

SWAMI DESIKAN'S
ASHTABHUJAASHTAKAM



ANNOTATED COMMENTARY IN ENGLISH BY:

OPPILIAPPAN KOIL
SRI VARADACHARI SATHAKOPAN



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श्री अष्टभुजाष्टकम्

ASHTABHUJAASHTAKAM

INTRODUCTION

Whenever Swami Desikan traveled to Sri Varadaraja's temple for his mangalasanam from his home in Thuppul, he had to pass via the Ashtabhujan and Yathokthakari temples. The Lord of Ashtabhujam made sure that He received sthotram from His bhakta (ashtabhujashtakam).



“Temple of Sri Ashtabhujan”

Seva Swami suggests that Swami Desikan followed the path of Tirumangai Mannan, who wondered about the Lord here and His urgency to meet him with eight hands instead of the normal four hands. In each of the eight hands, he holds a different weapon or flower (discus, conch, lotus, sword, kedayam, bow, arrow, and gada). He is ready to battle and chase away the virodhis that stand in the way of His bhaktas wishing to perform prapatti to Him. Swami Desikan suggests that the Lord was anxious and hence doubled His set of hands to grant protection to the Saranagata quickly. Here the name of the holy tank is Gajendra Pushkarani and He is “pratyaksham” to Gajendran and is thus Gajendra Varadan. Hence, Swami Desikan salutes Ashtabhuja Perumaal as “gajendra raksha! tvaritam bhavantham” and as “satAm Aptam”.

Our Lord, who rushed from Sri Vaikuntha in a great hurry to the side of the lotus pond where His bhakta Gajendra was screaming aloud “AdimUlamE! rakshasva





Maam”. Parakala Nayaki (Tirumangai Alvar) feels that the Aadhi-Kesava Perumaal of Ashta Bhujam rushed to her side with double set of four hands in great haste for protection just as he rushed once before to the GajEndran's side.

In his beautiful paasurams, Kaliyan as Parakala Nayaki states that she did not fully comprehend the identity of the One who rushed to her side, and that the Lord then replied that He is the One who blesses the prapannas with His eight arms (ashta bhujAn karOti) and came for union with Parakala Nayaki who pined for Him. Kaliyan describes this wonderful conversation to his mother and friends thru ten beautiful paasurams. Swami Desikan follows the path shown by Parakala Nayaki.

Kaliyan wonders “ivar aar kol?” (Who could this One be?) And the Lord replied “atta bhuya karatthEn yenRaar” (I am the Lord of the divya desam of Ashta Bhujam).

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“atta bhuya karatthEn yenRaar”





Kaliyan wonders aloud eight times:

1. ari uru aam ivar aar kol? (Narasimha rUpi)
2. anthaNar pOnRu ivar aar kol? (Vaamana rUpi)
3. ambhutham pOnRu ivar aar kol? (with the hue of a dark cloud)
4. anchudar pOnRu ivar aar kol? (ancient jyothi)
5. alaikkadal pOnRu ivar aar kol? (with the bluish hue of the ocean)
6. azhagiyathaam ivar aar kol? (the One with beautiful form)
7. meham -- pOnRivar aar kol? (Once again the bluish hue of a cloud)
8. en aavi oppaar ivar aar kol? (One who is the soul of my soul)

The Lord answers, “It is me, the Lord of Ashta Bhujam, that has rushed to your side” and delights Parakala Nayaki with that response. The Lord says, “I am the AttabhuyakarathEn”. Swami Desikan used the name chosen by the Lord Himself in His dialog with Parakala Nayaki to give the name of “Srimad Ashtabhuj Stuti” to this eulogy.

There are ten slokas in this stotra. One for each of the eight arms; the rest are phala sruti. In the very first sloka, Swami Desikan performs Saranagati with the prayer: “ashtabhujam prapadhye”. Swami concludes in one of the two phala sruthi slokas that this stotra on the Lord of Ashtabhujam is:

**prapanna jana pAtheyam, prapitsUnAm rasAyanam,
sreyase jagatAm yEtath SrImad ashTa bhujAshTakam.**

The “SrImad” aspect of Kamala-sahayan is brought out here and is described as the tasty food during the jiva's journey via the archiraadi maargam (path of light) and the powerful medicine for those who desire to perform prapatti. This stuti is considered as the most auspicious (SrImad) for the world of prapannas.



SHLOKAS AND COMMENTARY

“ashTa bhuja” means “eight hands”. This stotra is about Bhagavan in His form with eight divya-bhuja-s in the divya kshetram called Attabuya karam. This divya kshetram and its sthala purana have been covered briefly earlier. The title for the stotra is that given by Swami Desikan himself, and is included in the phala-Sruti sloka following the eight slokas in praise of this Perumaal.

In this stotram, Swami Desikan reminds us of Bhagavan's aiSvarya, sauSeelya, moksha-pradatva guNmas etc., and urges us to resort to Him and to no one else as the sure way to attain moksha. This is another stotram in which he conveys the basics of complete self-surrender (prapatti) and its efficacy in very crisp terms in the short span of eight slokas (excluding the two phala-Sruti slokas).

श्रीमान् वेङ्कट नाथार्यः कवितार्किक केसरी ।

वेदान्ताचार्य वर्योमे सन्निधत्तां सदा हृदि ॥

shrImaan.h ve~NkaTa naathaaryaH kavitaarkika kesarI.

vedaantaachaarya varyo me sannidhattaaM sadaa hR^idi

SLOKAM 1

गजेन्द्र रक्षा त्वरितम् भवन्तं
ग्राहैर् इवाहं विषयैर् विकृष्टः ।
अपार विज्ञान दयानुभावम्
आप्तं सतां अष्टभुजं प्रपद्ये ॥ १ ॥

gajendra raxaa tvaritam.h bhavantaM
graahair.h ivaahaM viShayair.h vikR^iShTaH.
apaara vij~naana dayaanubhaavam.h
aaptaM sataaM aShTa bhujam prapadye.. 1

Swami Desikan compares our lives to one being attacked and torn apart by our senses and dragged towards them on all sides as if by vicious crocodiles, and invokes Bhagavan's mercy and protection just as in the case of Gajendra when attacked by the crocodile.

The key words of the sloka are: “sathAm Aaptham Ashtabhujam bhavantham prapadhyE”.

Oh Lord of Ashta bhujam ! The alpa sukhams of the world are grabbing me and dragging me down towards them just like the crocodile that pulled Gajendran with its sharp teeth into the depth of the pond. When that GajEndran cried out with agony and uttered “AadhimUlamE”, You ran helter-skelter from Your comfortable sTanam in Sri Vaikuntam to the pool side, destroyed the offending crocodile and freed Your devotee from suffering. adiyEn's state is like that of the suffering and helpless GajEndran. I am being pulled down to my destruction by the vishaya sukhams (grAhairiva aham vishayai vikrushtai:). Wont You rush to adiyEn's rescue? There is



“Sri Gajendra Varadan rushed to rescue Gajendran – Thiruvallikkeni”

no upper limit to your Jn~Anam, Vaibhavam and compassion (apAra vij~nAna dayA-anubhAvam). You must forgive adiyEn's trespasses and protect adiyEn and secure Your title as SaraNagatha Rakshakan. You are a dear friend of the sAdhus (SathAm Aaptham). It appears that You are displaying eight arms to assure them of Your sure protection. adiyEn surrenders therefore at Your sacred feet.





SLOKAM 2

त्वदेक शेषोऽहं अनात्म तन्नः

त्वत् पाद लिप्सां दिशता त्वयैव ।

असत् समोऽप्यष्टभुजास्पदेश

सत्ताम् इदानीम् उपलम्भितोऽस्मि ॥ २ ॥

tvadeka sheSho.ahaM anaatma tantraH
tvat.h paada lipsaaM dishataa tvayaiva.
asat.h samo.apyaShTabhujaaspadhEsha
sattaam.h idaaniiM.h upalambhito.asmi

Here, Swami Desikan points out the need for us to realize our always being His dependent, and recognize our lack of independence from Him. As we may recall, this is one of the angas of prapatti -- KARpaNyam. When we observe the angas of prapatti, Bhagavan gives us the desire to seek His feet single-mindedly as the next step in attaining Him.

The Key words in this slokam are: “ThvayA yEva idhAneem satthAm upalambhitha: asmi”. Swamy addresses the Lord as the Lord of Ashta bhuja dhivya dEsam (AshtabhujAspadhan). adiyEn is devoid of any independence (asvatanthran, anAthma tantran), and the servant to You alone (thvadhEka Sesa:). I am almost like a nonexistent object because of my lack of satthA (asath sama api). As these matters weigh me down, You have the sanklapam to make me seek Your charanAravindhams (asath sama api thvath paadha lipsAm disathy). That has resulted in adiyEn having an existence now to perform surrender at Your lotus feet (ThvayA yEva satthAm upalambhitha: asmi).





SLOKAM 3

स्वरूप रूपास्त्र विभूषणाद्यैः

परत्व चिन्तां त्वयि दुर्निवाराम् ।

भोगे मृदूपक्रमताम् अभीप्सन्

शीलादिभिर् वारयसी वपुंसाम् ॥ ३ ॥

svaruupa ruupaastra vibhuuShaNaadyaiH

paratva chintaaM tvayi durnivaaraam.h.

bhoge mR^iduupakramataam.h abhiipsan.h

shiilaadibhir.h vaarayasiiva puMsaam.h.. 3

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Sri Desikan praises Bhagavan's guna of soulabhyam or His greatness in mixing with even the lowliest of beings with ease. We all can recall His greeting Kuchela with all the intimacy that one can imagine, doing paada-pujA for him with Mahalakshmi holding the pot of water, and then sprinkling the water from the paada-puja on His head and that of Mahalakshmi. If Bhagavan reveals His divine divya mangala vigraha or form to us right at the beginning, it just will prevent us from approaching Him in sheer awe of the greatness of this form.

Recall the reaction of Arjuna, one who lived with Bhagavan as a close friend throughout his life, when the viraat-svarupa was revealed to Him for a brief moment. In order to make it easy on us to approach Him, He presents Himself to us in forms where we can approach Him at our level, and hides His greatness from us for our benefit in the beginning. His archa-rupa, iconic form, in temples -- in this stotram the Ashtabhuj Perumaal -- is an example of this. Then as we get used to Him, He reveals His true form to us.

(COMMENTS):

Oh Lord! You have both Aathma and sareeram like us. Your Aathma is connected to Your dhivyAthma svaroopam. Your sacred body (ThirumEni) is saluted as Dhivya





MangaLa vighraham. The aabharaNamS, the weapons that You adorn on Your body can not be seen on any other god. Every one of these AabharaNamS and AayudhamS will attest to Your being the SarvEswaran. Therefore, it is hard to forget the fact that You are the Lord of all (Parama Purushan). Because of these overpowering anubhavams, it is not easy for Your adiyArs to approach You. They recognize their unfitness and try to stay away from You out of their sense of awe and inadequacy. That is not acceptable by You. Hence, You play a trick on the frightened chEtanams. You hide Your superior guNamS and start mingling with simple folks like they are Your equals. This permits the shy adiyArs to feel comfortable in approaching You slowly and they get used to mingling with You and performing Kaimkaryams for you without any inhibitions. That is how You enchant them by hiding Your lofty guNamS.

The key words here are: “PumsAm bhOgE mrudhu upakramathAm abheepsan, Thvayi dhurnivAram parathva chinthAm SeelAdhibhi: vaarayasi”.





SLOKAMS 4, 5, 6 & 7

शक्तिम् शरण्यान्तर शब्द भाजां

सारं च सम्तोल्य फलान्तराणाम् ।

त्वद्दास्य हेतोस् त्वयि निर्विशङ्कम्

न्यस्तात्मनां नाथ बिभर्षि भारम् ॥ ४ ॥

shaktiM sharaNyaantara shabda bhaajaaM

saaraM cha samtolya phalaantaraaNaam.h.

tvaddaasya hetos.h tvayi nirvisha~NkaM

nyastaatmanaaM naatha bibharShi bhaaram.h.. 4

अभीति हेतोर् अनुवर्तनीयं

नाथ त्वदन्यं न विभावयामि ।

भयं कुतः स्यात् त्वयि सानुकम्पे

रक्षा कुतः स्यात् त्वयि जात रोषे ॥ ५ ॥

abhiiti hetor.h anuvartaniiyaM

naatha tvadanyaM na vibhaavayaami.

bhayaM kutaH syaat.h tvayi saanukampe

raxaa kutaH syaat.h tvayi jaata roShe.. 5





त्वदेक तन्त्रं कमला सहाय

स्वेनैव मां रक्षितुम् अर्हसि त्वम् ।

त्वयि प्रवृत्ते मम किं प्रयासैः

त्वयि अप्रवृत्ते मम किं प्रयासैः ॥ ६ ॥

tvadeka tantraM kamalaa sahaaya
svenaiva maaM raxitum.h arhasi tvam.h.
tvayi pravR^itte mama kiM prayaasaiH
tvayi apravR^itte mama kiM prayaasaiH.. 6

समाधि भङ्गेष्वपि संपतत्सु

शरण्य भूते त्वयि बद्धकक्ष्ये ।

अपत्रपे सोढुम् अकिञ्चनोऽहं

दूराधिरोहं पतनं च नाथ ॥ ७ ॥

samaadhi bha~NgeShvapi saMpatatsu
sharaNya bhuute tvayi badhdakaxye.
apatrape soDhum.h aki~nchano.ahaM
duuraadhirohaM patanaM cha naatha.. 7





In slokas 4 to 6, Swami Desikan emphasizes the importance of prapatti. He reiterates that Sriman Narayana is the only one who can bestow the ultimate that can be asked for -- moksham, and all the other devatas can bestow only lesser fruits. Those who have realized this truth do not resort to the worship of anya devatas, but perform prapatti at the feet of Bhagavan and devote the rest of their life to His kainkaryam. Also, He is the only one who can protect us, and if He does not want to protect us, no other devata can protect us (bhayam kutah syAt tvayi sAnukampe, rakshA kutah syAt tvayi jAtaroshe). This again is one more reason for prapatti at the feet of Lord Narayana alone. None of the efforts that we may undertake, such as worshipping the anya devatas, will be of any use if He does not offer His protection. If He decides to protect us, with Periya Piratti (Mahalakshmi) standing in support of us by His side constantly, it does not matter what other efforts we undertake (tvayi pravuRtte mama kim prayAsaih, tvayyapravRtte mama kim prayAsaih). Thus He is the only upAya, and there is no other upAya for moksha.

As Swami Desikan has pointed out in several other stotras, he points out again in this stotra the relative difficulty of undertaking bhakti-yoga for attaining moksha and getting it to completion in this lifetime and the Lord being on the side of those who choose Prapatthi over Bhakthi Yogam as Upaayam and preventing them from feeling ashamed about their inability to execute the difficult-to-practice Bhakthi Yogam (“SamAdhi bhangEshu sampathsu api, SaraNyabhUthE Thvayi Baddha kakshyE, akinchana: aham dhUra adhirOham patanam cha sOdum apathrapE”). He strongly recommends that prapatti-mArga is the path to choose for us, who can not observe the stringent requirements of the bhakti-yoga (He obviously considers himself in this category; so we know where we stand !) ... SlOkam 7.

The Key words in these slOkams are :

“Thvath daasya hEthO: Thvayi nyastha AathmanAm bhAram Bhibharshi”

(You bear the responsibility of protecting those who wish to perform Kaimkaryams to You) ... SlOkam 4

“abheethi hEthO: Thvath anyam anuvartaneeyam na vibhavayAmi”

(adiyEn will not consider anyone other than You appropriate to approach for removal of my samsArice fear)....SlOkam 5

“Thvayi saanukampE bhayam kutha: syAth ? Thvayi jAtha rOshE rakshA kutha: syAth?”

(When You are compassionate towards me, where is the chance for fear to arise ?





When You are angry at me, who can dare to protect me ?)...SIOkam 5

“ThvadhEka tantram Maam Thvam svEna yEva rakshithum arahsi”

(adiyEn is totally under Your control, therefore, You have the rights to protect me by Yourself).

“Thvayi pravrutthE mama prayAsai: kim? Thvayi apravrutthE mama prayAsai kim?”

(When You come forward to protect me, where is the need for me to make any efforts to protect myself ? When You decide not to protect me, what is the use of my efforts in this regard ?)...SIOkam 6.





SLOKAM 8

प्राप्ताभिलाषं त्वदनुग्रहान् मां

पद्मा निषेव्ये तव पाद पद्मे ।

आदेह पातात् अपराध दूरम्

आत्मान्त कैङ्कर्य रसं विधेयाः ॥ ८ ॥

praaptaabhilaaShaM tvadanugrahaan.h maaM
padmaa niShevye tava paada padme.
aadeha paataat.h aparaadha duuram.h
aatmaanta kai~Nkarya rasaM vidheyaaH 8

Once a prapanna has done prapatti, moksham is guaranteed at the end of this life, and the prapanna spends the rest of his life in great bliss by performing selfless kaimkaryam at the feet of Bhagavan. The life of a prapanna after prapatti is described in detail in Nyasa Tilakam etc. In sloka 8 of this stotra Swami Desikan briefly restates this.

The key words of this 8th slokam are: “Thvath anugrahAth prAptha abhilAshAm mAm, Tava pAdha padhmE AathmAnandha kaimkarya rasam vidhEyA:” (adiyEn has been blessed through Your grace to realize my desire. May Thou grant me the bliss of performing kaimkaryam to You and Your Devi until this body falls down. May this kaimkaryam be completely free from any aparAdhams).



SHLOKAM 9

प्रपन्न जन पाथेयम् प्रपित्सूनां रसायनम्

श्रेयसे जगतामेतत् श्रीमद् अष्टभुजाष्टकम् ॥ ९ ॥

prapanna jana paatheyaM prapitsuunaaM rasaayanam.h
shreyase jagataametata.h shriimad.h aShTabhujaaShTakam.h 9

The key words of this sLOkam are: “AshtabhujaAshtakam yEthath jagadhAm SrEyasE” (This sthOthram on the Lord with 8 hands has 8 sLOkams. This sthOthram will shower sarva mangaLams on the people of this earth).

Oh Lord, You are the food during the journey of those, who have completed their prapatthis; for those, who wish to perform their Prapatthi, You are like a potent medicine against the disease of samsAram. This sthOthram about Yourself accompanied by Sri Devi will confer all auspiciousness on the reciters.

शरणागत सन्त्राण त्वरा द्विगुण बाहुना ।

हरिणा वेङ्कटेशीया स्तुतिः स्वीक्रियताम् इयम् ॥ १० ॥

sharaNaagata santraaNa tvaraa dviguNa baahunaa.
hariNaa ve~NkaTeshiiyaa stutiH sviikriyataam.h iyam.h 10

The prose order for this sLOkam is: “SaraNAgatha santhraNa thvarA, dhviguNa bAhuna HariNA VenkateeSAyaa iyam sthuthi:sveekriyathAm”. Normally, the Lord has four hands. In His hurry to rush to the side of the SaraNAgathAs and protect them, He has developed two sets of Four hands.

(MEANING):

This sthOthram has been composed by VenkatEsa Kavi on the Ashtabhuja EmperumAn, who out of His hurry to protect SaraNAgathAs has assumed double the



number of His chathur bhujams. adiyEn with the name of VenkatEsa Kavi requests the Lord to accept the eight sOkams of this sthOthram on Him with His eight hands !

कवितार्किक सिंहाय कल्याण गुणशालिने ।

श्रीमते वेङ्कटेशाय वेदान्त गुरवे नमः ॥

kavitaarkika siMhaaya kalyaaNa guNa shaaline.
shrImate ve~NkaTesdaaya vedaanta gurave namaH.

Daasan

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