-living (*acetana*), by the use of the word “*vishvaM*”.

This *mAyA* or *parAShakti* that makes both the living and the non-living dance to Her tunes, is the same one who as Mother Goddess graces all of us not only with everything mundane but finally the very Bliss of *brahman* (“*parAnanda-rasaM*”). This is the content of *Shloka* #99.

80

(Digest of pp.1295 -1306)

*sarasvatyA lakshhmyA vidhi-hari-sapatno viharate
rateH pAtivratyAM shithilayati ramyeNa vapushhA/
ciraM jIvan-neva kshhapita-pashu-pAsha-vyatikaraH
parAnandAbhikhyAM rasayati rasaM tvad-bhajanavAn // 99//*

The modesty of our Acharya is well-known. It is going to exhibit itself again in the next *shloka* #100 where he says, in winding up the *stotra*, that nothing is his, it is all *ambaal*'s work. So he does not give any *phala-shruti* (a list of what one achieves by reading this *stotra*; ‘*phala*’ means fruit, consequence, reward) as is usual with all devotional compositions. Instead, he gives, in this *shloka* #99, a different form of *phala-shruti*, wherein he says what an upAsana of *ambaal* would give a devotee (*tvad-bhajanaVAn*, meaning, one who propitiates You), and thus indirectly hinting to us something like a *phala-shruti*. The first part of this *stotra* is the form of Her in *mantra* and *tantra*. The second part is the form of Her physical beauty. Thereby the whole *stotra* becomes Her very Self. So the recitation of this *stotra* is itself an upAsana. The reciter is the ‘*bhajanavAn*’.

What does the ‘*bhajanavAn*’ get? The only answer could be: What will he not get? Whether it is of this world (*iha*) or of the other world (‘*para*’), he will get everything. One might say, from a Vedantic point of view, that ‘*iha-phala*’ is no ‘*phala*’ at all. But who has that kind of maturity that does not want mundane rewards of this world? One has to start from the tastes of this world and move on to discard them only gradually. The movement from the ‘*iha*’ (meaning ‘here’, ‘now’) to the

'*para*' (meaning 'distant', 'subsequent') has to go from stage to stage in the natural course of one's evolution. It is in this context that this *shloka* details both the '*iha-phala*' and the '*para-phala*' as rewards for the *upAsaka*. Both the kinds of rewards may be put together under four heads: Knowledge, Wealth, Beauty, Life. Of these the first one goes along with both '*iha*' and '*para*'.

Knowledge is obtained by Learning. The Goddess of Learning is Sarasvati. But *ambaal* Herself gives all that is given by Sarasvati – to such an extent that even Brahma, the Creator, is envious of such a devotee who has got all the learning that Sarasvati can bestow. Brahma the Creator, the consort of Sarasvati, was all along thinking that he was the sole beneficiary of Sarasvati's favours. Remember that Brahma with his four faces always chanting the four vedas is the repository of all knowledge. Still he feels that the devotee who is favoured by *ambaal* with all that Sarasvati has ever given Him, is a kind of competitor to Him *vis-a-vis* Sarasvati. 'How come, this human devotee of *ambaal* has more favours of the Sarasvati-type than what I myself have!' is the Creator's feeling. This is part of the first line of the *shloka*. "*SarasvatyA vidhi-sapatno viharate*".

The other part of the first line – "*lakshhmyA hari-sapatno viharate*" says the same thing of Vishnu, whose consort is Lakshmi. Again, *ambaal*'s Grace gives Her *upAsaka*, all favours of the Lakshmi type – meaning, wealth and prosperity -- that Vishnu Himself is envious!

The Acharya mentions Sarasvati before Lakshmi. In other words, he talks of Knowledge before Wealth. If the choice is given to us we might want to put Wealth before Knowledge. I am sure that if God were to suddenly appear before us and ask us what we want, most of us – nay, almost all of us – would ask for wealth, as our first priority. Wealth is the one thing that never satiates the human mind.

Certainly, Knowledge, Wealth, and Beauty are all desired by every one. But it is Wealth that gets the first seat in this. There is an interesting irony here. As far as wisdom and knowledge are concerned, none of us would call oneself unwise or unknowing. Even if we do not know we usually like to pose as one who knows! We don't take extraordinary efforts to make an improvement to our real knowledge. The same story with Beauty. None of us would like to be told that there is no beauty in us. And we would not like others also to think of us otherwise. In the case of Knowledge we may be slack in making efforts to improve. But in the case of Beauty every one of us takes elaborate pains to improve our presentation and appearance. This is the story with Knowledge and Beauty.

On the other hand, in the case of wealth, we all behave differently, almost contrarily. We may have wealth but we would not like other people to know about it. Always we make a plea for our need to have more and we go about taking that posture. In the case of Knowledge and

Beauty, we pose as if we have them even if we do not have them. In the case of Wealth it is the opposite! This is the irony, which clearly establishes that, among the three, Wealth is our first preference.

But our Acharya mentions Knowledge first and then only Wealth. This only shows his infinite concern for us. However much he may know our minds and their predilection for wealth in preference to knowledge, he wants to do good to us by influencing us in favour of the one thing that he knows will only do good to us. Because if wealth is accrued before the wisdom to use that wealth properly, there is every chance that such wealth will be lost in no time. His thinking goes along with Taittiriyaopanishad where, the prayer is for '*medhA*' (Right knowledge) (1.4.1) and then it says 'Thereafter ('*tataH*') give me wealth' (1.4.2). His own Bhaja Govindam also emphasizes this in "*artham-anartham bhAvaya nityaM*".

In an earlier *shloka* (#97) he said "You are Sarasvati, You are Lakshmi, Parvati also; and You are the source of them all, because You are the Queen-Consort of the Absolute Brahman" He did not call Sarasvati or Lakshmi as the Goddess of Learning or the Goddess of Wealth. Instead He made them the *Shaktis* corresponding to the '*sRshhTi*' function and the '*sthiti*' function. In apposition to the fact that they were the *Shaktis* corresponding to Cosmic functions, *ambaal* was placed as the Universal *Shakti* integrated into the *parabrahman* itself. And thereby She becomes the source of all other *Shaktis*. So the Learning and Wealth which are the domains of Sarasvati and Lakshmi, have their original source in *ambaal*. Naturally, by propitiating *ambaal*, the other two also are obtained.

And thirdly, *ambaal* is the original source of Power for the God of Love, namely '*KAmA*'. In fact Her own name is *KAmeshvari*, *KAmAkshhi* and *KAmakoTi*. It is that *KAmA* who was reinstated by her by being given a new life. It is he who reigns over the third fundamental desire of man, namely, Beauty. That is why when somebody possesses all the beauty that we can think of, we say the person is a Manmatha in physical form. The *stotra* that talks predominantly of the '*soundarya*' (beauty) of *ambaal*, is now said to give the beauty that man desires. In the case of Sarasvati and Lakshmi, they were feminine; so it was said (in the first line) that a devotee of *ambaal* gets knowledge (Sarasvati's gift) and wealth (Lakshmi's gift) in such abundance that their own husbands were envious of the recipient. Now Manmatha is male and so when his bounty of beauty is bestowed on the devotee due to *ambaal*'s Grace, his own wife Rati, becomes suspicious of the identity of the recipient –whether he is Manmatha himself! This is the content of the second line of the *shloka*.

Well, Knowledge, Wealth and Beauty – all three have been obtained. Are these enough? What if the recipient does not live long? Then that itself will negate everything else! That is why all our scriptures

include in their benedictions, ‘*dIrghAyuH*’ as the first blessing. Without long life and the implied good health, everything else is of no value.

And this is what is promised in the third line of the *shloka*. This is the most (materially) significant benefit to the *upAsaka*. ‘*ciraM jIvanneva*’ says the *shloka*. But as one goes on in one’s life, living long, in due time he gets into the thought process: “All these days I have obtained everything of value in this world (‘*iha*’) in terms of knowledge, wealth and beauty, - all by *ambaal*’s Grace. Let me hereafter work through the same *upAsana* of *ambaal*, for betterment of my after-life”. And then, what happens, is said in the third and fourth line of the *shloka*:

“*ciraM jIvanneva kshhapita-pashu-pAsha-vyatikaraH*
parAnanda-bhikhyaM rasayati rasaM tvad-bhajanavAn”

He who propitiates You, namely Your *upAsaka*, lives long, is able to discard the *pashu-pAsha* knot and enjoys the infinite bliss of *BrahmAnanada*.

So long as a *Jiva* revolves in the quagmire of the senses and their natural attractions, the *Jiva* is nothing but an animal (*pashu*). That is when the bond of ‘*karma*’ anchors him to the concept of ‘*janma*’ (birth and death). It is that bond that is called ‘*pAshaM*’. It makes him revolve again and again in the *samsAra* cycle. It is the sword of *jnAna* that cuts it asunder. And then he is no more a *pashu*. He becomes Shiva, the *pashu-pati* (the Lord of the *pashu*). The *parAnandaM* – supreme bliss of advaita – is then the essence (*rasa*) of his experience. Note that the Acharya uses his words very carefully. He does not say he ‘experiences’ that ‘*rasa*’. If he wanted to say so he would have used the words ‘*pibati*’ (drinks, consumes) or ‘*AsvAdayati*’ (tastes). But he has put in the word ‘*rasayati*’ meaning, he becomes the *rasa* (essence) himself and it is that becoming that is termed as ‘*rasayati*’. In other words there is no duality of the experiencer and the experienced. There is only one ‘*rasa*’. It is advaitam!

The great teacher of advaita uses two concepts of what is going to develop in future as the great *Shaiva siddhanta*. This shows his universality of outlook. Also, all along he has been propagating Soundaryalahari according to the *ShAkta* schools of thought. Accordingly *Shakti* was placed in the dominant position. But when he ends the *stotra* he raises Shiva to dominance and effortlessly throws in two important concepts -- namely ‘*pashu*’ and ‘*pAsha*’ -- of the Shaiva canon.

The flood of beauty of Mother Goddess is now terminating. All floods have to terminate in a sea or ocean. This flood (*lahari*) of words has now to merge in the ocean of shabda-*brahman*. The Acharya uses

the word '*salila-nidhi*' which is the same as '*jala-nidhi*' that means 'ocean'.

pradIpa-jvAlAbhir-divasakara-nIrAjana-vidhiH
sudhA-sUtesh-candropala-jala-lavair-arghya-racanA /
svakIyair-ambhobhiH salila-nidhi-sauhitya-karaNaM
tvadIyAbhir-vAgbhis-tava janani vAcAM stutir-iyam // 100 //

vAcAM janani: Oh Mother who generated Speech,
divasakara-nIrAjana-vidhiH : (just as one does) the light-waving ritual to the Sun-God

pradIpa-jvAlAbhiH : by the flames of a lamp,

arghya-racanA : (just as) the offering of the arghya ritual

sudhA-sUteH : to the moon

candropala-jala-lavaiH : by the water drops that ooze out of the moonstone in contact with moonlight,

salila-nidhi-sauhitya-karaNaM : (just as) offering ritual bathing to the ocean

svakIyaiH ambhobhiH : by its own water,

tava iyam stutiH : (so also is) this *stotra* on You

tvadIyAbhiH vAgbhiH : composed of Thine own words.

An elaborate explanation is needed for this final *shloka*.

81

(Digest of pp.1307 - 1321 of Deivathin Kural, 6th volume, 4th imprn.)

The great Acharya always does something different from other poets. Usually they all end their work with a *phala-shruti* – a listing of all the good things that will accrue by the reading, recitation and repetition of the *stotra* just finished. Here our author is himself a unique combination of the deity of the *stotra* and Her own Lord. So we would expect the last *shloka* of the *stotra* to be a magnificent *phala-shruti* that soars far higher than the ordinary. But what do we find?

Instead of trying to soar higher, he actually makes himself the humblest of the humble. “Why talk of *phala-shruti* for such an apology of a *stotra*, that has just been done by Her Grace? What accrues to whomsoever that worships Her has already been told in *shloka* #99. Let me stop there. Whatever happens in the world, whether highly commendable or not, all that is founded on Her Will. If everything turns out to be commendable then that may not contribute to the variety that is the spice of Her *leela*. That is why perhaps She encourages and prompts some low-level achievements also, for the very purpose of highlighting really higher ones! This *stotra* is one of such promptings of Hers. She is the Source of everything and so this is also Her child. And I

am placing Her child at Her own feet.” This is the spirit of the final *shloka* #100. In *shloka* #27 the Acharya laid himself at Her feet – that was his *Atma-samarpaNaM*. Now he is placing this child of Hers at Her own divine feet.

Thus he does not show it off as something worthy of being submitted to Her as an offering. He thinks that it is absurd to make such a submission. This absurdity reminds him of three other absurdities that are current in the world. And this is what makes the final *shloka*.

The word ‘*divasa-kara*’ means one who produces the day (*divasa*), therefore, the Sun. When a deity in the form of an idol of worship is located in the innermost sanctity of a *garbha-griha* in a temple then a waving of camphor flame makes sense because it really lights up the dark sanctum sanctorum and brightens up the deity with all its decorations. But what can a poor camphor flame do to brilliant sunlight? In fact it is the other way. The brilliance of sunlight actually dampens any light that may be emanating from the camphor flame! “The *devI* is the fullest Effulgence of the *Shakti* that is Speech (*Vak*). Before that Light, what can this poor *stotra* of mine do in terms of lighting up anything?” This is the attitude in which the Acharya is submitting his work at Her feet and compares his action to the absurd action of lighting up camphor and showing it as an offering to the Sun-God!

Every time he talks of the ‘hot’ Sun he immediately refers to the ‘cold’ moon! Here also the second example of absurdity (2nd line of the *shloka*) is about the moon. Worship is being done to the Moon-God. In any ritual worship, there are usually three offerings by means of water. One is ‘*pAdyaM*’ (that which is offered for washing the feet). The second is ‘*arghyaM*’ (that which is offered in the hands). The third is ‘*AcamanIyaM*’ (that which is offered to be taken in by the mouth). Technically, ‘*arghyaM*’ means “that which is valued most”. Therefore that formality has a special value. Now in one such *pUjA* that the Acharya might have witnessed, probably something like the following took place.

There are two gem-stones talked about in ancient literature. They are Moon-stone and Sun-stone. Probably these were there in ancient times and are now extinct. The sunstone draws into itself the rays of the Sun and radiates heat. Almost like a concentration through a lens. The moonstone is just the opposite. It absorbs moonlight into itself and pours out cool water! Now what some one did in the worship of the Moon was to take that water poured out by the moonstone and offer it to the Moon-God as an ‘*arghyaM*’! ‘*candra-upala*’ is moonstone. ‘*upala*’ is stone. And the moon itself is called ‘*sudhAsUti*’ because moon is said to pour out nectar by its light. ‘*sudhA*’ is nectar.

There is a gradation of absurdities in the two absurdities cited. Camphor has an independent existence outside of the Sun. The only dependence of camphor on the Sun may be that camphor may not light up if it is continuously exposed to an absence of any light or heat. On the

other hand, the case of the moonstone pouring out water is totally dependent on the moon, because it is the moonlight that makes it give out water. Thus the absurdity of using the water from the moonstone to offer *arghyaM* to the Moon is a greater absurdity than the camphor flame being shown to the Sun!

The third absurdity (from the third line of the *shloka*) is still more absurd. And the Acharya must have witnessed it many a time because he has travelled from coast to coast in the entire country. For example he must have seen it in Rameshvaram where people dip in the Ocean and offer worship to the Ocean-God Varuna. Any ritual worship has, as one of its sixteen formalities, a ritual bathing, called '*abhishekam*'. How does one do '*abhishekam*' to the ocean? Is it not funny? '*Abhishekam*' to the Ocean! But they all do it. The Acharya himself must have done it when he went to Rameshvaram. What do they do? They take some drops of water from the ocean itself and sprinkle it on the ocean with the *mantra* beginning with : "*Apo-hishhTA mayo bhuvah*. (Oh Water! You are conferring bliss)". 'If millions of people over the centuries have done this kind of worship of Varuna during their bath in the ocean, then why can't I', says the Acharya, 'take a few words from that ocean of Vak (Speech) and offer it to Herself, the Goddess of all Speech?'

The word '*sauhityaM*' in the third line of the *shloka*, is generally taken to mean the ritual act of '*tarpanaM*' (offering a little palmful of water) but the word actually means 'that which is most beneficial or pleasant'. In our country which is generally hot, the most pleasant thing is to give a bath. So I extended its meaning to '*abhishekam*' or bath, in the *pUjA* to the Ocean. Anyway it increases the intensity of the absurdity still further and so suits the context well!

Look at the gradation among the three examples. The Sun and Camphor are two distinct entities. The water oozing out of the moonstone gem, though caused by moonlight, still is different from the moon. But in the case of water being taken out of the sea and being offered to that sea of water itself, there is no medium involved; the water is the same. So the third example brings you to the peak of absurdity. And this quite naturally fits with the attitude of the Acharya when he thinks that what he has composed is nothing but the words of *ambaal* Herself. She is addressed as '*vAcAm janani*' -- meaning, the origin, the source, of everything that has anything to do with Speech -- in the fourth line. "What has been done is what You Yourself have composed in Your own words. It is all Yours. There is nothing of mine there". This is how the Acharya makes a complete surrender. He does not even use the words '*samarpanaM*' or '*arpaNaM*' meaning dedication. But it is clear that he has offered his entire self to the Goddess. The *jIvAtmA* has totally negated itself and there is only the *paramAtmA* thereafter. By means of the *bhakti stotra* of Soundaryalahari the Acharya has shown us what it is to reach the Self-Realisation of Oneness with the Ultimate.

And, most of all, he shows to us the peak of modesty. “*vidyA-vinaya-sampanna*” say our *ShAstras*. Here is the colossal example of *vidyA* (Learning) and *vinaya* (Modesty). If nothing else, we should learn this from the Acharya. His advaita lesson may not penetrate into our head. But this lesson in modesty that he teaches us should. Any time we feel heavy in our head, the thought must come: ‘Whatever I think I am is Her Grace’. And that thought will help us lighten the burden of I-ness in the head. Even the inhaling breath is given by Her; it is Hers. If only it had been ours we would never die!

If we thus start living as an instrument in the hands of *ambaal*, it will lead us to an advaita state of merging in Her. This lesson of being nothing but an instrument in Her hands and negating oneself as the doer is what this *shloka* tells us as the final teaching of all brahma-vidyA. Because it is this lesson and the consequent living of it (*‘abhyAsa’*) that takes us on to an advaita-anubhava (experience of non-duality). This is the *phala-shruti* that is unsaid here by the Acharya. It is the *phala* (reward, fruit) that asks for no *phala*! Only when there is a ‘doer’ there is a *‘phala* for the doer’. When the ‘doer’ himself has been negated, there is no question of *‘phala’*.

How does one negate and dissolve oneself and be only Her instrument ? Only by thinking of Her. We do not even know what the Universal *parAshakti* is like? So thinking of that *parA-shakti* is an impossibility. But here in this Soundaryalahari our Acharya has brought Her to us in a beautiful form from head to foot. Her form itself is nothing but Beauty and he has added beauty to it by his beautiful play of words. Looking at, and thinking about, that beauty from head to foot, in all the details that the Acharya has brought to us, is the only antidote for the ego in which we are all steeped in. She has blessed us all with our intellects and with the facility to use our speech and mind. Use all this in Her favour as a decoration. What She gave us, give it back to Her. That will kill our ego. Not only speech, but any art or science that we are capable of -- make it as an ornament for Her. In that attitude of humility every activity of ours will take us up the spiritual ladder. Whatever we then do will become a *sAdhana* to reach Her.

When one thus merges in the flood of Her beauty through these delightful stanzas of Soundaryalahari, maybe he will himself accrue all those qualities of beauty. Maybe not. But one thing is certain. In the eyes of the world he will appear to have become so endowed with all the beauties of the Mother Herself. For he has taken the nectar of Wisdom and the Milk of Love that flows from Her and so he should naturally be bubbling with that divine bliss that She has given him.

He might have a bald head. But the world will be attracted to him as if he has the “*kirITaM te haimaM*” (cf. #42) quality! His face may have all kinds of distortions. But others would gather round him to see his “*vadana-soundarya-laharI*” (cf. #44). Maybe he has squint eyes; but it

would be “*dara-dalita-nIlotpalaM*” (cf. #57) for the others. His uncouth mouth will appear to surpass the beauty of “*vidruma-lata*” or “*bimba*” (cf. # 62). Even when his body is disproportionate and unattractive, because of the *bhakti* and Divine Love with which he is full he would shine so well as to be said: “*jayati karuNA kAcid-aruna*” (cf. #93). Every movement of his would benefit the rest of the world as to say there is nothing better than this “*lakshmi-caraNa-tala-lakshhA-rasaM*” or “*nava-nalina-rAgam*” (cf. #71). Every step that he takes would make us melt in respect; and that is the “*karaNa-caraNa-shhaT-caraNaM*”-type (cf. #90) of *jIva* which merges in that lotus feet of Hers. Thus one who dips into the *stotra* that is Soundaryalahari, would become ultimately a veritable Soundaryalahari (flood of beauty)! There is no doubt that, with the blessings of our Acharya, The Mother of the Universe to whom we bow in prostration, by means of these Soundaryalahari *shlokas*, will gradually, but steadily, lead our Atman to become, ultimately, one with that Ocean of Bliss.!

Concluded.

Thus spake the Paramacharya

*Aum Shri Matre namaH / tvadIyAbhir-Angila-vAgbhiH janani idam
guror-bhAshhaNAkhyam gadya-vyAkhyanam gurbanugrahAt
samkshhiptaM samAptam ca / lokAs-samastAs-sukhino bhavantu // Aum
tat sat //*

Salutations to The Auspicious Mother. Oh Mother! By the Grace of the Guru (The Paramacharya), this prose commentary named ‘Discourses of the Guru’ has now been summarised and also finished, in words of English which are Your own. May all the Universes turn out to be happy. Aum tat sat.