

Trayamidam Sarvam



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CONTENTS

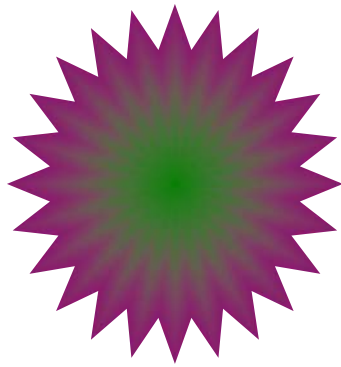
Three is a crowd 1

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॥ श्रीः ॥

श्रीमते रामानुजाय नमः

श्रीमते निगमान्तमहादेशिकाय नमः

श्रीमते श्रीलक्ष्मीनृसिंह दिव्यपादुकासेवक श्रीवणशठकोप श्रीनारायणयतीन्द्र महादेशिकाय नमः

त्रयमिदं सर्वम्

TRAYAMIDAM SARVAM

(Appeared under the title "Three is A crowd" in e-groups)

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My neighbour stepped out into the street with his wife and son, all three dressed up and apparently intent on enjoying an evening of entertainment. Just then, the elderly lady of the house called out to my neighbour not to go in a threesome. Unwilling to succumb to superstition and yet afraid of transgressing age-old beliefs, my neighbour sent his son ahead, waited a few minutes and then went with his wife. I was watching the proceedings attentively (it is really interesting to observe the activities of other people, especially one's neighbors—of course, in my case, it was no mere idle curiosity, but a "genuine desire to study people").

Since the neighbors had left and I could no longer observe them, I gave myself up to thinking—a rather strenuous exercise for a person of feeble intellect like me—and my thoughts focused on the old lady's aversion for a threesome. This jogged my memory, which in turn reminded me of the English saying, "Two is company, three is a crowd", which too speaks of the Europeans' preference for a twosome rather than a group of three. Is the Number Three then inauspicious and to be shunned in all our transactions? I felt this could not be the case, for there must be any number of matters where No. Three does play a significant part. I set my thoughts rolling and found, to my entire lack of surprise, that

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there was indeed a profusion of stuff for which Three forms the basis. Just a few are listed here.

THE THREE VEDAS

Being Vaidikas, let us start our journey into the thrilling world of Three with the Vedas. When faced with the question as to the number of Vedas, even a child would come up with the answer that they are four—Rk, Yajus, Saama and Atharvanam. However, "Trayee" is the word the Vedas use to describe themselves, in many a context. Thus, only Rk, Yajus and Saama Vedas are recognized to be the principal ones, with Atharvanam forming a mere adjunct for them. Says the Brihadaraanyaka Upanishad—

"trayo Vedaa eta eva vaak RgVedo Mano YajurVeda: Praana: Saama Veda:"

Sri Bhattar too calls the Pranavam "Trayee saaram" or the quintessence of the three Vedas—"Trayee saara: trayaatmaa Pranava: imam artham samadisat".



Rama sita lakshmana - Pranavam personified



When Indra wants to indicate to Bharadvaaja Maharshi the minuscule quantum of Vedas the latter has managed to learn during several lifetimes, it is three handfuls of sand that he holds up, while the portions of the Shruti yet to be learnt are represented in the form of three huge mountains. It is thus clear that the number of Vedas is indeed Three. "Moondru tondru sodiyaai" says Sri Tirumazhisai Piran too, praising the Lord as the luminous entity shining in the Pranavam. He also calls the Lord "Moondru moorthi", signifying the embodiment of the three principal Vedas.

THE THREE-LETTERED SECRET

We talked about the Pranavam, which is considered to be the distilled essence of all the Vedas. We find that the Pranavam too consists of three letters—A, U and Ma. And the Pranavam itself was formed by the Lord, with its components extracted with care from the three Vedas, says the Manusmriti—

"Akaaram chaapi Ukaaram cha Makaaram cha Prajaapati:

Veda trayaat niraduhat Bhoo: Bhuva: Sva: iti cha"

Is it any wonder then that Azhwars praise this formulation sky high as "Moondru ezhutthu"? And this Pranavam is to be pronounced with three maatraas, says Swami Desikan in Tatva Navaneetam--"Moondru maattirayaana ottrai ezhutthirckku mukkyartthamaai".

The Pranavam, in turn, forms the first word of the Ashtaakshara (Narayana) Mantram, which too consists of three words, the other two being the Nama: sabdam and Narayana naamam. Similarly, the principal "Vyaahritis", used in Praanaayaamam, are again three in number—"Bhoo:, Bhuva: and Sva:".

Talking about Praanaayaamam, again three of it is required to be performed before the Sankalpam for any Vaidika karma—"Tri: praanaan aayamyaa". Three Praanaayaamas, done in the prescribed fashion, represent penance in its highest form, says the Manusmriti:





"Praanaayaamaa braahmanasya trayopi vidhivat kritaa:

Vyaahrta Pranavai: yuktaa: vigyeyam paramam tapa:"

THE HOLY TRIAD—RAHASYATRAYAM

How many are the esoteric formulations which every Vaishnavite should always have on his (or her) lips and heart? No marks for guessing, they are again three in number—the Ashtaaksharam, Dvayam and the Charamaslokam. Here is a beautiful paasuram of Swami Desikan, expressing the Rahasyatrayam as a function of three: "Moondril oru moondrum moovirandum munnaangum tondra tolayum tuyar"

- Moondril—Of the three esoteric formulations or Rahasyas
- Oru Moondrum—the three-lettered Pranavam
- Moovirandum—the Dvayam with twice as many (six) words
- Munnaangum—The Charamaslokam with four times three (twelve) words.

This Kural tells us that a clear understanding of the Rahasya trayam and constant meditation on its esoteric purport would provide relief from all sorrow and ensure emancipation.

NUMBER THREE IN THE GITA

1. **Three Parts of Gita:** The Bhagavad Gita is divided into three Shatkas or groups of six chapters each, forming eighteen chapters in all. Predictably, we find several references to the number three in the Gita. Following are a few:

2. **Three Types of Karma Phalam:** The Lord classifies the fruits of all of our actions into three broad groups:

- a. Favourable or desirable,
- b. Unfavourable or disliked and





c. A mixture of both— "Anishtam Ishtam Misram cha trividham karmana: phalam"

3. **Trigunam:** The basic characteristics of Prakriti or Primordial Matter are again three, collectively known as Trigunam—

- Sattvam (Goodness)
- Rajas (Passion) and
- Tamas (Ignorance).

Of these, Sattvam is the embodiment of Purity and is illuminating. It frees one from all sinful actions and bestows unblemished knowledge. It confers robust health and righteousness too. ("Tatra Sattvam nirmalatvaat prakaasakam anaamayam")

Rajas is responsible for generating passion, unlimited craving and longing after various objects of desire ("Raja: raagaatmakam viddhi trishnaa sanga samudbhavam").

Tamas is caused by ignorance and is responsible for creating delusion, laziness, sleepiness, etc.—

"Tama: tu aggyaanajam viddhi mohanam sarva dehinaam

Pramaada aalasya nidraabhi: tat nibadhnaati Bhaarata!"

It is these three traits that cover men with a veil of delusion, which prevents them from realizing the true nature of the Lord, as being greater than the greatest and being everlasting and indestructible, says the Gita.

4. **Three Doors of Hell:** The Lord enumerates another set of three factors which unerringly lead us to the gates of Purgatory. These three ignominious traits ensure that the Jeevatma is forever bound up in Samsaaram and in the interminable cycle of births and deaths:



"Trividham narakasya idam dvaaram naasanam aatmana:

Kaama: Krodha: tatthaa Lobha: tasmaat etat trayam tyajet"

Kaamam is desire. The Shruti likens desire to an ocean—just as the ocean is full of waves, ceaselessly rising one after the other, the mind too generates more and more desires: the moment one wish is satisfied, it gives rise to another and so on.

Krodham is the uncontrollable anger which arises from unrequited desire and is directed at all those responsible for the non-fulfillment of the desire.

Lobham is miserliness and the disinclination to share one's prosperity with others.

5. **Three Types of Shraddha:** The Lord classifies the faith, sincerity and focus of all beings again into three—Saatvikam, Raajasam and Taamasam--

" Trividhaa bhavati shraddhaa dehinaam saa svabhaavajaa

Saatvikee Raajasee chaiva Taamasee cha iti taam shrunu"

6. **Three Types of Food:** The food preferences of people too fall into three categories, according to the three modes of material nature—viz., Sattvam, Rajas and Tamas.

- Foods dear to Saatvikas increase longevity, purify our lives and bestow health and happiness. Such foods are succulent, fatty, wholesome and pleasing to the palate—

"Aayu: Sattva bala aarogya sukha preeti vivardhanaa:

Rasyaa: snigdhaa: stthira hridayaa aaharaa: Saatvika priyaa:"

- Foods that are bitter, sour, salty, hot, pungent, dry and burnt are dear to Jeevas dominated by Rajo gunam. Such foods give rise to indigestion,



disease and distress—

"Katu amla lavana ati ushna teekshna rooksha vidaahina:

Aahaaraa: Raajasasya ishntaa:du:kha shokha aamaya pradaa:"

- Stale foodstuff which has lost its original flavour, smelly foods like garlic, left-overs, tasteless, decomposed and putrid food, food not offered first to the Lord, etc. come under the category of Taamasic aahaaram—

"Yaata yaamam gata rasam bhooti paryushitam cha yat

Ucchishtam api cha amedhyam bhojanam taamasa priyam"

7. **Yagyas are of three types:** Sri Krishna appears to be quite fond of Number Three. Here He is, enumerating another triad—three categories of Sacrifices, predictably falling into Saatvic, Raajasic and Taamasic ones.

- Sacrifices performed as per scriptural prescriptions, with a sense of duty and without an eye on reward, concentrating on Sriman Narayana as the Supreme Person to be pleased by the sacrifice (irrespective of the deity to whom the sacrifice is addressed) is said to be **Saatvika Yagyam**.
- Sacrifice performed for the sake of puerile material benefits, prompted by pride and other base emotions, is known as **Raajasa Yagyam**.
- Sacrifices performed in contravention of the scriptures, without the permission of elders and the wise, without the use of Mantras and ingredients prescribed by Shastras, without commensurate Dakshina to the participants and without the requisite degree of faith and sincerity, are classified as **Taamasic Yagyas**. Looking to the current day practices, most of the Yagyas we perform may well fall under this head.

We shall now see a few more significant references to Three in the Bhagavat Gita and go on to other matters.





Sri Krishna seems to be quite fond of number 3

8. *Tapas* is again of three types, avers the Lord—bodily penance, oral penance and mental penance. Worship of Devas, Braahmanas, Acharyas and wise men, purity of mind and body, sincerity in one's dealings with others, control of senses and non-violence towards all beings—all these constitute physical



penance or Shaareeram Tapa:--

"Deva dvija Guru praagya poojaam soucham aarjavam

Brahmacharyam Ahimsaa cha shaareeram Tapa: uchyate"

Penance is to be performed not only with the body, but with one's speech too. And how do you do that? Soft speech which is full of truth and affection, words which generate goodwill and friendship and the study and recital of Vedas -all these constitute oral Tapas—

"Anudvega karam vaakyam, Satyam priya hitam cha yat

Svaadhyaya abhyasanam chaiva vaangmayam tapa uchyate"

Penance of the mind consists of being calm, clear and without anger, intent always on others' wellbeing, prolonged observance of silence, absolute control over the capricious mind and its focusing on the Ultimate---

"Mana: prasaada: Soumyatvam Mounam Aatma vinigraha:

Bhaava samshuddhi: iti etat Tapa: Maanasam uchyate"

It is interesting to note that the aforesaid three categories of Tapas too fall into three broad classifications---again those of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, depending on the predominant nature of the performer. Tapas performed solely for pleasing the Lord, without any expectation of a quid pro quo and with absolute concentration is Saatvic Tapas, while Tapas done for the purpose of earning fame and acclaim for oneself is Raajasa Tapas. Penance performed with obstinacy and resulting in pain and distress for oneself and others is Taamasic Tapas.

9. **Three Types of Tyaagam:** Displaying His obsession with Number Three, the Lord classifies Renunciation into three types again—Saatvic, Raajasic and Taamasic. Giving up the duties ordained upon one by one's varna and aashrama (Sandhyaavandanam, Brahmayagyam, etc.) is known as Taamasic Tyaagam. This



is prompted by ignorance. Forsaking one's duties, considering them difficult or painful of performance, is Raajasa Tyaagam. Performance of duties with sincerity and without any desire for the fruits thereof, without any ego or selfishness, dedicating it solely for the Lord's pleasure, is known as Saatvika Tyaagam.

10. It is not for nothing that the Bhagavat Gita is universally acclaimed as a Manual of Management. You find in it advanced concepts of men and material management. Here is a sample, in which Sri Krishna speaks about the three factors which provide the requisite impetus for our daily functions. Any work carried out by human beings has three elements—

- Knowledge of the work to be performed
- The Object of Knowledge and
- The Knower—"Gyaanam Gyeyam Parigyaataa tri vidhaa Karma chodanaa".



bhagavath geeta tells on many triads



11. And once there is impetus and the action is performed, there are again three constituents of such work or action—

- The Senses, including the Mind, which actually carry out the work (Karanam)
- The actual piece of work and (Karma)
- The Doer (Karta)—"Karanam, Karma Karta iti tri vidha: Karma sangraha:"

12. **Three Doers:** Predictably, Workers too are classified into three categories, again in the Saatvic, Raajasic and Taamasic modes. One who does his duty without ego, with enthusiasm and sincerity and without being affected by success or failure, is called a **Saatvic Karta**. One who is extremely covetous, is stingy in spending for the ingredients required for the Karma but yearns after its fruits, is without purity, easily affected by happiness or distress and is of a sadistic temperament, is known to be a **Raajasic doer**. Laziness, unwillingness to even begin work (leave alone see it through), ignorance and disinclination in learning, deviousness and constantly being plagued by unhappiness are the characteristics of a **Taamasic Karta**.

13. **Three Intellects:** Human Intellects too are of three types as indicated above. Identifying, analyzing and adopting the strategy appropriate to both worldly and spiritual welfare, a healthy respect for scriptural prescriptions and a full realization of the do's and don'ts of life--these are what distinguish a **Saatvic Intellect**. One who is confused and invariably chooses the incorrect path over the correct one in matters temporal or spiritual, is said to possess a **Raajasic Intellect**. The **Taamasic Intellect** is one which, enveloped by enduring ignorance, perceives right as wrong and dharmam as adharmam and is in general at total variance with balanced perception.

14. **Happiness or bliss is again of three types**—Saatvic, Raajasic and Taamasic. Happiness which is not merely physical but belongs to the spirit, is difficult to begin with but confers enduring enjoyment, is of the Saatvic type. Pleasure



derived out of the association of senses with objects of desire, which is entirely ephemeral, is Raajasic bliss. Pleasure derived out of inaction and indolence and which results in delusion from beginning to end, is Taamasic.

Do you feel that too much has been said about the three basic traits of Prakriti—Sattvam, Rajas and Tamas? It may indeed appear so, but everything and everyone in this material world and, for that matter, in the worlds above, is indeed subject to the dominance of these three characteristics and there are indeed no exceptions, says the Lord—

"Na tadasti prithivyaam vaa divi deveshu vaa puna:

Sattvam prakritijai: muktam yadebhi: syaat tribhi: gunai:"

With its numerous references to three, it is not surprising to note that the Gita itself is classified into three parts of six chapters each—"trishatkam", as mentioned above.

The first six chapters deal with Gnaana Yogam and Karma Yogam, which are aimed at the limited bliss afforded by Aatmaanubhavam or enjoyment of one's self—

"Gnaana Karmaatkike nishtte Yoga lakshye susamskrite

Aatmmanubhooti siddhyartthe poorva shatkena chodite"

----- (Gitaarttha Sangraham—Sri Alavandar)

The second triad or Shatkam details the strategy of Bhakti Yogam (that is to be attained through studious observance of Gnaana and Karma Yogas), only through which is possible an appreciation of the Lord and His innumerable auspicious attributes—

"Madhyame Bhagavat tattva yaathaatmya avaapti siddhaye

Gnaana Karmaabhinirvarntya Bhakti Yoga: prakeertita:"



And what forms the subject matter of the third group of six chapters? The concepts of Prakriti and Purusha, their association, the Lord, Karma, Gnaana and Bhakti, etc., enunciated in the earlier triads, are dealt with in further detail in the third shatkam. Here are the majestic words of Sri Ramanuja, describing its purport: "Idaaneem uparitana shatke Prakriti Purusha tat samsarga roopa prapancha Isvara yaathaatmya Karma Gnaana Bhakti svaroopta tat upaadaana praakaaraascha shatka trayoditaa visodhyante"

THREE IN TIRUKKURAL:

Tirukkural, which incorporates much of Dharma Shaastraic provisions, is again divided into three parts—Aratthu paal, Porutpaal and Kaamattuppaal.

Maharshi Manu too enumerates a few triads.

1. Three items are considered extremely holy in a Shraaddham—

The maternal grandson of the departed, **Kritapa:** and the Sesame seeds which are used in Tarpanam.

2. Three other items, observance of which is a must during ceremonies to our forefathers, are—

- Purity of mind and body,
- eschewing anger and irritation and
- Unhurried performance of the Shraaddham.

Here is the relative slokam—

"Treeni shraaddhe pavitraani douhitra: Kritapa: tilaa:

Treeni cha atra prasamsanti soucham, akrodham atvaram"



THE THREE DEBTS

Even if your father was the richest person in the world and left you a lasting legacy, you would be depressed to know that you are still indeed a debtor. You were born with three debts and unless you take prompt steps to clear the same, they would pull you down without mercy. The Shruti (6th Kaanda of the Yajus Samhita) tells us that every one of us is born with three debts—"Jaayamano vai braahmana: thribhi: rinavaa jaayate". These are debts due respectively to Devas, Pitrus and Rishis. And how does one rid oneself of these debts? Vedas prescribe the strategies therefor—the debt to the Pitru devatas is liquidated by creating progeny and ensuring continuation of the race, that due to Rishis by learning the Vedas (Adhyayanam) and the debt to Devas is paid off through performance of Yagas and Yagyas—"Brahmacharyena Rishibhya: yagyena devebhya: prajayaa pitrubhya: esha vaa anruna:". One can even think of liberation only after paying off these debts— The Manu Smriti makes it clear that discharge of these three debts is a pre-condition for Moksham and failure on this front pushes one back into the vicious cycle of births and deaths:

"Rinaani threeni apaakrtya mano mokshe nivesayet

Anapaakritya moksham tu sevamaano vrajati adha:"

THE THIRD EYE

Mothers, while feeding recalcitrant infants, often threaten to call in the three-eyed monster, if the child doesn't eat up. Are there really three-eyed entities? Yes indeed, our Sri Nrisimha has three eyes. If you have any doubts regarding this, all you have to do is to go to Singaperumal Koil (near Chingleput) or T. Narsipur (near Mysore), where Singappiran sports a beautiful third eye. The Sesha Samhita speaks of Nrisimha with three large and round eyes emitting sparks of fire—"Tryakshai: visphurantam". Another deity with three eyes is Rudra—"Mukkannappa!" says Sri Nammazhwar. It is with this third eye that Rudra turned Manmatha into ashes, when the latter attempted to interfere



with the former's penance.

The Gowri Ashtottaram credits Parvati too with three eyes—"Trinetra Trisikha Sambhu samshrayaa sasi bhooshanaa". Bhrigu Maharshi too is reported to have sported three eyes, the last on his foot, which the Lord removed later.



mukkaNNappA

THREE HEADS

And what about three heads? Are you able to recollect offhand anyone with three heads?



The Yajus Samhita tells us about Visvaroopaa, son of Tvashtaa and purohita for Devas and Asuras simultaneously. ("Visvaroopaa vai Tvaashtra: purohito Devaanaam aaseet").

He had three heads, known as Soma paanam, Suraa paanam and Annaadam, with which he imbibed the three items of food and drink. This Visvaroopaa betrayed Devas by secretly passing on the havir bhaagam to the Asuras. Angered at this, Indra cut off his heads and in the process, incurred Brahmahatyaa dosham.

Dattatreya, regarded as a minor incarnation of the Lord, born to Atri Maharshi and Anasooya Devi, is also credited with three heads. At the other end of the spectrum, there was the raakshasa with three heads, known as Trisiras (belonging to the group of Khara and Dooshana) who was part of the 14000-strong army disposed off single-handedly by Sri Rama.

THE DIVINE TRINITY

Of the thirty-three crore and odd Devatas, only Three are said to be principal ones. Thus Trimurti consists of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra, charged respectively with the functions of Creation, Protection and Destruction. However, are these three entities equal to one another? And if Vishnu, as claimed in the Upanishads, is indeed superior to the other two, why should He be counted with the other two on an equal footing?

"Madhye Virinchi Shivayo: vihitaavataara:

Khyaatosi tat samatayaa tat idam na chitram" (Sri Varadaraja Panchaasat)

"It is no wonder that you are counted as one among the Trimurtis and taken by this ignorant world to be equal to the other two", says Swami Desikan, "for, the ill-informed proletariat, considering your earlier avataaras as a fish and a boar, is not able to see beyond those lowly life forms and perceive the Paramatma who assumes those forms out of His free will". Emphasizing this in Srimad Rahasyatrasaaram, Swami Desikan tells us, quoting scriptural authority, that



the three arguments that

- The Trimurtis are but three aspects/forms of the same composite Brahman (**Trimurti Iykyam**)
- Trimurtis consist of three different Devatas, who are equal to one another in all aspects (**Trimurti Saamyam**)
- There is a power much superior to the Trimurtis, which is actually the Parabrahmam and the three deities are but functionaries under this exalted entity (**Trimurti Utteernam**) are all false and unacceptable.



three mUrthys



The Christian Trinity: It is interesting to note that even in Christianity, the Godhead consists of three entities—Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. We can make this fit into our own concept of Trimurti too: Father could signify Brahma, who begot Rudra the Son ("Naanmukhanum taan mukhamaai Sankaranai taan padaitthaan"). The Holy Spirit is the Supreme Lord Sriman Narayana, who is the Inner Dweller and moving spirit behind all sentient souls, including Brahma and Rudra.

THE THREE STEPS

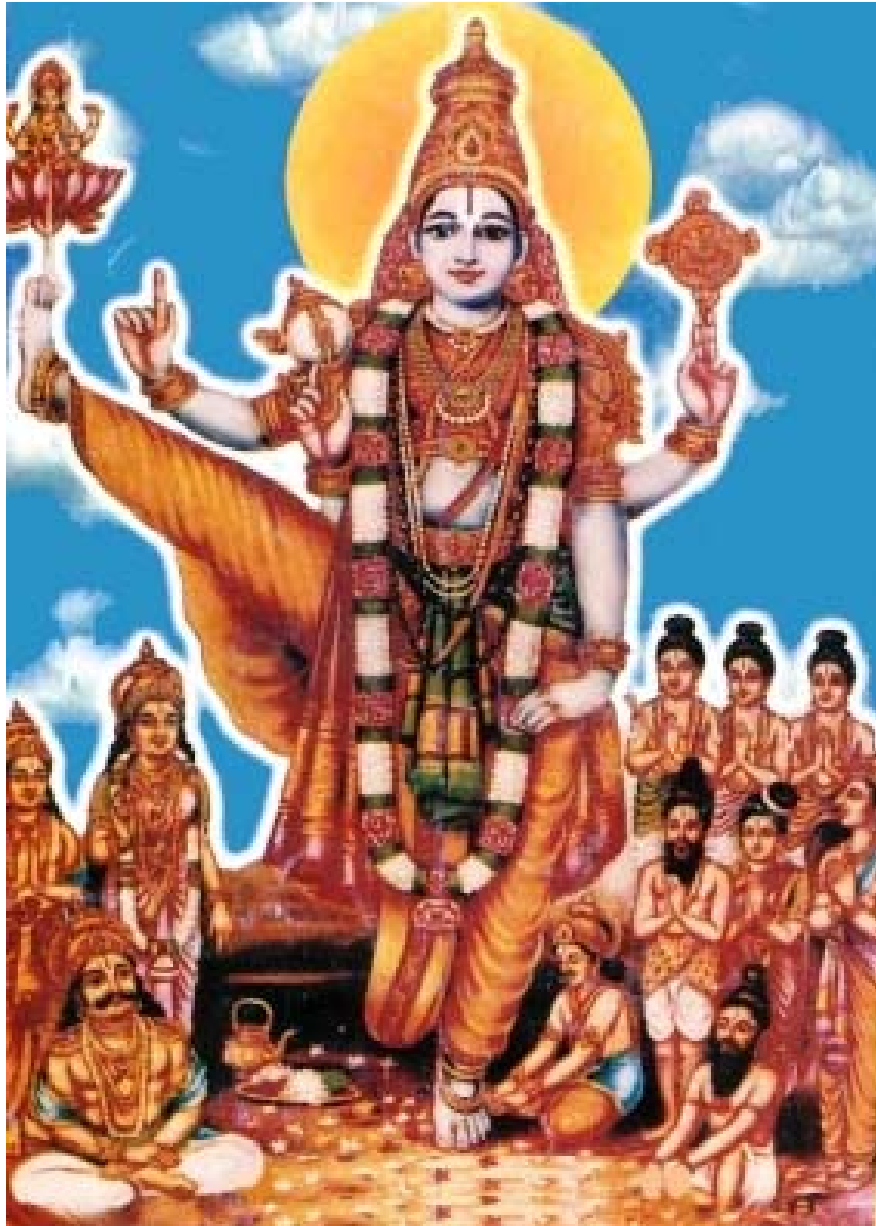
Any number of people might have walked any number of steps over the years, but it is just three steps that have stolen the limelight for all time to come. These were no giant steps to begin with, but were just tiny ones sought by a diminutive dwarf, so much so that the philanthropist from whom these three steps of land were prayed for laughed outright at the ridiculously trivial request and tried to persuade the seeker to opt for more substantial alms. However, the young bhikshu stood firm in His request. And once the request was granted, the dwarf suddenly grew into a colossus, spanning the three worlds with His burgeoning form. One foot measured the entire earth and another the heavens above and there was no space for the third step to be placed.

The three steps the Lord took as Trivikrama have been chronicled only too frequently by the Shruti—"treeni padaa vichakrame Vishnur gopaa adaabhya:", "idam Vishnur vichakrame tredhaa nidadhe padam" "Vichakrame prithiveem esha etaam". Azhwars too have waxed eloquent over this episode of the three giant steps the Paramatma took, in the process of which the Lord's tiruvadi was placed on all the sentient and non-sentient beings on earth. And Mahabali was so fortunate that the third step of the Lord was placed on his head. "Since I was not around at the time of the Trivikramaavataaram, when are you going to place your holy feet on my head?" asks Alavandar—

"Trivikrama! Tvat charanaambuja dvayam madeeya moordhaanam



alankarishyati?"



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Three Steps

There are three types of Trivikrama moorties, according to the Vishnu Kosam:

1. With the left leg lifted up and stretched out to the height of the knee of the right leg ("Jaanu maatram")—this signifies the act of measuring out the earth ("bhoo loka aakramanaarttham")





2. With the left leg aloft and stretched to the height of the navel ("Naabhi maatram") to signify the occupation of the mid-region by the second step ("antariksha loka aakramanaarttham") and

3. With the left tiruvadi raised to the level of the forehead ("lalaata maatram") to signify the occupation of the heavens.

THREE TYPES OF KARMA

Karma capable of ridding us of births and deaths is of three types, says the Kathopanishad—"Tri Karma krit tarati janma mrityoo". And what are these three types of action?

1. **Yajanam**: Performance of yaagas and yagyas, without any desire in their fruits and dedicating them solely for the Lord's pleasure—"Bhagavat preetyarttham"

2. **Adhyayanam**: Learning the Vedas and Vedanta from an Acharya and moulding one's life based on the learning.

3. **Daanam**: Giving away one's possessions to the needy, with absolutely no expectation of return in any form—"variyaarkku ondru eevade eegai".

TRISHAVANA SNAANAM, TRIDANDAM AND TRIPUNDRAM

The Narada Parivraajakopanishad has some interesting references to three, relating to Sanyasis. These holy men who have renounced all their possessions and have embraced the Paramatma as their sole relative, are supposed to bathe thrice a day. However, according to the Upanishad, the number of times differs according to the class and type of Sanyasi-

"Snaanam trishavanam proktam Bahoodaka Vanastthayo:

Hamse tu sakrit eva syaat, Parahamse na vidayate"

Sanyasis are required to sport the Oordhvapundram and Tridandam too,





according to this Upanishad. The lines of the Oordhva pundram worn on the forehead are again three, signifying the two holy feet of the Lord worn with the Sreechoornam in between, signifying the presence of Sri. Ekapundram or a single line, consisting only of Sreechoornam, is not approved, as it entails separation of the Divine Consort from Her inseparable companion.

A few words here about the Tridandam, which every Sri Vaishnava Yati holds aloft in his holy hand, as did Sri Ramanuja—"Upaveetinam oordhvapundravantam, trijagat punya phalam tridanda hastam". The three sticks that form the Tridandam signify the Sanyasi's triumph over the three aspects—Karma, Speech and the Mind, says the Upanishad—

"Vaak danda: Karma danadascha Mano dandascha te traya:

Yasya ete niyataa dandaa: sa: Tridandee maha yati:"



Acharya holding tridandam





Thus the three components of the Tridandam represent respectively the resolution to control Speech, Mind and the Body. The Tridandam is the Yati's closest friend and constant companion, as is evident from the mantra for picking it up—"sakhaa me gopaaya". Sri Koorattazhwan, in his Dhaatee Panchakam, describes in detail the glory of Sri Ramanuja's Tridandam. Sanyasis belonging to other faiths hold a single stick—"Eka Dandam": however, the reference to "Mukkol Bhagavar" or Tridandi sanyaasis in the Tolkaappiam, the earliest available Tamizh work, signifies the preponderance and popularity of Sri Vaishnava sanyaasis during ancient times. Even during the times of Tirumazhisai Piraan, there was a profusion of Sri Vaishnava Yativaraas at Srirangam, all immersed in the immeasurable bliss of Bhagavat Anubhavam—

"Chittreyittru muttra moongil moondru tandar ondrinar

Attra pattrar suttri vaazhum antaneer Arangame"

TATTVA TRAYAM

Going back to Vedaantam, we find that the Tattva Trayam or three tenets form the fundamentals of Visistaadvaita Siddhaantam. These are respectively Chit or Sentient Souls, Achit or Insentient Objects and Isvara, denoting the supreme Lord.

It is notable that the concept of "Tattva Trayam" is rooted in the Shruti, in the Svetaasvataropanishad, which lays down that the knowledge of these Three Tenets is indispensable to a seeker after liberation—

"Etat gyeyam nityam eva Atma samsttham na ata: param veditavyam kinchit

Bhokta Bhogyam Preritaaram cha matvaa sarvam proktam trividham Brahmam etat".

TRIVIDHA ACHETANAM

If we take the "Bhogyam" or the inanimate matter (which is known as





"Achetanam") first, it is of three kinds—

1) **Prakriti** or Non-sentient Matter—has the following characteristics:-

a) It is absolutely without the spark of knowledge, non-sentient. If we take an earthen pot, for example, it has no power of cognizance or knowledge.

b) It exists solely for the purpose of others, to be used as per their whims, fancies and requirements- ("achetanaa paraartthaa cha nityaa satata vikriyaa"—Parama Samhita). To cite the example of the Pot again, it doesn't serve any purpose of its own, but is utilised exclusively by its owner to fetch and store water, etc.

c) Though it is essentially eternal and permanent, it is subject to constant change and modification, in form and attributes. The Pot was first mud, then turned to clay with the addition of water, was then made into a Pot. When it breaks, it becomes bits and pieces, which, when they undergo further destruction, become mud again. Thus, though in its essential form of mud, it is permanent, it undergoes transformation into other forms constantly.

d) It is the abode of the three gunaas-- Sattvam, Rajas and Tamas.

e) It is this Prakriti that is the field of action for the Jeevatmas, affording them appropriate experiences in tune with their accumulated baggage of merit and demerit. For instance, this physical body (**Praakrita shareeram**) that all of us possess, has been given to us so that we may experience pleasure and pain in accordance with our Karma. The disembodied soul would not be able to experience anything without a physical shell composed of Prakriti.

2) The second type of Non-sentient matter or "**Achit**" is **Time**. Time, we are told, has neither a beginning nor an end ("anaadi: Bhagavaan Kaala: na antosya dvija vidayte"—Sri Vishnu Puranam), but only divisions like seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, centenaries, millennia etc. The advance of Time is inexorable and is what is responsible for changes in Prakriti, as for



instance the physical changes our body undergoes with advancement of age.

3) The third component of the class of "Achetanam" is "Suddha Satvam", representing the material of which the transcendental worlds of Sri Vaikuntam are made, beyond the reach of either Prakriti or Time. In these exalted worlds, though Time does exist, in the sense of providing a sequence to events, it is incapable of causing the sort of inexorable and irreversible changes, as it does in the mundane lands down below. The world of Suddha Sattvam is filled with immeasurable Wisdom and Bliss—"Gnaanaananda mayaa lokaa:". These are the worlds inhabited by the Lord and His celestial courtiers.

TRIVIDHA CHETANAM

Having seen the three types of Non-sentient matter, we go on to the three types of "Bhoktaa" or the Jeevatmas, who constitute the second important component of Tattva Trayam.

The individual soul is neither God nor Man, as all these nomenclatures are caused by and apply to only the physical shell in which it resides for the time being. When the soul is inside a cow's body, we call it a cow and another soul residing in Brahmaa's shareeram is known as "Prajaapati". There is, however, absolutely no difference between one soul and another, all the differences being caused by the material enclosures they occupy due to their Karma. .

These Jeevatmas fall into three categories:-

1) "Baddhaas" are souls like us, suffering constant imprisonment in physical shells. Due to their association with the perishable bodies, they are themselves termed perishable, in the Gita sloka, "Kshara: sarvaani bhootaani". This class of beings comprises of all those subject to the unending cycle of births and deaths, right from the exalted Brahmaa, the Creator, down to the most insignificant insect inhabiting the sewers of a city.

2) "Muktaas" are those who were originally "Baddhaas", but graduated to



liberation through the adoption of an appropriate strategy like Bhakti or Prapatti, for emancipation. All those occupants of Sri Vaikunttam who were originally inhabitants of the mundane morass, but were wise enough to recognise its despicable nature and to adopt an "upaaya", fall into this category, having acquired citizenship rights to Sri Vaikunttam through assiduous effort and the immeasurable grace of the Lord.

3) "Nityaas" are the permanent inhabitants of Paramapadam, with absolutely no stigma of earlier residence in the inauspicious worlds down below. These are exalted souls who have always been in Sri Vaikunttam as its natural citizens, performing eternal service to Emperuman without even a second's interruption, drinking in His boundless beauty with their unblinking eyes— "Tat Vishno; paramam padam sadaa pasyanti sooraya:". Ananta, Garuda, Vishvaksena, et al fall in this category.

The third and most important component of Tattva Trayam is the **Isvara** or the Parabrahmam, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, the repository of all auspicious attributes, the antithesis of all that is evil or bad, unassociated with any of the baser traits common to mankind, like fear, greed, anger etc.

To sum up, Tattva Trayam or the Three Tenets comprise of the Non-sentient matter Achetanam, the sentient individual souls or Jeevatmas and the Lord and Master, the Isvara, who controls and directs the first two. Achetanam is classified into three categories—Prakriti, Kaalam and Suddha Sattvam, while Jeevatmas fall into three similar types, viz., Baddhas, Muktas and Nityas.

And we have another triad thrown in here by Sri Ramanuja, who says that the Svaroopam, Stthithi and Pravritti of all the three types of sentient souls and non-sentient objects are subject to the Lord's will—"Svaadheena trividha chetana achetana svarooapa stthithi pravritti bhedom"

THREE TYPES OF PERSONS

People fall into three categories, says the Udyoga Parva of the Mahabharata—





"Trividhaa: purushaa: Raajan! Uttama adhama madhyamaa:" Commentaries on Tiruppavai provide a lucid explanation of who is an Uttama and who are Madhyamas and Adhamas.

One who lives by exploiting others is an Adhama. Most of our politicians would perhaps fall in this category. Those who adopt a policy of "Live and let live", making a living while letting others too to survive, are Madhyamas or mediocre persons. One whose credo is to uplift others even at the cost of one's own existence, one who lives solely for others rather than for himself, is an Uttaman. "I am prepared to sacrifice my life and even yourself, my dearest Sita! but I am not prepared to go back on my words, especially to Brahmins" says Sri Rama, giving an example of preparedness for supreme sacrifice at great personal cost, to serve the interests of others. It is this category of person who qualifies for the sobriquet "Uttaman".

Another definition is found for the aforesaid three classes of people, in the Yuddha Kaandam of Srimad Ramayanam. And paradoxically, it is Ravana who defines them. An Uttaman is one who begins a course of action after due consultation with his near and dear and well-wishers and who seeks divine blessings for the proposed action. Madhyama is one who keeps his own counsel and acts based on his own perceptions of Dharmam. One who doesn't weigh the pros and cons of his actions, doesn't recognise the power of divine will over human endeavours and vows to finish the job himself, but fails miserably, is an Adhama purusha.

OTHER FAMOUS TRIADS

We shall now see a few miscellaneous items, which again have three as their basis.

a. **Three Types of Water**—"Munneer"—When Azhwar talks of a world of three waters being created by Emperuman ("Munneer gyaalam padaittha em Mukhil Vannane!"), he refers to river water, spring water and rain water. All these waters eventually reach the sea, which is also known as "Munneer" and the Lord





who is of the sea's complexion as "Munneer Vannan".

b. **Three Dastardly Offences:** The sins we commit are of three types, according to Sri Ramanuja—Bhagavat apachaaram, Bhaagavata Apachaaram and Asahya apachaaram. The first consists of offending the Lord through our inappropriate conduct, defying His dicta as reflected through the Shruti, Smritis, etc. The second involves offending those dear to the Lord, viz., Bhaagavatas. The third is causing offence to the Lord or His devotees with absolutely no reason at all and as a matter of principle.

c. **"Mukkurumbu"**—Sri Koorattazhwan is said to have conquered three types of conceit ("**Vanja mukkurumbaam kuzhiyai kadakkum nam Koorattaazhwan**")—Conceit born out of Wealth, pedigree and learning.

d. **Karmas are of three types**—**Nityam** (like Sandhavandanam, Brahmayagyam, Amavaasya tarpanam, etc., which are to be performed daily) **Naimittikam** (like Pitru tarpanam on Sankramanam, Grahanam, etc.) and **Kaamyam** (various yagyas like the Sudarsana Homam, Aayushya homam, etc., performed for achievement of specific goals on specific occasions)

2. The Mahabharata tells us that the number of divine bows is again three—

"Treeni eva etaani divyaani dhanoomshi divi chaarinaam

Vaarunam Gaandivam tatra Maahendram vijayam dhanu:"

In this count, the exclusion of the Lord's bows Saarngam and Kodandam, is perhaps they fall into an incomparable category of their own.

3. Talking of Sri Rama, it is interesting to note that whenever He goes on a long journey, He prefers to go in a group of three. First, when He went for Yaaga Samrakshanam, He was accompanied by Visvaamitra and Lakshmana—**"Ooshustaam rajaneem tatra Sarayvaam susukham traya:"**. Next, when He went for vanavaasam too, He went with Lakshmana and Sita—**"Ramamaana vane traya:"**



4. **The Three-lettered Name:** There might be any number of names for the Lord: one of them is certain to confer emancipation on not only the speaker and the listener, but on all those around. And this tirunaamam is predictably a three-lettered one—"Moondru ezhuttudaya per"—the Govinda naama. It is this nama that bestowed liberation on the habitual sinner Kshatrabandhu, according to Tondaradippodi Azhwar—"Moondru ezhuttudaya peraal Kattirabandhum andre paraamgati kandu kondaan".

5. **Three types of Agni** are respectively the Gaarhapatyam, Aahavaneeyam and Daakshinaagni. This is what Sri Tirumangai Mannan indicates, when he refers to "Mutthee, Naanmarai Ivagai Velvi" in Siriya Tirumadal. The Manusmriti tells us that one's father is the Gaarhapatyaagni, mother Daakshinaagni and Acharya, Aahavaneeyaagni: the purport is that these three persons are to be regarded, revered and served like the three holy fires-- "Pitaa vai gaarhapatyaagni: Maata agni: dakshina: smrita:| Guru: aahavaneeyastu saagni: tretaa gareeyasee||"

6. **Three Consorts:** Though the Lord might have any number of Divine Consorts, the principal ones are again three—Sri, Bhoomi and Neela. "Devimaar aavar Tirumagal, Manmagal, Aayar Madamagal endru ivar moovar".



saaranathan and saaranaayaki with 3 dEvigal - Sri, bhu, neeLa
(thanks: srivaishnavam.com)



7. **Trikaalam**: The day is divided into three parts, for the performance of Nitya Karmas—**Praata: kaalam** or the morning, **Madhyahnam** or the afternoon and **Saayam Kaalam** or the evening. Sandhyaa vandanam is supposed to be performed at all the three parts of the day. The Divine Consorts gently massage the Lord's lotus feet throughout the parts of the day, says the Siriya Tirumadal— "**Angayin muppodum varuda arituyil amarndanai**". This "Trikaalam" can also be construed to mean the Past, Present and the Future. One who knows these three is known as a Trikaala Gnaani.

8. **Three Flying Forts, (Tripuram)** respectively of gold, silver and iron, were creating havoc among peoples of the world and were ultimately destroyed by Rudra, with Vishnu as the impelling force. This episode is chronicled in the Shruti.

9. Speaking of Tripuram, Tripuraa Devi is the name of a devoted female disciple of Sri Ramanuja of royal descent, who finds mention in the commentary to Naachiar Tirumozhi. This sterling lady's devotion to her Acharya was legendary. When asked by her relatives as to why she did not worship gods other than Sriman Narayana, she did not furnish any elaborate reply citing various scriptural texts—she just said, "I do not worship anya devatas because Sri Ramanuja does not do so".

10. Any good state has to have three types of fortresses, as did Lanka of Ravana. "**Mummadil Ilangai**" describes Parakaala, referring to the natural security of forest, mountain and ocean, mountain and forest—"Kaattaran, Malai aran and Neer aran"

11. **Trisoolam** refers to a three-pronged weapon. Though we normally tend to associate this with the angrier forms of Shakti and with Shiva, (which Sri Tirumangai Mannan refers to as "**Konnavilum moovilai vel**") Trisoolam is also one of the sixteen weapons carried by Sudarsanaazhwan, says Swami Desikan in Paramata Bhangam—"Chezhiya Gadai, Musalam, Tisoolam tigazhdadu".

12. **Trilokam** —refers to the three worlds, those above attained by meritorious



people, those below the earth inhabited by sinners and the ones in-between, populated by people like us. The Lord, as one who supports all these three worlds, is acclaimed in the Sahasranaamam as "Triloka dhrit" and as the overlord of the three worlds, is known as "Trilokesa:", which Azhwar translates as "Moovulagaali". However, the Brihadaaranyakopanishad gives us another set of three worlds—Manushya Lokam, Pitru Lokam and Deva Lokam—"Atha trayo vaava lokaa: manushya lokaa pitru lokaa devaloka iti"

13. **Flowers are of three types**, white ones signifying purity or Sattvam, which are ideal for worshipping the Lord, red ones indicating Raajasic qualities and black ones betraying a Taamasic nature.

14. Since Emperuman is praised by **three types of Saama** mantras, viz., Brihat Saamam, Rathantara Saamam and Vaamadevya Saamam, He is known in Sahasranaamam as "Trisaamaa". When Drona is about to be cremated, brahmanas sang the three Saamaas as part of the cremation rites, the Mahabharatam tells us—

"Agneen aahritya vidhivat chitaam prajvaalya sarvasa:

Dronam aadhaaya gaayanti treeeni Saamaani saamagaa:"

15. The Gita tells us that the purpose of the **Lord's avataaraas is three-fold**—Saadhu Paritraanam or protection of the good, Dushkrit Vinaasanam or destruction of the wicked and Re-establishment of Dharma on a firm footing (Dharma Samstthaapanam).

16. **Tribhangi**: When Sri Krishna held up Govardhana Giri to shield the inhabitants of Gokulam, His tirumeni was stylishly bent at three places, imparting Him additional beauty (if at all that was possible), says Sri Nampillai—"Varshattile novu padugira pasukkalai rakshikkaikkaaga malayai edutthaan avan: appodu tri bhangiyaaai nindra vadivu taan vaalaar aadinaar pole tamakku aakarshakamaai irukkum". However, more than with Sri Krishna, it is Rama who presents a remarkable position of Tribhangi-the face slightly tilted to the



right, the stylish torso inclined to the left and the hip and strong (but slender) legs to the left—"Mukham dakshinato bhangam, madhya kaayam tu vaamata:, kalyanam dakshinato bhangam"



Tribhangi

17. **Pramaanam** or sources of knowledge are three, according to the Yatindra Mata Deepika. They are

- a. Pratyaksham or what we see with our eyes,
- b. Anumaanam or what is deduced through inferences and

"Kaayena kurute paapam manasa sampradhaarya cha
Anritam jihvayaa cha aaha trividham karma paatakam"

says Srimad Ramayanam too.





c. Sabdam, consisting of Vedas.

18. **Three Sources of Sin:** Sins originate from three sources—Mind, Tongue and Body. Sinful thoughts are generated by the mind, the body is used to for the actual performance of wrong deeds, while the tongue utters falsehood knowingly. "yat mayaa manasaa vaachaa karmanaa vaa dushkritam kritam" says the Aghamarshana Sooktam.

Talking of Srimalad Ramayanam, while describing to Sita the enchanting physique of Sri Rama, Hanuman mentions several sets of three;

- **Trishtthira:** Rama's chest, wrists and knees were extremely strong and steady.
- **Trilamba:** His eyebrows, arms and andas were long.
- **Triyunnata:** Rama's stomach, navel and chest were prominent and high.
- **Tritaamra:** The corners of His eyes, nails and soles of His feet were red.
- **Trishu snigdha:** His hair, genitals and feet were smooth.
- **Trishu gambheera:** His speech, gait and majesty were indeed deep and imponderable.
- **Trivaleeyan:** He had three folds of flesh at His neck and stomach.
- **Tryavanata:** His breasts, tips of breasts and the soles of His feet were depressed.
- **Tripaad Vibhooti,** literally translatable as three-parts Vibhooti, refers to Sri Vaikunttam. This follows from the Purusha Sookta vaakyam telling us that all the mundane worlds form but a quarter of the Paramatma's bounty. The balance three quarters belong to the Nitya Vibhooti or Sri Vaikunttam—"Tripaadasya amritam divi".





29. **Three sources of diseases:** Vaadam, Pittam and Sleshmam are three items, which generate diseases if the fine balance among them is disturbed. These are known as "Traya Aamayaa:"

30. **Trisstthaanam:** The three parts of the body from which sounds of the alphabet originate, are collectively called "Trisstthaanam" and they consist of the heart, the throat and the mouth.

31. **Trividha Paapam:** The huge baggage of sin we have accumulated over our innumerable births is classified into- Praarabdhm, Sanchitam and Aagaami. Performance of Prapatti washes off all sins other than a portion of those which have started yielding their poisonous fruit.

32. **Three Types of Prapatti:** When we talk of sins, we should talk also of the universal remedy therefor, viz., Prapatti or Saranagati. This simple but effective strategy is of three kinds, depending on the procedure adopted therefore.

a. A person of impeccable wisdom and conduct directly surrendering his soul to the Lord is known as "Sva Nishtta". Sri Ramanuja's saranagati at the lotus feet of the Divya Dampathi on Panguni Uttaram at Srirangam is a fitting example of this type of Prapatti.

b. The second kind is "Ukti Nishttaa", that adopted by persons with no clear knowledge of tattvam, but with an overwhelming faith in the Lord's qualities as a saviour, uttering the Prapatti mantram after the Acharya, much like parrots.

c. The third procedure, "Acharya Nishttaa", consists of one being included in the Saranaagati performed by the Acharya—"Aachaaryanudaya aatma aatmeeya bhara samarppanathhile taanum antarbhootan".

33. Creation is possible only if three factors come together. These three items are known respectively as Nimitta Kaaranam (The Efficient Cause), Upaadaana



Kaaranam (the Material Cause) and **Sahakaari Kaaranam** (The Accessorial Cause). The oft-quoted example is that of the process of pot-making, with the Potter being the Nimitta Kaaranam, clay being the Upaadaana Kaaranam and the wheel and shaping stick being Sahakaari Kaaranam. In other words, the raw material from which things are created is known as Upaadaana Kaaranam, the accessories required therefor are the Sahakaari Kaaranam and the entity which puts both the material and implements to good use for producing the desired product is known as the Nimitta Kaaranam. In our Visishtadvaita Sampradaayam, Brahman is both the Nimitta Kaaranam and Upaadaana Kaaranam for creation. Addressing Sri Devanatha of Tiruvaheendrapuram, Swami Desikan wonders at His astonishing powers for performing amazing acts, beyond even the contemplation of the most exalted of deities, powers which have been neither heard of or witnessed earlier-:adhbuta shakti:". It is this Shakti which enables Him to create the various worlds with Himself as both the material and efficient cause. Having accommodated all matter and beings in a sublime form in His capacious stomach during Pralaya, He uses the same as the material cause for bringing forth Creation as and when occasion arises. It is His divine will to transform Himself from a Supreme Being with sentient beings and non-sentient objects in their subtle form, forming an inseparable part of Himself, into the Universal Ruler with a full complement of adoring acolytes, manifesting themselves into a gross form. When He wills to become many ("bahu:syaam prajaayeyeti"), He creates the innumerable varieties of beings and objects, all forming His own shareeram.

34. The Three Reasons: If you were asked why you should worship the Lord, His Consort and your Acharya, what would be your reply? To save you the trouble of deep thought, let me quote from the Vaartthaamaalai (158) which furnishes a real reasoning for the aforesaid: We worship Emperuman because:

- a) He generates in us the inclination for liberation and kinkaryam,
- b) He makes us adopt a suitable strategy like Bhakti or Prapatti for attainment of Moksham and



c) He Himself forms the readily-available strategy or Siddhopaayam, with Bhakti or Prapatti forming secondary upaayas.

We worship the Universal Mother because:

- a) She intercedes with Emperuman on behalf sinning mortals like us,
- b) It is She who forms, along with the Lord, the Divine Duo to be attained and to whom all kainkaryam is to be performed and
- c) It is She who allots us the specific service to perform at Paramapadam, taking into account our desires in this regard, thereby affording us the bliss of eternal service—"tat tat paricharyaayaam aagyaapayantyaa".

The Acharya is to be adored because:

- a) He imparts to us indispensable wisdom regarding the Tattvatrayam, Arttha Panchakam, etc.,
- b) He instructs us in ideal modes of conduct towards the Lord and His devotees and
- c) He initiates us into Bhakti or Prapatti and thereby ensures for us a berth at Paramapadam.

35. **Three Types of Sri Vaishnavas:** Aatkonda Villi Jeeyar is reported to have classified Vaishnavas into three categories:

- **Satkaara Yogyar:** Those entitled to honour—these are Bhaagavatas who have just stepped on to the first step of Sri Vaishnavism. They adopt all the outward signs being a Vaishnava and are extremely proud of belonging to the Sampradaayam, but lack the wisdom or conduct as ordained by Acharyas.
- **Sahavaasa Yogyar:** Those in whose company we should make our living:



These Sri Vaishnavas are blessed with Gnaanam and Anushttaanam and the tutelage of a great Acharya.

- **Sadaanubhava Yogyar:** Those whose every action and word are to be enjoyed and emulated by us: These are parama Bhaagavataas whose eyes fill with tears and whose hairs stand up at the very mention of the Lord's name or attributes and who are distressed beyond measure by separation from the Lord and His devotees.

36. **Eeshanaa Trayam:** Every person is plagued by attachment to three factors, which is cumulatively known as Eeshanaa Trayam. Every person, on entering the Sanyaasa Aashramam, is expected to renounce these benumbing triad. These are **Putreshanaa** (attachment to one's progeny), **Dareshanaa** (attachment to the wife) and **Vitteshanaa** (attachment to Wealth and other worldly possessions.)

37. The Yagyopaveetam, which confers on the wearer the eligibility for exploring the rarified corridors of the Shruti/Vedanta, consists of three separate threads and is known as the "**Muppuri Nool**". It is the practice of many Bhaagavataas rich in anushttaanam to wear three Yagyopaveetams (instead of the two usually worn by house-holders). In the case of ladies, the Mangala Sootram which takes the place of Yagyopaveetam, is tied with three knots.

38. **Mukkani:** The tastiest fruits are three—Maa, Palaa and Vaazhai—mango, jack fruit and banana, known collectively as Mukkani.

39. Normally, prizes for any competition or event are awarded in sets of three—first, second and third prizes.

40. The Mudal Azhwaars, forerunners of the twelve apostles of devotion, are three—Poigai Azhwar, Peyaazhwar and Bhootattaazhwar.

41. The confluence of the **three rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati** is acclaimed as the holiest of waters—the Trivanee Sangamam at Prayag (present



day Allahabad).

42. The ancient Tamizh language is often called "**Muttamizh**" as it consists of literature in prosaic, poetic and dramatic forms. Swami Desikan's prabandams are indeed an adornment to the three types of Tamizh—"Cheppa sevikku amudenna tigazhum chezhum gunatthu....muppatthu irandivai mutthamizh sernda mozhi tiruve".

43. Granting that Sanskrit is older than English, the commonness of words in the two languages (Tri: and Three) denoting the number under discussion, indicates that English has indeed borrowed from Sanskrit.

44. Three is a Prime Number, not divisible by any other.

45. My son tells me of the Doberenier's Triads about which he has just read in Chemistry. This principle lays down that when elements are arranged in the order of increasing atomic masses in a triad, the atomic mass of the middle element is equal to the average of the atomic masses of the other two elements.

46. The ancient dynasties which ruled Tamizh Nadu were again three in number—Cheras, Chozhas and Pandyas. These lines of rulers are so ancient that the Pandya Raja finds a mention in Srimad Ramayanam.

47. And in recent times, all music lovers pay obeisance to a **Musical Trinity**, viz., Sri Tyaagaraja Swamy, Sri Muthuswamy Deekshitar and Sri Syaama Shastri.

48. All our troubles stem from three types of sources—**Aadyaatmikam** (resulting from the body), **Aadibhoutikam** (caused by other persons) and **Aadidaivikam** (resulting from divine forces like rain, sun, etc).

49. **Avastthaa Trayam**: The Varaahopanishad classifies states of wakefulness into **Jaagrata** or the fully-awake state, **Swapnam** or the dreaming stage and **Sushupti**, which is deep, dreamless sleep.



50. There are three modes of worshipping Emperuman, according to the Uddhava Gita—Vaidikam (as is used in most of the sannidhis in Tamilnadu, Taantrikam (in vogue in Keralite temples) and Misram (a mixture of the first two).

"Vaidika: Taantrika: Misra: iti me trividho makha:

Trayaanaam eepsitena eva vidhinaa maam samarchayet"

51. Three years was the time taken by Vyasa Maharshi to compose the Mahabharatam—three years of continuous composition, without sleep—

"Tribhi: varshai: sadaa utthaayee Krishna Dvaiypaayano muni:

Mahaabhaaratam aakhyaanam kritavaan idam uttamam"



vedavyasa took 3 years to compose mahabharata.

52. The Manusmriti tells us never to offend three types of beings: Kings, Serpents and a wise Brahmin, even if they have fallen on lean times.



"Kshatriyam chaiva Sarpam cha Braahmanam cha bahushrutam

Na avamanyeta vai bhooshnu: krisaan api kadaachana".

53. **Three are the sources of Dharma.** The first and foremost is the Shruti, next are the Smritis (Dharma Shaastras) and the third, the conduct of good men, says the Mahabharata—

"Veda: paramo dharma: Dharma Shaastreshu cha apara:

Sishtaacheernascha sishtaanaam trividham Dharma lakshanam"

54. If we regard Dharmam as a great tree, three are its principal branches—Yagyam, Adhyayanam and Daanam, says the Chaandogyopanishad—"Trayo dharma: skandhaa: yagyo adhyayanam daanam iti"

55. **Three Fathers:** Apart from one's actual father, two others too are to be revered and regarded as equal to the parent: these are one's elder brother and teacher/Guru. There are thus three fathers one is blessed with, according to Srimad Ramayanam—

" Jyeshtto bhraataa pitaa chaiva yascha vidyaam prayacchati

Triaste pitaro gyeyaa dharma cha pathi vartina:"

56. **The Three Sons:** Apart from one's actual son, one's younger brother and disciple are to be regarded as sons—

"Yaveeyaan sodara: putra: sishyaschaapi gunodita:

Putravat te traya: chintyaa: dharmaschet atra kaaranam"

57. Three again are the great sins that arise from a wrong mind-set, according to Sita Devi—they are a. Uttering Untruth, b. coveting another man's wife and c. fighting with someone with absolutely no reason—

"Treenyeva vyasanaani atra kaamajaani bhavantyuta





Mithyaa vaakyam gurutaram tasmaat gurutarou ubhou

Para daara abhigamanam vinaa vairam cha roudarataa"

Three sins are said to lead to one's downfall—hankering after others' belongings, coveting others' wives and doubting the sincerity of one's close friends—

"Parassvaanaam cha haranam para daara abhimarsanam

Suhridamm ati sankam cha trayo doshaa: kshayaavahaa:"

58. Depending upon Her location vis-à-vis the Lord at temples, Sri Mahalakshmi is classified into three types by the Isvara Samhita-

- a. Yoga Lakshmi, resting in the Srivatsa on the Lord's chest ("Srivatsagaa")
- b. Bhoga Lakshmi, standing by the Lord's side ("Paarsvagaa") and
- b. Vira Lakshmi, installed at a separate sannidhi as a "tanikkoil Naacchiaar" and worshipped independently, while the first two forms receive worship along with Emperuman.

59. **Veda vaakyaas** are of three types—

a. **Vidhi:** These sentences of the Shruti prescribe a particular Karma or course of action: e.g. Svargakaamo yajeta, (those desiring to attain Swargam, perform this yagyam) etc.

b. **Arttha Vaadam** is the portion of the Vedas which praises the Karma ordained by the Vidhi vaakyaas, to induce the performer to perform karma.

c. **Mantram:** These sentences prescribe the procedure for the performance of the karma ordained by the Vidhi vaakyaas.





60. Sri Ramanuja might have composed no less than 9 great works, most of them mighty tomes, weighty both in the physical and spiritual sense. However, three among them stand out—the **Gadyatrayam**—as they display his deep devotion and for highlighting the strategy of Prapatti, of which he doesn't deal in detail elsewhere in his writings, except as an aid to Bhakti. Thus, the **Saranaagati Gadyam**, the **Sri Ranga Gadyam** and the **Vaikuntta Gadyam** are unparalleled paeans in prose addressed to the Paramatma, which are majestic in composition, mighty in purport and a pleasure to listen and recite.

61. **Three Genders**: Nature creates people in three moulds—Male, Female and Neuter, each category serving its own intended purpose. However, the Lord cannot be classified into any of these three categories, says Sri Nammazhwar—**"Aan allan, Pen allan, allaa Aliyum allan"**. The use of the male word-ending ("allan") by Azhwar here is quite significant, about which we shall see in detail some other time.

62. The complete family unit consists of a minimum of three members. The Shruti doesn't favour an existence as a single, whether it be male or female. **"Ardho vaa esha aatmana; yat patnee:"** say the Vedas, in an original enunciation of the concept of the "better half". However, it is no use staying as mere husband and wife and a couple should necessarily graduate to the status of parents, without which their lives are not complete—**"Prajayaa hi manushya: poorna:"**. Thus for a family to be complete, we must necessarily have a minimum of a man, his wife and a child.

63. We know that the basic necessities of life are three—Food, Clothing and Shelter. In the Sampradaayam too, we have three similar concepts—**Dhaarakam** (life-support), **Poshakam** (that which helps us to sustain and flourish) and **Bhogyam** (which affords immense pleasure). This is brought out by Sri Nammazhwar's words, describing Kanna Piraan as **"Unnum soru, parugum neer, tinnum vettrilai ellaam Kannan Emperuman"**.

64. Shastras tell us that the sources of cure for any malady are three in



number—Mani, Mantram and Oushadham. This is brought out by Sri Kulasekhara Perumal in his Mukunda Mala, with three slokas describing Emperuman as all the aforesaid three. In slokas beginning with "Bhaktaapaaya bhujanga Gaaruda Mani:" "Shatrucchetaika Mantram" and "Vyaamoha prasamoushadham", Azhwar tells us that the Lord is indeed Mani, Mantram and Oushadham, and is the sole solution for all our problems.

65. **Three Schools of Vedanta:** Major schools of Philosophy which accept the authority of the Shruti are again three. Advaitam advocates the identity of the supreme soul and the individual soul, declaring only the Parabrahmam to be real and all the rest to be illusory. Dvaitam, on the other hand, argues that the Ultimate and the Jeevaatma can never be one and are indeed two distinctly separate entities. Visishtaavaitam toes the middle and more logical path, accepting the existence of both the Paramatma and other beings, with the qualification that the latter form the former's body. The beauty of this formulation is that unlike the other two schools of thought, it doesn't discard inconvenient and contradictory passages of the Shruti, but reconciles them to show the essential harmony of all Veda vaakyaas.

66. **Prasthaana Trayam:** As we know only too well, it is difficult for philosophers to agree on anything. However, if all the aforesaid schools of thought are unanimous about something, it is that the Upanishads, Bhagavat Gita and Brahma Sootras form the basis of all philosophical thought and are acceptable praamaanas.

67. Last, but by no conceivable means the least, we have the glorious Sampradayam that is famed as the Munitraya Sampradayam, tracing its origins to and owing allegiance to the tenets of three great souls—Sri Nathamuni, Sri Yamuna Muni and Sri Ramanuja Muni and which has been blessed by Mahans like Sri Upanishad Bhaashyakara, Sri Saakshaat Swami, Sri Tirukkudandai Desikan and a glorious lineage of later Acharyas.



Munitrayam- Nathamuni-yamunamuni-Lakshmanamuni

Well, true to the title of this essay, the number three has indeed resulted in a crowd--of words, information and quotes--and it is perhaps time to end this rather long saga, which has run to no less than 25 pages. Let me end in style with a beautiful paasuram of Sri Periyazhwar, in which he quotes quite a few triads

" Moondru ezhuttu adanai moondru ezhuttinaal moondru ezhuttaakki
Endru kondru iruppaarkku irakka nan kudayaam Purushotthaman irukkai
Moondradi nimirndu moondrinil tondri moondrinil moondru uru aanaan
Kaan tadam pozhil soozh Gangaiyin karai mel Kandam ennum kadi nagare"

Srimate Sri LakshmiNrisimha divya paduka sevaka SrivanSatakopa

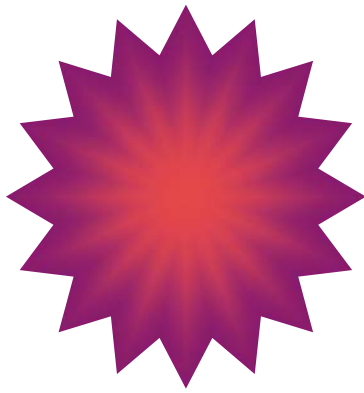
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