

Sri Alangudi Swamigal Divya Charitram

– Sri Sri Krishnapremi Swamigal

In the village Alangudi of the prosperous Chola kingdom, lived a pious, poor Brahmin of good character named Narayana Iyer. Having completed his vedic studies, he performed his duties of a Purohit (priest) well. He also fulfilled the responsibilities of a Gruhastha (family man) as per the Dharma Shastras (religious texts) and was highly devoted to Lord Gopalakrishna. After being childless for quite a long time, he was finally blessed with a son, who had qualities similar to Prahlada, by the grace of Venugopalakrishna Swamigal.

The baby was named Ramakrishnan and brought up with a lot of love. At five years, he was taught the alphabets and at seven years, he had his Upanayanam as ordained by the Shastras. Ramakrishnan was then sent to a great pandit to gain knowledge. Within his sixteenth year, he had learnt the vedas completely and mastered the two parts of the vedas – shikshai and vyakaranam. His parents then started looking for a suitable bride for their son who was now a vedic scholar. But Ramakrishnan was scared he wouldn't have the opportunity to think of God if he falls into the trap of marriage. He wanted to break the family ties, go into the forest and seek god. He concluded that this was the essence of all Shastras and waited for the right time to follow his heart.

Meanwhile, in order to stabilise his determination for bhakti (devotion) and gyana (knowledge), he went in search of a guru as he realised the importance of guru's blessings. This was when Balakrishnananda Saraswati Swamigal appeared in Ramakrishnan's dream, gave him the Nrisimha mantra upadesham and guided him to read the Bhagavatam. Since then Ramakrishnan's bhakti kept increasing. He would always sit in solitude and chant mantras and read the Bhagavatam.

Didn't Mahatma Balakrishnananda Saraswati have a Darshan of Sri Guru Swamigal with the help of the master of all Shastras, Gopala Bhagavatar, and after reading Sri Bhagavannama Bodendra Swamigal's Namasiddhantha Granthas, didn't he decide to live in Govindapuram because of the interest he

developed in chanting Bhagawan's Nama (names)? He was extremely interested in Srimad Bhagavatam. He would sing the shlokas of Srimad Bhagavatam playing the veena and give beautiful discourses. Bhaktas (devotees) would get totally engrossed in the stories he would narrate forgetting his own self. With Sri Balakrishnananda's blessings, Ramakrishnan developed a lot of love for Srimad Bhagavatam and gained great knowledge in it.

Sri Ramakrishnan's parents got him forcibly married to a good-natured girl against his wishes. Highly frustrated Ramakrishnan, unable to go against his father's orders, thus became a Gruhastha (family man) unwillingly. But his mind did not get trapped in the muck of family life. It continued to dislike natural pleasures and remained pure. His wife was only blessed enough to be married to him, not live with him. As a child, she continued to live with her parents without being welcomed into her in-laws' house. Looking at the bond that has been forced on him, Ramakrishnan grew more frustrated everyday. One day he dreamt that many thieves who were forcibly tying him up in a forest ran away dropping the rope when a roaring lion appeared. He realised this meant that Lord Nrisimha will soon save him from the torture of relatives who are thieves. The next morning, he received news that his wife had passed away, and his joy knew no bounds. He then performed her last rites.

After his wife's death, Sri Ramakrishnan's determination grew into a fire, and worldly pleasures turned into cotton in this fire. He was constantly meditating on his favourite god, Sri Prahlada's saviour. But his relatives mistook his solitude as the agony of separation from his wife. So they decided to get him married again. Sri Ramakrishnan sensed the next misfortune that was about to befall him. Early one morning he suddenly attained Unmatthavastha like Sri Sadashiva Brahmendral. He got up and ran from his place without getting caught by anyone.

Swamigal, from His twenty-eighth year, behaved like an Avadhuta (saint who is beyond worldly concerns and standard social etiquette). His clothes moved away from His body. He would always appear as an inanimate object or a dimwit. The hair on His head would hang as long, unkempt, tangled locks. His

body would appear lean. But His mind would be pure, treating men and women as equals. He would always spend His time in silence or have Narayana in His thoughts. At times, He would run, dance, sing, cry or chatter away. If god-related activities were organised anywhere, He would attend and listen carefully. But after listening for a short while, He would forget Himself and start dancing, singing and crying. He would experience goose bumps and sing “Narayana Narayana” on a high pitch. Streams of tears would flow down His eyes, and He would even scream or faint at times.

Wandering from place to place in this state, He reached Tiruvisulur that had become holy by the dust on the feet of great Bhagavatas (followers of the Lord). In this village lived Sri Ramasubba Shastrigal, a world-famous master of all Shastras, who put down the ego of other learned scholars and himself showed scholarly arrogance. He had a few doubts in Srimad Bhagavatam and therefore ignored this holy book. But when he heard Srimad Bhagavatam from Swamigal just once, he developed faith and interest in it.

Swamigal would never stay anywhere more than a day. Only when He was hungry, He would stand in front of a house with open hands, receive food and take care of His body. Else, He would go without food for many days. Why do Paramahansas (teachers who have attained enlightenment) need a mattress when they have the earth as a bed? With an instrument like a hand, why is a pillow required? When tribute to god serves as a vessel, why is any other vessel necessary? When directions serve as clothes, is white silk essential? With trees, rivers and mountains as relatives, is there a need for other kith and kin? When god is the saviour, are favours from the rich required? Sri Shukar thus said and likewise this Mahan (great man), without any concern for anything or anybody, wandered about freely.

Moving about in this manner, He developed a hatred towards His own silence. Like Sri Shukar, He wished to give discourses on the Bhagavatam. Looking for a suitable place to do this, He reached a village named Kamakshipuram as an Avadhuta on an evening. On seeing Swamigal, a person named Panchanatha Iyer welcomed Him with great reverence and treated Him well. To the people who had come there to pay their respects, Swamigal said, “I have not come

here for Bhiksha (food). I came here with the desire to deliver the Bhagavatam. Will anyone listen to it sincerely?" To this, people paid their respects and said, "It is our good fortune that you have come this far to bless us. We are eager to listen to you. But some of us are shy to see you as a Digambara (one who wears the directions as clothes, i.e., wears no clothes). You are a seasoned person. Since we all are not seasoned yet, even though we wish to listen to the Bhagavatam, we are hesitant because of your Digambara state."

Hearing this, Swamigal said, "If my Digambara state interferes with your paying attention to the Bhagavatam, then I will follow the Niyamashrama regulations from today." The villagers were surprised by what He said. Swamigal immediately went to Panangudi Swamigal, and with him as His guru, He accepted the Ashram as per the rules. Since Swamigal did not get trained by any guru, and like Prahlada, had attained completeness with an invisible guru, Panangudi Swamigal realised that He was like a self-illuminant lamp and named Him Swayamprakashananda Saraswati Swamigal.

A person named Sri Narayanananda Saraswati Swamigal was an extremely nonchalant, calm scholar of Prakanda Vedanta, a great devotee of Krishna and a brilliant speaker on Srimad Bhagavatam. When He was once having His food at a place and a dog entered the house accidentally, the host beat it up with a stick. Immediately Narayanananda ran as well. When the host followed Him, paid His respects and requested Him to return, Narayanananda said, "The dog and I have natural bodies. But Atma (soul) is a part of the Paramatma (Supreme God), and there is no difference between the two. You could drive me away with a stick as well." This great soul had six disciples. Famous among them were Mannarkudi Raju Shastrigal, Sri Balakrishnananda Saraswati Swamigal and Sri Gopalananda Saraswati Swamigal. Sri Gopalananda Saraswati Swamigal was Sri Krishna's devotee, and conducted discourses in Srimad Bhagavatam. His disciple was Sri Prakashananda Saraswati Swamigal. And Sri Prakashananda Saraswathi Swamigal's disciple was Panangudi Swamigal. Panangudi Swamigal was the guru of Sri Alangudi Swamigal who was called Sri Swayam Prakashananda Swamigal.

Realising that His Avadhuta state was standing in the way of His wish to preach Srimad Bhagavatam to an immature audience, Sri Alangudi Swamigal was kind enough to move from His state of renunciation of social norms to Niyamasanyasa. From then on, He accepted the Dandam, Kamandal and Kaashayam (saffron robe), sported the sandalwood paste mark (gobi chandanam) and Urdhva Pundaram, and spent all His time reading the Bhagavatam and giving discourses. He managed His Ashram by following many principles. Generally, the principles of Ashram are followed keeping in mind the maturity of the majority of people. Isn't the reason for following these principles to reach god?

Isn't it god's speciality that He attracts Atma Ramas (devotees in whose hearts he resides) and makes them sing his stories? If Swamigal, who roamed about like Shukacharya, had given discourses on Srimad Bhagavatam, how sweet and marvellous they must have been? The people who listened to Swamigal's Bhagavatam are indeed very fortunate.

Just as Sri Shukar told Parikshit, "I was once a person totally absorbed in the supreme joy of experiencing Nirguna god (omnipresent god without a form) and roamed around like a dumb child lacking consciousness. But attracted by the qualities of god, I took to studying Srimad Bhagavatam.", Sri Alangudi Swamigal also moved from being a Paramahansa with no worldly concerns to Niyamasanyasa because of His interest in Srimad Bhagavatam. He took great pains in following the principles of Sanyasa (renunciation) and travelled to different villages, preaching Srimad Bhagavatam. Alangudi Swamigal was a person with a lot of tolerance, patience and kindness. He never experienced any feeling of lust or anger and always followed many regulations. Some of them were taking bath thrice a day and eating as per the rules. Sometimes He survived on grated coconut for months. At other times, He would just eat a wood apple (vilva pazham) or drink only milk for months together. He sometimes ate only saththumavu (powder made from different grains).

In this way, He carried on His life. Often, He would play with kids. In villages that lacked a pond, Swamigal would take the help of young men and dig a pond. He was also interested in making gardens and organising temple

festivals. He would always stay in the garden, mutt or temples outside a village. And would mostly wear only the Koupinam (undergarment – a piece of cloth passed between the legs and held by a string at the waist). As mentioned in Srimad Bhagavatam, He would follow the principles of Ashrama. And would never touch money with His hands.

When people invite Swamigal to their village, He would ask, “If I visit your village, can we hold a Saptaham (reading the Bhagavatam for seven days)? I will not visit the place just for Bhiksha.” Alangudi Swamigal has visited some places often and conducted many Saptahams. People in those places still show a lot of interest in Bhagavata Saptaham and are great devotees of Lord Krishna. Some of these important places include Kamakshipuram, Vadarangam, Thittacherry, Marathurai, Veppathur, Kodimangalam, Arayapuram, Mayavaram, Thaplampuliyur, Arasavanankadu, Konerirajapuram, Anandatandavapuram, Srikantapuram, Palayur, Kaliyakudi, Pavattakkudi, Vishnupuram, Thethiyur, Paravakkarai, Thuthukudi, Koothanaur, Srirampuram, Melappalayur, Radhamangalam, Sirugamani. In these places, disciples still reminisce the experience of listening to Swamigal’s Bhagavatam.

These villages were holy because of Swamigal’s stay. Elderly people here followed the Dharma (religion) and were devoted of god. Due to Swamigal’s influence, many people read the Bhagavad Gita everyday and chanted hymns. In the villages that Swamigal frequented, even the women and children would have learnt the shlokas of the Bhagavatam by heart. Swamigal was especially fond of Sridhareeya Vyakhyanam in the Bhagavatam. In any discourse, He would never stay away from saying a shloka from Sridhareeyam. The family man named Kodandarama Iyer was Swamigal’s favourite disciple. He would do the moola parayanam (reading the Bhagavatam) in Swamigal’s Saptahams.

Apart from Bhagavatam and hymns, Swamigal was also conversant with Ayurveda and Mantra Shastras. But He was not very inclined towards them. If necessary, He would help someone through His disciples.

For example, in Anandatandavapuram, in Swamigal Pattabirama Iyer's disciple's house, someone had invoked evil spirits for evil purposes. This caused the disciple a lot of trouble. When Alangudi Swamigal heard of this, He felt sad out of kindness and asked Kodandarama Iyer to preach Nrisimha Mantram to Pattabirama Iyer. This resulted in the removal of all obstacles. In this way, Swamigal has helped many people in times of trouble. But He could not attend to such matters personally.

In each Saptaham, after finishing the discourse, there would be overnight recital of Divya Nama Keerthanam (bhajan songs composed as an expression of bhakti). Swamigal would participate in the event and blissfully listen to the songs the entire night. And the next day He would discourse, unmindful of the hardships of staying awake the whole night. Owing to these amazing virtues and bhakti, He was very supportive towards family-oriented people.

On one occasion, Swamigal conducted a Saptaham in a village called Thittacherry. Many devotees listened to Him and considered themselves fortunate. As usual, there was Nama Keerthanam everyday. Swamigal would always enjoy narrating Gajendra Moksham and Prahlada Charitram. That day Gajendra Moksham turned out extremely well. Swamigal discoursed, "Narayanan is the Paradevata (Supreme God). All other devatas (gods) are below him because they did not come to save Gajendran. When the devatas heard his prayer, 'Let the source of all existence come and save me,' they thought that they were created and the prayer was directed to the one who created them. So along with Gajendran, they prayed to the Paramatma as well. Then Vasudevan himself appeared holding his Chakra and mounted on Garudan and saved Gajendran. This shows that Sri Hari is the Supreme God."

On hearing this, a scholar said, "In each mythological text, each god is praised as the Supreme God. This Gajendra Moksham is only an imaginary story to show Hari's supremacy. We must not give importance to stories that talk about Shiva-Vishnu differences because they are just debates." To this, Swamigal got annoyed and said, "It is difficult for people like you to get faith on Bhagavatam. Unless god takes pity on you and clears your mind, my preaching will not be useful. The scholar asked, "Why don't you admit that you were wrong? Being a

Smartha Sanyasi, instead of telling people about all the gods, why are you one-sided like a Vaishnava Sanyasi?" Swamigal replied "I just narrate the principles given in the Bhagavatam. Only if I say otherwise, do I need to admit I was wrong." The scholar showed an indifferent attitude towards Swamigal and left.

Swamigal would usually go for His bath early in the morning everyday to the Raja canal, a rivulet from Kollidam river. Some of His disciples were also with Him that day. When Swamigal was having His bath, a crocodile grabbed His leg. He immediately lifted both His hands to the sky and screamed "Hare Hare". The crocodile instantly left Swamigal and disappeared into the water. This caused a big wound in Swamigal's leg.

Good sense prevailed in the scholar who was watching this incident. He immediately fell at Swamigal's feet and said, "I argued that Gajendra Moksham is false and an imaginary story only out of arrogance. This incident of Yatheendra (sanyasi) Moksham has truly happened only to remove my ignorance. Please forgive me." Swamigal replied, "What is there to forgive? At least, from now on, do not feel jealous if Narayanan is called the Supreme God." The scholar then turned into a great devotee.

The wound in Swamigal's leg from the crocodile bite became huge. On being requested by His disciples, Swamigal treated the wound Himself. He asked the disciples to boil some medicinal herbs, create a balm and pour the hot balm on His leg. But no disciple was bold enough to come forward and do it. Swamigal immediately said, "Fools! Why are you so scared? How many times have I told you that the Atma is different from the body? If that's true, would I experience the pain as an Atma?" Saying this, Swamigal took the boiling balm from the stove, poured it on His leg and laughed loudly. The disciples who saw this were teary-eyed out of devotion. In a few days, the wound healed.

Once, Swamigal conducted a Saptaham in a grove by the Arasal river in the village called Koothanur. The grove resembled Naimisharanyam (a holy place where sages have performed their penance in Uttar Pradesh); Swamigal resembled Sutapouranikar (the sage who narrates Sri Sathyanarayana story to

a group of sages); and the devotees who listened to Him resembled Sounakati Maharishis. Around 3 pm in the afternoon, when it was quite hot, a snake entered the place. On seeing the snake, the people listening to Swamigal suddenly rose and there was chaos. Some of them got ready to beat up the snake. By then the snake curled itself under the Asanam that Swamigal was sitting on. Soon people requested Him to get up. To this, Swamigal said, "A person has the right to Sanyasa only when he realises that each form in the world is god himself. My body and the snake's body are not different. Sri Nrisimhan is the Atma in both bodies. So why fear? Please sit quietly and listen to the story." On hearing this, everyone sat down. But wouldn't people's minds keep thinking about the snake? So Swamigal used His yogic powers to attract their minds towards Him.

People forgot that the snake had entered the place. After finishing the discourse, Swamigal got up from His Asanam and asked one of the people to check if the snake had left. But the person was scared to lift up the Asanam and check. Immediately, Swamigal smiled and lifted up the Asanam. The snake had disappeared. Everyone was surprised. Swamigal said, "Do not fear. The snake went back this way. As you were listening with total concentration, you did not notice it." People then sought His blessings to be able to immerse themselves in stories of god, in this way, always.

Swamigal travelled to many villages, conducted hundreds of Saptaha Yagnas, spread bhakti (devotion towards god) among people, and attained fame. Unlike most people, he did not attain fame by working hard for the family. Swamigal, who had sacrificed worldly pleasures, spent all His life in bhakti and devotion. In His last years, He lost his vision. So the disciples took Him to Dr. Mahalinga Iyer for treatment. The doctor initially came to meet Swamigal without much reverence. But when he met Him, he instantly realised that Swamigal had come to him under the pretence of eye surgery only to bless him. In the operation theatre, when the doctor was about to administer anaesthesia, Swamigal said, "It is possible to forget about your body even without anaesthesia. When I lose consciousness about my body, you can operate on my body without any hesitation." Saying this, He performed the Shavasana (corpse pose) and went into yogic state without any consciousness of His body. The doctor, with great reverence and astonishment, operated

using his instruments, removed the two eye lenses, cleaned them, fixed them back in the eyes, applied medicines and bandaged the eyes. Till then, Swamigal showed no movement. The doctor was shocked. He understood that noble men will not conform to medical research; the treatment he had given was the treatment that would help him in his journey to heaven; and the diseases Mahans experience are their leelas (games they play). Just as Swamigal could see clearly with His eyes after the surgery, the doctor could also see clearly through his eyes of enlightenment.

Moving from place to place, Swamigal, who foresaw His day of liberation, finally reached the village named Mudikondan. The fortunate people there served Him in many ways. During the Yuva year of the Vaikasi month, Swamigal wanted to celebrate Nrisimha Jayanthi in a grand manner. It was His usual practice to perform Nrisimha Jayanthi elaborately every year. This year, Saptaham was organised close to the Nrisimha Jayanthi celebrations. Swamigal discoursed the Bhagavatam wonderfully in His own style. On the evening of Sri Nrisimha Jayanthi, the chapter on Sri Rukmini Kalyanam came to an end. That was the day of completion of the Saptaham. On that night, discourse on the eleventh chapter was supposed to be held. But after the discourse in the evening, as it was Nrisimha Jayanthi, Swamigal discoursed Pahlada Charitram instead. After Sri Nrisimha Avatar, Swamigal was passionately discussing the point where Pahlada prayed to god.

He reached the shloka where Pahlada tells Sri Nrisimha, “You possess such high qualities. With your radiance, you are the embodiment of time, controlling this universe. You also possess the qualities that nature cannot deceive and are illuminant because of your freedom. But caught in the vicious circle plaguing the world, I am suffering. Hey Nrisimha, my Lord! Please pull me towards your holy feet.” As Swamigal was explaining the meaning of this shloka, His Atma got liberated from His body in the form of light from the crown of His head. Only some excellent disciples had a Darshan of the Jyoti (light). The extremely holy body of Swamigal was buried following all the regulations for Sanyasis. Let Swamigal, who became one with Lord Sri Nrisimha, bless us with bhakti towards Nrisimha.

Sri Lakshmi Nrisimham Parabrahmane Namaha