

नमश्शिवाय

Gajendrastuti

Stuti (Hymn) by the leader of elephants

The story of Gajendramoksha (liberation of the leader of elephants) is narrated in chapter 26 of Srimannarayaniyam by Sri Melpathur Bhattathirippad. This chapter is a beautiful condensation of Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of Canto 8 of Srimad Bhagavatam. For reasons of abridgement, the stuti by Gajendra (leader of elephants) consisting of 28 verses is referred to only very briefly in two verses (verses 7 & 8 of Chapter 26 of Srimannarayaniyam). But much of the contents of this stuti can be found in Chapter 98 (Nishkalabrahmopasana), the author's own inimitable hymn on dedicated worship of Lord Sri Krishna as formless Brahman.

It is considered that a more elaborate study of the stuti as contained in Srimad Bhagavatam would be of considerable help to those who are keen on a deeper awareness of the glory of the Lord of Guruvayur. Srimannarayaniyam refers to the Stuti as "आर्तिव्यक्तप्राक्तनज्ञानभक्तिः पूर्वाभ्यस्तं निर्विशेषात्मनिष्ठं स्तोत्रश्रेष्ठं निर्गुणस्थम् अन्वगात्" - "with the true knowledge and devotion gained with efforts in the earlier life becoming clear in the mind by the torments undergone in present life, (Gajendra) worshipped the Lord, who is beyond all qualities and who is present in all beings as Self, with a Great Hymn."

For the benefit of those who are not familiar with Srimad Bhagavatam and Srimannarayaniyam, this article gives a synopsis of the story of Gajendra Moksha and the salient features of the Gajendrastuti. A study of Chapter 26 of Srimannarayaniyam along with the Gajendrastuti in Srimad Bhagavatam (verses 2 to 29 of Chapter 3 of Canto 8) is certain to evoke true devotion towards the Almighty, by whose Grace a devotee would be able to transcend the trans-migratory cycle of life and death.

The Story

Indradyumna, the king of Pandya and a great devotee of the Lord was once engaged in the worship of the Lord at Chandana mountains. He was so deeply immersed in worship that he did not know of the arrival of Sage Agastya desirous of experiencing the king's hospitality. Deeply angered by the indifferent attitude of the king, the sage cursed that the proud king be born as an elephant.

With the memory of the Lord shining bright in his heart, the king even after attaining the form of a jumbo lived a contented life as Gajendra (the leader of elephants). He lived on the Trikuta mountains in the middle of the milky ocean playfully engaged with many she-elephants. In physical strength he outpowered every other being. How can a devotee of Lord ever have any deficiency? Powered by his physical strength and due to the divine nature of the place, he lived there without any sorrows.

Induced by the Lord and fatigued by the intense heat of the summer, Gajendra once entered a lotus-lake, in the slopes of the mountain, quenched his thirst and spent time merrily sporting with his mates. At that time there lived in the lake a Gandharva (a celestial being) who had

become a crocodile due to a curse by Sage Devala. The crocodile caught hold of the foot of Gajendra and pulled him down into the water. Is it not to bless the devotees that the Lord makes them go through hardships?

For some time, the other members of the herd tried to pull their leader out of the waters and failing in their attempt left their leader to his fate and returned. With the strength gained by devotion to the Lord, the elephant struggled with the crocodile for a thousand years and finally when it was time for one-pointed devotion which alone enables one to win the final Grace, the Lord made Gajendra lose the struggle with the crocodile.

With the true knowledge and devotion gained in the earlier life becoming clear in the mind by the torments undergone in present life, Gajendra praised the Lord who is beyond all qualities and who is present in all beings as Self, with a Great Hymn.

As the hymn was addressed to Lord without attributes, other deities who identified themselves with various qualities did not pay attention. Lord Guruvayurappa, who is the Self in all beings, overflowing with mercy, mounted on Garuda (Eagle representing Vedas which is the Lord's vehicle) made Himself manifest to Gajendra. Gajendra, with great strain, picked a lotus flower and holding it in his trunk submitted it to the Lord uttering with great difficulty: "Narayana Akhilaguro Bhagavan Namaste (Lord who is refuge to all humans, Spiritual emancipator of all, one who has valour, fame, resourcefulness, detachment, omniscience and dominance over all, Prostrations to Thee).

As the Lord lifted Gajendra from the water and split the crocodile with His holy discus Sudarsana, the crocodile was released from the curse and attained its earlier form of Huhu, the Gandharva. Gajendra blessed by the Lord attained liberation and merged with the Lord.

Through this simple story, Sage Veda Vyasa, the author of Srimad Bhagavatam has illustrated:

1. How fickle and uncertain the worldly life is.
2. How even great souls can at times lose their temper for frivolous reasons.
3. How even a devotee like Indradyumna can become a victim of a curse for no fault of his. It may be noted that even curses of Mahatmas (Great souls) are with the intention to eventually lead devotees to enlightenment.
4. How even a person cursed to become a crocodile can get released from the curse holding on to the foot of a devotee (though with evil intentions). True devotees purify everyone who come close to them.
5. How devotion to Lord in this life can protect a person from sorrows in following life, be it even that of a beast.
6. Finally, when faced with a crisis, beyond the control of all but the Lord, unshakeable faith and devotion will enable the devotee to seek exclusive refuge in Him leading to realization of the Lord as Ultimate Truth and dissolution of self in Him.

The Stuti

The stuti by Gajendra is one of the finest in Srimad Bhagavatam and is rich with many gems of Vedanta philosophy. The summary of the stuti is as follows:

O' Lord; You permeate the universe as consciousness, make the universe cognisable to senses being present in all living beings, dissolve the universe with passage of time and is the prime source and controller of all, prostrations to You

I take refuge in You from whom this universe emerged, in whom it exists, whose manifestation it is, by whom all are created and who is beyond the subtlest.

O Lord, Self-radiant, by whose wish this universe comes to light during the time of creation, dissolves into disappearance at the time of deluge and who remains beyond creation and dissolution, as witness to both – protect me.

When all the worlds and their protectors perish, everything is covered by intense and indescribable darkness, You shine for ever beyond the darkness as the Eternal and Omnipresent. I bow before You.

Just as the true form of an actor who adorns different make-ups as different characters is not known by the viewers, Your real form is not known even by Devas (demi-gods) and Rishis (Sages) - what to talk of a mortal creature (an elephant) like me. May that Lord who is beyond knowledge and description protect me.

May I attain You, desiring to see whose auspicious lotus feet, the sages with pure heart, complete detachment and kindness towards all, with saintly conduct, perform extraordinary penances of celibacy.

Prostrations to You, the Supreme Lord who while remaining as formless Brahman with no birth and therefore no activities, vices or virtues, but who for the sake of creation and dissolution of the worlds, also assume countless forms performing wonderful actions with Your infinite power of Maya.

Prostrations to the Self-luminous Supreme Self, witness of Nature, beyond words and thoughts, not subject to outward consciousness.

You are the embodiment of consciousness and bliss, donor of liberation attainable by the enlightened with Satva Guna (virtuous qualities) through Sanyasa (hermithood). Prostrations to You.

Prostrations to You, who is peaceful (without attachment or aversion) terrific (to the evil-minded) concealed (visible to none though omnipresent) who appears to follow the three qualities (Rajas, Satva and Tamas required for creation, sustenance and dissolution) and who is the knowledge of Supreme Truth and is equanimous.

Prostrations to You, who is the Jiva (individual self – knower in the body-sense combination of all beings), controller of all Jivas, eternal witness of all actions, causeless and cause for expansion and contraction of primeval nature.

Prostrations to You, who is the knower of all knowledge grasped through the senses, prompter of all actions with the shadow of unreal illusions but who, ever remain in Your true form.

Prostrations again and again to You, who is causeless, cause of all, a cause that can be viewed only with wonder, goal of all Vedas and Sastras (spiritual sciences), embodiment of liberation and final refuge to all.

I prostrate before You, who is like consciousness concealed by Gunas (Rajas, Satva and Tamas) just as fire (capacity to burn) concealed in wood. When agitated You appear lighted up as mind and when activities get totally extinguished You shine as Self-radiant.

O' Lord You who is totally free, merciful, non-hesitant, self-radiant and present in all beings as each one's self – liberate those like me bound by beastly urges who seek refuge in You. Prostrations.

O' Lord, prostrations to You, who is hard to attain for those with their minds fixed on bodies, progenies, friends, house, wealth and personal connections but accessible to those with liberated minds, free from attachments, meditating upon You in their hearts with faith and devotion.

May the Lord who gives all that is desired (Dharma – righteousness, Artha – wealth or Kama – objects of desire) to the unenlightened devotees but also confers upon them blessings such as servitude to Lord free me from the bondage I am in.

I praise You, who is eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, Lord of all, who is hard to comprehend, but attainable through devotion. You are integral and non-dual. Though the very self of all, You are like a subtle object very far, not subject to sensual experiences.

Those who take exclusive refuge in You do not desire any worldly gains. Singing your auspicious and wonderful stories they immerse themselves in an ocean of bliss.

Brahmadeva (the creator), all other Devas, Vedas, all beings stationary and moving, all the worlds with different forms and names are all created with a tiny part of Your Power.

Like sparks from fire and rays from the sun, from your brightness, continuously come out the flow of Gunas (Satva, Rajas and Tamas) in the forms of intellect, mind, senses of knowledge and action, bodies etc. and merge back into You.

You are not Deva, Asura (demoniac being), human, male, female, transgender, creature, guna, karma, real or even unreal. Victory to You who remain as remnant when everything is discarded.

I do not desire to live in this world. What is the use with this body of an elephant covered by sheaths inside (ignorance) and outside (thick skin)? I desire liberation from that sheath which blinds one from true knowledge of Self that does not wear out with time but is destroyed only by Your Grace.

I prostrate before the creator of this universe whose form it is, who remains separate from it, who sports with it, who is the knower of it, who is without birth, omnipresent and occupies the supreme position.

Whom the Yogis released from karma contemplate in their hearts purified by Yoga, that Lord of Yoga I prostrate.

Prostrations to You, who is beyond the reach of those with impure minds and senses blocked by Your speedy and forceful Maya with its three powers (Rajas, Satva and Tamas) in the form of senses turned outward, but who protects those who take refuge in You, submitting their egos at Your lotus feet.

By Your Maya this world does not know You, concealed by ego. I bow before the Lord who is of indescribable greatness.

Conclusion:

Srimad Bhagavatam (in verse 1 of Chapter 1 of Canto 1) makes clear that Lord Narayana is Satyam Param (Supreme Truth) whereas Srimannarayaniyam (in verse 1 of Chapter 1) underscores that the Lord of Guruvayur (Lord Narayana) is Brahman (the Eternal Pure Consciousness and Bliss). Upanishads declare that the Brahman is the true form of all Jivas (individual selves) in all beings. What separates the Jivas from Brahman is the ignorance of this truth on the part of Jivas in the form of ego. The only way of realizing one's true form is therefore submission of one's ego at the lotus feet of the Lord. The merciful Lord is ever willing to liberate those who take refuge in Him. The Supreme Truth cannot be known by Jiva, but Jivas can experience the Supreme Truth by turning away their minds from worldly pleasures, possessions and power along with one's ego through devotion to Lord and merging with Him, who is a personification of Brahman, the Supreme Truth. Constant meditation with faith on the magnificence of the Lord through prayers and study of stories & studies such as this one will help carry the devotee towards the Supreme Truth.

God bless all.

नमश्शिवाय साम्भाय हरये परमात्मने प्रणतक्लेशनाशाय योगिनाम्पतये नमः

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