

SRIMAD RAHASYATRAYĀSARA

A BRIEF ACCOUNT

OF

THE SUCCESSION OF ACHARYAS



SANSKRIT SLOKA :

(With due devotion) we repeat the expression of adoration to our *gurus* and likewise to their *gurus*; and among these (latter), we pray for the grace of the Primeval Couple (Narayana and Lakshmi), the twin *seshis** of all the worlds (so that they may be both the end to be attained by us and the means of attaining it).

TAMIL VERSE :

Having carefully studied the beautiful hymns sung with delight in Tamil by seers, we have come to understand the real meaning of the regions of the Upanishads which are otherwise difficult to comprehend - seers known as Poygai Muni, Bhutamuni, Peyalvar, Kurugesan (Nammalvar) who was born on the banks of the cool Tamraparni, Vishnuchittan, the pure-minded Kulasekhara, our Pananathan, Thondaradippodi, the splendour that appeared in Mazhisai (Tirumazhisai alvar) and the prince of Mangai armed with sword and spear for making bright the path of the Vedas throughout the world.

TAMIL VERSE :

To those who venture to attain release from the bondage of *sam-sāra*, the ancient path indicated to us by the spotless Madhurakavi

* A *sasha* is one who exists solely for the purposes of another. That other is *seshi*.

Note: (1) The commentator says that Vishnuchittan stands for Vishnuchittan and also for his daughter Andal, the authoress of many hymns.

by his own example is the only safe² path, for while there is Sri Krishna, the great cowherd, who incarnated solely for the sake of his devotees to confer bliss on them, to be their refuge, to be their final goal, to stand in relation to them as mother, father, brother and so on, to change their desire for the pleasures of this world into a desire for Himself, to remove all their sins, to show them infinite compassion, to reveal the truth, and so also to bring about in them a likeness to Himself — while there is Sri Krishna ever ready to do all this,³ he sought only the feet of the sage Satagopa (*Nammālvār*) who rendered in Tamil the truths contained in the Vedas which are otherwise hard to understand.

THE ĀCHĀRYA ESSENTIAL FOR MOKSHA :

It is said in the *Smritis*: “Kshatrabandhu*¹, who was the worst of sinners, and *² Pundarika, the virtuous — both of them obtained *moksha* or release from bondage by virtue of their having *āchāryas*.” It is thus declared that in the case of every one, the only means of securing *moksha* is to have an *āchārya*. To the man desirous of *moksha*, the line of *āchāryas* is stated in the *Sruti*³ to extend upward even to the Supreme Bhagavan for purposes of meditation.

Note (2) *safe path*: This means *Bhakti and Prapatti* which lead to *moksha*. *Acharya bhakti* is called *bhakti* and *prapatti* as it leads to them.

Note (3) Madhurakavi in his decade of Tamil verses, says that, to him, Nammalvar is the only God and that through him, he expects to derive all the benefits that men expect to have from God Himself. The path indicated by him is that of devotion to the *Acharya* for attaining *mukti* as well as other things.

* 1 Kshatrabandhu led the life of a highwayman in a forest. He was a source of terror to the sages who lived in that forest. Once when the sage Narada happened to pass by him, he rushed at him with his stick. Narada took pity on him and asked him to find out from his wife and children whether they would share the sin he was committing, as it was done for their sake. They refused and Kshatrabandhu realised his folly and begged to be instructed by Narada in the truths of religion.

* 2 Pundarika was a virtuous Brahmin, who, though he followed the righteous path and went on a pilgrimage to holy places, did not get a vision of God. It was only after being initiated into the *Ashtakshara* by Narada that he realised God.

3 The *sruti* referred to here means:— “This line of the *acharyas* extends up to Bhagavan thus: This is his *acharya*; his *acharya* is so and so and so on up to the Lord”.

BHAGAVĀN THE FIRST ĀCHĀRYA:

The Supreme Lord is the foremost of all *āchāryas*, as may be seen from the following passages:— “Him¹ (Sri Krishna) who is possessed of all excellences, who is the *āchārya*, father and *guru*”, “Narayana² who is the *guru* of all the world is also my *guru*”, “Thou³ art my kinsman, and Thou art my *guru*”, and “Thou art⁴ the *guru* of all the worlds and likewise their goal”. It is He that, at the beginning, vouchsafed the Vedas to Brahma and when they were stolen, brought them back to him and through him spread their knowledge in the world. It is He that blessed Brahma’s sons, Sanatkumara and others, to understand⁵ all truths by themselves and to follow the path of renunciation. Through them He revealed the means of attaining sālvation. It is Bhagavan who, later by the agency of such great seers as Narada, Parasara, Suka and Sounaka, maintained intact the tradition of the Upanishads. It has been said “Know⁶ that Vyasa who is otherwise called Krishna Dvaipayana is the Lord Narayana Himself. Who else is there in the world, O Maitreya, that could compose the *Mahābhārata* ?” It has also been said, “Devoutly⁷ uttering the name of that great sage (Vyasa), Bhishma said with folded hands”. Into such great men as Vyasa referred to above the Lord entered and through them published to the world great works like *Mahābhārata* and *Sārīraka Mimāmsa (Brahma Sūtras)*. Further in such incarnations as Hamsa, Matsya, Hayagriva, Nara, Narayana, and the *Gītāchārya* (Sri Krishna), He himself stood out and revealed spiritual truths and also the means of attaining *moksha (tatva and hita)*. He had his invaluable teaching confirmed also

1 Mahabharata; *Sabha Parva* : 41—21. *Acharya* here means one who teaches Brahma Vidya and *guru* one who teaches the Vedas. This verse was spoken by Sahadeva to those assembled at the Rajasuya sacrifice.

2 Vishnu Purana 5 : 1—14.

3 Mahabharata : Gandhari’s words.

4 Alavandar’s *Stotram* : 60.

5 Mahabharata : *Santi Parva* : 349—71.

6 Vishnu Purana : 3 : 4—5.

7 Mahabharata : *Adi Parva* ; 114—40.

through the words of such men of wisdom as Bhishma. It has been said ⁸ "Narayana Himself dictated the whole of the *Pāncharātra*". When this *Sāstra* which was originally taught by Him became lost, once again at the end of the *Dvapara Yuga* and the beginning of the *Kali Yuga*, He ⁹ revealed it again through Sankarshana in accordance with the ordinances of the *Satvatas* so that all castes, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras, might, after initiation by the *āchārya* with the prescribed marks (*Sankha* and *Chakra*), worship and render service to the lord in the performance of their daily duties with their minds set on the Eternal. As is said in the following verse, "In the yuga of Kali ¹⁰, the Lord Achyuta enters into the respective persons of men already born and carries out His designs", Narayana assumed a new series of ten incarnations in the forms of Parankusa (Nammalvar), Parakala (Tirumangai) and others. In these ten *avatārs*, just as clouds take in the water of the ocean and then pour it down in the form of rain so essential to the life of every one, the Lord gathered together those parts of the Vedas which are most significant and revealed them briefly in a language (Tamil) which is accessible to every one.

When this path of spiritual life was threatened with obstruction by heretics, open and covert, He incarnated again in the land of Agastya in the forms of many teachers of the true doctrine. Has it not been said, "The god,¹¹ Narayana, Himself, assumes a mortal form out of compassion and lifts up the world submerged (in the darkness of ignorance) with the sastras as His hand", and so also, "Our^{11a} Lord dressed in his yellow raiment came as the *guru* out of compassion to impart the teaching of the Veda". In reference to this, the Maharshi, Suka, says, "In the¹² *yuga* of Kali, devotees of Narayana endowed with spiritual greatness, will

8 Mahabharata : *Santi Parva* : 359—68.

9 Mahabharata : *Bhishma Parva* 66—39—40.

10 Vishnudharma : 108—50.

11 Jayakhya Samhita.

11a Perialwar : Tirumozhi 5—2—8.

12 Bhagavatam XI. 5—38, 39.

be born here and there in large numbers in the land of the Dravidas, where flow the rivers, the Tamraparni, the Vaigai, the Palar, the holy Cauveri and the Mahanadi which runs westwards."

THE SUCCESSION OF VAISHNAVITE ĀCHĀRYAS.

Among these *āchāryas*. Nathamuni was the son of Iswaramuni, and he gave us "Nyaya Tatvam" and "Yoga Rahasyam." Since Nathamuni received the sacred tradition from one of the spiritual descendants of Madhurakavi, and was blessed with spiritual wisdom from a study of *Tiruvoymozhi* and since, in his yogic contemplation, Nammalvar appeared to him and taught him the sacred lore, his *āchārya* was Nammalvar himself (though they lived at different times). Nathamuni's son was Iswara Bhatta. To Iswara Bhatta was born Alavandar (Yamunacharya). The works of Alavandar are the following eight:— "*Āgama Prāmāṇyam*", "*Purusha Nirūaya*", the three *Siddhis*, namely, "*Ātma Siddhi*", "*Īswara Siddhi*", "*Samvit Siddhi*", "*Srī Gītārtha Saṅgraha*", "*Stotram*" and "*The Tetrad of Slokas*." Sottai Nambi was the son of Alavandar. Sottai Nambi's son was Ennachchan. Ennachchan had four sons, one of whom was Pillayappar. Pillayappar's son was Thozhappar. Thozhappar had two daughters. The chief disciples who sought the feet of Nathamuni were eight:— Uyyakkondar, Kurukaikavalappan, Nambi Karunakara Dasar, Erutiruvudaiyar, Thirukkannamangai Andan, Vanamadevi Andan, Uruppattur Achan Pillai and Sokattur Alvan. Uyyakondar had five disciples; they are:— Manakkal Nambi, Tiruvallikkeni Pan Perumal Araiyar, Settalur Sendalangerar, Sri Pundarika Dasar and Ulagapperumal Nangai. The chief disciples of Manakkal Nambi were five; they are Alavandar, Deivattukkarasu Nambi, Gomatam Tiruvinnagar Appan, Siruppulloor Avudaiya Pillai and Acchi. Alavandar had fifteen disciples: they are:— Peria Nambi, Tirukkottiyur Nambi, Tirumalai Andan, Alavandar Alvar, Tirumalai Nambi, Isandan Deivavari Andan, Siriyandan, Tirumohoor Appan, Tirumohoor Ninrar, Deivapperumal, Tirumangai Aliyar, Pillai Tirumalirun-

jolai Dasar, Maraner Nambi and Alkondi. Six disciples sought the feet of Perianambi; they were:— Emperumanar (Sri Ramanuja), Malaikuniya Ninrar, Arya Sri Satagopa Dasar, Aniarangattamudanar, Tiruvoykulamudaiyan Pattar and Tirukkacchi Nambi. Sri Ramanuja learnt the meanings of the *rahasyas* or mantras at the feet of Tirukkottiyur Nambi. He studied *Tiruvoymozhi* at the feet of Tirumalai Andan. He learnt *Tiruvoymozhi* at the feet of Alavandar Alvar and learnt also “*Stotram*” and the ancient tradition from him. At the feet of Tirumalai Nambi he studied the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Sri Ramanuja’s writings are nine in number: *Srī Bhāshyam*, *Deepam*, *Sāram*, *Vedārtha Saṅgraham*, *Srī Gītā Bhāshyam*, *Siriya Gadyam* (Sriranga Gadyam), *Periya Gadyam* (*Saranāgati Gadyam*), *Vaikunta Gadyam* and *Nityam*. The names of the chief disciples of Ramanuja may be learnt from the respective tradition of each reader.

BHAKTI TO ĀCHĀRYA ESSENTIAL :

It has been said, “The wise’ man should bring his *guru* to the light (of renown) and should guard the sacred *mantra* with great care; from the omission to bring his *guru* to light and by revealing the *mantra*, he declines in wealth (of knowledge) and in age (spiritual standing).” His bringing the *guru* to light and his omission to do so, it needs no saying, are due to the excess or deficiency of his devotion to his *guru*.

From **Kata Sruti* and †*Jābāla Sruti* it is well-known that that all`desired knowledge arises from supreme devotion to the *guru* resembling that to Bhagavan. This is learnt also from the incident of Sanjaya seeing all things as if they occurred before

1 Seshasamhita: 14-50

* NOTE: *Kata Sruti*: This wisdom concerning the soul cannot be obtained by the mere exercise of reason. Only when it is imparted by another (the *guru*), does it lead to the knowledge which is the means of attaining *moksha*. *Katopanishad* 1. II. 9

† *Jabala* says in the *Sruti*: “It is only the *Vidya* or wisdom learnt from an *acharya* that gives proficiency” *Chandogya Upanishad*: IV-9-3

him, as the result of his supreme devotion to his *guru* Vyasa. From the episodes of Raikwa (and others) it is evident that the *guru* who does not reveal spiritual truths immediately even to those *sishyas* who are of excellent character will not be adversely affected in his spiritual life. If, on the other hand, the *guru* reveals these spiritual truths to any and every disciple in the belief that the *sishya* who has sought him must be good, he will be adversely affected; for, in such cases, it is said that the sins of the disciple become also the sins of the *guru*. This may be seen from the story of Brahma. Without careful enquiry (into his fitness) he revealed truths to Indra. As a consequence Brahma forgot his divine knowledge and had to be taught again by Bhagavan through the agency of Narada, Brahma's very disciple. In the *sloka* referred to above, the meaning that, by not bringing the *guru* to light and by improper bringing of the *mantra* to light, the man suffers decline *respectively* in wealth and in age is primarily intended owing to appropriateness and the support of Jabala and Kata Srutis. There is nothing wrong in interpreting the *sloka* as meaning also "He who omits to bring his *guru* to light and brings the *mantra* to light will suffer decline *both* in wealth (the wealth of spiritual knowledge) and in age (spiritual standing)." It follows from this that a man should bring his *guru* to light by way of the overflow of his supreme devotion to him under all conditions and that the sacred *mantra* should not, for the sake of any material advantage, be revealed to the fickle-minded who do not possess all the qualities prescribed for a disciple. If the *mantra* is revealed to undeserving persons, its great value which is like that of a casket made of rubies containing a precious jewel will suffer and the *guru's* spiritual greatness will also be adversely affected. The word *guru* refers, by implication, to the earlier *gurus* also in the line of ascent extending up to Bhagavan. Or it may mean *gurus* in general. Similarly the word *mantra* refers also to the meanings of the *mantra* and other secret doctrines connected with it. As a rule or *vidhi*, it has been laid down that, whenever a man meditates on these secret meanings or mysteries, he should also meditate on the lineal succession of *gurus*. It has also been said: "As

an ¹³expiation for having conversed with those that are forbidden as unfit (for conversation), we should meditate on the virtuous." By the words "the virtuous", this *sloka* refers primarily to the *ūchāryas*.

TAMIL VERSE :

" Having sought the protection of my *guru* who has graciously taught me that Bhagavan is the Inner Self within me and having also bowed with devotion to the line of his *gurus*, I seek the refuge of the feet of the Lord, after bowing at the feet of that generous soul who appeared in Sri Perumbudur owing to his compassion (for his fellow-men), (his *guru*) Peria Nambi, Alavandar (the *guru* of Peria Nambi, Manakkal Nambi, Uyyakkondar who taught the good path (of *prapatti*) to Manakkal Nambi, Nathamuni (the *guru* of Uyyakkondar), Satagopan (Nammalvar) (the *guru* of Nathamuni) and Senainathan (the *guru* of Nammalvar) and then, of the gracious Lakshmi, sweet to the Lord as ambrosia.

SANSKRIT VERSE :

May these great spiritual teachers, Nathamuni and others, fill my heart here and now with delight, so that I may not be subject to the impact of the arrows of Manmatha (i. e. to the pleasures of the senses)—teachers who bring us blissful truths of varied kinds from Vedanta, who convey to us (like Bhagiratha) the celestial river of the compassion of the divine couple to be sought in full faith and who are foreign to the paths of envy, error and deception !

SANSKRIT VERSE :

The blissful line of our *gurus* who are possessed of many auspicious qualities, who have brought down the arrogance of rival controversialists by the successive neighs issuing from Hayagriva who delights in sitting on the throne of their hearts, and whose triumphant banner fixed at the top of the mansion of the four

quarters has, by the flourish of its cloth waving in the breeze, dispelled the doctrines of their respective systems like tufts of cotton and thereby rendered the good path clear to all — this blissful line of our *gurus* shines supreme.

TAMIL VERSE :

We that cling to the noble qualities and sweet words of the benevolent sage, Ramanuja, who adorns the world with his renown and who, like an elephant, knocking down plantain trees, refuted the arguments of those that, with the help of their unrestrained logic, wrought great havoc in the straight paths of the * *Brahma Sūtrās* — we (that cling to his words) and are thereby blessed with spiritual fervour shall no longer (even) think of deeds that are evil.

TAMIL VERSE :

We, who were caught up in the stream of *samsāra* from time immemorial, and have, now, by a change of fortune, come to acquire a knowledge of our true spiritual nature, consider that Sri Yamunacharya (Alavandar) came into this world to protect us from being sunk again in the mire of *samsāra* and we will ever be attached to the feet of the sage (Alavandar) who triumphed over his opponents and blessed us with his writings. Never more shall we read the works of heretics.

TAMIL VERSE :

We shall come to new life again by bowing every day at the feet of the noble and generous Nathamuni, who to his (two) § loving disciples who were like a trumpet and a conch (to proclaim the truth and to cow down the exponents of rival systems) taught the art of music so that they might sing the sweet strains of the Tamil

NOTE:— The disputations of these *acharyas* are compared to the succession of neighings coming from the God Hayagriva who is seated in their hearts. By these disputations they are said to have put down the pride of the exponents of rival systems.

* (or the *Upanishads*)

§ Two disciples : Kilagathalvan and Melagathalvan.

Veda which had been long forgotten in the world and who propagated in the world, for the pursuit of all, the path of *tapas* (*bhakti and prapatti*). In all the four regions of the world there is no one equal to us (because of this devotion of ours to Nathamuni).

NOTE: There are some who maintain that this chapter on the succession of *gurus* is not part of *Srimad Rahasyatrayasara* and that the latter begins only with the "Introductory Chapter", which follows.