

Soundaryalahari :

A Digest of Kanchi Mahaswamigal's Discourses

Introduction

For the benefit of those who do not know about the Mahaswamigal here is a brief biographical note:

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal (1894 - 1994), also once known as the Mahaswamigal, was the sage of Kanchi in Tamilnadu, India, who was so simple, humble, profound, enlightened, compassionate, scholarly and full of Grace that he naturally and effortlessly touched the hearts of men and women, prince and pauper, around the world. Ascending to the Headship of the Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt at the age of thirteen as the 68th pontiff in the line of succession from Adi Shankara, he ministered to the needs of the afflicted and the distressed and spread the message of compassion and of a return to the most treasured ancient values. After a mission like this full of action for almost half a century which included a 30-year walking pilgrimage of the entire subcontinent of India, he laid down his headship and devoted his time, for the next forty years, to severe penance for universal welfare. Not one of those thousands who had his *darshan* every day missed to feel the soul-stirring presence of 'the Living God' in their veins.

A small note on the limited objective of this digest.

The name 'Digest' itself is too much of a claim by this writer, who has just studied the discourses in Tamil (on Soundaryalahari – a 100-*shloka* piece, in Sanskrit) of the Mahaswamigal, in 'Deivathin Kural' – meaning, 'The Voice of God' – in Tamil, in the sixth volume of the seven-volume series of that name, recorded by and, rewritten in, the inimitable style of, Ra. Ganapathi. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, has published an English translation of this. Without reading that I have attempted here in this digest to test myself whether I had understood at least a part of the Mahaswamigal's thoughts. The best way of testing oneself is to try to communicate to others. There are a number of readers interested in the subject. Some of them know Tamil and probably would have read Ra Ganapathi's book in the original. Some others may have read the English version. The purpose of this digest is TO BRING THE ADVAITA PART (and the relevant questions that arise usually in the discussions that are very common in the discussions on advaita) TO THE FOCUS AND ACQUAINT OURSELVES WITH THE MAHASWAMIGAL'S VIEWS, WONDERFUL ELABORATIONS AND COMMENTS ON THE SUBJECT. As a consequence of this objective, I have not covered all the *shlokas* even out of the 42, the only ones which the Mahaswamigal himself has covered in full (he has covered another 37 in part, another 10 just in passing, and has not touched at all the remaining 11, which are *shloka* Nos.19, 32, 68, 72, 76 to 81, 85). Even within the exposition of a particular *shloka*, large portions have been omitted by me. In spite of all this the 'Digest' – contrary to the meaning of the word - is rather long. It is broken into 81 Sections. Each section happened to be a post on the web in some leading groups who had an interest in advaita as well as in Mother Goddess. Note that the original extends to 744 pages (pp.577 to 1321 of the sixth volume, 4th impression). The attempt has been made, therefore, to be as brief as possible. But, wherever it is found that the Mahaswamigal's already lucidly forceful and simple explanations cannot be 'digested

through a further precis or summary', I have resorted to almost a close (or free !) translation of his words as reported by Ra. Ganapathi. And also it may be noted that I, as the digest writer, have not dwelt on those portions of the discourses that were not reasonably clear to me. The postings on the Yahoo lists (advaitin; advaita-L, *ambaa*, and sadhana_ *Shakti*) took place from August 2003 to April 2004. The whole venture has actually been a *swAdhyAya-yajna*, that is, a yajna of study. I pray to the Mahaswamigal himself as well as my own Guru and father, (late) Sri R. Visvanatha Sastri, that what has finally turned out does not misrepresent either the Mahaswamigal or the Soundaryalahari !

On the organization of this 'Digest'

The entire exposition is by the Mahaswamigal. So the first person pronoun, wherever it occurs, is his. The 'I' of advaita-vedanta is always within quotes. Additional explanations given by Ra. Ganapathi are so acknowledged. And note that the Mahaswamigal most often refers to Adi Sankaracharya as 'Our Acharya'.

V. Krishnamurthy

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(Digest of pp.581-583)

“How could Adi Shankara, who preached the *jnAna mArga*, have promoted this work (Soundaryalahari) of *bhakti*? It cannot be his,” say some who profess 'Philosophy'. But our Acharya was not a professor who isolated philosophy as a separate discipline. Having written very profoundly on advaita and its deepest implications in his several commentaries and the other works of his, he promoted the spiritual pursuit of the common man by writing and talking about the need to follow one's *swadharma* by *Karma* and *Bhakti*. His intent was to raise the common man from his own level. For this purpose he went from one pilgrim centre to another all his life and composed hymns after hymns and also established *yantras* in temples.

The philosophers argue: *JnAni* says everything is One. But *Bhakti* can happen only when there is the duality of the devotee and the deity. Therefore, they say, the *jnAni* can never be a *bhakta*. These philosophers cannot themselves claim to have the Enlightenment of advaita ! But there have been those who could have so claimed, like the sage Suka, Madhusudana Saraswati or Sadasiva-brahmam. If we carefully study their lives we will know that they had been devotees of God in the fullest sense of the word and have themselves written works of *Bhakti*. Even in our own times Ramakrishna Paramahansa has been a great devotee of Mother Goddess. Ramana Maharishi has done works of devotion on God *Arunachalesvara*. Again, on the other side, great devotees like Manikka-vasagar, Nammazhvar, Arunagiri-nathar, Tayumanavar, etc. have themselves been convinced advaitins, and this is reflected in innumerable flashes in their compositions.

If a *jnAni* should not do a *Bhakti* composition, then I would say that he should not also do a work of *jnAna*. Why am I saying this? Let us go back to the definition of a *jnAni*. ‘The world is all *mAyA*; the thinking of people as if they were separate separate *jIvAtmAs* is nothing but Ignorance’ - with such a conviction through personal experience, they have thrown away that Ignorance as well as its basic locus, the mind, and they live in the non-dualistic state of ‘I’ am everything’ – such should be the status of the *jnAni*; shouldn’t it be so? Such a person preaching, or writing a book, even if it be about the subject of *jnAna* – is it not a contradiction? Unless such a person thinks there is a world outside of him and there are *jIvAtmAs* outside, how can he think of ‘teaching’? Teaching whom? And when we look at it this way, all those great teachers of *jnAna* should really not be *jnAnis* ! What power will there be for such a teaching about *jnAna* from teachers who are not *jnAnis* themselves?

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(Digest of pp.584-587)

On the other hand what do we observe in our experience? Whether it is the teaching about *jnAna* in the Gita, or the Viveka Chudamani of our Acharya, or the Avadhuta Gita of Sri Dattatreya or the teaching in the *Yoga-vASiShTa*, or a song of Tayumanavar – even as we just read these we feel we are being taken beyond the curtain created by *mAyA* to some distant peaceful state of Calm. Just by reading, in one’s spiritually ripe stage, such teachings, there have been people who have renounced the world and reached the state of Bliss-in-one-Self! If these teachings had not been written from that spiritual apex of Experiential Excellence, how could such things have ever happened?

Therefore, however much by our intellectual logic, we may argue whether a *jnAni* can get *bhakti*, how the *jnAni* can do any preaching and so such possibilities cannot exist and so on, these are certainly happening, by the Will of the Lord which is beyond the Possible and the Impossible.

It is only the Play of the Lord that, the *jnAni*, who is non-dualistic internally, appears to do things in the dualistic world. His mind may have vanished, *mAyA* might have been transcended by him; but that does not mean the outside world of *jIvAtmAs* has disintegrated. What do we gather from this? There is a Super-Mind which does all this and in some mysterious way is compering and directing the entire universe. And it also means it is the same Supra-Mind that is making the minds of men revolve in the illusion of *mAyA*. It is that Power which is known in advaita scriptures as *saguNa-brahman* or *Ishvara*. In the scriptures devoted to *Shakti* or Shiva, whenever they call the Actionless nirguNa-Brahman as ‘*ShivaM*’ they call this *saguNa-brahman* as ‘*Shakti*’, ‘*parA-shakti*’ or ‘*ambAL*’. Just as that *nirguNa-Brahman* exhibits itself and acts

as the *saguNa-brahman*, so also, it must be presumed, that the enlightened *jnAni* also does his external actions and that again, is the work of the *saguNa-brahman*!

What is the path of *jnAna*? It is the effort through self-enquiry and meditation for the eradication of the mind and vanquishing of *mAyA*. But the other path is to dedicate oneself and all one's thoughts and actions to that very *parA-shakti* (who produced this *mAyA* on us) with an attitude of devotion. It is like giving the house-key to the thief himself ! However much the *parA-shakti* may play with you and toss you and your mind hither and thither, Her infinite compassion cannot be negated. Only when we separate and rejoin, we realise the value of that union. To pray to Her for that reunion and for Her to get us back to Her in answer to our prayers – this is the great *LeelA* of Duality wherein She exhibits Her Infinite Compassion ! So when one prays with *Bhakti* for such release She releases Him by giving Him that Wisdom of Enlightenment.

It is wrong to think that the goal of *Bhakti* lies in the dualistic attitude of being separate from God. It is by this wrong assumption that people ask the question: How can a *jnAni* exhibit *Bhakti*? In the very path of *Bhakti* wherein it appears there is an embedded duality, the same *Bhakti* would lead the practitioner to the stage where he will ask: Oh God! May I be one with You! This is the subtle point which the questioning people miss. When that stage comes to the devotee, the very *parA-shakti* known as *kArya-brahman* or *saguNa-brahman* will bless him with that *jnAna* that takes him to the non-dual *kAraNa-brahman* or *nirguNa-brahman*.

Not everybody can practise the path of *jnAna* that brings the realisation of the *mahA-vAkyas* by *sraVaNa* (hearing), *manana* (thinking and recalling) and *nididhyAsana* (contemplating). Only when the mind vanishes one can realise the Self as the Absolute *Brahman*. If that is so, the real question is: How to kill the truant mind, which refuses to be subdued, much less vanquished ? The very effort of vanquishing the mind has to be done by the mind only. How can it kill itself ? The palm can slap another; but it cannot slap itself. Though we are thus brought to a dilemma, there is a supreme power which has created all these minds. So instead of self-effort to kill our minds, we should leave it to the *parA-shakti* and surrender to Her. Instead of falling at the feet of the witness for the prosecution we fall at the feet of the prosecutor himself ! Then She will help us quell the mind; She will grace us with the necessary *jnAna*.

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(Digest of pp.587 - 590)

Either She might totally eradicate your mind and give you the peaceful state of 'I am shiva' (*shivoham*) or She might tell you from within:

“Look, after all, all this is My Play. The Play appears real to you because of *mAyA*. I shall totally erase that *mAyA*-view for you. Then you can also be like me, with that calm non-dual bliss inside and having on the outside a mind which is untouched by *mAyA*. Thereby you can also be a witness to all this worldly Dance. You will thus see yourself in Me and see Me in all the worldly multiplicities. In other words instead of making the mind non-existent, your mind will then be full of Me”

And She might make you just exactly that way. But I know your worry. You constantly worry about the impossibility of transcending *mAyA*, of eradicating this worldly vision and of vanquishing the mind. You keep worrying to the extent of almost weeping over it. To such a weiling seeker She replies:

“Why do you worry and weep like this? You are worrying that you cannot discard the world from your view. But you forget that the world was not your making. This Sun and Moon, mountains, trees, oceans, animal kingdom, and the millions of living beings and categories – all this was not created by you.

“When that is so, you are worrying about the little ‘you’ that you are, and you forget that this little ‘you’ also was not your creation. Instead of thinking all this is not only one but one with Me, your *mAyA*-clouded view makes you think they are all different and distinct. And even that *mAyA*-view that clouds you, again was not your making!

“My dear child, you are caught up in the web of the world, a mind and a *MAyA*-cloud -- all this is My making. Did I not make Krishna say to you: mama *mAyA* duratyayA ? (My *mAyA* is intranscendable). I have also told you there that it is ‘daivi’ (made by the Power of God). If you had made it all, then you could have overcome them. But it was all made by Me in the fullness of Power.

“You *jivas* have only little fragments of that Power. So if you cannot eradicate the world, the mind and the *MAyA* that I have made, you don’t have to cry over it. It is not in your Power. It has to take place only by My Grace. Come nearer to Me through Devotion ! I shall do the eradication in proper doses for you.

“That somebody is able to control his mind and is able to walk on the path of *jnAna* – that again is My own Grace. It is I who have granted that privilege to him. What appears as many and different must be seen as one. To crave for that view is what is called ‘advaita-vAsanA’. One gets it only by My Grace”.

(Now the Mahaswamigal, who has been talking in the words of the Mother Goddess, continues on his own).

There is another novelty here. Even the *jnAni* who has had the non-dual Enlightenment, still enjoys the play of *mAyA*. He sees the different things; but knows they are all one. Just as a spectator of a play who is not playing any role in it, the *jnAni* enjoys the playful novelties of *mAyA* and revels in his devotion to that parA-Sakthi who is the author of it all. To be keeping such *jnAnis* in this dual-non-dual state is also the

work of Mother Goddess. Mark it. It is not that the *jnAni* is showing Devotion just for the sake of others only. No, By himself he is indeed thinking

(I think the Mahaswamigal is here letting out an autobiographical tip !)

‘What a pleasure to witness this dualistic play of the non-dualistic One ! What a multiplicity of beauty, panoramic variety and continuity of Love !’ . Thus revelling in that blissful vision, he continues to pour out his own love (*bhakti*) to that Transcendental Power from the bottom of his heart. This tribute to the *jnAni* has been given by the great Teacher Suka himself.

(Cf. Bhagavatam 1-7-10:

AtmArAmAshca munayaH nirgranthA apy-urukrame;
kurvanty-ahaitukIm *bhakti*m itham-bhUta-guNo hariH. – meaning,
Those who revel in the Self, even though rid of all attachments,
show a causeless *bhakti* towards the Lord, just naturally.)

On the one hand the devotee who has yet to get the Enlightenment enjoys the devotional state for the very reason of getting the Enlightenment; on the other hand, the one who is already enlightened and is a *jIvan-mukta* shows his *bhakti* for the sake of enjoyment of that *bhakti* and not for any other reward or purpose.

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(Digest of pp.590-592, 608-613)

(The Mahaswamigal continues to speak the words, as if, of the Goddess):

“Thus I am the One who gives this new *Bhakti* in the state of *jnAna*. And I will be the One who will give you that *jnAna* to you, my devotee, when the time is ripe. Don’t you worry. You have come to Me as your Mother. I will take care of you. The bondage in which I threw you shall be removed from you by Myself. You need not have to keep on crying for ‘Release’. Once you know I am the only One there is, hold on to that steadfastly; there is no question of ‘Release’ thereafter. ‘Release’ from what?

“Let *jnAnis* think that they will get the Ultimate Peace only when the duality-awareness goes away from them and let them go their own way of Enquiry of the Self. When you feel you don’t have the interest or the stamina to go that way, don’t feel bad or incomplete. Come through the path of Love. See the multiplicities. But instead of seeing them as different and separate, try not to forget that the basis of all of them is the single Me. Love Me from your heart and view everything through Love. Encompass everything in Love. I shall raise you to the Ultimate Enlightenment by My Love and Grace”.

Thus arises the godly experience that is blessed by the Mother Goddess. By Mother Goddess I also mean the Lord-God, the *paramAtmA*, and also the individual favourite deity of each of us. It is the same

supreme Power that engulfs you into the *mAyA*, that graces you as *saguNa-brahman* and also takes you to that blissful state of *jnAna*.

Finally let me also say this. By the very fact that the *jnAni* writes a book on *jnAna*, it must follow that he should also write on *Bhakti*. For, writing a book means communicating with others. So that means he has accepted the presence of a world of duality in which he has to communicate and educate. The *jnAni* as he is, must have already 'descended' to this world of duality and decided to raise the commonfolk to his level. He who knows that the source of all this duality is that Infinite Compassionate God-principle, would ipso facto have no compunctions for making a hymn of praise for that Ultimate in Its *saguNa* form. And he also knows that it is that very same Power that prods him on to make this hymn. So where is the contradiction here?

But if you contend that he is writing *jnAna* works for the benefit of the world – '*loka-sangrahArtham*' without any '*kartRtva-buddhi*' -- the awareness of doership – then with the same non-awareness of doership he can write both *jnAna* works and *bhakti* works. What and where is the difference? The World-welfare (*loka-kalyANam*) is the purpose. It is the Lord who is effecting the welfare through the hands and mouth of these chosen *jnAnis*. And the most efficient way for the *jnAni*, the Lord knows, to reach the masses, is to propagate hymns of praise of the divine, pilgrimage to holy centers, installation of mystic *yantras*, and all the way down to ritual worship.

There are three superlative hymns of praise on Mother Goddess in the form of Lalita. Chronologically they are: '*AryA-dvishati*' (also called '*lalitA-stava-ratnam*') a 200-*shloka* piece by Sage Durvasa; '*Soundarya-lahari*' which is actually made up of two parts – '*Ananda-lahari*', a 41-*shloka* piece brought from Kailas by Adi Shankara and '*Soundarya-lahari*' the 59-*shloka* piece composed by Adi Shankara himself, the two pieces together going by the popular name of Soundaryalahari by Adi Shankara; and '*Panca-shati*' (a 500-*shloka* piece) by the poet Muka.

Durvasa's *AryA-dvishati* gives us a spiritual experience of the presence of the Almighty-Goddess in the very words of *AryA-dvishati*. In this he describes the complicated structure of the *ShrI-chakra*. The Goddess's Grace descends on those who read and recite such hymns of praise composed by great devotees who have already merited the descent of Her Grace on them. Durvasa, Adi Shankara and Muka are three such. Such Grace exhibits itself first in the eloquence of these hymns. And the result is, the devotee who revels in the recitation and repetition of these hymns, himself gets that eloquence and flow of language and of speech.

The Goddess gave such an eloquence to Muka. '*MUka*' means 'dumb'. We do not know what name he had before. But from the moment he composed the five hundred *shlokas* in Her praise, we have known him

as the poet Muka !. Both the *AryA-dvishati* and the *MUka-pancashati* bring to our vision the majestic splendour of the form of Mother Goddess like an expert painter's masterly painting. The third one, the Soundaryalahari is the crowning glory of all three and of all hymns of praise of the Mother Supreme.

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(Digest of pp.614 -622, 645-654)

Of Soundaryalahari it may be said that there never was one like it, nor ever will be. It has a perennial charm that does not satiate. And its majestic eloquence is unbeatable. In his *bhaja-govindam* our Acharya uses very elementary words because it happens to be the alphabet of Vedanta. But here he is describing the undescribable. So he uses words very precisely. Consequently the vocabulary turns out to be difficult. But the words chosen only add to the lilting charm of the poetry that he weaves. The metre used is '*shikariNP*', meaning 'that which is at the apex'. It has 17 syllables for each of the four lines.

Through the descriptions of the Goddess's form that make up the latter 59 *shlokas*, he brings *ambaal* right before our mental eyes in all Her majesty, grace and splendour and overwhelms us by the bliss which the very words and metaphors pour on us. Just as a master-sculptor dedicates each movement of his chisel to the object of his sculpture, he transforms each word, as it were, by his own spiritual experience of the Goddess and thus in turn we readers feel the words themselves constitute the Goddess.

It is not only blissful poetry, but blessed poetry. Such blessedness arises not because of any flowery language, but by the fact the Acharya is himself blessed ! 'Mother, this hymn is nothing but a composition of yours in your own words' ('*tvadIyAbhir-vAgbhiH tava janani vAcAm stutir-iyam*' - *shloka* #100), says he in the concluding line. Inspirations of great saints and sages, not only benefit mankind by their inspired poetry, but bring to successive generations, an inspired contact with the great men, even long after they have passed away. Thus our Acharya in enabling us to have a '*darshan*' of the Goddess herself, gives us, in addition, a '*darshan*' of himself !

The concept of 'intense' devotion does not care for the language used, or for the manner of worship. It is the intensity of devotion and depth of feeling that matter. But getting that intensity and depth is the most difficult thing. That is exactly what eludes us. Now that is where the beauty of such blessed poetry like Soundaryalahari excels. Whether you understand it or not, whether you pronounce the words correctly or not, the very attempt itself of reciting it produces in you the needed *bhakti*! This is the word-power of the words of such blessed poetry. The vibrations of the words give us all the material and spiritual success.

We have only to keep the objective of *bhakti* steadfast in our minds. Everything else just follows.

Of all the *stotras* that our Acharya has done, it is the Soundaryalahari that is the topmost. The *aShTottara-nAmAvaLi* of the Acharya has the *nAmA* '*soundarya-laharI-mukhya-bahu-stotra-vidhAyakAya namaH*' meaning: 'prostrations to the one who composed many *stotras* with soundaryalaharI as the prime one'. Of the *BhAshyas* that he wrote, '*brahma-sUtra-bhAshya*' towers supreme; of his expository works, '*viveka-chUDamaNi*' is prime and of all his works of *bhakti*, the SoundaryalaharI tops the list.

SundarI, the beautiful, is Her name. *MahA-tripura-sundarI* or just, *tripura-sundarI*, both derived from the root name, *SundarI*, is the Goddess propitiated by the great *mantra* called '*Shri-vidyA*'. Of the many names of *ambaal*, such as *PArvatI*, *durgA*, *KALI*, *BALA*, *BhuvaneshvarI*, etc., it is the *SundarI* name that goes with '*RAja-rAjesvarI*', the Queen-name of all the scriptures that talk of and dwell on the Mother Goddess. Sage Ramakrishna has said: I have seen many forms of Gods and Goddesses; but I have never seen one more charming than '*tripura-sundarI*'! The word '*soundaryam*' pertains to *SundarI* and means 'The Beauty'.

But the beauty of it all is, that the name '*tripura-sundarI*' or any of the other (synonymous) names of the same form, namely, '*Lalita*', '*RAja-rAjeshvarI*', '*KAmAkshI*' or '*KaAmeshvarI*' do not occur anywhere in the text, including its title! Even the other descriptive names of the Goddess like '*hima-giri-suta*' (daughter of Himalaya mountain), or simply, *giri-suta*, *shivA*, *bhavAnI*, *uma*, *satI*, *pArvatI*, *chanDI* – occur only at one or two places. General attributed names, like '*jananI*', '*mAta*', '*amba*', '*devI*' meaning either 'mother' or 'goddess', -- which commonly go with all feminine deities -- occur at a few more places, but even they are few.

While he begins with '*shivaH-shaktyA*', the most potent name of *ambaal*, namely '*Shakti*', gets mentioned. '*Shakti*' means 'power'. It is the absolute *Brahman*'s power or energy that *ambaal* personifies. So this name tells everything about the Goddess. And it comes in the very beginning, but never after.

(In *shloka* #32, the word '*Shakti*' appears but there it is a code-word for a syllable in *ambaal*'s *mantra*).

Finally, one more point regarding occurrence of names. The role of a woman has three stages: as daughter, as wife, as mother. The last two roles certainly do get mentioned very often in *stotras* pertaining to a feminine deity. But the Soundaryalahari uses the daughter-reference such as '*himagiri-sute*', '*tuhina-giri-kanye*', more often. And again, when the first part of 41 *shlokas* ends, he ends by referring to '*janaka-jananI*', the mother-father role of both *Ishvara* and *IshvarI* of the whole universe.

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(Digest of pp.675-686)

(This part is entitled: “The title: ‘Ananda-lahari’ – advaitam and ShAktam”. The matter is rather terse. But the Maha-Swamigal himself concludes by saying: “What is finally to be understood as the essence is the following:” This summary is translated here as closely as possible.)

The *shAkta* philosophy (*ShAktaM*) talks of ‘*ShivaM*’ in place of the actionless substratum ‘*Brahman*’. Even if it is actionless, it is Cit, knowledge, says advaita. In place of this Cit, *ShAktaM* talks of Cit-*Shakti* or simply, *Shakti*. The *Brahman* of advaita peacefully rests in itself. In *ShAktaM*, on the other hand, the peaceful *ShivaM* has the *Shakti*, power or energy, that manifests as knowledge potential (Cit-*Shakti*) and this manifestation is its play as the multiplicity of the universe. In advaita there is no second. What appears as the universe is only an appearance created by *MAYa*. *MAYa* has no relationship with *Brahman*. What it is, and how it came – all this is inexplicable. That research is not necessary. What is needed is how to get out of it and obtain the personal realisation of the basic *Brahman* behind. And hence the path of *jnAna*. In *ShAktaM*, it is claimed that the play of duality starts by the Will of *ShivaM* coupled with *Shakti*. Even here there is a role of *MAYa-Shakti*. But we shall dwell on it later.

It is *Brahman* that appears as *jIva*, through the effect of *MAYa*. If one follows the path of *jnAna* and transcends *MAYa*, then *jIva* realises itself as *Brahman*, says advaita. In *ShAktaM* also it says that the *jIva* and *ShivaM* are basically the same and actually become the same in the state of *mokshha*; particularly in the *ShrI-vidyA* scriptures it is specifically accepted so. Dvaitam, VishishhTAdvaitam, SiddhAnta-shaivism (Shaiva-siddhantam), *ShrIkaNTa*-shaivism (ShivAdvaitam), Kashmiri Saivism – in this order, the philosophies start from a concept totally distinct from advaita, gradually nearing and ultimately becoming very near to advaita.

And in *ShrI-vidyA* the identity of *jIva* with *Brahman* is clearly stipulated. The two philosophies differ only in the concept of creation. In advaita, duality is said to be only an imagination and so is to be totally negated. In *shAkta* philosophies, duality is said to be created by parA-*Shakti*, the energy of *Brahman*. It is also the parA-*Shakti* that grants the *mokshha*, which is the identity of *Brahman* and *jIva* in eternal peaceful bliss. This bliss is called *shivAnandam* and/or *shAntAnandam* in the shaivite schools, and *cidAnandam* in the *shAkta* schools.

There is no difference in the concept of *mokshha* as the realisation of the one-ness of *jIva* and *Brahman*, between advaita schools and the *ShrI-vidyA tantra* of the *shAkta* schools. The philosophy of advaita takes creation as a ‘*vivarta*’ (a false appearance, manifestation, of reality) whereas the *ShrI-vidyA* school takes it as ‘*AbhAsa*’ (an effulgence of a ‘reflection’). That the sun appears as a reflection in water is ‘*AbhAsa*’. In

the same way the universal Cit-*Shakti* reflects itself with a limitation and becomes the *jIva* as well as the universe -- this is the *shAkta* concept of creation. But without the original object called the Sun there could be no reflection. So in basics it comes back to the advaita concept. But the *shAkta* holds that to the extent there is an object with its reflection, there is a phenomenal reality for *jIva* and the universe. It does not hold that it is 'mithyA' which is the advaitin's contention.

It is the latter part of Soundaryalahari that dwells on the beauty (saundaryam) of *ambaal's* form. The former part dwells on Her *Shakti*. It is called *Ananda-lahari*. The identity between *Shakti* and Cit is referred to in the word '*cidAnandalahari*' in verse #8 of Anandalahari. "*bhajanti tvAm dhanyAH katicana cidAnanda-laharIm*", meaning, 'Only the most fortunate few (recognize you and) worship you as the flood of knowledge-bliss (*cidAnanda*)'. Note here that while for every reader of the Soundaryalahari portion the whole beauty of Mother Goddess is fully experiential, in the Anandalahari portion the people who can experience the bliss of the *Shakti-lahari*, that is, the *cidAnanda-lahari*, are only the few fortunate (*katicana dhanyAH*) !

The close correlation between advaita and the various *shAkta* schools, particularly the *ShrI-vidyA tantra* school, has been used by our Acharya who is aware that many cannot follow the abstract path of *jnAna*. And that is why perhaps he chalks out a path whereby one starts from the '*leela*' of creation of duality and goes forward along the path of *ShrI-vidyA* and finally ends up in advaita itself. In accordance with this, even when he composed many *stotras* on Shiva and VishNu, he never goes deep into the *shivAgama* or *vaishNava-Agama* nuances but dwells mainly on the *bhakti* and consequent emotions only. On the other hand when he worked on Soundaryalahari, the first part, *Ananda-lahari*, – even though it is said that he only 'brought' it (from Kailas) and not composed it – is totally a *shAkta* scripture. The sum and substance of the twin work of *Ananda-lahari* and Soundaryalahari seems to be: "advaita is The path; if not, the next (alternative) is *ShrI-vidyA*" !

In fact, *ShrI-vidyA* is the connecting cord between advaita and all that is dvaita. It unifies the *ShAntaM-ShivaM*-advaitam with *Shakti*, the creator of duality, and therefore, of the universe. In LalitA-sahasranAma also, the last name is *lalitAmbika* and the last but one is *shiva-shaktyaikya-rUpiNI*. And this takes us to the very beginning *shloka* of Soundaryalahari !

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(Digest of pp.687 - 699)

*Shivas-ShaktyA yukto yadi bhavati shaktaH prabhavituM
na ced-evaM devo na khalu kushalaH spanditum-api /
atas-tvAm-ArAdhyAM hari-hara-virinchAdibhir-api
praNantuM stotuM vA katham-akRtapuNyaH prabhavati // 1 //*

ShaktyA yuktaH bhavati yadi – Only if yoked with *Shakti*
ShivaH devaH – (even) Lord shiva
shaktaH – has the ability
prabhavituM – to create the world;
evaM na cet -- if not so (yoked),
kushalaH na – (He) is not capable
spandituM api – even to make a move.
khalu – Isn't it so?
ataH – Therefore,
kathaM prabhavati – how is it possible
akRta-puNyaH – (for) one who has not accrued any (spiritual) merits
praNantuM – to do prostrations to
stotuM vA -- or to praise (by hymns)
tvAM – You
hari-hara-virinchAdibhir-api ArAdhyAm –
 who are worshipped even by Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma and the like?

(To get the total meaning, please read the English portions above in the order in which they are presented above. The Maha-Swamigal does the same thing, but presents it in the order in which it will make sense in the Tamil language. He usually does not give the total meaning in one go. We shall follow the same pattern in all the succeeding shlokas.)

Here is embedded the most important *shAkta* doctrine that the *para-shakti* is higher than the Triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. It is only by Her will and action that even the actionless *nirguNa-ShivaM* gets into action through the Triad and the cosmic process of presentation of Duality starts. “Everything in the universe moves because of You, Oh *para-shakti*; when that is so, even the prostration to you or praise of you by a devotee does not happen by itself”. And then by implication our Acharya brings out the point that when *ambaal* grants the power to somebody of praising Her, She does not give it to all and sundry but only to those who have spiritual merits.

And again then, by one more implication, one can take it to mean that the one who is doing the *stotra* now, namely, the Acharya himself, must, ipso facto, be of great spiritual merit. Is that what he means? Is he so devoid of humility that he praises himself by implication? # Later in *shloka* #57 he is going to say: ‘*snapaya kRpayA mAm-api*’ (that is, pour your glance of compassion, EVEN on poor me) and again in *shloka* #84, ‘*mamApi shirasi dayayaA dehi caraNau*’ (EVEN on my head please place your feet). So the only way we should interpret the present *shloka* is: “You can move even the immutable *ShivaM* into action. It is You therefore who have given even me, who does not have any spiritual merit, the capability that you usually grant only to the meritorious ! It is You who have moved my senses of speech into the action of hymnising You !”

Prostration is by the body (*kAyAM*). Praising through a hymn is by speech (*vAk*). By implication the mind (manas) is also mentioned. Thus in the very first *shloka* the dedication to Her by *manas*, *vAk* and *kAyAM* has been done. And naturally, the completion of this dedication in the form of ‘*Atma-samarpaNaM*’ – dedication of one’s self in fullness – comes in the very last *shloka* (#100).

There is a parallel observation in the very first *shloka* of Viveka-chUDAMaNi. “*muktir-no-shata-koTi-janma-sukRtaiH puNyair-vinA labhyate*”, meaning, ‘Unless one has earned spiritual merit in 100 crores of births, one cannot go the *jnAna mArga* and obtain *mokshha*’. But note: our Acharya does not say explicitly, in this major work of *bhakti*, that only by spiritual merit you can go along the path of *Bhakti* or *jnAna* or for that matter any noble path. Whereas, in the Viveka-chUDAMaNi, which is a work on the path of *jnAna*, -- mistakenly appropriated by people who think that that is the way to avoid the traditional worship of deities!-- right in the 3rd *shloka*, he says that ‘Seeking a proper guru and starting on the path of *jnAna* occurs only by the Grace of God’ – “*deivAnugraha-hetukam*”!

The bottom line of this *shloka* is that Shiva earns His place and prestige only when He is united with *Shakti*. But the words Shiva and *Shakti* have been placed in the *shloka* in that order, with Shiva first. This indicates that the dependence is mutual; neither of them is to be lower in hierarchy or glory. THERE IS NO HIGHER OR LOWER BETWEEN THIS ORIGINAL DIVINE COUPLE. They have an equality, ‘*samaM*’ in Sanskrit and this is the origin for the word ‘*samaya*’ to get the meaning of ‘religion’ or ‘tradition’ in Hindu culture. In the *shAkta* and Shaiva scriptures the word ‘*samayAcAra*’ is used to denote the path of worship, that is done mentally through the noblest attitude of devotion arising from the bottom of the heart. The reason for the word ‘*samaya*’ therein is that there are five categories in which Shiva and *Shakti* are considered ‘equal’ in that regimen of worship.

One: In their names. Shiva and *ShivA*; *hamsa* and *hamsI*; *bhairava* and *bhairavI*; even, *samaya* and *samayA*.

Two: In their forms: *KAmeshwara* and *KAmeshwari* are both maroon in colour, each has four hands, three eyes, the half-moon adorning their heads, the same four weapons – bow, arrow, *pAsha* (noose) and *ankusha* (goad) -- in the four hands.

Three: In their location: the same peak of Meru; the center of the Ocean of nectar in MaNi-dvIpa; the same central *bindu* of *ShrI-chakra*.

Four: In their function: It is the same five-fold function – called *pancha-kRtya* – namely, Creation, Protection, Dissolution, *tirodhAna* or *MAYa*, Grace or *anugraha* leading to *mokshha*.

Five: In their benediction to the world.

But, though the work begins with the name of Shiva, the *shAkta* school will still find in the very name of Shiva itself, the dominance of the feminine *Shakti*! In the very word 'Shiva' there is the vowel 'i' along with the consonant 'sh'. The vowels 'I' (as in 'feel') and 'i' (as in 'fit') are themselves names of *ambaal*. All consonants are letters pertaining to Shiva and all vowels pertain to *Shakti*. This is a general rule. In addition the letters 'I' and 'i' are supposed to be the very forms of *ambaal*. Just as the actionless immutable *Brahman* has a symbolic praNava or 'Om', so also the *Brahman* coupled with *Shakti*, the kArya-brahman, has a symbolic seed letter called the praNava of Shiva-*Shakti*. And in that *praNava*, the letter corresponding to *Shakti* is 'I'.

There is Vedic authority for this. Also in the *ShrI sUkta* the form of *ambaal* as Lakshmi who resides in the heart-lotus is mentioned as manifesting in the vowel 'I' and the surrender is made to that manifestation. Note that one of the many sanctities of the word '*ShrI*' is derived from this.

Thus the first word of of the first *shloka*, though it begins with Shiva is actually a propitiation to the feminine *Shakti*. For, from the word '*Shiva*' if we remove the vowel 'i' and bring the consonant 'sh' to its first position '*sha*', the word becomes '*shava*' meaning 'a dead body'! Thus the word '*shiva*' gets its life from the vowel 'i', which is the seed letter for *Shakti*. Also note that the popular word for '*saguNa-brahman*' in Vedanta is '*Ishwara*', which begins with the sound 'I'. This is quite in accordance with its role as the dynamic active Lord who takes care of the creation and propels the entire universe.

(For those who know the Tamil language here are two more interesting observations:)

In Tamil the consonants and vowels are known as 'body-letters' (*mey-ezhuttu*) and 'life-letters' (*uyir-ezhuttu*) respectively. So in the praNava of Shiva-*Shakti*, the Lord corresponds to the 'body-letter' and the Goddess corresponds to the 'life-letter'. And this coordinates with the thought that Shiva is the body and *Shakti* is the soul.

Secondly, in Tamil parlance it is common to say: 'If you have the power (*Shakti*) to do this, do it; otherwise stay quiet as '*shiva*' ('*shivane-enRu iru*')! This again coordinates with the thought that Shiva is the actionless substratum and *Shakti* is the switch that switches everything into action!

Throughout his *bhAshyas* and all his minor works, our Acharya is never tired of repeating: All worldly activities are *MAYa*; one should aspire to realise and become the changeless and actionless *nirguNa Brahman*. Thus the immutable *ShivaM* is the object of all his writing and advice. What produces movement out of that *Brahman* was called *MAYa* by him and he spared no pains to paint that *MAYa* in uncomplimentary colors and warn us strongly against getting into her clutches.

But the very same Acharya, now, in the first *shloka* of Soundaryalahari, exclaims with great admiration of *Shakti* (that very same *MAYa*): Oh, Goddess, without you even Shiva cannot move!

How can the same person talk in two contradictory ways like this? Which is true? If one of them is not true, can the Acharya tarnish his name by speaking an untruth?

If you look at these things only by logic, you will not get anywhere. The definition of Truth does not come by logic. WHATEVER WILL DO GOOD TO WHOMSOEVER IT IS INTENDED, THAT SHOULD BE STATED LOVINGLY; THAT IS TRUTH (SATYAM). For those who can tread the path of *jnAna*, he recommended retirement from the world. For those who have yet to evolve to that stage of spiritual maturity, he recommended the path of *Bhakti* and Karma; this will make them reach the *kArya-Brahman* through worldly actions of work and worship. When one does not have an evolved attitude to a certain path, it is counterproductive to advise him go that path. So it is not a question of being logical; it is a question of seeing the psycho-logical (!) perspective. The ancients called it '*adhikAri-bheda*', that is, difference in prerequisite qualifications.

Secondly, it is not just that he understood the psychology of different types of seekers of spirituality and preached accordingly. It is more. Both the advices he gave, though seemingly opposite, are 'true', each at a particular stage of evolution. In the phenomenal world, creation and the universe and the activator of all of them, namely, Ishwara, are all 'real' certainly. But when we enquire into the root cause of all this, we find that the more basic Reality is the Existent Self-in-itself that is actionless but through a miraculous magic wand of *MAyA* brings about all this moving world.

Thus, when an Acharya or the scripture compares two paths or two objects of worship and speaks of one as the better or greater of the two, it does not always mean that the other thing, that had a lower estimate, is worthless. That which our Acharya talked about as the thing to be discarded, namely, perception of duality, in all his works – that very same thing he now praises to the sky, saying that this is what you have to hold steadfastly in the *bhakti* path. In one case it is duality, in the other case it is '*sva-svarUpa-anu-sandhAnaM*' (remaining steadfast in one's own Self).

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(Digest of more parts of pp.699-737)

There are two statements. One says: Even Shiva, only when united with you, Oh *Shakti*, is able to monitor the whole world. And the other statement says: The Triad formed of *Hari*, Hara and Brahma worship *Shakti*. Both these statements are contained in the 1st *shloka*. Are Shiva and *Hara* different? Are they not the two names of the same deity? Why two names, and two actions? Is one the Prime Mover (corresponding to the word '*spandituM*') and the other the one who worships (corresponding to the word '*ArAdhyAM*')? Are they not both the same?

Of course, advaita says all are the same One. But the very origin of this *stotra* is not to stay at the level of advaita. Everything may be the same One ultimately, but on the surface, they are seen to be different. So Hara is one, Shiva is another. The Shiva who is said to be ‘moved’ is the *ShivaM* enunciated as the first principle in the scriptures of the *shAkta* and Shaiva schools. *Hara* is the ‘*Rudra*’ who is in charge of the function of dissolution among the five functions of the Almighty. ‘*Hara*’ comes from the root verb ‘*har*’ to destroy, to eradicate, to nullify.

(At this point, the Maha-Swamigal begins to explain at length the technicalities about the ‘five cosmic functions’.

What follows is a much-condensed digest.)

It is the same *paramAtmA* who became the three members of the Triad for the discharge of the three functions of Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution. For all the three functions the power source is *ambaaL*, the parA- *Shakti*. It is the explicitly expressed power of *Brahman*. So we may call it *para-brahma-Sakti*. It is not only the power for the Triad but it is the power source for the entire universe of the animate and the inanimate. By calling it *para-brahma-Shakti*, let us not think it is different from *para-Brahman* itself. For, when the *Shakti* of an entity is separated from it, whatever it be, the very fact of its being that entity is lost. To give a mundane example, a ten-horsepower motor loses the very fact of motorship if the horsepower is taken away from it. Therefore the *para-brahma-Shakti* is *para-Brahman* itself. But the *para-Brahman* can also remain in itself without ‘exhibiting’ or ‘exploiting’ or ‘manifesting’ its power. When the *paraBrahman* so rests in itself by itself as itself, it is known in *shAkta* parlance as ‘*ShivaM*’.

It is from that calm *nirvikAra* (changeless) state of the First Principle that we have all come to this *jIva* state with a mind and all its runaway associates called the senses. Only when we merge in that *ShAnti* (Peace) back again it may be said that we have reached our true state and transcended the *MAyA* effect, the bondage of *samsAra*. That blissful state of *mokshha* is so calm and peaceful because it is now the same as being *Brahman*, which naturally, is calm and actionless without exhibiting its latent *Shakti*. In our daily life we may observe that if somebody is totally inactive, unresponsive and unaffected by anything, we refer to him jocularly (at least in the Tamil world) as ‘*para-brahmam*’!

Thus we are constrained to view Shiva as ‘*para-brahman*’ and *ambaaL* as ‘*para-brahma-shakti*’. Though neither of them exists without the other, we may allow ourselves the privilege of speaking of them AS IF they are different. Without *para-brahma-Shakti*, the world would not be there. Now we have to consider two more cosmic functions in addition to the three well-known to all of us. We were nothing but the calm Shiva-*svarUpa* once; from that state somehow the real nature has been forgotten and we have arrived at this ignorant state of a *jIva* and we find ourselves in a revolving cycle of *samsAra* without the knowledge of our true state. The power which has done this to us must also be the same

para-brahma-Shakti. And by the example of several sages and saints who, though thrown into the vortex of *samsAra* like ourselves, have obtained the Enlightenment which took them back to that *mokshha* state, beyond the *MAyA* enchantment, it is clear that this function of gracing the spiritually merited ones with *mokshha* is also done by the *para-brahma-Shakti*.

These two functions are called ‘*tirodhAna*’ and ‘*anugraha*’ respectively. The meaning of the root verb ‘*tiras*’ is to be secretive or to hide. It is from the verb ‘*tiras*’ that the Tamil word ‘*tirai*’ (meaning, ‘curtain’) has come. It is *MAyA* that blinds the real thing from us by a ‘*tirai*’ (curtain). Just as the three functions of creation, sustenance and dissolution have been assigned (by the *para-brahma-shakti*) to Brahma, Vishnu and *Rudra* (Hara), so also Her assignee for the *tirodhAna* function is called ‘*Ishvara*’ (also ‘*maheshvara*’) and that for the *anugraha* function is called ‘*SadAshiva*’. The first three functions are subject to *MAyA*. This mayic activity is in the control of *Ishvara*. Release from *MAyA* is granted by *SadAshiva*.

These are the five cosmic functions. Together they are called the five-fold activity (*pancha-kRtyaM*) of the Lord. This concept of *pancha-kRtyaM* is also mentioned by the Shaiva schools. The very word *pancha-kRtyaM* means and involves activity. And as we know, no activity is possible without the *kArya-brahman* (*para-brahma-shakti*) coming in. So we can take it that the original source is *para-shakti*. She does it through the five agents of Hers, namely the five forms of divinity mentioned above. The *shAnta* (calm) *ShivaM* in its nascent state cannot act. When action takes place it takes place through *para-shakti* in the form of the five-fold functions. *ShivaM* by itself does not produce the action. But it is in *ShivaM*, the *paraBrahman*, that the first vibration for action sprouts, by its own *Shakti*. But even before the action there must have been a will. This will is called the *icchA-Shakti*. On the basis of this *icchA* -- the first wish, as it may be called, and the Upanishad also says: ‘*akAmayata*’ -- the *kriyA-shakti* (the power of Action) begins the *pancha-kRtya-leelA*. Thus, what was the *paraBrahman* by itself in itself, willed to ‘become’. It is for this divine will that the Upanishad uses the word ‘*kAma*’, meaning desire. This ‘desire’ is not to be taken in any derogatory sense. It is pure Divine Will from Being to Becoming. Thus the first evolute from *Brahman* is this divine *kAma*. So the *Shakti* that is the origin of this is called *KAmeshvari* and the *ShivaM* in which this *kAma* sprouted is therefore called *KAmeshwara*.

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(Digest of pp.699-737 contd.)

The first evolute from *Brahman* is the ‘desire’ (*kAmaM*) that the *leelA* of the manifestation of the universe should take place. So the

'*KAmeshvara-KAmeshvari*' evolute is the first couple. She (*KAmeshvari*) might later be called '*LalitAmbaal*' or '*RAja-RAjeshvari*' but He (*KAmeshvara*) is never called '*Laliteshvara*' or '*RAja-RAjeshvara*'. Again She is '*tripura-sundari*' – which name is the origin for the titling of this composition as 'Soundaryalahari', but there is no '*tripurasundara*'.

All these latter names of *Shakti* have come because She is the Creator, Monitor and Queen of this entire universe. That is why, as soon as the *lalitA-sahasranAma* begins with the name '*ShrI-mAta*', the next two names are '*Shri-mahArAjnI*', and '*ShrImat-simhAsaneshvarI*'. For these two names there is no masculine counterpart of the name.

When *Brahman* 'chose' to become *saguNa-Brahman*, the initial spark was that 'desire' to become. So the *KAmeshvari-KAmeshvara* couple arose and is rightly named so. The *panchakRtya* is for the world to arise and go on from there. Thus the desire to produce multiplicity out of Herself is the *kAmAM*. But along with this desire is also the act (in the form of *MAyA*) of 'separating' the created multiplicity from the reality of the Creator. Is this not then a cruel desire? # The ultimate aim is to bring back everything into the source. Then why do it at all? That is the Cosmic Play. The very 'desire' to exhibit into a multiplicity is based on the joy of bringing back everything together into the one and only source.

The *para-brahma-Shakti* exhibits itself into five functions. Thus we have a five-fold aspect of brahma-*Shakti*, created by itself from itself. So these five aspects are represented in a peculiar form where *KAmeshvari* is sitting on the left lap of *KAmeshvara*. The seat on which they are sitting facing the East, has four legs, namely Brahma (Creation), Vishnu (Sustenance), Shiva (Dissolution), and *Ishvara* (mAyic curtain); the seat itself is SadAshiva (*mokshha-anugraha*). These five are called the five '*Brahman-s*'. And this explains the name '*panca-brahma-Asana-sthitA*' for the Goddess.

There is also another name '*panca-preta-Asana-Aseena*' meaning 'She who is seated on the seat of five '*preta-s*' – *preta*, meaning 'dead body' --. The '*Brahman-s*' of the earlier name are here called '*preta-s*', because, if the five functions had not been assigned to them, they are nothing, - like the motor without the horsepower! Even for *KAmeshvara*, she is the life-giving *Shakti* and therefore the name '*KAmeshvara-prANa-nADI*' which occurs both in Lalita-sahasranama and in Trishati.

Now let us come to the word '*spandituM*'. The *hara-rudra* has been assigned the duty of samhAra, this is a 'full duty', so to say. On the other hand, the Shiva that is the absolute *Brahman* has just been 'moved' – moved from within! This movement is the '*spandanaM*'. The *ShivaM* was like a calm, ripple-less, vibration-less peaceful lake; and in that lake, the first ripple, the first vibration, the first movement took place in the form of '*kAmAM*'. The agent for this was the cit-*Shakti* of *Brahman* itself. She, the cit-*Shakti*, not only became two, namely the willing power (*icchA-*

Shakti), and the acting power (*kriyA-Shakti*), but made the *icchA* rise in *Brahman* itself and this 'making' was itself Her first act of creation!

Let us analyze this still further. Before someone 'desires' he should first recognize that he 'is'. When we are in deep sleep we don't desire. So the event of 'desire' rising in *Brahman*, must be preceded by the awareness of self-existence. *Brahman* was just existing in itself, but was it 'aware' that it was existing as such? The very event of cognition – by *Brahman*, as it were – that 'I am *Brahman*' is itself an act of the 'spandana'-effect of *Shakti*.

This 'experience' of *Brahman* of the act of recognizing itself has a technical name in Vedanta. It is '*parAhanta*'. '*ahanta*' is the thought 'I am'. When we wrongly think that our real 'I' is body-mind-intellect, it is called '*ahanta*' – the word derived from '*ahaM*'. When the supreme Absolute, which is the origin of all the 'aham's in the world, thinks of itself as 'I' it is supreme '*ahanta*', that is, '*para-ahanta*'. In devotional literature, it is customary to call *parAShakti* the '*parAhanta*' form of *ShivaM* and thus arises the name '*parAhanta-svarUpiNI*' for *ambaal*.

Indeed the 'feeling of I-ness' that arises in the immutable *Brahman*, is the spandana caused by *Shakti* and that is what personifies her. Our Acharya brings this effectively by using the word '*Aho-purushhika*' in Sloka #7. The word means that She is the personification of the thought 'I am *Brahman*' of *Brahman* !

The *shAkta* school conception of Shiva and *Shakti* sometimes appears to involve a duality there. Thus they contend that it is *Shakti* that caused the movement. Acharya's *shloka* also seems to say so. But the Acharya, while appearing to be talking '*dvaita*' he has built his advaita into it by using the word *spandanaM*. In what was Knowledge-Absolute, the thought of 'I' arose from within. This internal pulsation is the *spandanaM*. The word is very precisely placed here. Because '*spandanaM*' by its very meaning negates anything external. It is internally caused. Something like what you say in modern science about the central nucleus bursting of its own accord.

But even the *shAkta* schools cannot place Shiva and *Shakti* as two separate things. Because Shiva and *Shakti* are like the lamp and its light, the flower and its fragrance, honey and its sweetness, milk and its whiteness, word and its meaning. Thus they cannot be separated from each other. Even though the credit for the *spandanaM* is given to *Shakti*, it is not as if She and He are separate. This mutual dependence of the two should be kept in our mind always.

The mutuality of Shiva and *Shakti* should be in our minds all the time. When hard core ideas from philosophy are made into poetic

extravaganzas, both for the poetic excellence and for the liberties taken with a view to making the devotees revel in their devotion, it is natural to exaggerate or make out-of-the-way comparisons. Thus at one time it may be said that Shiva is greater than *Shakti* and at another time quite the opposite. In every one of these presentations one should not forget the equality, nay, the identity of the two. Keeping this clearly in his mind, our Acharya, though he built into the first *shloka* the idea that it was *Shakti* who made Shiva move, he takes care to see that the prodding for the 'movement' does not come from outside. She is inside Him and therefore the word '*spandanaM*'.

In Kashmir Saivism this internal *spandanaM* is emphasized very well. Though we call it Kashmir Shaivism, the propagators of that philosophy did not give it that name. '*Trika-shaivism*' is its name. For it focusses on three principles; pashu, pati and *pAsham*. '*pratyabijnA-shAstra*' is also another name for the same. To know the fact that Shiva principle is Atman is *pratyabijnA*. The literal meaning of '*pratyabijnA*' is 'to know a thing truly as it is'. Another name for this school of philosophy is '*spanda-shAstra*'!

According to that *shAstra*, Shiva and *Shakti* together form the para*Brahman*. All the universe is a reflection of that para*Brahman*. By saying this it does not mean that the reflection is outside of *Brahman*. Nor does it think of a '*kevala-shivam*' (*ShivaM* and *ShivaM* alone) that has no connection with the universe. Since the para*Brahman*, according to this school, is shiva as well as *Shakti*, the reflection (*AbhAsa*) is due to the presence of *Shakti*. And even then, it is not like light and its reflection, wherein we think of the reflection outside of the light. # There can be nothing outside of *Shakti*. Siva-*Shakti* is one. Within that one there comes an internal *spandanaM* and the duality is presented. Again the presentation is not outside of *Brahman*. Just as a reflection shows itself in the mirror, there is nothing outside of the mirror. The word '*spanda*' is exploited in Kashmir Shaivism to establish two things. One is that the universe is not outside of *Brahman* and two, *Shakti* itself is not an external action on *Brahman*. *Shakti* is abhinnaM – non-separate – from *ShivaM*.

Among the various *shaiva darshanas*, what comes nearest to our Acharya's advaita is this *spanda-shAstra*. On *mokshha* both say the same thing. But instead of saying that the universe is *mithyA*, created by *MAYa*, this school includes not only *MAYa* as well as the *Ishvara* of advaita vedanta in their *Shakti*. According to them there are 36 fundamentals. Of these *ShivaM* is the first and *Shakti* is the next. But immediately they say that the *ShivaM* which is '*sat*' (Existence) has always the '*cit-shakti*' within it. Therefore *ShivaM* is sat-cit. The Ananda appears when the play of reflection, producing the universe, starts as a sport.

In order to accommodate those who cannot take the strenuous *jnAna*-path of advaita, our Acharya has adopted in this work of *bhakti*, the concepts of *spandanaM* and those of *pashu*, *pati* and *pAshaM* from the shaiva *shAstras*. In *shloka* #99 he says: He who worships *ambaal*, throws off the attachment (*pAshaM*) to the animal self (*pashu*) and enjoys the nectar of the bliss of param-Ananda. Obviously when composing the SoundaryalaharI. he must have had in mind several objectives, such as: This hymn to Ambal should raise Her to the skies so that in the devotees it should generate *bhakti* towards Her exclusively (*ananya-bhakti*); it should reach the pinnacle of poetical excellences and respect all poetic traditions; it should also be concordant with the religious traditions of *Shri-vidyA-tantra*; even though it may not stress the advaita point of view exclusively, since anyway *ShRI-vidyA* and advaita are not discordant, it should be able to touch upon advaita though tangentially. Instead of saying that the Acharya had these objectives we might say that *ambaal* had already predetermined his objectives for him.

Even though these are the basic purposes which we see have all been fulfilled in the hymn, it should be said to the credit of our Acharya that, because of his steadfast holding to advaita, and of his great respect for *Shri-vidyA*, and of his natural poetic talent, he did not regiment himself as to be circumscribed by preconceived limitations. It is our good fortune that he allowed his talent and imagination to express itself freely and soar as high as it liked. Such a freedom has resulted in one of the most excellent hymns which excels in poetry, in mysticism, in devotion, in spirituality and in religious tradition. And in this process, the flood of ideas that gushed forth from him includes without bias some of the philosophical concepts and thoughts that came to the forefront, long after his time, like those of Saiva-siddhanta, Kashmir Shaivism, visishTAdvaita, and dvaita.

The schools that I just mentioned of course took their present form only after the time of our Acharya. But the original ideas from which these schools sprang were there from earliest times. In fact advaita also had its origin long before our Acharya. But it was he who streamlined it and presented it as a *siddhAnta*. In the same way the Acharyas of the other schools who came only later to our Acharya, pulled out the ideas which were already there and established their *siddhantas*. It is the greatness of Adi Shankara that he was able to see the other points of view also by his erudition and farsight even before they had been established as a popular school.

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(Digest of pp.743-760)

I was saying that our Acharya, had included ideas from the non-advaita schools also. These ideas as well as those of advaita had their

origin long before their chief proponents propagated them formally as a siddhanta. So Soundarya lahari being a work of *bhakti* leaning a little on the side of the Shakta schools, has these ideas also in it. It talks about the '*spandanaM*' of *brahma-Shakti* and praises, in superlative terms, the *Shakti* that caused it. But there is no such idea of '*spandanaM*' in the advaita shAstra of Adi Shankara.

The *Brahman* of advaita is motionless, and changeless. This immutable *Brahman* was, according to advaita, neither moved from outside nor perturbed from the inside. The multiple presentations that resulted through the Creation process was just due to *MAyA*, which, with the base (*adhAra*) of *Brahman*, somehow initiated it. It is only an appearance according to advaita and that is why *MAyA* is criticised and recommended to be negated. Our Atman is nothing but that very nirguNa *Brahman*. If we do not know it, it is because *MAyA* has done its work of hiding the Reality from us.

But it is that very same *MAyA* that the Soundaryalahari now has taken to the skies and praised as *Shakti*, as a power greater than even the Triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Though it does not use the word '*MAyA*' here, it uses the word '*Shakti*' and from the very fact that *Shakti* is the root cause for creation of the universe, it is clear it must be the same as the *MAyA* of advaita.

In advaita the nirguNa *Brahman* is unrelated to the *saguNa Brahman* which produces and monitors the whole universe by *MAyA Shakti*. For, nirguNa *Brahman* just is; it can never be related to or predicated with anything. The miraculous way in which *MAyA* exhibits that *Brahman*, as *Brahman* with name and form and all the associated multiplicity, is analogous to the way we see in a dimly lit twilight the appearance of a snake in a rope. Clearly there is no relationship between the appearing snake and the rope which is the support for the appearance.

However, the *ShAktaM* that the Acharya projects to us has a *MAyA Shakti* which is not unrelated to *Brahman*. There is no brahma-*Shakti* talked about in advaita. Here in *ShAktaM*, it is brahma-*Shakti* that is important. That is the *ambaal*. One of her aspects is the magic wand of *MAyA*. Not only that. She is Herself the *jnAna-Shakti* (the power of cognitive self-recognition) which is diametrically opposite to *MAyA*; and further it is the *icchA Shakti* (the power of wilful self-emanation) and *kriyA Shakti* (the power of creative act) also. She stands inseparable from the *ShivaM* which is the nirguNa *Brahman* of *ShAktaM* which, however, is a shade different from the nirguNa *Brahman* of advaita.

The identity of Shiva-*Shakti* is important here. Identity does not mean just a union. It is a total oneness. It is identity in the sense there is only one. Being one and only one is what is called '*Aikyam*' or identity. In Lalita Sahasranama, after calling Her *Shivaa*, the next name is *Shiva-Shaktyaikya-rUpiNI*. This Shiva is only a close fit to the *Brahman* of

advaita. So, unionizing with Him, and relating with Him, ‘moving’ Him, She has done as a couple, all the Creation of the Universe and the monitoring of it. Whenever there is a *Shakti*, there must be a locus standi (*AshrayaM*, Base) for it. The concept of, say, a *Shakti* of ten pounds of weight does not arise unless there is something to which the weight can be related or referenced. A fragrance or a colour is certainly an abstract *Shakti*, but it has to have an Ashrayam for it to exist as a fragrance or a colour. Thus for every *Shakti* there is an Ashrayam. The *Shakti* that is the origin for all the known *Shaktis* has itself an Ashrayam and that is the *ShivaM-Brahman*. It is the *Shakti* of that *Brahman*. So it cannot be separated from its Ashrayam. You cannot separate the whiteness from milk, or the taste of milk from milk. So by the expansion of *Shakti* whatever happens there is *ShivaM* also in that expansion. In all actions of *Shakti*, *ShivaM* has to be present.

When *Shakti*, the *ambaal*, grants *mokshha* to the *jIva*, the *jIva* attains the changeless nirguNa state, say the Shakta works like the *Shri-vidya*. Even then that nirguNa state has also the *Shakti* in it!. It is said that *Shakti* itself revels in enjoyment of bliss in its own creation of the universe of duality. But it is not even right to say that the play of creation is for enjoyment. Because if you accept this, it would mean that when there is no creation, *Shakti* is without that bliss! So instead of saying that She indulges in Creation for enjoyment of bliss, we should rather say that it is the very Bliss that is part of Her that exhibits itself as the creation.

Let me now explain the subtle difference between the *MAyA* of advaita and the different *Shaktis* of the Shaiva and *shAkta* schools. Starting from the *ShivaM-Brahman*, they talk of 36 principles. According to the Shaiva-siddhanta school, the first five are called pure ‘*MAyA*’ and the latter 31 belong to the category of impure ‘*MAyA*’.

ShivaM is the first. Next there come three different *Shaktis*, namely, *cit-shakti*, *jnAna-shakti*, *vidya-shakti*. These correspond to three different dimensions of cit. When it pertains to the non-dual shiva-*Shakti*, it is cit. When it pertains to the seed-knowledge of duality for the purpose of creation it is called *jnAna*. In the next stage it is aware both of its non-dual state and its potential for the sprouting out into multiplicity, and then it is called (pure) *vidya*. After these three, come the next, now the fifth in order, namely the kriyA *Shakti* which is the executing part. Only thereafter, starting from the sixth principle, it is *MAyA* and all its evolutes.

All this importance given to *Shakti* in the Shaiva and Shakta schools is avoided in advaita, with all the evolved appearances from *Brahman* being branded as the effect of *MAyA* and we being asked to discredit them.

But even in the way the Shaiva and Shakta schools go, the question can be asked; Somehow or other, it is the hierarchy of these

Shaktis that bind us to this *samsAra*. Why then praise that *Shakti* and worship it with hymns like Soundaryalahari?

This is the key question. The answer is, *MAyA Shakti* even in the Shakta schools does not end there. It is also the *jnAna Shakti* as we saw above. And the bottomline of it all is that this same *Shakti* as *jnAna Shakti* graces us with Knowledge and Enlightenment in the end. And in the meantime She shows Infinite Love towards us in order to take us back into her fold. That is the greatest anugraha that She does for us. And that is why we worship Her and pray to Her for Release.

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(Digest of pp.760 -766)

(The Maha-Swamigal devotes one more discourse now on *mAyA*; now dwelling on the status of *mAyA* in advaita, vis-à-vis, the path to Enlightenment)

All the *ShAkta* schools, adopt an interesting strategy with respect to *MAyA*. Whatever bondage is created by *MAyA*, they make it all related to the divine. Though *jnAna* and *MAyA* are at opposite ends, the very world, mind and senses created by *MAyA* are channelised into Love and the pure Beauty of the Mother Goddess, so that one is blissfully involved in the worship and prayers aimed at Her. Once the mind is unified in this noble direction, it is then not difficult to get involved into enquiry about the Self.

Thus our Acharya also has adopted the same strategy of going towards *jnAna* by resorting to the very objects created by that which is opposite to *jnAna*. In other words, the thought of God, worship, listening to stories about His glory, temple worship, getting emotionally enraptured in *stotra* recitation, raising the tempo of spiritual involvement by continuous japa leading to the correct mood for meditation – these constitute the means by which one follows the *bhakti* path thus preparing oneself for the path of *jnAna* that is the ultimate. And hence the Saundaryalahari.

The *mAyic* effect cannot be easily discarded. A tremendous amount of discretion (*viveka*) and dispassion (*vairAgya*) might be needed. In the absence of these the distractions of the sensory world will be constantly pulling us away. And when such pulls are very strong, one should not despair of the hopelessness in making progress in spirituality. It is for this reason that the Acharya, without asking us to discard the mayic effects totally, as he would do to a more spiritually mature seeker, asks us to get involved in *bhakti*, puja, worship, devotional recitation and music. If everything of the world is made to relate to the divine in this way, the *MAyA*-created world can be gradually won over. It is like using a certain type of gloves when working with high voltage electricity. The shock of the system will not be there and at the same time one has a control over it.

What I am going to tell you now may surprise you in that it comes from me. I was talking about the *mAyic* creations. They provide the background for the spiritual *sAdhanA*. There is a *sAdhanA*, a *sAdhaka*, and the *karma* of *sAdhanA*. This triplet is certainly all *MAyA*. So what we do is to use *MAyA* itself to fight *MAyA*. This is indeed a strategy to reach advaita-*bhAva*. The very fact of a guru teaching you is nothing but Duality. But that itself can lead to advaita-siddhi. Like a lion roaring in the dream and waking you up, so also the mayic dream in which we are all in can be wiped off by a guru's words doled out in the world of duality.

Granting that the very act of '*sAdhanA*' implies duality, the Acharya, does not hesitate to bring in, into his *stotras*, the many *sAdhanAs* that have goals even contradictory to advaita. When every propitiation of the divine is certainly a dvaita act, why shy at the rituals of the non-advaita schools? So without reservation he allows his imagination to go the path of other *siddhAntas* also. That is why, we hear in Soundaryalahari, ideas from dvaita, visishTAdvaita, shaivam and *ShAktaM*.

Another important point has to be mentioned. Since all creation is *MAyA*, according to advaita, it is not to be thought that advaita avoids all talk about *Shakti*. In Chandogya Upanishad, at one point, it says: The *paramAtmA* is full of all *karmas*, all desires, all fragrance and all tastes. It desired – '*akAmayata*' –and that is how the One became the Many as said in Taittiriya Upanishad. Not finding any satisfaction in being alone, it wanted a partner and this desire resulted in it becoming two as pati and patni – so says Brihad-Aranyakopanishad (I -4- 3). Those two were the father and mother of the entire human race, according to the same Upanishad.

The *BrahmasUtra* (II-1-30) also says: '*sarvopeta ca tad-darshanAt*' – The Upanishads say that the *paramAtman* is thus endowed with all *Shakti*.

Our Acharya does not just gloss over such statements. Just because they talk about *MAyA* he does not overlook their mention. In his bhAshya he emphatically says: "*shakti-yukta para devata*". Since he himself has defined *MAyA* as *anirvacanIya* (that which is inexpressible or unexplainable), he is not afraid of questions like: 'Where did the *Shakti* come from'. In the matter of *Brahman* one cannot ask questions like 'How is it possible?' in the same manner as one would ask when being presented with material matter and worldly concepts. The profound and majestic truths about *Brahman* cannot be learnt by logical quibbling, but only by what the Vedas have declared. (*Brahma-sUtra-bhAshya*: II – 1 – 31).

Therein he says: The talk of creation arises only when, instead of being in that samAdhi state as *Brahman*, we begin to think and talk about *Brahman*. When the nirguna *Brahman* which is nothing but pure

cit, is talked about in relation to Creation which is just *avidya-kalpita* (imagined by ignorance), it is said to have 'sarva-*Shakti*-yogam' says the Acharya. '*Shivas-ShaktyA yuktah*' is just this !

Following this the Brahma sutra says: '*lokavattu leela kaivalyam*' (II-1-33). The world creation is just *leela*. The Acharya concludes his *bhAshhya* on this with the words: "When the vedas talk about srishTi, it is not about the nirguNa absolute *Brahman*. It is only a view, name-and-form view, of Duality imagined by ignorance ; it is only a phenomenal reality". But though he goes in this strain, he also admires the *leela* of the Lord. "It may appear as a great achievement from our angle – this Creation – but for Him it is only just a play" !

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(Digest of pp.766-774)

There is also the Upanishad authority for saying that the non-dual *Brahman* sprouts out the world of duality by sheer internal vibration. This is in Katopanishad. All this world arises from the life force called *prANa* and moves thereon. The word for 'moves' that is used is '*Ejati*'. *EjanaM* and *KampanaM* both mean movement, but not by any external force. We may also interpret it as vibration from the inside. *Brahma sUtra* also uses the word '*kampanAt*'. When the Acharya writes the *bhAshhya* for this he writes: This *prANa* which causes the vibration is not simple air. It is the very *Brahman* itself !

(It is to be noted that in this portion of the *bhAshya*,
Adi Sankara has used the very words 'spandam' and 'pratyabhijnA',
which are the words for Kashmir Shaivism,
without anywhere hinting that the words come from there.)

We can get many more such authorities to confirm that as far as the phenomenal reality is concerned, there is a creation with *MAyA* as the cause. Whenever these passages occur, they also concur with many of the thoughts of the *shAkta* scriptures.

Let us not think that the Acharya's outpourings in the Soundaryalahari is just a mixture of several viewpoints! We should keep an open mind and let ourselves go along with the flood of poetry that comes and simply concentrate in the *ambaal* with faith and humility. Then we can get the maximum joy out of it.

(Now follows a general, but remarkable, advice of the Maha-Swamigal on
'How to approach the Soundaryalahari' .)

When the scriptures or *shAstras* talk about deep philosophical principles which have themselves a divine character, they present certain descriptions allegorically. We should not misunderstand these allegories. In fact the word 'allegory' itself is not the right word here. When esoteric principles are deliberately personified, that is 'allegory'. The profound ideas of the *purANas* or the *shAstras* are not just mental creations of the author. It is *parAShakti* Herself who opens out those principles in those

forms to great rishis or persons who have reached the *siddhi* in the *mantras*.

If this world is taken to be real, then more real are the principles and stories that help us throw off our shackles and reach our True State. Even today if we can do the *japas* and *dhyAnas* in the proper manner, and melt our hearts in intense devotion, those forms can be seen as we see each other in the outside world. And when such divine sights occur our ordinary views of each other would pale into insignificance. The Love and Bliss that such sights generate will take us to the realisation of the Ultimate. Therefore it is not right to say that everything is an allegory.

To get back to what I was saying earlier, these divine forms which personify esoteric fundamentals, might contradict what we consider to be normal, right, decent, and beautiful in the ordinary mundane world. Just because of that it is not correct to conclude that the original reality itself is not right, decent and beautiful.

Similar things can be said of the poetic traditions and the culture of classic literature. Or even of sculpture, painting or architecture.

In all these, our norms cannot be the standards of ordinary worldly life. Works like *Soundaryalahari*, which are simultaneously devotionally divine hymns and poetic excellences, have to be approached in the right manner in order to obtain the fullest benefit from them. Our minds have to be open and clean. The *Shri-vidyA shAstras* describe in esoterically romantic terms how Shiva, who is nothing but the Absolute *Brahman*, coupled with *KAmeshvari*, the personification of the *icchA* (Will) of Shiva, cause creation to happen. Such matters occur in *Soundaryalahari* also.

All these years the *upAsakAs* (intense devotees) without any prejudice followed the path of *Shri-vidyA* and have been able to discard all the faults like desire and the like. And Muka-kavi puts this with poetic emphasis in his *Pancha-Shati*: “Mother, you caused ‘desire’ to rise even in Shiva who burnt to ashes the very desire personified in the form of Manmatha; that is why You are able to eradicate the internal faults like desire in *jIvas* and give them Enlightenment”.

The punchline here is the fact that our people of ancient times had the right approach to such works of art, poetry and devotion. The *Guru-shishhya-paramparA* took care to see that such works were handed over only to those who could be expected to have the right approach. Whether the work was religious or poetical, mystical or secular, they would, when communicating with the public, only touch such delicate works and not elaborate upon them in detail. Accordingly, when the common man meets with any situation wherein there is an idea, concept, story or character, apparently repugnant to him, he does not get distracted, because his main aim always was to take only those things which suited his taste and which were recommended to him by elders.

Thousands of years have passed like this. And our people have followed the traditional paths without ever giving place to indecent imaginations or wrong interpretations. The common man knew that there must be some sense in those deep and profound things because great men say so and he would not unnecessarily probe into them. Not that he was not rational-minded; it only means that he had an unshaking faith in tradition and also he was aware of his own limitations.

But then the printing press arrived; and times changed.

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(Digest of pp.774-793)

The printing press came as a revolution. And it became the order of the day for anybody to write on anything, publish and put it in the hands of anybody. One of the earliest effects was that profound ideas got mundane interpretations in the hands of the uninitiated. As independent human beings each one felt that whatever strikes his mind is right and each one made his own interpretations. Neither the authors of books had the strength of practice behind them; nor the readers had any intention to try and experience what they read. Several readers were just curious and nothing more. Or they were interested in a so-called 'academic research' mostly for purposes of self-glorification and recognition in the material world. How can any spiritual benefit arise from these?

Thus arose two major setbacks in the culture. The first one is that those who were traditionally equipped to do the *upAsanAs* and were also fit to do them, preferred the glamour of modern days to break off from their traditions. And the second one is that all and sundry took to these difficult *upAsanAs* without proper guru or training. It is not clear, I must confess, which is the major disaster.

I know that I may be criticised and commented that I have a 'vested interest' in saying all this. But having started to talk on Soundaryalahari publicly, I cannot but give you this warning. Let me conclude by saying that there is nothing wrong in approaching *shAstras* like Soundaryalahari as an aid to get Mother Goddess's Grace and thereby to go upward in the spiritual ladder. It is enough you know that it is great. Just with that approach if you recite it, *ambaal* will give you the necessary mental strength and maturity to reach higher levels of spirituality. Automatically the ultimate object of realisation would also be obtained by Her Grace.

The *mantras* and their esoteric meanings have to be safeguarded like nuclear secrets. If you really want to get them, approach the proper guru and if he thinks you have the requisite qualifications he will tell you. In this connection I will tell you an important matter. I am touching it, so that you may not 'touch' it ! The name *KunDalini* and all the associated *cakras* are being talked about by every one now, especially

ever since Sir John Woodroffe wrote about 'The Serpent Power'. I am not finding fault with him. I only thank him for bringing to light the fact that our ancients had great things to tell the world in spite of modern advances in science. My only warning to you is that without a proper initiation no *mantra* or japam will help anybody. It is like having costly electrical and electronic equipment in your house without a power connection. The same thing with these *mantras* and *KunDalini* yoga. Without the guru power they will not work.

That is not the only thing. There is more in it. The power that comes through these electrical words of the *mantras*, can also give you a shock because you may not be properly insulated. Only when it comes from the guru, it gets properly secreted within bounds; if it exceeds the bounds, that is if the insulation is not there, it will only burn you ! My own suggestion to book-writers is that when they publish such things, let there be a popular edition which avoids the profound matters of *mantra* secret. And let there be a limited circulation book which does get into those secrets, but such 'classified' books must be made available only with the authorization of the proper guru. I think, from my platform, it is my duty to say this.

Finally what is wanted is a rapport with the author. A devotee, a poet and a vidhushaka (the Royal Fool or Clown in the King's Court) – these three have a great licence to do or write what they want. Of these our Acharya was both a devotee and a poet. So there is a *bhakti-bhAva* in everything he writes and there is also a poetic licence exhibited in pieces like the Soundaryalahari. In classical literature, there is always a respectable status for this freedom which a poetic or devotional piece enjoys. Of the many such licences we can refer here to ninda stuti (where you actually criticise the deity you are supposed to praise), praise one of the divine couple to the extent of bringing down the other of the pair and so on. If we look at these with a humility and an open mind for poetic exaggeration, we may also enjoy them. Now come to the first *shloka*.

Shiva is the husband and *ambaal* is the wife. It is only by Her power that even He moves – this is the content of the first *shloka*. One might ask: Just to boost up the glory of Mother Goddess does one have to descend to such a level as to bring God Himself to the level of saying that He is simply a nonentity? The esoteric principle here is that the immutable *Brahman* expresses itself only by the unfolding of the cit-*Shakti*. The poetic principle involved here is that the beloved, being the fair sex, is always to be given the credit and so 'He moves only when She moves Him' is also acceptable. Thus on both counts, the presentation is enjoyable.

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(Digest of pp.794 – 802)

Now let us come to modern Science and see whether there is any correlation with the set of ideas relating to *ShivaM* and *Shakti*. Matter is inert and its nature is inertia. But we know that inert matter undergoes internal changes and in due course evolves into more complicated matter and finally the universe itself. What is the power which made inert matter non-inert?

(These talks of the Maha-Swamigal probably date back to the thirties or the forties of the 20th century !)

In atomic science they talk about the interconvertibility of matter and energy. This energy is our *Shakti*. This is what makes inert matter non-inert. So *ShivaM*, the immutable *Brahman*, has to be compared to the 'inert matter' of science; but the comparison is not right since, *Brahman* is consciousness so not *jaDam* (that which has no consciousness), whereas inert matter of science is *jaDam*. Further, in the convertibility of matter into energy there is a difference for, when matter becomes energy, the matter that has become energy is now not there as matter. But in our philosophies, when energy shoots forth from *ShivaM*, the *ShivaM* still remains the same *ShivaM*.

After the Relativity theory of Einstein, science has come nearer to advaita vedanta and the *ShAkta* schools. Time and Space are relative concepts, as far as I have understood these scientific theories. *Brahman* is the only absolute. Everything else is relative, says vedanta. Anything that appears as real, does so because it is resting on the *Brahman*-canvas. This appearance as reality, is the relativity of science and the *MAyA* of advaita Vedanta. Science which talks of the relativity, does not say what is the absolute. The only absolute is *Brahman*, according to our religious scriptures as well as philosophical schools. Though western knowledge makes a distinction between religion and philosophy, *SanAtana dharma* does not make any distinction between the two. In it the two are inseparable like Shiva and *Shakti* ! And that Absolute has been experienced as Atman by our great sages. That is the soul of all souls.

But this fact has evaded science. Even if the scientists one day accept it in theory, they will have to say "its 'proof' is not within our jurisdiction; go to the *shAstra* of Spirituality to know it". Science can explain, through its laws, only certain 'movements' of the grand cosmic dance of *parAShakti*; whereas it is incapable of showing a path for becoming the Absolute by quelling the live Mind that vibrates in an integrated way together with all the vibrations of the universe. Nor is it the goal of Science. Only religious scriptures can show you the way. But even then, the final gates will be opened only by *ambaal*. Who else,

except the One who originally separated us from the Absolute, can reunite us with that Absolute?

It is unfair on our part to find fault with science for what is beyond science. In the same way protagonists of science must realise that there is a limit to their scientific quest. They have no right to say that what transcends their science is wrong or false. That the two are complementary must be felt by both sides. It will be fascinating to discover that several scientific truths have been enunciated, though in a different way, by some of our scriptural findings.

Why not think of the proton with a positive charge in the centre of the nucleus, as Shiva and the electron with the negative charge that goes round, as *ambaal*?

There is a 'still center' for everything which is its peaceful center. Even though it has no vibration it is not the emptiness nor it is of zero potential. The equilibrium which we aim at when we weigh a weight, is this still center. Every object has a center of gravity. Even in a dreadful storm, there is a 'storm center'. Always the energy radiates from such a center and that is why movement and action are produced. It is that center which may be called *ShivaM* and the energy that radiates from it and revolves about it is *ambaal*.

When something is positive and the other is negative, it does not appear to be equivalent. So to arrive at equivalence there is another way of looking at it. Instead of saying that one is in the center and the other revolves around it, think of each as half and half. That is the *ardha-nArIshvara* form. The right side is Shiva (positive), and the left side, *ambaal* (negative). This may be justified by the fact that the heart is on the left side and supplies the 'life' for the entire body. If it does not work properly, the right side also cannot work: *na khalu kushalaH spanditum api*, as the *shloka* 1 says.

(The Mahaswamigal goes on like this irrepressibly !

It must be enjoyed in the original of Ra Ganapathy's volumes.)

Another observation about 'left' and 'right'. What is 'right' in the original is shown as 'left' in the reflection. And what is 'left', becomes the 'right'. The non-dual *nirguNa-brahman*-Consciousness when it gets reflected in the mirror of *MAYa*, becomes the *saguNa brahman* that creates and monitors the dualities of the universe. This is an accepted principle of the advaita school. In other words IT IS SHIVA THAT GETS REFLECTED IN *MAYA* AND BECOMES THE *AMBAAL*!

(Emphasis mine – VK)

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(Digest of pp.802 - 820)

I was saying: It is Shiva Himself who gets reflected in the mirror of *MAYa* and becomes *ambaal*. If you ask the advaitin, "What is this *MAYa*", he will reply: 'It is not possible to say what it is. You know it is called

MAYa, magical ! So it will not allow us to understand it'. The *ShAkta* school will say: 'Even *MAYa* is only a part of *ambaal*'. I already told you that *MAYa* occurs only at the stage where *ShivaM* becomes the *jIva*, according to *ShAktaM*. That the *jIva* does not know that it is itself *ShivaM*, is *MAYa*. It is the work of *MAYaShakti* that makes it incomprehensible for *jIva* to know the Permanent Eternal One and mistake the ephemeral things as permanently existing.

It is at this point that the object and its reflected image analogy leads to the positive and negative. What we said earlier pertained to electricity. But now we shall take the positive-negative phenomenon of photography. In the positive, light is light and dark is dark. In the negative on the other hand, light is dark and dark is light. That is the Ignorance which shows what exists as not existing and non-existence as existence. This is the handiwork of *MAYa* ! We are all submerged in this *MAYa* and since *ambaal* is responsible for this, we call Her, *MAYa*.

But to top it all, we should not forget that, the very *ambaal* who does all this play of *MAYa*, is Herself the Most Compassionate One, and those of us who can surrender to Her as the Only Refuge, will be graced by Her and made to cross the *MAYa*-curtain !

Now we can make the meaning of the first *shloka* more meaningful. The very fact that the Acharya says that it was *ambaal* who activated the first movement in *ShivaM* gives a clear hint to us, that the reverse movement of the universe going back to that immutable *ShivaM* has again to be triggered only by Her Grace.

All the movements which resulted in the *jIvas* and the universe coming up are together called (cosmic) evolution. This is not Darwin's evolution. In his case it is something where lower level beings transform in due time to higher levels. In Vedanta, the *Brahman* at the apex expands into the universe and living beings. This outward expansion of subtle principles into gross matter is called evolution. The principles are taken to be 36 by some and 24 by some. Having become the *jIvas*, our goal should now be to go back to the source. That going back is *mokshha*.

All the things in the expanded mode have to get back into the internal mode and merge in *Brahman*. That is ascent (*ArohaNam*). The descent of *jIvas* and the universe from *Brahman* is *avarohaNam*. The terms 'expansion' and 'merging' seem to be better. Expansion of *Brahman* is Evolution and the merging into *Brahman* is 'Involution'. All of us have evolved from *Brahman*; not by ourselves but by the Will and Action of *ambaal*. We cannot involve into *Brahman* except by Her Will and Grace. Even though, in her cosmic Play, She seems to have given us a role for ourselves, we can never complete the 'Involution' without Her Grace. The electrical switch makes the fan rotate. Only the same switch can stop it from rotating. Thus the same Cause which made us evolve has to work

again to make us involute into *Brahman*. So we have to pray to Her. This is where *bhakti*, *jnAna* and yoga come in.

What is incomprehensibly divine would be made comprehensible by the divine itself if we cultivate intense love for that divine. This intense love is *bhakti*. If we have that, the divinity then would descend to make itself comprehensible to us. It is this *bhakti-rasa* coupled with the poetic *rasa* that our Acharya gives us in the form of Soundaryalahari.

So with all this introduction based on Sloka 1, we may now go forward. Sloka 2 elaborates the words ‘*hari-hara-virincAdhibihir-api ArAdhyAM*’ (you who are worshipped even by Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma and others) of Sloka 1. Here it says that only by Her Grace these three great divinities discharge their functions of Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution. And this they do just by the power of the dust of the holy feet of the Mother Goddess! This praise of the divine dust is carried over into Sloka 3 also. It (the divine dust) is the ‘rising sun for the darkness of the Ignorant, the flower-bunch giving out the honey of wisdom for the Dull-witted, and the wish-fulfilling godly gem for the Poor’.

Sloka 4 continues to dwell on the glory of the Divine Feet but does it very subtly.

tvad-anyaH pANibhyAM abhaya-varado daivata-gaNaH
tvam-ekA naivAsi prakaTita-varAbhIti-abhinayA /
bhayAt trAtuM dAtuM phalam-api ca vAnchhA-samadhikaM
sharaNye lokAnAM tava hi charaNaveva nipuNau // 4 //

daivata-gaNaH: The multitude of gods

tvad-anyaH: other than You

abhaya-varado: grant *abhaya* (=fearlessness) and boons

pANibhyAM: by the hands

tvam-ekA asi: You are the only one

na-eva: not at all

prakaTita-vara-abhIti-abhinayA: exhibiting – boon (giver) – fearlessness (giver) – by your ‘*mudrAs*’.

sharaNye: Oh Refuge

lokAnAM: for all the worlds

hi: indeed

tava: Your

charaNau-eva: feet alone

nipuNau: (are) expertly efficient

trAtuM: to protect

bhayAt: from fear

dAtuM api ca: and also to give

phalam: the fruit, the result

vAnchhA-samadhikaM: more than what one wishes.

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(Digest of pp.820-824)

“Other than You, all divines are seen with their *mudrAs* of *abhaya* (fearlessness) and *vara* (Boon). In other words they show by their hands that they give *abhaya* and *vara*”. This is the meaning of the first half of the *shloka*. But it does not mean that *ambaaL* would not grant ‘*abhaya*’ and ‘*vara*’. In fact in the Mayavaram temple She is known as ‘*abhaya-ambika*’. One of Her other names is ‘*vara-pradAyini*’, ‘the benefactor of boons.’

In fact the Acharya only means that She doesn’t have to give ‘*abhaya*’ and ‘*vara*’ by Her hands. Her divine feet alone are capable of granting what other deities do by their hands. The very word ‘*kAryaM*’ in Sanskrit (which means, ‘the act’ or ‘action’) goes back to the word ‘*kara*’ meaning ‘hand’. So the other divines have to take effort to do the action of giving ‘*vara*’ and ‘*abhaya*’. You, Oh Goddess, can do anything by the very ‘*sankalpa*’ (determination). Even the fivefold cosmic actions beginning with creation are done by You just by ‘wiggling the eyebrows’ (kshaNa-calitayoH brU-latikayoH – *shloka* 24 – meaning: by the movement, for a moment, of the eyebrows). Whether it is to protect devotees from fear, or it is to give them more than what they want through their wishes, She does it by just being there. By taking refuge at Her feet, the devotee achieves his wishes. She is the refuge of the entire universe.

Note the expert use of the words ‘*sharaNye*’ and ‘*charaNau*’. The first comes from the word ‘*sharaNa*’ meaning refuge. She is the Ultimate Refuge for the whole world. The second word comes from ‘*charaNa*’ meaning ‘foot’. Her feet are the Refuge; because the feet themselves are capable of granting our wishes, by just being there. Just as flowers, without ‘doing’ any action, radiate fragrance.

When one asks for the removal of fear, that is, fearlessness (*abhaya*), the positive response from the deity could only be the removal of fear; there is nothing more to be given. On the other hand, whatever other wish one asks for fulfillment, there can always be something more than that wish and thus She – nay, just the grace of Her divine feet – gives the devotee more than what he wants.

A question may arise. Why is ‘fearlessness’ sought separately? Can it not be given as one of the many wishes, by the Goddess? Why is it separated from the general category of ‘boons’?

(The following paragraphs are so exquisite in the original that it was decided to translate them literally word by word !)

Fearlessness (*abhaya*) is not a commodity that is given and taken. It is actually another name for advaita. ‘Only when there is duality there is fear’ says the Brihad-AraNyakopaniṣad (1.4.2). If there is only one thing there is, from what can fear arise? Only when there is a second entity fear arises in relation to it. “If one thinks even of the tiniest

distinction in *Brahman*, then fear arises. Even wise men, if they think of *Brahman* as another distinct object, are ceased of fear”, so says Taittiriya-upanishad (II – 7).

The moment we think of *Brahman* as different from us and as a God with qualities, we get into the mood of ‘*bhakti* out of fear’. Even the westerners talk about the ‘God-fearing’ nature as man’s noblest quality. When will that fear go? It will go only when the non-duality conviction arises that there is no *jIvAtman* distinct from *Ishvara*. In that state of the Existence of One without a second, where is the scope for a boon-giver and a boon-receiver – two entities? The symbolic exhibition of the ‘*abhaya-mudra*’ in the deity’s hand is in fact a formless (esoteric) principle only. There is no giving, no taking, there. It is a supreme state and the *mudra* is only a symbol for it. The Lord may be eradicating fears from the smallest fears, through those of birth and death, to the largest fear, namely that of duality, that of separation from Him; but the actual state of fearlessness is only the non-dual state. And that is why, it does not form part of the category of boons.

To the same question the scholars of the other (dvaita) schools cite the ‘*bhava-bhiti*’ that is, the fear of the cycle of births and deaths, as the major fear to be removed by Divine Grace and that is why, they say, ‘*abhaya*’ is kept separate from the other boons; and they stop there.

The ‘*abhaya mudra*’ is shown by the upward extended palm of the right hand. Other schools of philosophy say that this right hand points to the Divine worlds like Vaikunta and Kailasa in the upper worlds. But we advaitins say that it indicates the non-dual state which is vast and boundless like the wide space (*AkAsha*) up above.

(The translation-mode ends here.)

The hand which shows the boon-giving status is the left hand but with the palm facing us and extending downwards. ‘I want this and I want that’ is itself indicative of a lower state. Just as the actionless advaita state of ‘*abhaya*’ belongs to the Shiva side, namely the right side, the hand which shows the boon-giving Grace legitimately belongs to the action-packed *Shakti* side of the divine form. The left palm is extending downwards; what does it point to? It points to the divine feet, which is the last Refuge. Hold on to My Feet, says the Goddess, “That is the greatest boon for you”.

The show of ‘*mudra*’ is technically called ‘*abhinaya*’. To exhibit whatever mood there is internally, by the expression in the face, or by a symbolic gesture of the hands or feet is called ‘*abhinaya*’. Particularly, that shown by the fingers of the hands is called a ‘*mudra*’. It is the science of *tantra* that prescribes the ‘*mudras*’. The science and art of dancing has adapted only these ‘*mudras*’.

The bottomline of this *shloka* is to say that all this business of hand *mudras* belongs only to the other deities. Ambaal does not show

any of these *mudrAs*. Obviously one is thinking here of the Goddess Lalita-tripura-sundari only.

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(Digest of pp.824-831)

The Goddess Lalita-Tripurasundari, as affirmed in this *shloka*. does not have the '*vara-abhaya*' hands, (*vara* = boon; *abhaya* = fearlessness). She has the sugarcane-bow and the arrow of flowers in those two hands. Note however, the Acharya himself says in Sloka 70 that She has all Her four hands indicative of *abhaya* and *vara*.

Let us not make the mistake of thinking that this *shloka* means that all other deity-forms have the '*vara-abhaya*' hands. There are several without these hands. Think of *Vighneshvara* (Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed deity) whom we see at every nook and corner (in India). What about the figure of the dancing Nataraja? He has only the '*abhaya*' hand but no boon-giving hand. Minakshi of Madurai does not have these two hands.

The Vishnu deity (of almost all temples) Himself, though He has four hands – with conch, disc, mace and lotus --, has no '*vara-abhaya*' hands. *Varada-rAja* – the name meaning 'the king of boon-giving deities' - - in Kanchipuram, inspite of His name, does not have the '*vara*' hand; He has the mace in that hand ! Maha-lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth, almost invariably, has the *vara-abhaya* hands. But the Goddess of Learning, Sarasvati, does not have either.

Durga, most of the times, has an '*abhaya*' by the right hand, while the corresponding left hand is on the thigh – this situation being called 'Uru-hastam' . Some of the Su*Brahmanya* deity-forms have the same configuration. Balaji of Tirupati has the *vara-mudrA* in the right hand, while His left hand is an '*Uru-hastam*'. Thus the statement of this *shloka* "Other than You, all other deities show the '*vara-abhaya*' *mudrA* by their hands" is to be considered a poetic exaggeration only.

(At this point the Maha-Swamigal begins
an elaborate introduction to slokas 5 and 6,
thereby dwelling on the topic:

"Is it legitimate for God to bless one 'to desire' ?")

So far in the first three *shlokas* the *stotra* does not say specifically which deity is being praised. Even in the fourth *shloka* there is just a clue that the deity is without the '*vara-abhaya*' hands. How many hands there are, or what are in those hands? – these questions are left open. In the next two *shlokas*, the clue is given (*shloka* #5) that it is that deity that prodded a desire in mahA-vishNu to take the form of '*mohini*' and create sensual impulses even in Lord Shiva and it is also the same deity (*shloka* 6) which gave even to the God of Love (*Manmatha*) the power to disturb even the minds of great sages and saints. And thus we get the idea that the deity of this *stotra* could be the *KAmeshvari* that we spoke

of, in the beginning when we discussed the original 'Desire' that sprouted out in *Brahman* itself 'to express Itself'.

(See Sections -9 and 10.)

The major purpose of *bhakti* is to quell all desires and get attracted to that Infinite source of Bliss. While that is so, how is it legitimate for a *bhakti-stotra* to praise that very deity as One who encouraged and manouvred the powers that be, to fall in Love? In spite of our reverence to the Acharya, we have to raise this question sometimes. The world-view has to disappear in order for Divine Enlightenment to appear; but here the deity is praised for having engineered the creation of that world ! Knowledge arises only after all '*kAma*' (Desire) has been eradicated; but here She is glorified as having been that very Power who gave the power to the God of 'Desire' for generating Desire. Does it mean, then, that 'Desire' itself is Divine Grace?

It all means that opposite forces have to exist. We have to contend with both. If there were no enemy, internally, to struggle against, life could be totally without any challenges and therefore uninteresting. If everything was going smoothly, then we would not even recognize 'good' as 'good'. The cross-currents of conflicting powers exist for the purpose of proving to us that 'good' will survive and surface at the end. The 'desire' in *Brahman* resulted in the creation of the universe. The 'desire' in the living results in the world of the living growing up.

Note another interesting marvel. What we consider as 'good' has something 'bad' in it and vice versa. To understand this subtlety of Creation and carry on our struggle in this drama of the world is the art of living in fullness. Desire (*kAma*) and Anger (*krodha*) are wrong; but this is only a generalised statement. Looked into deeply, even they have 'good' in them. There should be a 'desire' for 'good' and 'anger' against 'bad'. In fact it is not only not wrong, but essential. In the same way, what appears to be 'good' will have 'bad' hidden in it.

On top of this all there are two important things to note. One is the Lord's shower of Grace; and the other is our surrender to Him. Both are products of Creation; without the existence of evil and the necessity to fight it, Grace and Surrender have no meaning. On His side, the highest He does is 'Grace' or Anugraha. On our side, the highest we can do is 'Surrender'. TO ACCEPT THAT WE CANNOT DO ANYTHING EXCEPT TO SURRENDER TO HIM IS THE APEX OF ALL THAT WE CAN DO ! You will know it when you do it !

(Note: Emphasis mine – VK)

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(Digest of pp. 831-836)

Even if millions of people do not go the right way what is of significance is that one of them will see the difference between good and

bad and make the total surrender to Her and get Her shower of Grace for him to see that he (the *jIva*) and the Ultimate are one. Not all the seeds of the fruits of a tree grow into a full tree. In the whole world of living beings even if one in a million achieves that Infinite fullness of Man the purpose of Creation is fulfilled. That probably is *ambaal*'s idea of Creation.

But again, those who do not so achieve the Fullness are not to be considered wasted or damned. There is no eternal damnation in our scriptures. Acharya Madhva propagated that idea. Maybe he thought that at least the dread and fear of eternal damnation would motivate people into reforming themselves to be good. Even an extremely sinful person has a way of ultimate redemption -- that is the creed of our religion.

Once there was a king. An ordinary commoner was told by him, on an important mission, to come and see him in his camp. But the commoner entreated the king to give him some kind of an authentication, like a ring or something, which would gain him the entry to the king's presence when he presented himself at the camp. The king gave him such a ring; but the ring did not have his (the king's) seal. It had the seal of the enemy king. The commoner was perplexed. Why is this king giving him a ring which would only be identified as the enemy's? The king himself removed his doubt by saying: "There are so many of my own couriers and courtiers who have obtained from me my authenticated ring so that they can meet me any time they like. The line of such people would be so large at any time, that you would not get anywhere near me when you come to meet me. But if they see the seal of the enemy king in your hands they would take you to be a spy and would present you before me in no time !"

This perhaps is the strategy of *ambaal* ! Desire, Anger and the whole gang of bad things are Her own Grace to us in the form of authenticated 'rings', so that we may go to Her soon. Once Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, asked Krishna to keep giving her difficulties and miseries all the time so that she will never forget the Lord ! In other words, in the mystery of creation, unhappiness itself is a divine blessing in disguise.

Again, the opportunity of showering Grace on an individual does not stop with that person. It continues to pour on all the offsprings of that person in the same way. At this point one is tempted to say that, in spite of the general Hindu prayer that there should be no more births, the very fact that there are offsprings is itself a shower of Her Grace. How else can the balance of *karma* of *jIvas* be exhausted? If there was no '*kAma*' in the world those who die with a large balance of *karma* would have to go unredeemed. Thus it is *ambaal*'s grace that there is '*kAma*' as one of the four objectives or purposes of life.

And the scriptures come to our help by earmarking four stages of life in which one of the stages, namely, *gRhastAshrama* (the householder-

stage) is set apart for giving vent to our legitimate desires. Just as there are exceptions to every rule, for this general rule of creation also there are certain exceptions in the form of a few, - very few -, who take to the fourth ashrama (sannyasa) without having to go through the second ashrama of a householder.

Another final point. Whoever has the power and the means to create should have also the power and the means to bring the end to creation and the created. The *ambaal* has the power to create and spark the desire in us; and therefore She has also the power to free us from that creation and release us from the desire that overpowered us. The obverse of a coin has always a reverse. So the same (obverse) power which originates '*kAma*' in human beings, has also the (reverse) power to say, in respect of certain blessed individuals, to that '*kAma*', "Don't go near such and such persons" !

So Manmatha, the God of all sensualities, who overpowers us by the power which he got from *ambaal*, has however to obey Her when She says: "Thus far and no further". The *shlokas* 5 and 6 which talk of the power of Manmatha has this implication for the devotees of *ambaal*, though the *shlokas* do not say so; they only talk of the obverse of the coin, not its reverse ! And that, the unsaid reverse, is the significance of those two *shlokas*, especially for those of us who can surrender to Her through recitation of these *shlokas*. Her *leela* is: From advaita through 'desire' to dvaita; and then, ultimately, to advaita through Her Grace and Compassion!

Now we shall go over to *shloka* #7. Here comes, for the first time, a graphic description of the form of *KAmeshvari* (Raja-rajeshvari, LalitA-tripura-sundari), the deity of praise in Soundaryalahari. Even here, no name is mentioned; in fact, throughout the hymn, the name does not occur.

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(Digest of pp. 856-860)

*kvaNat-kAnchI-dAmA kari-kalabha-kumbha-stana-natA
parikshhINA madhye pariNata-sharac-candra-vadanA /
dhanur-bANAn pAshaM sRNimapi dadhAnA karatalaiH
purastAd-AstAM naH puramathitu-rAho-purushhika // 7 //*

kAnchI-dAmA: (She who is) wearing the girdle with jewelled bells

kvaNat: tinkling and jingling (of jewels)

kari-kalabha-kumbha-stana-natA: (She who is made to) lean forward by the breasts that resemble the forehead of a young elephant

parikshhINA madhye : (She who is) slender in the middle (of the body)

pariNata-sharac-candra-vadanA: (She whose) face is like the autumnal full moon

dadhAnA karatalaiH : (She who is) wearing in Her hands

dhanur-bANAn: the bow and arrows

pAshaM: the noose

sRNim-api : (and) also the goad

Aho-purusshika : (She who is) the 1'-ness (=Ego, in the positive sense)

pura-mathithuH: of the destroyer of (the demon named) pura — i.e. of Lord Shiva

AstAM : may She appear

purastAt : before

naH : us.

(See Section 10
for an explanation of “*Aho-purusshika*”)

A girdle is called ‘mekhala’. If there are tingling bells in it it is called ‘kAnchi’. The name ‘raNat-kiNkiNi-mekhala’ that occurs in the LalitA-sahasranAma is just this ‘kvaNat-kAnchi-dhAmA’, namely, the jingling girdle with bells. The string of bells is also called ‘maNi’. So ‘kAnchi’ is also known as ‘mani-mekhala’.

In Tamil literature ‘Mani-mekhalai’ is one of the five great epics. The heroine of that epic is *Manimekhalai*. At the end of the story she finally comes to the town of Kanchi where she feeds the poor from her inexhaustible vessel (*akshaya-pAtram*). This work ‘Manimekhalai’ is slanted towards Buddhistic religion. Accordingly the heroine reaches salvation after getting the initiation from a Buddhistic Guru. But the incident of feeding the poor from an ‘akshaya-pAtram’ is a traditional story of the Goddess Kamakshi of Kanchi from age-old times. Even in the Sangam Age (of Tamil) there was a woman by name ‘KAmak-kaNNi’ which is nothing but the Sanskrit ‘KamAkshi’. Well, all this is a digression from my thought that ‘Mani-mekhalai’ finally comes to the town (Kanchi) which has the same name as hers!

By the mention of ‘Kanchi’ the author has hinted at the deity of his devotion. There are scores of feminine deities in this country from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. *KshIra-bhavAni* (in Kashmir), *Bhagavati* (in Kerala), *ChamunDeshvari* and *ShAradAmbA* (in Karnataka), *JnAnAmbA*, *BhramarAmbA* and *Kanaka-durga* (in Andhra), *TulajA BhavAni* (in Maharashtra), *ambAji* (in Gujarat), *Vindhya-vAsini* and *anna-pUrNeshvari* (in Uttarpradesh), *KALI* (in Bengal), *KamAkhyA* (in Assam), *VaishNavI* (in Jammu) and finally, *MeenAkshI*, *akhilANdeshvari*, *dharma-samvarddhanI*, *KamalambAL*, *BalAmbAL*, and *Shiva-kAma-sundari* (in Tamilnadu).

(Note: The Maha-Swamigal does not seem to have mentioned the names of the regions in the above list. These names have been supplied by Ra. Ganapathi in a footnote. The Maha-Swamigal seems to have just reeled off the names of the deities only.)

Thus there are several several deity-forms of *ambAL*. But, there is only one deity which conforms to the form of *LalitA-tripura-sundari* as delineated in the *ShrIvidyA tantra* with certain characteristic physical

features and arms and weapons and that is the deity 'KamAkshi' of Kanchipuram. The author of Soundaryalahari who does not mention the name of the deity of his devotion throughout the text, has perhaps hinted it here, by using the word 'KanchI-dAmA' !

The word 'dAmaM' means 'twisted rope or string'. It was because YashodA bound child Krishna with a 'dAmaM' around his waist, He is called 'dAmodara' (*udara* means stomach). 'KanchI-dAmA' is so named because the jewel-belled girdle is made up of twisted golden strings. When *ambaaL* gracefully walks over, not only the ornaments round her ankles but the jewels of the girdle also jingle !

The whole earth is personified as *BhUmA-devI*. When one visualises that form, the geographical location of the navel for that form on the earth is said to be Kanchipuram. When the girdle with bells is also imagined at its location on the waist, the facade of that girdle comes at the position of that navel; and that is why the *kshetra* (place) also gets the name of Kanchi !

A girdle which circles the globe must be really big. When that is supposed to be the ornament around the waist of *ambaaL*, then that waist also should be big. But that is not so, says the description: '*parikShINA madhye*'. '*kShINa*' means 'lean'. The preposition 'pari' indicates that the leanness is extra-ordinary. Thus '*parikShINA madhye*' means She is really very slender in Her middle. The miracle is that this 'slender' waist covers the whole universe. 'The macro within the micro' !

Let it be. But what about the face? The face is the '*mukhya*' (= important, significant) part. It is from the word '*mukhya*' the word '*mukha*' (face) arose. How is *ambaaL*'s face? She is '*pariNata sharat chandra-vadaNA*'. Her face is like the moon, with all the coolness and the whiteness of the autumnal full moon. Later, (in the 63rd *shloka*), the Acharya puts this thought in more poetic terms: '*smita-jyotsna-jAlaM tava vadana-chandrasya*' – which, in effect, means 'your moon-like face radiates miraculous moonlight through its smile'.

Another point. The second line of the *shloka* has two words both beginning with 'pari' : '*parikShINA*' and '*pariNata*'. When you read the whole line the sound of the alliteration creates a pleasant feeling. Such beauties are the specialities of great poets.

Note : At this point this author checked all the slokas of Soundarya-lahari. Almost all of them have in their second and fourth lines such alliterations or similar-sounding words which create the lilting effect which the Maha-Swamigal mentioned even earlier.

Just a few examples:

Shloka # 1: *Na cedevam devam devo; praNantum stotum;*

7: *parikShINA ... pariNata...;*

purastAd AstAm, ... puramathithuH ;

17: *saha janani sanchintayati;*

Vacobhir-vAgdevI-vadana;

97: *patnIm, padmAm; hareH, hara-sahacarIm;*

Bhramayasi, parabrahma-mahiShI.

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(Digest of pp.861-866)

The third line of the seventh *shloka* is:

'dhanur-bANAn pAshaM sRNimapi dadhAnA karatalaiH'

'Holding by the hands the bow, the arrows, the noose and the goad' is the meaning. 'sRNi' means 'ankusha', the goad. These four are the specifics that determine now the deity of dedication in this *stotra*. And so we may be certain now that the deity that is being praised is the deity of the *ShrIvidyA mantra*, namely lalitA-tripura-sundari or Kameshwari. If we are not very 'technical' about it, it is also the same as Raja-Rajeshwari. When *ambaaL* is in this form, She has four hands, with the noose and goad in the two upper hands and the bow and arrows in the two lower hands. Manmatha, the God of Love has the same bow of sugarcane and the same arrows of flowers.

There are two things: *rAga* (attachment and liking); and *dvesha* (hate and dislike). The former gives rise to *kAma* (desire) and the latter gives rise to *krodha* (anger). Desire and anger have to be kept in control. Of course all these are born out of the great divine mAyic play of *ambaaL*. And by the same *leela* of *ambAL*, they disappear by Her Grace (*anugraha*). The very thought that they will so disappear by Her Grace will help us fight against them.

'rAga-swarUpa-pAshADhya', meaning, She who holds the noose, which is 'rAga' in physical form -- is one of Her many names in the *lalita-sahasranAma*. Similarly, another name is *'krodhA-karAnkushojjala'*, meaning, She who shines by the goad, which is 'krodha' in physical form.

Of the twin of Desire and Anger, desire has the form of *ambaaL*'s noose (*pAshaM*). When you talk of *'yama-pAshaM'* it is the noose. When you talk of mother's *pAshaM* (*tAip-pAshaM*, in Tamil) it is her attachment and affection and therefore her concern, her desire (*AshA*). It is the desire that binds us. It binds us like a rope.

Anger has the form of *ambaaL*'s goad. Anger pierces you like a goad. But it does not pierce the other man on whom you are angry. He may go away just like that, indifferently. Our anger pierces only ourselves. The pierce of the goad will be felt by us only. And we hurt ourselves. Modern science tells us how energy is wasted during anger and how much. What is more interesting is the further scientific fact – with which our scriptures agree – that whereas we exhibit anger (*krodhaM*) at something we don't like and thus waste energy, the energy loss is more while we like something, desire it and happily indulge in that desire (*kAmaM*). In fact, Desire is the 'hita-shatru' – enemy in the disguise of a friend.

The words '*pAshaM*' and '*ankushaM*' both ring a bell and bring the 'elephant' to our minds. The elephant is always tethered by a heavy chain to an anchor. The chain is actually a 'rope of attachment' (*pAshakayiru*, in Tamil) for the elephant. The twins '*kAma*' and '*krodha*' are elephant-like in their strength; so they have to be controlled with effort in the same way an elephant is controlled by a '*pAshaM*' (rope) and '*ankusham*' (goad). The man who rides and monitors the elephant uses the goad to control it. The elephant-like evils of Desire and Anger are both in the mind. So it is the mind that has to be controlled. In fact in Sivanandalahari (*shloka* #96) our Acharya compares the human mind to a '*madhepa*', meaning, a mad elephant.

Our *ambaaL* is always shown with a *pAshaM* (noose) and *ankushaM* (goad). This itself is Her *leela*. They are Her important accessories. This is one way of looking at it.

Another way is this. She shows *pAshaM* (affection, attachment) to us; so with the '*pAshaM*' in her hand she binds us and pulls us away from all our worldly '*pAshaMs*' (attachments) and makes us come back to Her with the cry 'Oh Mother!'. And that gives us the attachment to the attachmentless Divine. '*PatratraAn patru*' (in the language of Valluvar, in Tamil)! Again, when we fall into the Anger mode, She brings her '*ankusham*

M' (goad) on us and subdues our anger, by that very *ankusham* which stands in her hand as the personification of Anger (*krodham*) ! When Desire is unfulfilled it turns into Anger. The same Desire and Anger, in Her hands, in the form of the noose and the goad, become the cure for the two evils in human minds.

Though our *shloka* in the Soundaryalahari mentions 'bow' and 'arrow' first and then mentions the 'noose' and 'goad', it is the 'noose and goad' that are special to *ambaaL*. Manmatha the God of Love has the same bow and arrows both of which he uses to get mankind downward into sensuality. His bow draws man's mind into sensuousness and his five arrows affect the five organs of cognition.

But the same bow and five arrows in the hands of *ambaaL* work in a positive way as is vindicated by two names (that appear just immediately after the two names about *rAga* and *krodha* I mentioned a little while ago) in *lalitA-sahasranAma*, namely, '*mano-rupekshhu-kodaNDA*' and '*pancha-tanmAtra-sAyakA*'.

The former means: '(She who has) the bow of sugarcane, the sugarcane being the figuration of the mind'. The latter name means: '(She who has) the five arrows that are the figurations of the five *tanmAtras* (= subtle principles behind the senses)'.

The same sugarcane bow, which in Manmatha's hands, draws man downward into sensuality, in Her hands, leads us upward by producing the 'desire' for *mokshha*. The same five arrows of flowers, which in

Manmatha's hands, lead man's five senses outward toward sense objects, in *ambaal's* hands, makes us desire, to see Her divine form, to hear the melody of music in devotion to Her, to taste the sweetness of the nectar flowing from Her Grace, to smell the fragrance of the flowers that adorned Her, and to feel the touch of Her lotus feet.

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(Digest of pp.866-869)

Just a change of place of the weapons changes their purpose and effects! The same bow and arrows, that, in the hands of the God of Love, were the cause of man's downfall into the sensual world, become, in the hands of the Mother Divine, the switches for turning our mind and senses towards the Eternal Bliss of Her Presence. It is something like the knife in the hands of the thief; if the same knife were in our hands, he runs away! When we submit to that magical switch of Hers, we overflow with *bhakti*; and this together with the outpouring of Her Grace drenches us in the flood of that spiritual Bliss, and we forget ourselves as separate entities. When we delude ourselves as separate it is *MAYa* ; this is the worst state of existence. When we forget ourselves as separate it is Knowledge; it is the best state.

Thus when we see that a change of place transforms the worst into the best, we may learn a lesson. Why not transfer all the beautifications and dressing-up that we do for ourselves into ornamentations and dresses for *ambaal*, thereby transforming their effect? When we decorate ourselves it BRINGS IN the Ego. When we decorate Her, it BRINGS DOWN our Ego. Decoration in Sanskrit is '*alankAraM*'; and ego is '*ahamkAraM*'. If we do the '*alankAraM*' to Her, our '*ahamkAraM*' is gone !

In short, the flower-arrows in *ambaal's* hands grace us with the needed sense-control and the sugar-cane bow in Her hands bestows on us control of our mind. Nothing else is needed for Enlightenment ! As Muka-kavi says in Pancha-shati, 'Mother! Whereas You sparked desire in Shiva Himself who had burnt the Lord of Desire to ashes, the same You, in our case, eradicate desires in the desire-filled Jivas'.

Mind and the five senses are together counted as six instruments for the human being. Instruments are called '*karaNas*' in Sanskrit. The six '*karaNas*' of man are like the '*caraNas*' (feet) of a bee. So the *jIva* itself is nothing but a six-footed bee with six instruments of action. The analogy becomes apt when we think of the bee merging into the depths of a flower with all its (six) feet stuck in that depth. For, the *jIva* has to work its way to stick its six instruments out into the lotus of the divine feet of the Mother. This is the idea which our Acharya himself later builds into Sloka 90 of Soundaryalahari: '*nimajjan majjIvaH karaNa-caraNaH shhaT-caraNatAm*', meaning, 'plunging (into Your lotus feet), may this *jIva* of mine with its six instruments as the feet (become) the six-legged bee' .

The important thing to note here is what has not been said. It is not said that the mind and the five senses should submit themselves to the bow and arrows of *ambaal*. It is only said that they should dissolve themselves into the divine feet. Recall from *shloka* #4 that ‘She need not give *abhaya* and *vara* by Her hands; Her feet themselves are capable of doing that’. In this *shloka* #7, instead of the *vara* and *abhaya mudrAs* in the two hands, the bow and arrows are mentioned. They have been said to give the mind-control and the sense-control. But one may question: Why can’t these controls be also a Grace from Her feet? That is why it has been said that the mind and the five senses should merge in the lotus of Her feet as a bee gets lost inside the flower. The noose and the goad in the other two hands would then be not necessary at all to quell the Desire and Anger in the human mind.

But then, the question arises: Why four hands, instead of just two?

(These things are not amenable to logic,
said the Maha-Swamigal earlier.
But here he does not repeat himself.)

That the four hands add to the beauty of this beauty Queen is to say it naively. But remember She is the Queen of the Universe. The majesty of that status is shown by the bow and arrow in the two forehands. But She is also the Benefactor of the bliss of *Mokshha*; therefore She is the Queen of the Empire of Enlightenment (*jnAna-sAmrAjyaM*). *RAga* (Attachment) and *dveshha* (hatred, enmity) are two arch-villains that constitute the obstacle to *mokshha*. These two are killed by the noose and the goad in Her other two hands, thus establishing that She is the Queen of *‘jnAna-sAmrAjyaM’*.

The bow and the arrows in the forehands has also another significance. What we have to surrender to Her feet, namely our mind and the senses, She draws by Her own initiative to Herself; the bow draws the mind and the arrows the senses, to Herself. It is as if a loving mother says to her child: ‘Dear child, why do you have to fall at my feet; I will take you onto my lap’!

This whole *shloka* is a fit one for meditation. It reminds us that the bow and arrows that turned the Ishwara Himself – the Supreme who is nothing but a bundle of Knowledge, cit – into a creation-mode through the artifice of making Him fall in love with Ishwari, who thereby became *Shiva-kAma-sundari*; that same bow and arrows now draw the medley of minds and senses of the *jIvas* and keep them under its control, thus protecting them (spiritually). In fact the bottom line is that even this action of ‘drawing’ and ‘protecting’ is not done by the bow and arrows but by just Her feet.

Indeed weapons in the hands of Gods and Goddesses are powerful not because they are weapons but because they are given that Power by the supreme *Shakti*, that is, *ambaaL*. What She is said to do by Her weapons and other instruments is all just Her Will. She wills it and it is done. What a mysterious play! Just catch hold of Her feet. That is

enough. She wills to shower Her Grace and there is a downpour of *abhaya* (fearlessness), *vara* (boon), control of the five senses, control of the mind, and what-have-you!. As a cosmic play, She may use Her weapons, or She may not; She may show *mudrAs* or She may not.

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(Digest of pp.869-883)

Having described Her four arms and what She held in them, having portrayed Her general physical features including the autumnal full moon of the divine face, the *shloka* #7 ends with the svarUpa-lakshaNa (Inherent Definition) of *ambaal*. This is the core of the core. She is the personification of the 'I-ness' of the Absolute *Brahman*. I have talked about it earlier. In other words She is the cit-*Shakti* Itself. She is *jnAna* in form. She is *jnAna-ambaal*.

'*purastAd AstAm naH*' – May She appear before us. May She become cognizable for us. Note the use of the word 'us' ('*naH*') here. Our Acharya is praying for us all. It is not 'me', but 'us'. The purpose of the graphic description in this *shloka* is for us to keep Her before our mental vision.

There is a Tamil *stotra* called *abhirAmi-antAdi*. This is a *stotra* by a great devotee *abhirAmi-bhattar* on the Goddess known by the name of *abhirAmi* in TirukkaDavUr. The form of *abhirAmi* has four hands with *vara* and *abhaya* in the two forehands and lotus and bead-necklace (*aksha-mALA*) in the other two hands. The *stotra* has 100 verses. Right in the second verse the author describes how the Goddess gave darshan to him, as having in Her four hands, the bow, the arrows, the noose and the goad. In the last verse of his poem he gives the same description of the Goddess.

The next *shloka* (#8) of Soundaryalahari describes her location, her own world in the Cosmic Geography. Just as Shiva has Kailas, VishNu has Vaikuntham, She has Her own, but there are actually two locations for Her. One is the central peak, called the peak of Meru. The other is called the City of *ShrI* (*ShrI-puraM* or *ShrI-nagaraM*) in the Ocean of Nectar (*amRta-sAgaraM*). But the descriptions of the residence of *ambaal* in either of them is the same. This *shloka* (#8) – '*sudhA-sindhora-madhya ...*' gives the description of the *ShrI-nagaraM*. Right in the centre of the Ocean of Nectar; surrounded by the forest of five kinds of divine trees; in the island called *maNi-dvIpaM*; therein in the Garden of kadamba trees; in the palace of gems called *cintAmaNi*. right on the seat of the five brahmAs;

(Re: the five brahmAs, see Section 10.)

And right there, She is seated, as an inundation of Bliss that is of pure Cit, Knowledge. This is what one has to visualize in one's meditation.

After this *shloka* come two *shlokas*, #s. 9 and 10, wherein we are told how to propitiate *ambaal* through the *KunDalini* Yoga and *mantra* yoga. Sloka #9 describes how one achieves the bliss of advaita by moving the *KunDalini Shakti* through the six *chakras* (also called lotuses). From bottom up, in these *chakras*, the *KunDalini Shakti* is in the form of the five elemental principles – earth, water, fire, air, and space and then in the sixth, as the mind principle. The *nADI* (nerve, approximately) which has all these *chakras* is called the *sushumnA nADI*.

When *KunDalini* is taken up via this *nADI* through all these *chakras* and finally is unionised with the shiva-tattva in the thousand-petalled lotus at the top of the head, that is when She causes the realisation of the bliss of advaita. What is in the micro is also in the macro. When *ambaaL* is in her *virAT* (universal expansion) state, the five elemental principles and their origin, the mahat principle, are all in the experience of a yogi who sees them in the *KunDalini chakras*. And that very mahat, which is the Cosmic Mind, merges itself in the *Brahman*, namely, the *ShivaM* in the sahasrAra (thousand-petalled) *chakra*, thus causing the *advaita-siddhi*.

This experience of the ‘*rasa*’ (flavour) of advaita is actually the experience of the taste of nectar, says the next *shloka* (#10). When advaita is ‘experienced’ there cannot be two things: one, ‘the taste’ and two, the One that gives that taste, namely *ambAL*; and much less another thing called a *jIva*. So the word ‘experience’ is just a ‘formality’ (*upacArAM* in Sanskrit) for saying what cannot be said formally. However, just before that ‘experience’ and after it, there is something like a sentiment similar to an ‘experience’, the benefactor of that experience and the recipient of that experience – in fact, a triad or *tripuTP*.

I talked of lotuses earlier. They are not lotus flowers of our familiar village pond. The lotus flower of a pond blooms only in sunlight. In moonlight they close up. On contact of the heat of fire they disintegrate. On the other hand, in these *KunDalini* lotuses, whether it is agni-khaNDam, sUrya-khaNDam, or candra-khaNDam, the lotuses corresponding to the khaNDam blossoms, when the *KunDalini* reaches there. And in the end, the full moon itself blooms the thousand petalled lotus at the top of the head. And the nectar of moonlight flows from the moon.

That is the ‘*rasa*’, the flavour, the juice, the essence. Who is giving that ‘*rasa*’? It is the *ambaal*. Her divine feet is there in the reflection of the moon as the Guru’s Grace. That is where indeed the nectar flows from. That it flows from the moon is only a way of saying. The one who receives and realises the flow of that nectar-*rasa* is the *jIva*. But the *advaita bhAvana* (attitude) that She is Herself the ‘*rasa*’ and She is also the ‘*rasAsvAda*’, the taster of the ‘*rasa*’ – this feeling will also be there.

Maybe you are all thinking : '(The Speaker) is neither going into the subject of *KunDalini*, nor is allowing us to go near it. How, in the world, can we ever have such profound experiences? At least he (the speaker) could have gone on without mentioning these!'

Well, it is not necessary to have them as the *KunDalini* yoga. ...

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(Digest of pp.883-887)

[Note: This is a difficult part. So what is given is almost a close translation rather than a 'Digest'.]

It is not necessary to go the *KunDalini* way. Whatever path you take, whatever method of *upAsana* (spiritual worship) you follow, without having to go through the regimen of the *KunDalini* yoga, if you sincerely follow any one path with an one-pointed faith, you will, when you reach a certain advanced stage, get those breathing-in and breathing-out experiences exactly as you would, in a yoga *sAdhana*, all by itself. You may not even feel it. It will get transformed by itself. In a still more advanced stage, when we are in one-ness with the object of our *upAsana*, the breathing may even be stationary in the *kumbhaka* state.

In ordinary mundane activities of ours we usually exhale by the left nostril. On the other hand, the same exhaling, if you carefully observe it, will come by the right nostril, when you have just had a noble elevating experience of peace like the darshan of a deity or of a saintly sage. At a higher stage, the exhaling will be equal in both nostrils, to the extent that, it will then be only one step short of staying in the *kumbhaka* state, but at the same time, without any tendency to suffocate, the whole system being light and comfortable – all these changes in the breathing will certainly occur.

And thus, at the end, one may even reach the penultimate state to *advaita-siddhi*, namely, the movement of breath reaches the top, touches the divine feet of *ambaal* and the nectar starts flowing! Even in our ordinary day-to-day life, if we have an extraordinary experience of happiness, we sometimes suffocate and swoon; that is actually a reflection of the taste of *kumbhakaM*. That also is a fragment of a fragment of the experience of the sprouting of the nectar at the top of the head !

I am telling you all this just to point out that even in the path of *bhakti* such superlative experiences do occur.

Just have a look at the great devotional songs and poems of confirmed devotees of God, like the shaiva saints of Tamilnadu, the vaishnava Alvars, the devotees from Maharashtra, Bengal, North India, Sufi saints, and also of Christianity. All these songs will only flash the many yogic experiences and spiritual experiences of enlightenment.

It is not just yoga and *jnAna*. We should also mention the experience of Love, *premA*. When we talked of fundamentals like ichA-

Shakti, *Kameshvara* and *Kameshvari*, it is all very subtle and pure Love. The word '*kAmam*' brings to our mind various connotations. It may be thought that the fact of a sannyasi talking about it strikes a discordant note. But in reality, in terms of an esoteric context there is no fault there. It only indicates by symbols that *Shakti* intertwined with the substratum of Peace is what creates 'Creation'. There is nothing wrong here. That is why *ambaal* brings the experience of *prema* (Love) along with those of yoga and of *jnAna*, to many great people, at the very end of their *sAdhanA*.

In the evolution of the Origin into multiplicity, the very first thing that happens is the *icchA* (Wish, Desire) and the Love-pair. So also, at the very end of the *sAdhanA* for the involution of the *jIva* into the Source, the *nADI* goes through the *nAyika* stage just before the last stage of the Union with the Supreme. That is the stage of identity with *Shakti*. That is when there is an anguish for union with the *nAyaka*, that is, *ShivaM*. It is in that anguish one surrenders totally with the attitude: "I am incapable of doing anything. It is all Your Wish".

Then even that desire to merge in Shiva disappears and there remains only the Will of the Lord. In other words, the involution that the *jIva* made with deliberate effort merges in that first evolution of Shiva. At that point, as far as that *jIva* is concerned, Shiva Himself, without expanding in evolution, involutes within Himself and receives the *jIva* into Him. Think of a flood of flowing water. Put some object into it. The waves will toss it back and forth and push it over to the bank. This is natural. But when there is a great vortex in the current, it takes the object into itself and consumes it. This is what happens here also.

(In the above paragraph Ra Ganapathi in his Tamil version does not use any Tamil or Indian language word for 'Involution' and 'Evolution'.

Obviously, the Maha-Swamigal himself must have used these english words only.)

The first 'wish' of Shiva, and the last 'wish' of the *jIva* together coalesce into a symbolic Love here! We can get confirmations for this from the songs of great devotees across the world and across religions. The songs of Manickavasagar and Mirabhai have excellent parallels in the songs of Sufi Saints and Christian mystics. It is all an experience of Yoga, *jnAna* and *Prema*.

Though we have said that it is the 'wish of Shiva' and 'wish of *jIva*', it is all only the cit-movement of *ambaal* only. Only when the complete merger has taken place it is *ShivaM*. So when we say that He takes something into Him, that action itself is Hers only.

I just talked about the highest yoga-experiences that occur in the path of *bhakti*. Without going into yogic *sAdhanA* or tAntric *sAdhanA*, if one follows the *bhakti* path with the attitude: "All this is beyond me, Oh Mother, You are my Refuge", then even the self-pride that 'I am doing a

great *sAdhana*' will not arise. The Mother Herself will lift up even the lowliest and grant him the highest experience.

One might feel let down that he cannot get that flow of nectar from the full moonlight-glow that occurs when the *prANa-Shakti* reaches the thousand-petalled lotus called sahasrAra. One need not regret the absence of this experience. '*pariNata-candra-vadana*' says the *shloka* #7. That full-moon-face is easy to be kept in mind. Stick to it. Think of the nectar flowing from the graceful glance from those eyes and the nectar of the blissful smile of that face . She gives you what you thought about and grants you the internal light of the moon and an internal flow of nectar.

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(Digest of pp.887-892)

Let those who have the capacity to go through the path of *KuNDalinI* yoga go that way. For us, the easier *bhakti* path which holds doggedly to The Mother is enough. What they can get, She will give the same to us. Maybe She will take us also to that path, after a certain stage and give us those experiences. Maybe She will also tell some of them who have gone through that difficult terrain, "Enough of this" and bring them back to stay quiet in a total attitude of surrender.

Right in the *shloka* (#10) where it talks about the flow of *amRta* in the *nADIs*, let us see how the *shloka* winds up. It does not wind up with the idea that the eternal flow of nectar at the point where the *prANa Shakti* reaches the head, brings the non-dual union of the *jIva* with the Absolute; but it ends up by saying: "the *KuNDalinI* in the form of that *prANa Shakti* descends through *Chakra* after *Chakra* and winds itself up in the *mUAdhAra Chakra*, where it again goes to sleep".

It is the winding and whirling up that gave it the name of '*KuNDalinI*'. When a snake sleeps it winds and whirls up. In fact all animals do it. They don't stretch their limbs and sleep. Some winding up will be there. But it is the snake that winds up totally in the form of a *kunDala* (ear ornament). The *parAShakti* whose power is infinite, exhibits Herself in each of us only a fragment of a fragment. All the remaining power of the *parAShakti* is the sleeping *KuNDalinI*.

Well. Instead of continuing the talk of the flow of *amRta* and the blissful sensation of it, I have now come down to the talk of the sleeping state of *ambaal* in us commonfolk. What is the meaning of this kind of ending such a profound discussion? Yes, there is a meaning. So long as the thought that 'I have done a great yoga-*sAdhana*' is there, even great yogis will have to tumble down to the normal ground-level state. And so, mark it, even if one goes high up to the *kuNDalinI* yoga stage, the only key that will unlock the door is the attitude of surrender which says: 'It is not me; It is You, Oh Mother!'

In the next *shloka* (# 11), the *Shri Chakram* (also called the *Shri YantraM*) is described. The very mention of '*Shri VidyA pUjA*' implies the *pUjA* of *Shri Chakram*. Every deity has a *YantraM* exclusively associated with it. But those who do Shiva *pUjA* and or VishNu *pUjA* do not usually keep the corresponding *YantraMs* in the *pUjA*. Maybe in temples under the various altars of the deities the corresponding *YantraMs* would have been formally installed. But in households where Shiva or VishNu *pUjA* is done only the BANa lingam or the SalagrAmam is kept, but not the *YantraM*. In the panchAyatana *pUjA* which includes worship of *ambaaL* one keeps the stone called '*svarNa-rekhA-ShilA*'. But when you worship *ambaal* alone, you don't keep that '*ShilA*'. Only *Shri Chakram* is kept. In some places along with the *Chakram*, an image with hands and feet may also be kept.

The regimen of worship for any deity has both '*mantra*' and '*Yantra*' associated with it. A certain sequence of sounds, repeated often and often gets the beatification of the presence of that *devatA* (divinity) prescribed by it. Just as each *devatA* has a physical form with limbs, so also each *devatA* has a form in a stringed sequence of sounds. It is called the sound-form, just as the recitation of *mantras* aims at the *mantra*-form.

In addition there is the *Yantra*-form for each *devatA*. The form has lines, triangles, enclosures, circular or otherwise; these are not just geometrical figures. Each of them has a meaning and significance. They have extraordinary power. Each *YantraM* is set to absorb and bring into focus the *paramAtmA* in the form of that *devatA*. In addition to the repeated mental recitation of the *mantra*, one does *pUjA* to the *YantraM* also. Within the triangles of the *Yantras* and other enclosures, the seed-syllables (*bIja-aksharas*) corresponding to the *mantra* pertaining to the *devatA* would be inscribed. The very *devatA* that is the life of an idol with arms and feet is also considered to be brought alive in the corresponding *YantraM*. In fact the *YantraM* is even more comprehensive; for it includes the native residence of the *devatA* and all its accessory deities within itself.

The Mother Goddess, whom we call *ambaal*, has many forms like *MeenAkshI*, *durgA*, *Bhuvaneshvari*, *ShAradAmbika* etc. Each of these has its own *YantraM*. But it is very common that even the worshippers of these forms do only the *Shri Chakra pUjA*, rather than the *pUjA* of the particular *mUrTi* (form). This is so not only in houses, but in temples also. Famous *durgA* temples have only *Shri Chakra* installed therein. Sringeri has *ShAradAmbAl* as the main *mUrTi*; however the *Yantra pUjA* is for *Shri Chakram*. All this goes to show the importance of the *Shri Chakram*.

Lines, circles, squares, figures formed by these – all these configured into a *Chakra* along with a centre point (*madhya-bindu*), is called a *YantraM*. Only such a design has the power to bring into focus the power of the particular *devatA* – in fact it is an infinite power –and so

may be called (with a smile) a 'Divine Design'. (This is Mahaswamigal's own word). These designs collect and absorb divine energy and have the power to radiate that energy.

In the *Shri Chakra*, the central portion is circular. There are nine triangles there. They criss cross one another, thus producing forty-three triangles. The central dot is also considered to be one triangle. Together the triangles number forty-four. These forty-four triangles are classified into six *AvaraNas*. The straightforward meaning of this word '*AvaraNa*' is 'what hides'. Here it should be taken to mean track, corridor, row, or *prAkAra* in Sanskrit. If several people crowd around one individual, the latter is naturally 'hidden'. So they form an *AvaraNam* around him. The central dot is also taken as one *AvaraNam* just as it is taken also as a triangle. In fact around it the other forty-three triangles constitute five *AvaraNas*. Together with it we talk of six *AvaraNas*. Outside of these six *AvaraNas* and forty-four triangles, there are three rounds or corridors. They constitute three more *AvaraNas* and thus we have nine *AvaraNas* in all. You would have heard of Dikshidar's '*nava-AvaraNa*' compositions in music. The *ShAstras* describe and enunciate who lives in what *AvaraNa*, what is the principle involved, who is the *adhi-devatA*, what kind of anugraha (Grace) they can bestow, what *mudra* is to be shown to them and so on. The compositions of Dikshidar go through all this in brief.

Out of the outermost three *AvaraNas* (rounds) of the total nine, the two inner are made up of lotus petals arranged in two circles. The ninth *AvaraNa* is a design looking like three compound walls; but now it is not a circular structure but of square design. The whole thing is a unique design with an infinite divine potential.

But beware. One has to be careful.

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(Digest of pages 892-898)

A *Yantra* means that every bit of it whether a line or a circle or an angle, has to be of the right size and proportion as prescribed. It cannot err even a little this way or that way. Just as a *mantra*, with a wrong incantation, produces contrary effects, so also a small mistake in the design of the *Yantra* can cause havoc. In the *Shri yantra* again, if the apex of the central triangle faces west instead of east, as it should, results can just be the opposite. So when you sit opposite to it for the worship, the apex should be on the side nearer to you and not on the farther side. One has to be really more careful with the pUja of a *YantraM* than that of an idol (*vigraha*), in terms of the ritualistic do's and don'ts. In modern times many have turned over to Shri Cakra *pUjA* in their homes, a few merely for the pride of it, another few because it is the fashion, and yet another few out of ignorance. But the injunctions are

not being followed properly. Consequently, loss of peace is on the increase.

It is not enough to just wish for great observances. We should be able to observe the shastraic injunctions correctly. We should be able to perform exactly as was demonstrated to us and passed on to us by our elders. Only then we will reap the right benefits. Certainly *Shri Chakra* has been eulogised in the Shastras to the sky. But the very same *AvaraNa* have also prescribed a certain regimen for such *pUjA*. By taking the attitude 'I will do my personalized *pUjA* in my own way' not only will you miss the promised or expected results, but actually it will turn out to be counter-productive.

A *Yantra* is not just the residing seat of a *devatA*; it is the *devatA* itself. It is not just a representation, or a copy. It is not a substitute for the *devatA*. It is the *devatA* itself. It is the presentation of the *devatA* and not a re-presentation. More so in the case of *ambaal*. For, Her Divine Presence is very special in Her *Yantra*. It is because of this that *ambaal-pUjA* is mostly done to Her *Yantra* than to Her most beautiful physical form.

[At this point, Ra Ganapathi, (the Boswell of Mahaswamigal), adds the following note:

Usually we talk greatly of the 'name' and 'form' of devatAs.

But generally, in the case of feminine deities, the 'name' takes a lesser role. And in the case of *Shri Vidya mantras*, the name is not there at all. Only the seed syllables are dominant.

Again, though the *devatA* of *Shri Vidya*, namely Tripurasundari, is as shown by her name itself of very beautiful form, instead of the worship of her form

This question was asked of the Mahaswamigal .

He expressed concurrence with the above statement and joined in expressing his own astonishment that this is so.

But he did not choose to give any explanation.]

In addition to the two natural locations for Her, namely, the Ocean of Nectar and the *Meru* peak, one should add Her *YantraM* as another place of Her permanent residence. No, no, I just committed two errors. The *Shri Chakra* is not just Her residence. The *Shri Chakra* is Herself ! This was the first error. The second one is that the *Shri Chakra* is not like the Ocean of Nectar or the *Meru* peak where She is said to reside. Even in those two places, She resides only in the *Shri Chakra*, though now magnified million times.

When She is in the *Meru* peak, the *AvaraNas* are piled up peak upon peak in a three-dimensional manner. It will be in the form of an upright cone. Such a three dimensional configuration of *Shri Chakra* is called '*Meru-prastAram*'. People call it just '*Meru*' colloquially. When the *Chakra* is two dimensional it is said to be 'bhU-prastAram'. A mixture of the two, where the beginning *AvaraNas* rise higher and higher, but later the latter *AvaraNas* are all in the same plane, is called '*ardha-Meru*' (ardha means 'semi'). A *pUrNa-Meru* is that which has all the *AvaraNas* in the *Meru-prastara* style. In our Mutt at Kanchipuram and in

Tiruvidaimarudur MukAmbal sannadhi, what you find is *pUrNa-Meru*. In Mangadu it is *ardha-meru*. In the Kamakoshtam at Kanchipuram it is *bhU-prastAram*.

The *ShrI Chakra*, *ShrI VidyA*, *ShrI MatA*, *ShrI puram* all pertain to the devI, the Mother Goddess, LalitA-tripurasundari. The prefix *ShrI* is the prefix usually given for respect and has no extra connotation of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity and Wealth. The *Chakras* and the *mantras* associated with other *devatAs* are distinguished by their name itself carrying the name of the *devatA* – as in, Shiva-*Chakram*, Sudarshana-*YantraM*, ShhaDakshhara-*Chakram*, etc. Only in the case of LalitA-tripurasundari, the *Chakram*, the *YantraM* are known as The *Chakram*, The *YantraM*, The Mantram.

The *ShrI Chakram* depicts the advaitic identity of Shiva and *Shakti*. That is why the two kinds of *Chakras* of Shiva and *Shakti* are intertwined. The (four) triangles with the apex upward are known as Shiva cakras and the (five) triangles with apex downward are known as *Shakti Chakras*. The angles at which these interesect, the lotus petals on the outer corridors, the circular lines, the square design at the outermost, all have specific prescriptions; these are given in *shloka* 11.

All this is not to be read or studied like reading fiction or for acadmeic interest. They have to be seriously learnt straight from a Guru. They have to be preserved as such. I did not want to omit them completely and therefore I just touched upon these. But don't take them lightly.

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(Digest of pp.898-903)

Shloka #12 talks about the extraordinary beauty and charm of the Devi. With a poetic excellence it says: "Much has been said in detail and with precision about Your *Yantra* – the lines, the planes, the circles and the squares. But to describe You and Your physical feature excellences, it doesn't seem to be possible. No poet has ever succeeded in that task!".

BrahmA is the Adi-kavi, the most ancient poet. The Bhagavatam refers to him in this fashion in the very first *shloka*. The Goddess of Learning, Sarasvati, is his *Shakti*. Who can therefore be a greater poet? He has composed *stotras* on every *devatA* you can imagine. All the divines usually go to him for redress of their grievances. He takes them to the concerned God, either Shiva, or Vishnu or Devi, etc. Every time he sings praise of the particular God whom they are approaching for help. His *stotra* on *ambaal* in the work called sapta-shati is famous. But even he could not describe the beauty of *ambaal* as it is. The first half of *shloka* 12 goes as follows:

*tvadIyam soundaryam tuhina-giri-kanye tulayitum
kavIndrAH kalpante kathamapi virinchi-prabhRtayaH /*

tuhina-giri-kanye: Oh Goddess, Daughter of the Himalayas

tulayitum: to weigh (or assess)

tvadIyam: Your

soundaryam: beauty

kavIndrAH: great poets

virinchi-prabhRtayaH: (like) Brahma and others

kalpante: (only) imagine

kathamapi: somehow (in feeble ways).

Virinchi means Brahma. *prabHRtayaH*: and the others of the kind. They tried to describe Your beauty '*tvadIyam soundaryam*'. The word '*tula*' stands for a pair of weighing scales. In one pan of the scales we put the object to be weighed and in the other pan we place the 'weight' whose weight we know. In other words when we don't know the weight of something we calculate it by comparing it with something whose weight we know. So when you don't know how to describe the beauty of *ambaal*, what we do is to look for something whose beauty we know. Such a 'weight' we know is known by the name of 'analogy' or 'example'. The face is like the moon, the eyes are like lotuses, the hair on the head is like a beehive – all these are examples and analogies, which help us to comprehend the 'weight' of the beauty of *ambaal*, in terms of known 'weights'.

So what the poets do is to imagine newer and newer examples with great effort. This effort of imagination by the poet is denoted by the word '*kalpante*' in the *shloka*. '*kalpanA*' is imagination. They only imagine an example. They are not able to arrive at the real thing, is what the *shloka* says. The fact they are not able to do it, is gracefully hinted at by the *shloka* in the words '*kathamapi kalpante*'.

The *Yantra*-form of the Goddess has been outlined with precision. But Her physical form eludes imagination. Attempts by even the great Brahma and others to find suitable examples have only failed.

To describe the form, somebody should have seen it in full. Has anybody seen it? # Of course it is not right to say that She has never been seen at all. Because we have several poet-devotees who have had a flash of Her and in the wake of that flash have composed wonderful devotional poetry. Even in the case of the greatest of devotees, to whom She might have given darshan, maybe one got to see Her lotus feet, another the Graceful eyes, and another the bewitching smile in the face. Like that some part of Her may have caught the eyes of even these devotees; but never the full form!

Then who has seen Her full beauty? Only the Lord, Her husband, Lord Shiva. Indeed She took this very beautiful form in order that He may be involved in the *leela* of Creation. And thus She became Tripura-sundari, the beautiful. So Her physical form has been totally

dedicated to Him. Though Her full beauty is not visible for our perception Her fullest Grace and Compassion are available for every one of us.

That Her full beauty is perceptible only to Her Lord is not said in so many blunt words. It is nicely couched in a subtle poetic extravaganza which comes in the next two lines of the same *shloka*. (*shloka* #12):

*Yad-AlokautsukyAd-amara-lalanA yAnti manasaA
tapobhir-dushhprApAm-api girisha-sAyujiya-padavIm //12 //*

yat : (of) which (beauty) (This goes with 'Your beauty' in the first half).

amara-lalanAH : the divine damsels

Aloka-autsukyAt : because of their curiosity to have a complete look

yAnti : reach

manasaA : mentally

girisha-sAyujiya-padavIm : the unity status with Lord Shiva

dushhprApAm : that is inaccessible

tapobhir-api : even by great penances.

The divine damsels who are particularly thought of here are the famous quadret: *RambhA*, *Urvashi*, *tilottamA* and *MenakA*. They are supposed to be superlatively beautiful. Even they, having seen a little of the beauty of *ambaal*, have considered themselves insignificant, in relation to *ambaal*'s beauty. They are naturally curious to get a look at the complete beauty of Mother Goddess. But they also know they cannot have that complete picture, because the Goddess is totally dedicated to the Lord and Her complete beauty is not perceptible to any one else. So what do they do? Only the Lord knows Her fullest beauty. So they want to be one with Him, the Lord Shiva. This is the *Shiva-sAyujiya-padavI*. Then and only then, they can have an idea of the complete beauty of *ambaal*.

But that Shiva-sAyujiya status is not so easy to obtain. And what exactly is this *sAyujiya*?

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(Digest of pp.903 - 909)

To reach the world of the *ishhTa-devatA* (Chosen favourite deity) and live in that world is called *sAlokya-padavI*. The next stage is the *sAmIpya* stage. This is the stage where one lives in the beatific presence of that God. The next stage which is *sArUpyam* is the process of becoming that very form by continuously meditating on the form. The ultimate is the *sAyujiya-padavI* where one becomes in essence the object of one's adoration. This is an identity status, both in form and essence.

There are devotees of Shiva who seek that *sAyujiya padavI* in their unquenchable thirst for becoming one with the Lord. In their case the

sAyujyam is an end in itself. On the other hand, the divine damsels (go back to *shloka* #12) who are seeking that *sAyujya* status with Lord Shiva do not seek it as an end, but as a means to be able to see the beauty of the Supreme Goddess. It is an irony that in the hands of these damsels even the greatest goal (*sAdhyam*) of *shiva-sAyujya* status has become a *sAdhanA* (means) for the *sadhyam* (that is, that which is sought, and therefore, a further goal), the darshan of the fullest beauty of *ambaal!*

Well, just because these damsels have sought that status is it going to be within their reach? It is something which is inaccessible even for the hardest penance. These damsels know only to disturb and destroy the penances of the rishis. The sense-control needed for the hard penance is beyond their reach. So what do they do? They only try to achieve it mentally. But that status indeed is not reachable even by the mind. ‘*yan manasA na manute*’ says the Upanishad, meaning, ‘What cannot be thought of even by the mind’. The bottomline therefore is, even they cannot ultimately know the beauty of *ambaal!*

It is to be noted that this *shloka*, which elevates the beauty (*soundaryam*) of *ambaal* to its apex, is actually in the midst of the first part, that is Ananda-lahari.

Another *shloka* (#14) describes *ambaal* as the personification of Time (*kAlam*). There are six seasons in a year. These 360 days of the year are the 360 rays of light emanating from the infinite Light of *Shakti*. Each of the *Chakras* represents one of these seasons and there are as many rays there as there are days in the corresponding season. For instance, in the *mULAdhAra Chakra*, there are fifty-six rays, corresponding to the fifty six days of *vasanta-ritu* (the spring season). She thus contracts Herself as a *ritu* in Time and stays as such in that *Chakra*. In reality She transcends Time; She is *kALAtItA*. It is in that transcendent state, She manifests as the divine Feet in the thousand-petalled *Chakra*, beyond the six *Chakras*. The pair of Her lotus feet – ‘*tava padAmbuja-yugam*’ -- is there in that *sahasrAra Chakram*.

Amidst the Anandalahari *shlokas* I will now pick up one *shloka* (#15) which depicts Her, not in Her *lalitA* form, but in another form consistent with the *ShrI VidyA tantra*.

*Sharat-jyotsnA shuddhAM shashi-yuta-jaTA-jUTA-makuTAM
vara-trAsa-trANa-sphaTika-ghuTika-pustaka-karAM /
sakRn-na tvA natvA katham-iva satAM sannidadhate
madhu-kshhIra-drAkshhA-madhurima-dhurINAH paNitayaH//*

satAM: For (those) noble ones,
sakRt : just once
natva: having prostrated
tva : to You

Sharat-jyotsnA-shuddhAM : who is as pure and white as the autumnal moonlight

shashi-yuta-jaTA-jUTA-makuTAM: who has the crown of matted hair that includes the moon, and

vara-trAsa-trANa-sphaTika-ghuTika-pustaka-karAM: who holds in the (four) hands, the boon *mudrA*, the fear-protection *mudrA*, the crystal bead necklace, and the book

Katham-iva : why (would)

paNitayaH : the speech capabilities

madhu-kshhIra-drAkshhA-madhurima-dhurINAH: which are pregnant with the sweetness of honey, milk and grapes

na sannidadhate: not accrue?

Here the Goddess depicted is the the Goddess of Speech, (*vAg-devi* or Sarasvati), but without Her usual *VINA* in Her hand.

The word '*sharad*' becomes very apt when one refers to Goddess Sarasvati. It is in *sharad-ritu* (the autumnal season) that we do *pUjA* to Sarasvati. She is called *ShAradA* because of that. Our Acharya had a special affinity to the *ShAradA* name. Sarasvati is very important to him because we know he reached the peak of excellence in scholarship.

ShAradA is one of the more important names of Sarasvati. It indicates simultaneously the perfect purity of whiteness and the cool Grace that combines pleasantness and goodness. Very often '*sha*' and '*sa*' get interchanged in tradition. In north India there is the custom of referring to *ShAradA* as *SAradA*. The latter word means, *SAradA*, the One who graces you with the essence (*sAram*) of Knowledge. This may be another reason why the Acharya had an affinity toward the name. The name of the deity he installed in Sringeri is *ShAradAmbAL*. In spite of the fact that he had a liking towards this name, just as he never mentioned either *lalitA* or *Tripura-sundari* in this *stotra*, he did not also mention *ShAradA*. Still, by the words '*Sharat-jyotsnA*' in the beginning of this *shloka*, he reminds us of *ShAradAmbAL*.

The second line of the *shloka* talks about the four hands. Two of the hands show the *vara* (boon) and *abhaya* (fearlessness) *mudrAs*. Earlier it was said in *shloka* #4 that all others other than *LalitAmbAL* show the *vara-abhaya mudrAs*. So in this *shloka* he presents Saraswati with the *vara-abhaya mudrAs*. The dual word '*trAsa-trANa*' indicates the '*abhaya*'. For '*trAsa*' means 'fear' and '*trANa*' means protection. Protection from fear is just '*abhaya*', fearlessness.

SphaTika-ghuTika is the crystal bead necklace. In Sanskrit it is called '*aksha-mAlA*'. This is the same as '*akshara-mAlA*'. The *akshharas* are the alphabets. The 51 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet from '*a*' to '*kshha*' correspond each by each to the beads in the necklace; that is why it is called '*akshara-mAlA*', also called '*aksha-mAlA*'. Here I have to

tell you a very important component of the *ShAkta* tradition and scriptures.

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(Digest of pp.909 - 915)

The *aksharas*, alphabets, are very important for *ShAkta*m. Each letter has a basic sound principle associated with it. The very creation is by the vibration of sound waves. The elemental principle of '*AkAsha*' produces, through vibration, subtle sounds, and from these sounds creation starts, from that the *mantras*, and the vedas that are full of *mantras*. The subtle principle underlying AkAsha, that is, the tanmAttra associated with *AkAsha*, is 'sound' . The key concept in *ShAkta*m is the cycle of evolution and involution and so, the sound principle runs as its life-line. On one side Shaktam has the *artha-prapancham*, the universe of matter, where the fundamental principles are *Shiva-tattvam*, *Shakti-tattvam*, *sadAshiva-tattvam*, *Ishvara-tattvam* and *shuddha-vidyA tattvam* – which take you through the evolutionary stage from the *para-Brahman* to the universe of matter and being. On the other side there is the sabda-prapancham, the universe of sound. It starts from the most subtle one called '*para*'. Including this there are five 'sound' (*shabda*) principles. After '*para*' there is '*pashyantI*', then '*madhyamA*'.

The subtle sound '*para*' cannot be heard by human ear and cannot be vocalised by human voice. It is in fact the root source, the substratum, of all sounds. When that gets a little focussed – just a little – and materialised, it becomes '*pashyantI*'. In other words, what was 'without purpose' and was just plain and simple sound-root, namely, '*para*', became inclined towards being heard and being spoken and so in that direction 'solidified' slightly and thus '*pashyantI*' arose. So '*pashyantI*' has a purpose!. The very word itself means 'seeing', 'looking forward'. '*para*' had no purpose; but when the 'purpose' arises, it becomes '*pashyantI*'.

Next comes the actual subtle sound, called '*madhyamA*'. This is not produced by any human voice. It arises by itself. This is therefore midway between the subtle sound of '*pashyantI*' and the actual sound of the human voice, which is physical. Hence the name '*madhyamA*', which means 'what is in the middle'. This is a self-generated sound. It is therefore also called '*anAhata*'. '*Ahata*' means 'what is forced or externally generated'. That which is not forced or not generated externally, is the '*anAhata*' sound.

All that is externally generated is '*Ahata*'. In this category come all sounds, that human voice produces, by the vibration of air through the larynx, and all instrumental noises produced by the blow of air or by beat of drum or by the friction of matter with matter, metal with metal.

After *parA*, *pashyantI*, and '*madhyamA*' comes the speech that man produces with effort. This is called '*vaikharI*'. This is classified into two: just mere noise is called '*dhvani*' --- when a child cries, or when we just laugh loudly or weep aloud; that which is recognisable as 'such and such a sound' is called '*varNa*'. This '*varNa*' is the *akshhara* or the alphabet. There are 51 specified *akshharas*.

The five principles of the *artha-prapancham* are usually equated with the five sound principles. In fact the latter are more important, because it is by the vibration of these sounds that the *artha*-universe began.

Now let us come to the five elemental principles in which *ambaal* manifests Herself in the *kuNDalinI* cakras. Starting from *mulAdhAra*, upwards to the *vishuddhi Chakra*, the *tattvas* of earth, water, fire, air and AkAsha are proceeding from the concrete to the subtle ones. This is the *artha-prapancham*. The five elemental sound principles are also manifested in the *kuNDalinI Chakras*, but in the reverse order. It is in the *mulAdhAra Chakra* that the most fundamental sound energy '*parA*' is present. So from the *mulAdhAra* to *vishuddhi*, they go from the subtle to the concrete, thus ending up with the most concrete one of the human voice, namely, the '*varNa*' category of *vaikharI*.

The 51 sounds of the alphabet are called '*mAtRkAs*'. The word '*mAtRkA*' means 'mother'. A young mother who moves and mingles with us in our own childish world is called '*mAtRkA*'. A royal mother with a higher status is called '*mAtA*'. She is the '*mahA-rAjnI*' of *Lalita-sahsranAma*. But She is also the '*mAtRkA-varna-rUpiNI*', meaning She is in the form of the varnas (= *akshharas*) or the *mAtRkAs*. In *ShAkta* scriptures the *aksha-mAlA* and the book are indicative of the *shabda-prapancham*. That is why *ambaal* is holding them in the other two hands.

The *ShrI vidyA mantras* are made up of pure *akshharas* only. It is the Mother Goddess Herself who takes the forms of these sounds. Those who do the *mantra*-japa are being blessed by Her through these sounds. Her Grace makes even the *kuNDalinI* yoga achievable by the vibrations of the *nADIs* at the japa of the *mantras*. We, in addition, get many of our other desires fulfilled. Not only this. By repeating these sound vibrations we get even the darshan of Her physical form. Thus Her entire *leelA* takes place in this universe of sounds and sound vibrations. All that I said now is about the *akshharas* only.

When we combine these *akshharas* in various combinations we get the various words and nAmas and also the *stotras*. In fact even the Vedas arose like this.

In the *ShrIvidyA mantra* there are three '*kUTas*', spheres of influence. The first one is called '*vAgbhava-kUTam*'. It means that it arises from '*vAk*', speech. The entire *mantra* is the form of *ambaal*. And in that form, the face is '*vAgbhava-kUTam*'. In the scriptures and *stotras* of *ShAkta*, it is very often said that She gives 'excellence of speech' to

Her devotees. In this very *shloka* (#15) that is what it says. Why all this importance to this Grace of the Goddess? Let me explain.

31

(Digest of pp.915-920)

The power of speech is endowed by *parA-shakti* only to the human species. As a special gift from Her it must be really important for us. If we have any good sense in us we would use it only for noble purposes. The *shakti* of speech that She has given us should be used only to reach Her again.

The greatness of the power of speech lies in this. Its greatness lies in using it, not just to get great experiences for oneself but for further transmitting them to others also. This can be done only by the faculty of speech. It is for such sharing that the *parA-shakti* has given us, Her children, this unique faculty. What greater benefit could there be in life for the power of speech?

When a Guru teaches a certain path of *sAdhanA*, he appends to it a number of strict injunctions to be followed. On the other hand a poet perhaps is able to give a similar thing in the form of pleasing enjoyable music. It is the Grace of *ambaal* that has made such a thing possible by endowing us all with the faculty of speech. That is why we praise *vAk-Shakti*. It is *LalitAmbikA* who graces us thus and this *shloka* says She does it in the form of *vAg-devi*, that is Sarasvati. Just once if we bow down to Her, good souls get the excellence of the faculty from Her.

Note however that '*satAM*' is the word used. Not everybody but only those noble souls who can be classified as '*sAdhu*' would be endowed. The excellence of speech is compared to the excellence of sweetness of three kinds: honey, milk and grapes. They can be easily swallowed and digested. On the spiritual side, the speech faculty would help them receive messages full of sense and assimilate them in their innermost hearts; and all this by just one prostration. Instead of saying in prosaic words that 'they will be endowed with such faculties' the poet in the Acharya says: Why would not they be endowed with such faculties?

Just a word about the play with the sound of the word '*natvA*'. It is used two times. One time to mean '*natvA*', that is, (having) prostrated; and another time to mean '*na tvA*' meaning, 'not – You'. Here it is two words 'na' and '*tvA*'. The word '*na*' goes with '*sannidadhe*' (endowed, graced) so that it gives the meaning: (Why would they) be not endowed. The 'You' goes with the earlier word '*natvA*' thus meaning prostrated to You.

*kavIndrANAM cetaH kamala-vana-bAlAtapa-ruciM
bhajante ye santaH katicid-arUNAm-eva bhavatIM /
virinchi-preyasyAs-taruNatara-sRGgAra-laharI-
gabhIrAbhir-vAgbhir-vidadhati satAM ranjanam-amI // 16 //*

ye katicit santaH : Those few righteous persons who
bhajante : worship
aruNAm eva bhavatIM: You who are nothing but *aruNA* , that is,
 the colour of crimson personified
bAlAtapa-ruchiM: (and) who are the rising Sun to
kavIndrANAM cetaH kamala-vana: the forest of lotuses (in the form
 of) the minds of great poets,
amI : they
ranjanaM vidadhati: give rapturing excitement
satAM ; to the noble souls
gabhIrAbhir-vAgbhiH: by majestic and profound words
taruNa-tara-sRGgAra-laharI : that is a flood of love which is
 youthfully fresh
virinchi-preyasAH : from the beloved of Brahma, i.e., from
 Sarasvati.

In the previous *shloka* the talk was about the all-white *vAgdevI*.
 The same Sarasvati is now talked about in her dynamic (*rajo-guNa*)
 form. Just before sunrise, it is all crimson in the east and we call it the
 rising of *aruNa*. The word *aruNa* means ‘crimson-red’. The charioteer of
 the Sun is of that colour; so he is called *aruNa*. Here *aruNA* is the
 personification of the crimson colour and this is Sarasvati in Her *rajo-*
guNa form. When She is meditated in this form She gives the speech-
 excellence, where love is dominant. Love belongs to rajo-guNa. It is
 therefore usually symbolised as crimson. So it is quite fitting that
aruNA-devI graces one with Love.

But mark it. It is not the usual natural romantic love of the worldly
 kind. It is the esoteric Love of the partnership of *Kameshvara* and
KAmeshvari. Those who can comprehend it in that light are the
 righteous ones (*santaH*). In the previous *shloka*, one is said to obtain
 poetic excellence by worshipping the all-white pure Sarasvati. The
 poetry that springs out of this grace would also be white, sAtvic and
 would have the consequence of giving wisdom and dispassion. Such a
 wisdom and dispassion can be experienced as an expression of Love.
 That occurs only to the noble souls (*satAM*) . It is to their satisfaction
 that the devotees of Sarasvati sing. It is these noble souls who were
 said (in the previous *shloka*) to obtain the sweetness of speech, equal in
 sweetness to *madhu* (honey), *kshIra* (milk) and *drAkshA* (grapes). And
 in this *shloka* the same noble souls are being joyfully entertained by the
 worshippers of Sarasvati, the Crimson (*aruNA*): ‘*vidadhati satAm*
ranjanam amI’. Those who were ‘poets’ in the previous *shloka*, have
 now become ‘connoisseurs’ !

The poets of the previous *shloka* were those noble persons who
 obtain the proficiency for poetry from *ambaaL*. Among those noble

persons those who reach the *nAyika-bhava* (attitude of the beloved) towards the Almighty are only a few (*'katicit'*); these are the ones who can sing of Her Love in the proper manner.

The ecstasy they enjoy and give in singing is called '*ranjanaM*'. There is a pun on this word here. It is made up of two words '*ram*' and '*janam*'. The consonant '*ra*' itself denotes 'red'. It stands for two kinds of fires. One is the ordinary one; and the other is the fire of love (*kAmAgni*). '*ram*' + '*janam*' means that which causes red. It means 'to cause love that is red'. The redness here indicates ripeness. When a fruit is ripe it is deep red. The 'reddening' of the mind is to make it fully mature and ripe for receiving the Fullness that is God. The noble persons who are now singing by the Grace of *ambaal* in the form of *aruNA* (red Sarasvati), are mature enough to produce the esoteric 'redness' of '*ram*'. So the poetry comes out of them in a wave of Love (*ShRngAra-lahari*). They are actually deep and profound words (*gabhrAbhir-vAgbhIh*). On the surface they appear to be love and romance. But deep within it, there are gems of philosophy there.

Goddess *KAmeshvarI* has herself the name '*aruNA*'. Recall Her *dhyAna-shloka*: '*aruNAM karuNA-tarangitAkshhIM*'. Here our Acharya is actually invoking the eight armed Goddess: with bow, arrow, noose and spear (that go with *KAmeshvarI*) in four of the hands and with *varam*, *abhayam*, *aksha-mALA* and book (that go with Sarasvati) in the other four hands. This is the *aruNa*-Sarasvati with eight hands, talked about by our elders.

32

(Digest of pp.921-924)

In the next *shloka* (#17) the talk is about the unique '*sArasvata-siddhi*' (the *siddhi* of all Speech and Learning) obtained by the contemplation of LalitA-Tripurasundari surrounded by the *vAg-devatAs* (the Gods of speech). The name '*vAg-devatA*', if used in the singular, denotes Sarasvati Herself. When it is used in the plural, it denotes eight divinities. They are assigned as follows to the various *aksharas* (letters of the alphabet):

One for the sixteen vowels;

One for the five letters starting with *ka*;

Similarly one for each set of five letters starting respectively with *cha*, *Ta*, *ta*, and *pa*;

One for *ya*, *ra*, *la* and *va*;

One for *sha*, *shha*, *sa*, *ha*, *La*, *kshha*.

Thus there are eight *vAg-devatAs* for the 51 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. The first of these is called '*vashinI*'. Therefore all the eight are called '*vashinI*, etc. *devatAs*' (*vashinyAdi devatAH*) or simply, '*vashinI devatAs*'. These are the ones who sang the Lalita-sahasranAma at the

behest of *ambaal* Herself. In the seventh *AvaraNa* (always you count from outside) of the *Shri Chakra*, there are eight triangles; that is where these eight *devatAs* are seated, surrounding *ambaal*.

(Unfortunately for us the Mahaswamigal does not quote the *shloka* #17 and give his word-by-word meanings, though he explains most of it
For the sake of completeness I give below the *shloka* and supply a word-by-word meaning from what I understand from His Holiness's discourse and from other sources. VK)

savithrIbhir-vAcAM shashi-maNi-shilA-bhanga-rucibhiH
vashinyAdyAbhis-tvAM saha janani samcintayati yaH /
sa kartA kAvyAnAm bhavati mahatAM bhangi-rucibhiH
vacobhir-vAg-devI-vadana-kamala-moda-madhuraiH // 17 //

yaH samcintayati : He who reflects on

tvAM : You

janani : Oh Mother,

vashinyAdyAbhiH saha : along with the vashinI-*devatAs*

vAcAM savithrIbhiH : who are the Generators of Speech

shashi-maNi-shilA-bhanga-rucibhiH : who have the colour of the broken moonstone gem,

saH : he

mahatAm kAvyAnAM kartA bhavati : becomes the author of great poetic compositions

vacobhiH ; through words

bhangi-rucibhiH : (which have) the taste of art and wit

vAgdevI-vadana-kamala-moda-madhuraiH : (and which have) the sweet fragrance of the lotus face of vAg-devI (Sarasvati).

(I now continue the Mahaswamigal's comments – VK)

These eight *vAg-devatAs* constitute the Mothers of speech. That is why the *shloka* #17 which prays for excellence in speech begins with '*savithrIbhir vAcAM*'. In traditional literature there is a gem known as '*chandrakAnta gem*' which is crystal-like and which will melt in moonlight. The *vAg-devatAs* have that kind of crystal colour in which moon reflects in a dazzling manner. In one *shloka* *ambaal* was depicted as pure white like the moonlight (*sharat-jyotsna shuddhAm* - #15). In another She is *aruNA*, red (#16). In this *shloka* (#17) the *aruNA*, that is *ambaal*, is sitting surrounded by the *vAg-devatAs*, majestically like a Queen with all Her attendants. Whoever can meditate on this scene (*sancintayati yah*) gets the literary capacity and competence to compose great epic poems. In fact he gets the fluency and the power of speech which only great writers have.

And the *shloka* uses a specific word here: '*mahatAm bhangi rucibhiH*'. The word '*ruCi*' means 'taste', or 'flavour'. 'Taste' certainly has

an association with the tongue and the food which it ‘tastes’. But the *shloka* adds on to this the ‘flavour’ by the nose also. The food ‘taste’ was indicated by the last line of *shloka* (#15) where it was said that the speech prompted by *ambaaL* has the taste of ‘honey, milk and grapes’. Now in this *shloka* that speech is likened to a profound flavour, not of any ordinary one, but of that which emanates from the lotus face of Her who is the single *vAgdevI* integrating all the eight *vAgdevIs*! Not only that. We can infer from this that it is not simply the speech that emanates through the poetry of the devotee has the divine flavour; the people who read and recite that poetry would also get that divine flavour.!!

The fact that *ambaal* graces and bestows the faculty of speech is mentioned in the latter part of Soundaryalahari several times. *shloka* #75 says that, fed by Her breast milk one is endowed with magnificent poetic capabilities. *shloka* 99 says that the *Sarasvata*-Grace that She endows makes even Brahma, the *pati* of Sarasvati, envious. The holy water that washes Her feet can make even the dumb to sing poems (*shloka* 98). Obviously our Acharya takes pleasure in talking about this aspect of *ambaaL*’s Grace. Maybe he wants us all to read and recite his *stotras*, thereby get the Grace of the Mother and also get the *vAk-siddhi* (speech excellence) that She will certainly grant. That is why, it appears, he is never tired of repeating this.

The word ‘*shashi-maNi-shilA*’ means ‘moon-gem-stone’ literally. Because of the fact that the dark patch on the moon appears like a rabbit (‘*shasha*’ in Sanskrit), the moon is known by the word ‘*shashi*’. The word ‘hima-kara’ also denotes the moon, meaning thereby that there flows icy water from the moon. So ‘*hima-kara-shilA*’ also represents the same moonstone gem, known as ‘*chandrakAnta stone*’ in Tamil. ‘*sudhA*’ is nectar and ‘*sudhAkara*’ is also the name of the moon, because it is also said that there flows nectar from it. Just as it was said that the attendants of *ambaal* have the colour of the moonstone (#17: *shashi-maNi-shilA*), it is said in *shloka* #20, that he who can meditate on *ambaal* Herself in the form made up of the moonstone (*hima-kara-shilA*), She who is the daughter of *hima-giri* (Himalayas) and is therefore ‘*hima-giri-sutA*’, will pour ‘*sudhA*’ on him, ‘*sudhA*’ meaning nectar and ‘*sutA*’ meaning daughter. In fact it says more.

33

(Digest of pp.925-929)

kirantIm-angebhyaH kiraNa-nikurumbA-mRta-rasaM
hRdi tvAm-Adhatte hima-kara-shilA-mUrtim-iva yaH /
sa sarpaNAM darpaM shamayati shakuntAdhipa iva
jvara-plushhTAN dRshhTyA sukhayati sudhA-dhAra-sirayA // 20 //

saH yaH : He who

Adhatte : establishes
tvAM : You
hRdi : in (his) heart
hima-kara-shilA-mUrtim-iva: as the form made of moonstem gem
kirantIM : which shoots forth
angebhyaH : from all its parts
kiraNa-nikurumbA-mRta-rasaM : the nectar essence through clusters of its rays,
shamayati : cools down
sarpANAM darpaM : the energy of snakes
shakuntAdhipa iva : like Garuda
sukhayati : (and) relieves
dRshhTyA : by just an eye-glance
sudhA-dhAra-sirayA : (that is) full (as it were) of the flow of nectar
jvara-plushhTAN : those who are suffering the deadly heat of fever.

The importance of this *shloka* is in its impact on the eradication of disease. All kinds of diseases afflict people. People who come to those of us like me, mostly come to pray to us for removal of this sickness or that. In fact that tells me how many different kinds of illnesses and afflictions are there in the world. Our Acharya certainly would know all that and for sure he would have known the remedies for all of them. But he must have thought of posterity on these lines: “They cannot think of me as God. Even those who grant the avatarhood, would think of me only as a jnana-avatar and so would think of praying to me only for *jnAna* and *vairagya* (dispassion)”.

When people of modern times physically see a spiritually great person, they get to know many of his characteristics and activities. So, in addition to thinking of him as a *jnAni* or saint, they also think of him as father, as mother, child, doctor, a go-getter for a job or a marriage alliance, and what not; they pray for all these and get the *anugraha*. But when one is no more, he is only thought of as a jnAni and only as a benefactor of enlightenment and nothing more. Of course, if he is considered a siddha, he is prayed to for material welfare even after his physical frame is no more. And we think of our Acharya only as a *jnAni*. So he must have naturally thought “Let me leave some *stotras* for posterity so that they get their sicknesses removed by recitations of these”. He left behind him a ‘*Subrahmanya bhujangam*’ for this very purpose. And in this Soundarya lahari too, there are several *shlokas* mainly for eradication of disease.

The whole of Soundaryalahari, as I already said, is a *mantra-shAstra*. Each of its *shlokas* can give certain specific results when it is used for a *mantra*-japam. For instance, there are *shlokas* for

Learning and Education (Sarasvati’s Grace of *VidyA*) : *shloka* nos. 3, 12, 15, 16, 17, 60, 64, 75, 96, 98, 99;

Wealth and Prosperity (Lakshmi’s Grace) : *shloka* nos.23, 45, 71, 91,99;

Grace of both Sarasvati and Lakshmi: 96, 99;
 Proficiency in music: 66, 69
 Being blessed with a son : 6, 11, 46, 98
 A long-gone relative to return from his journeys: 9
parakAya-praveshaM (to jump into another body) : 30, 84
 Warding off evil spirits: 24, 37, 85, 90
 To counter the bad influence of planets: 48
jnAna, mukti and *sac-chid-Ananda*: 27, 63, 73, 84, 97, 99.

[Please let it be noted that the Mahaswamigal only listed the various results that accrue from the *shlokas*. Specific numbers of *shlokas* associated with the specific results are reproduced here from a note appended by Ra. Ganapathi.]

If one does a recitation (*pArAyaNam*) of the *shlokas* without desiring any particular favour, one gets the realisation of either the *saguNa-brahman* or the *nirguna-brahman*, depending on the attitude of the devotee. Even if one has a desire to be fulfilled, each *shloka* will give its own reward. The first *shloka* and the last *shloka* are known to be '*sarva-siddhi-pradam*' and they will fulfill all one's desires.

Some *shlokas*, by their very meanings, allow us to infer what results will accrue from reciting them. I say 'infer' because, they may not bluntly say what results will accrue. *shlokas* which bluntly say so are few, like the ones we saw earlier (*shloka* 17) and the present *shloka* (#20). Even here, the statement is only that if such and such an *upAsana* is done such and such a result will accrue. Only later commentators, who came in the *sishya-parampara* (lineage of disciples) of our Acharya have listed the specifications of the *upAsana*, how they should be done, what *yantra* to be used, how many days the *pUjA* or *japam* should be done and similar requirements.

I was saying that we could infer from the meanings of certain *shlokas* the results that will accrue. Ashamed at the excellence of speech of *ambaal* Herself Sarasvati winds up Her play on the *VINA* (# 66). The three lines on the neck of *ambaal* are the boundary lines between the three kinds of *rAga*-categories, so that they may not mix with each other, says *shloka* #69. It is clear that a *japam* of either of these two *shlokas* will result in proficiency of music.

shloka #28 has the thought that even after drinking the nectar the divines do not live beyond the deluge (*pralaya*), whereas Lord Shiva, even after drinking the deadly poison, continues to live. It is easy to infer that by doing a *mantra japam* of this *shloka*, one gets a long life, poison or no poison.

But there are many more *shlokas* where we cannot in any way infer what results will accrue from a *mantra-japam* of the *shloka*.

I was saying that there are many *shlokas* where we cannot in any way infer what results will accrue from a *mantra-japam* of the *shloka*. *shloka* #35, for instance, says that *ambaal* lives in the six chakras as the five elements and the mind. It is said that this *shloka* has the effect of curing tuberculosis. Obviously there seems to be no connection. Like this there are several *shlokas* where the meaning and the results said to accrue from it are totally disconnected. It all means that the vibrations of the sounds created, the words themselves, not their meanings, have that effect. We may make a doll in the shape of a red chili, with sugar as the material base; the outer will look like a hot chili, whereas the whole material is sweet. In the same way the meanings of the words may be something, but the power of the words as a *mantra* may be something else.

Also, the same *shloka* may give different, almost contradictory, results for different persons. *shloka* #84 (*ShrutInAM mUrdhAno*) has been said to give the power of leaving one's own body and getting into the body of another. But the same *shloka* has also been earmarked as a *sAdhaNA* for *mokshha!*. One has to remember, in such cases, it is the attitude of the devotee in question that comes into play. The attitude of the *upAsakA* (the practitioner of the *sAdhana*) has a value. Depending on the needs and desires of the *upAsaka*, the results will vary. Honey can induce sleep in some one who is habitually a non-sleeper; and the same honey, in the case of a lazy and constant dozer, may produce wakefulness and alertness. Thus the same *shloka* might give different results depending on the mental make-up of the user. *shloka* #63 ("*smita-jyotsnA-jAlaM*") is a *sAdhana shloka* for the merging of *jIva* in *Brahman*; but if one does not want this high noble effect, it will give the other effect of attracting people to oneself! Again, *shloka* #73 which talks about the breast feeding of *ambaal's* milk and the consequent effects on Ganesha and Su*Brahmanya* can lead to two different results: if the goal is *jnAna*, the *mantra-japam* of this *shloka* with that as goal, will lead step by step from the blessedness of celibacy all the way up to the obtaining of *brahma-jnAna*; on the other hand if the same *shloka* is used as a *mantra* by a lactating mother who is lacking the necessary breast-milk, she will have her problem solved.

Here is a lemon. It has several uses. It can be used in a garland of lemons for the Goddess. It can be used to give a lemonish touch to an edible combination of vegetables. It can be used as dirt remover while cleaning vessels. It can be used for a medicinal purpose. It may also be used in occult practices. In the same way, the effect of a word or word-vibrations can vary over a wide spectrum. That is why, the ideal way is to have the attitude: "I don't want this or that. Whatever you think as good

for me, Oh Mother, give me that. Even if you don't want to give anything, let me do the recitation for just the love of it".

Whether you want it or not, there are effects of such recitation. For instance, the *shloka* #44 beginning with "*tanotu kshhemaM nas-tava vadana soundaryalahari*" gives a general cure for all ailments and sicknesses. Specific cures for specific diseases of the body have also been noted for several *shlokas*. Each of these only trumpets the power of *shabda* (sound). There is a *shloka* for the cure of diseases of the eye and the ear. "Your eyes have an extent up to the ears" says the *shloka* (#52) "*gate karNApyarNam ... ime netre*". Just by thinking that *ambaal's* eyes extend up to the ears, the power of sound is so much that the diseases of both the eyes and ears are cured! Here it appears there is some kind of correlation between the effects of sound and the meanings of the words which make the sound. In another *shloka* (#58), though both these (eyes and ears) are mentioned, the effect is said to be 'cure of all diseases'. What is the logic behind this? You cannot answer the question. We have only to say "Sound value is such"!

We started all this account from *shloka* #20 which contains the *mantra* for two kinds of ailment – one, a poisonous bite and two, fever. Let us go to that *shloka* now.

Ambaal is thought of as having a form that shoots forth *amRita-rasa* (nectar essence) through the rays emanating from every part of Her body. Hers is that kind of form which is crystal-like in colour that reflects moonlight with a cool and delightful shine; it is a colourless colour. And nectar springs forth from every spot of that form. The very thought of this divine feat gives us a cooling effect. One who meditates on this himself gets the qualities of nectar. What is the opposite of nectar? Poison. That is why no poison, no snake can touch him!.

Poison is the opposite of nectar. The opposite of snakes is Garuda. Actually there are two opposites of a snake. One is Garuda; the other is a peacock. Lord Vishnu has Garuda as his vehicle and Lord Su*Brahmanya* has peacock as his vehicle. But the same Vishnu is also reclining on the snake. And Su*Brahmanya* is Himself called *NAgarAja* (the King of snakes). All this looks self-contradictory.

The snake has two facets. When it sleeps as the *kuNDalinI shakti* in a person it only promotes lust. Even the little *prANic* energy in them is lost in that lust. Therefore the snake in that situation is said to be poisonous and evil. It is this poison that Garuda and the peacock destroy. When the poison is eradicated, the same snake of the *kuNDalinI*, when it rises to the *sahsrAra cakra*, it pours forth nectar! Now it is a 'good' snake - not the corresponding Tamil word, which means a deadly snake! The fact that energy is lost because of lust is accepted by all. But the same energy becomes immortal energy (nectar-flow) by yoga is not generally accepted by people; and that too, by the people, who have never done the experiment!

I was saying that the same human energy that is wasted by lust becomes the powerful nectar by yoga. Whereas the former is understood by every one easily, the latter fact is always questioned and debated. The difficulty in the belief comes from the observation that even great yogis that we hear about, ultimately, maybe after a few hundreds of years, die. What is missed in the understanding here is the fact that the nectar-flow that yoga talks about and the nectar-drink that the divines are said to have partaken are both different, totally different. That divine drink of '*amRit*' has nothing to do with any spiritual uplift or the progress of the soul.

The divine drink of nectar that emanated from the churning of the milk ocean is just like one more medicine. It has no power to take care of the resident of the body, the Atman. It only takes care of the body and protects it from becoming old and from decaying. Have you ever heard that the devas like Indra and others who drank that *amRit* have become Realised Souls? Their only goal has been endless sensual enjoyment. At least for the human species, sensual enjoyment tires one out after some time since the body ages; so a human being has every chance of turning to something more permanent, something spiritual. The devas on the other hand have no way of learning by experience that sensual enjoyment is not the end of it all.

If the nectar-flow at the apex of the *KuNDalinI* yoga could only cause the non-decay of the body and nothing more, I am sure real yogis would not have gone the path of the *kuNDalinI* yoga. After all they were after an eternal bliss, not an eternal body. The flow of *amRit* from the thousand petalled lotus seat in the sahasrAra-chakra is just a step prior to the Realisation of advaita. In addition to that it certainly can give to the body, so long as it lasts, an enviable health. But it is mainly intended to shower the divine unlimited bliss. A yogi devoted to the *ShAkta* tradition may not discard the body and the universe as *mAyA*, in the same way as a *jnAni* would do. He would only look at everything as the *leelA* of *ambaal*. Therefore so long as he wants it, he is given the power to watch this *leelA* of *ambaal*. But in due course of time, maybe several hundreds of years, it will strike him to want to merge with that Ultimate. And at that time his body will also fall.

I told you of two kinds of serpent: the good one and the bad one. The former is what gives the nectar. The latter gives only poison. It is this latter one that is destroyed by the peacock of Lord Su*Brahmanya* and the Garuda-vehicle of Lord Vishnu. When the former (the good one, the nectar-showing serpent) is the form of Su*Brahmanya*, we say He is *nAga-rAja*, the King of snakes. It is the same one that Lord Vishnu is having as his bed-rest. It is the same one that Lord Nataraja is having

around his raised foot. And it is the same one who came as Patanjali and taught the *yoga-shAstra*, where, even if the *kuNDalinI* yoga is not particularly mentioned, the *kuNDalinI* that arises out of that yoga is of the serpent form.

Besides the peacock and Garuda, there is one more enemy of snakes. That is the '*nakulam*' or mongoose. One of the names of *ambaal* is '*nakuleshvari*'. It is actually the name of '*MantriNI*' the chief Minister in the universal kingdom of Queen Lalita-*ambaal*. The latter keeps only the portfolio of gracing the devotees and delineates the other duties of administration of the entire universe to *MantrinI*. The sahasranama name '*mantriNI-nyasta-raAjya-dhUH*' meaning, 'She who has delineated the responsibility of the burden of administration to *MantriNi*' arises from this fact. '*ShyAmaLA*' and '*Raja-mAtangI*' are other names of this *MantriNI*. Meenakshi of Madurai is also the same. She is the '*nakuleshvari*', who shakes up the sleeping serpent-power in the *mUAdhAra Chakra* and opens up the treasury of the Atman to us. The '*mUAdhAra*' has another name '*kulam*'. The *kuNDalinI* sleeps in the '*kula-kunDa*'. What wakes it up is the '*nakuli*'. This word arises from '*nakulam*' which should be broken up as '*na kulam*' to mean, 'not kulam', and therefore the opposite of '*kulam*'.

Of the three enemies of the serpent, Garuda is important; because he is also the one who brought the *amRit* to the serpents after fighting even the King of the divines, Indra. That the serpents could not partake of the *amRit*, is a different story. The fact that Garuda is the opposite of the serpent and of its poison and has connections with the story of the divine nectar is what is made capital of in #20 of Soundaryalahari.

He who meditates on *ambaal* in Her moonstone form which radiates rays of *amRit*, can conquer the poison of the serpent like Garuda, the King of birds. Not only that; by his very look, such a person eradicates, in anybody else, the poison of an extreme fever. By meditating on the Goddess as the One who pours *amRit*, his own body system gets the *amRta-nADI*, perhaps from the *sahasrAra-chakra* and so his glance, his sight, itself is enough of a cure for the poison of the fever.

The eight *vAg-devatAs* are themselves of the moonstone colour. Their seat is in the eight triangular portions of the eight-sided *AvaraNa* in the *ShrI-chakra*. This *AvaraNa* is itself called '*sarva-roga-hara-chakram*', that is, the chakra that eradicates all diseases. All of this is due to the effect of *mantras*.

Though the crystal colour of the moonstone is what is praised above as the colour of *ambaaL* to be meditated upon, the colour of the *devatA* of *ShrI-vidyA mantra* is red or crimson. This colour of the Goddess has been praised, two slokas earlier (#18) but since it talks of '*vashIkaram*' (captivation into submissiveness) I did not want to mention it. But still I want to tell you how the redness is important.

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(Digest of pp.942-950)

In Soundaryalahari, as well as in many similar works, there is mention about attaining a most attractive form, captivating women into submission by means of mantra, and such matters. These should not be taken literally. What does it mean to bring another into submission to you? It only means that you are already submitting yourself to such practices. To appropriate a lot of property simply means to allow oneself to be appropriated by that thought of proprietorship. To want to bring somebody else into submission implies that you are already submissive to such thoughts. Thereafter there is no question of *bhakti* towards *ambaal* or of surrendering to Her. Our Acharya would never have meant to make us slaves to such mean desires.

What he intended must therefore be to warn us well ahead so that we can steer clear of such desires and aspirations. Just as all rivers fall and get absorbed into the sea, so also all desires should get absorbed in oneself, never to rise up again – says the Gita. That is the kind of *shAnti*, Peace, that our Acharya would have advocated. It is the captivation by oneself of all desires and the absorption of all of them into oneself that the Acharya must have meant by the power of '*vashyaM*', meaning, 'captivation into submission'. All the three worlds become a woman who submits to the *jnAni* in submission – this is the vashyam that he talks about in Sloka #19; not the captivation of a woman into submission for lustful objectives.

Now let me come, as I promised, to the importance of the red colour of *ambaal*. It is the colour of the eastern sky when the sun is just rising. *KAmeshvari* is of that colour. What is so great about it? There is some physics of light here and there is also the philosophy of creation and dissolution. Red is at one end of the spectrum. When a colour is visible it means the light wave corresponding to that colour is the only thing that has not been absorbed by the medium that transmits the light. Whatever colour is reflected, that shows up; and whatever colours are absorbed, they do not show up. When white shows up it means none of the colours is absorbed, all of them are 'reflected' and they merge into one colour, white. When dark shows up it means all the waves of light are absorbed and there is no 'reflection'.

Of the three *guNas*, shuddha-*satvaM*, or pure *satvaM*, is the one that does not keep any of the three for itself and therefore it is pure white, like milk. It is taken to be indicative of the *para-Brahman*, though the latter transcends all the colours and the *gunas*. On the other side, the colour that keeps all the colours within itself and does not let any reflection out is black and this is the colour of '*tamas*'. It is pure Ignorance. The in-between *guna* is *rajas*, the *kriyA-shakti*. It is red in colour because it is the first colour that separates itself from the pure

white sunlight and forms the beginning of the projection of the other colours and creations.

From the pure white of *satvaM* to the total darkness of *tamas*, the entire spectrum and variety of creation -- all of them have come from the *parabrahman*, through the first emanation of the 'red' *KAmeshvarI*. The 'kriyA' (Action) that projects the *jIvas* from *Brahman*, and the 'kriyA' that takes the jivas back to *Brahman* – both the *kriyAs* are those of the *parA-shakti* who rose up as the all-red *KAmeshvarI* from the first 'thought' of the Ultimate. Therefore 'red' is indicative of Creation and is therefore the colour of Creator Brahma. The activity of life is all due to the flow of blood which is 'red' in colour. The Sanskrit word for blood is '*rakta*' which also means 'red'. Creation is done by a poet also; so the poetic talent, '*kavitvam*' is also taken to be 'red'.

There are differences in the redness of rajas. The seeds of '*kundumani*', the fruit of bitter gourd, and '*pAdirip-pazham*' are all red.

[Note : The botanical name for '*kundumani*' is *Abrus precatorius*. The seeds of this contain poisonous proteins.]

But the first one is poisonous, the second is bitter though good for health, while the third is sweet as well as good for health. In rajas also, there is the rajas that binds, the rajas that keeps a goal of *mokshha* and the rajas that lifts you up to *mokshha*. The 'redness' of *KAmeshvarI* is of the third type. It is that redness which has to be meditated upon, says *shloka* #18, as the one that engulfs all the region from the sky to the earth. The words '*saraNi*' and '*lahari*' both mean a flood. '*ShrI*' stands for the beauty of *ambaal*. '*ShrI – saraNi*' mentioned in #18, is therefore nothing but Her Soundarya-lahari, the flood of Beauty.

The mention of *ambaal*'s Supreme Beauty (*shlokas* 12 and 18) in this part of Ananda-lahari, in spite of its *yantra*, mantra and esoteric occupations, is to tell us that all this is to lead us on to the darshan of that supreme beauty of *ambaal*'s form, described in the latter part, namely, Soundaryalahari. That physical form of course is contained in the 'head-to-foot' description; but the redness that radiates from that form is a light that fills up the universe!

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(Digest of pp. 950-958)

In the *sahasra-nAma* ((poem of)one thousand names) of Lalita there is a long series of names which describe the divine form from head to foot. Naturally the hands have a due place there. But the hands and the weapons held in them are talked about even before the head-to-foot description starts. The weapons are not said to be just held, but they are built into an esoteric description. The weapons *pAshaM*, *ankushaM*, bow and arrow are each given a philosophical meaning. The '*pAsham*' (noose) is called '*rAgaM*' (desire) there.

‘*rAga-svarUpa-pAshADhyA*’: Desire is the noose which binds. So She has the noose of Desire in Her hands. But the desire is not the wrong desire, it is the desire that binds one to *ambaal*. At that point there should be no hate or dvesham. That is why there is an ankusham (goad). And then there are the bow and arrow to help us bind our mind and senses to the Ultimate. Only after this the darshan of *ambaal* in Her head to foot physical form will be obtained. But even before that form is visible, what one sees is the vast spread of the red colour everywhere. So the name that occurs just before the first name in the head-to-foot description is ‘*nijAruNa-prabhA-pUra-majjat-brahmANDa manDala*’, meaning, ‘She immerses the entire universe in Her crimson effulgence’. The same idea is said in the second line of *shloka* 18:

divaM sarvAM urvIM aruNima-nimagnAM.

In several places in the Soundaryalahari, we find the same descriptions as in Lalita SahasranAma almost in the same words.

The forehead of *ambaal* is like an inverted half-moon :

dviTyaM tan-manye makuTa-ghaTitaM chandra-kalashaM (shloka 46);
ashhTami-chandra-vibhrAja-daLika-sthala-shobhita (L.S.)

If She opens Her eyes, it is Creation; if She closes them, it is Dissolution:

nimeshonmeshAbhyAM praLayam-udayaM yAti jagati (shloka #55);
unmeshha-nimishhotpanna-vipanna-bhuvanAvaliH (L.S.).

Not even a tree bearing precious gems (*vidruma-lata*) can equal the enchanting lips of *ambaal*:

dantachhada-rucheH pravakshye sAdRshyam janayatu phalaM vidruma-lata (shloka #62);
nava-vidruma-bimba-shrI-nyakkAri-radanacchada (Lalita-sahasranama).

The jingling of the gems in the anklets of *ambaal*’s feet is described in both almost in the same words:

Subaka-maNi-manjIra raNita- ... charaNa-kamalaM (shloka #91);
sinjAni-maNi-manjIra-maNDita-shrI-padAmbuja (L.S.)

The idea that *ambaal*’s very speech can beat the sweetness of the *vINA*-music of Goddess Sarasvati, epitomised in the Lalita-sahasranama line

nija-sallApa-mAdhurya-vinirbhatsita-kacchapi,

is developed in a whole *shloka* #66 of Soundaryalahari.

While giving examples and analogies to various parts of the form of *ambaal*, when it comes to the chin of *ambaal*, both the Lalita sahasranama and the Soundaryalahari, say that it is devoid of all analogies:

Katham-kAram brUmas-tava chubukam-aupamya-rahitaM (shloka 67);
anAkalita-sAdRshya-chubuka-shrI-virAjita (L.S.)

Before the radiance of the pair of lotus feet of *ambaal*, the real lotus pales into insignificance, according to the Lalita-sahasranama line:

pada-dvaya-prabhA-jAla-parAkRta-saroruhA.

This idea is developed elaborately in *shloka* #87 where the Acharya shows in how many ways the divine feet pales the lotus into insignificance. Lotus withers away in snow. But *ambaal*, whose house of birth as well as the house of marriage both are in Himalayas, the feet are always excelling in snow. Lotus droops during night; but the divine feet beam with freshness. The lotus has the Goddess Lakshmi within it (and would not give it!), whereas the divine feet of *ambaal* dispense wealth and prosperity (that is, Lakshmi) to all who touch them. Thus the divine feet are always one up, -- so ends the *shloka* (#87) “*himAnI hantavyaM*”.

While the Acharya has done *stotras* on Vishnu and Shiva giving a head-to-foot description of the deities, he has shown great originality in the fund of his innovative descriptions and analogies. Then why did he not do it here in the case of *ambaal*? Why did he have to borrow from the Lalita Sahasranama? It shows only the Acharya’s humility and the high pedestal on which he places the Lalita-sahasranama.

Now let us follow the main trend of our coverage of Soundaryalahari. In *shloka* #21 he talks about the flood of absolute bliss in *Brahman* that is experienced by one who has reached the apex in KunDalini yoga. This flood is legitimately called by him ‘*AhlAda-lahari*’. ‘*AhlAda*’ means happiness, joy, bliss.

And now comes one of the most easy-worded, but profoundly meaningful *shloka*, #22.

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(Digest of pp. 958-963)

The next *shloka* is of great interest. Even in the portion of Anandalahari, which is supposed to be mainly the esoteric content of the *ShAkta* scriptures, there are *shlokas* which reflect the pure *bhakti* sentiment coupled with excelling poetry. One such *shloka* is #22. In this *shloka* one is lifted from the dvaita-*bhakti* to an advaita-like stage where there is a symbiosis of *bhakti*, *shakti* and *jnAna*.

bhavAni tvam dAse mayi vitara dRShhTiM sakaruNAM
iti stotuM vAnchan kathayati bhavAni tvam-iti yaH /
tadaiva tvaM tasmai dishasi nija-sAyujya-padavIM
mukunda-brahmendra-sphuTa-makuTa-nIrAjita-padAM //22 //

“*bhavANi*” – Oh Mother *bhavAni*. *Bhava* is the name of Shiva. The *Shakti* of *Bhava* is *BhavAni*.

tvam vitara : Please (you) cast

dRShhTiM : (your) glance

sakaruNAM : (which is) coupled with Grace and Compassion

mayi : on me

dAse : (who is your) servant.

vAnchan : Wishing

iti stotuM : to praise thus,
yah: whoever
kathayati :says
bhavAni tvam iti : “*bhavAni tvam*” ,
tadaiva (= *tadA* + *eva*) : then and there, (that is, even before you complete the remaining words “*dAse mayi vitara dRShhTiM sa karuNAM*”)
tvam : You
dishasi : grant, give
tasmai : to him
nija-sAyujya-padavIM : your own *sAyujya* status.
 (We shall come to the fourth line of the stanza later)

The marvel here is, that the devotee has not yet said the full prayer of his, namely: Oh Bhavani, You please cast on me, your servant, your glance of compassion and grace. He has just said: “Oh Bhavani, You” ! That itself is sufficient for the Goddess to pour Her maximum Grace of Her own *sAyujya* status on the devotee. This is the implication of the words ‘*tadA-eva*’ in the beginning of the third line of the stanza. The very moment one says ‘*bhavAni tvam*’, he is granted the Grace. How is this? And what is this *sAyujya* status that is being granted?

(The *sAyujya* concept was described in the first paragraph of Section– 29)

The *sAyujya* status is that which becomes one with the Object of Adoration. But what is being said here is not the oneness with the *nirguNa-brahman*. Why am I saying this? Now go to the fourth line of the *shloka*.

Mukunda: vishnu
Brahma : creator brahma
Indra : Indra, the King of the divines
sphuTa-makuTa : the shining crown
nIrAjita-padAM : the feet which have been offered the ceremonial waving (*nIrAjana*) of lights before them.

And thus, the last line means, in conjunction with the third line, “Then and there, You give him your *sAyujya* status, (which earns them) Your feet that have been given the ‘*nIrAjana*’ (waving of lights) by the Gods Vishnu, Brahma and Indra who, by falling at Your feet, have had their shining crowns touch your feet and thus have offered worship to it”.

It is the *sAyujya* status (the identity in form and essence) that privileges the devotee to enjoy the worship of even the Gods, through their ‘*nIrAjana*’ to the Divine Feet, with which there is identity now.

If one reaches advaita-*sAyujya* (identity) with the Ultimate, things will not be like this; for there is no ‘form’ there and there are no feet to be worshipped! And then there will be no gods in name and form. The

advaita *sAyujiyam* is the oneness with the Ultimate *nirguna-brahman* where there is no more universe. So what is said in this *shloka* is not the *sAyujiya* of advaita.

It is the supreme *Brahman* which manifests itself as the First Cause in terms of *parAshakti*. She is the Queen of this Universe and She administers this whole universe by Her own agents such as Brahma and Indra. It is those divine agents who fall at Her feet in obeisance. It is in that state that the individual soul (*jIvAtmA*) becomes one with the *parAshakti* in its *sAyujiya* status. It is that *sAyujiya* that is spoken of here.

The interesting fact is that even the advaita shAstras do speak of this state. Of course the goal of the advaita scriptures is not this. The peaceful nirguNa state without any mention of *shakti* or of any 'action' is the goal of advaita. But the 'Ishvara' that advaita talks of does 'get into action'! It is He (taking the place of '*parAshakti*' of the shAkta schools) who does all the *leela* with the devotee. That is why, even though the Ultimate is something in which there should be no talk of 'the rise of desire' or the 'occurrence of determination (*sankalpa*)', the Upanishads do speak like 'Whatever objects He desires, they appear by His very desire'. (*yam kAmam kAmayate saH asya sankalpAd-eva samut-tishhTanti*' --Chandogya U. VIII -2). This means just that He has the quality of 'aishvarya', namely, the godliness of being *parAshakti*.

Even if the person goes via the path of jnAna and looks forward to the advaitic union in *nirguNa brahman*, the *parAshakti* catches hold of him, as it were, on the way and makes him play along with Her in *saguNa-sAyujiyaM* (identity with Ishvara, the aspect of *Brahman* with form) in the world of action! But the play does not end there. He soars even higher spiritually. He is now in identity with the *parAshakti*, the Director of the entire universe and all its play. It is in that state he enjoys the bliss of union with the *saguNa* Ultimate. It is a state where there is the apex of Devotion and also the sense of advaita-jnAna – a perfectly peaceful and blissful state.

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(Digest of pp. 964 - 969)

Thus the identity (*sAyujiyam*) that *shloka* 22 talks about in its third line has something to do with jnAna, *bhakti* and *shakti*. It is not the *Brahman*-realisation spoken of in advaita.

Now we shall take up the pun on the words '*bhavAni tvam*' in the *shloka*. As soon as the devotee utters the words '*bhavAni tvam*' as a beginning for his full sentence: '*bhavAni tvam dAse mayi vitara dRshhTim sakaruNAM*' the Goddess is ready to grant him the highly merited *sAyujiyam* (identity) with Her. What is so powerful in those two words '*bhavAni tvam*'? This is where the poet has played with Sanskrit grammar.

The word '*bhavAni*' can be interpreted in two ways – one as a noun, and another as a verb. The verbal root is '*bhava*'. This itself gives the two meanings. When '*bhava*' is a noun it is a name of Lord Shiva. In this context '*bhavAni*' would mean 'the consort of *bhava*', that is, *ambaal*. '*bhava*' as a verb would mean 'be' or 'become'. In this context, '*bhavAni*' would mean 'Let me become' or 'Let me be'. So '*bhavAni tvam*' would mean 'May I become You'. Remember that in Sanskrit a sentence accommodates changing the order of the words in the sentence without affecting the meaning.

Ambaal is an ocean of compassion and grace. So when a devotee seeks the identity with Her by the two simple words '*bhavAni tvam*', She doesn't wait for his further words; She simply grants the *sAyujya*-status 'then and there'! But the irony of it is, he, the devotee, considers himself too low in the spiritual ladder to merit anything great and he has no conception of what honourable return from the Goddess awaits him. 'Just a glance towards this poor me, Oh Mother!' – this is all what he pleads for. Note that the poet uses the word '*yah*', meaning, 'whoever'. So the devotee does not have to be a great '*sAdhu*'. He could be any one. He may not even know that there is a status called '*sAyujyam* with *ambaal*'! The couple of words '*bhavAni tvam*' has such an effect even on ordinary persons who recite it.

The Almighty is the Lord. I am only a servant – This is the attitude of the devotee in the first line of the *shloka*. Of course it is an attitude of duality, not advaita. But even to such a person who only wants to be a servant of the Goddess, *ambaal* hands over in a platter the very advaita itself. Certainly this is *saguNa-advaitam*. But would She not also grant him, in due course, the *nirguNa-advaitam*?

Take the case of Hanuman. He was always steeped in the concept "*dAsohaM*", (*dAsaH* + *ahaM*) meaning, "I am your servant". '*dAsa*' means servant. By the very fact that he was steeped in that concept of "*dAsohaM*" all his life, he reached the advaitic stage of "*sohaM*" (*saH* + *ahaM*), which means, "I am He (That)". What this *shloka* says is that *ambaal* transforms every one who comes to Her with the attitude of "*dAsohaM*", to the apex stage of "*sohaM*"! It is a stage which is difficult for countless persons who struggle for the realisation of "*aham brahmAsmi*" and for even still more who ceaselessly meditate on the words "*tat-tvam-asi*" of the guru. While many of them find it an inaccessible ideal, it is granted even to the ordinary person who sincerely comes to *ambaal* with the two words "*bhavAni tvam*" though with something else in mind.

We have still not finished with '*bhavAni tvam*'. So far we considered '*bhavAni tvam*' as two words. But '*bhavAni-tvam*' can also be considered as a single word. Then it means 'the state of being *bhavAni* or parA-*shakti*'. The structure of the single word is something like '*amaratvam*' which means 'the state of being immortal' and like '*kavi-tvam*' which

means ‘poetic talent’. So the moment the devotee says ‘*bhavAni tvaM ambaal*’ takes it as a request for ‘*bhavAni-tvaM*’ and She grants the ‘*bhavAni-tvaM*’ to him. In other words She gives Her own status, namely the status of *sAyujya* with Her to him.

Remember the devotee has not even begun his petition to Her. But even before He asks in full, She is ready to give him not only what he asks but even more. Recall the “*vAnchA-samadhikaM*” of *shloka* 4, where it was said that Her feet are capable of gracing the devotee with ‘more than what is wished’!

At this point the Mahaswamigal
makes a very subtle comment about Adi Shankara,
which is exquisite. It also shows
the *bhakti* which he has towards
(the Acharya) Adi Shankara.

The following paragraph is almost an exact translation,
so that it can be enjoyed more.]

When we see this, something remarkable strikes us. Suppose somebody is a great scholar in a language and without any knowledge-arrogance he is also a sincere devotee of the Goddess, to the extent that he considers himself as nothing but a lowliest servant of *ambaal*, -- all this is actually a description of the Acharya himself -- such a one never ignores even the commonest of people, but discovers a deep content even in their ordinary comments and speeches. Such profound contents will certainly be granted to him (at his stature) as an experience, by *ambaal*. But when he says that such an experience will be given by *ambaal* even to the common man, why would She not give it to him who has the greatness of heart to see the profound in the profane! The stanza of KuraL (in Tamil) which says: “From whomsoever whatsoever is heard, to see the Truth in that is Knowledge” gets a new meaning here. “Knowledge” may as well be taken to mean “Experiential Knowledge”!

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(Digest of pp. 970 - 973)

In the Vaishnava tradition, they do not accept the attributeless non-dual *Brahman*, but they do talk about One-ness with the state of the Almighty Mahavishnu, along with all His powers. But even when they say this, out of deference to propriety, they make an exception to what one can obtain. The exception is ‘*Lakshmi-patitvaM*’, that is, ‘the state of being the spouse of Lakshmi’. Naturally whatever powers and states of Mahavishnu you may aspire for and actually get, becoming the spouse of Lakshmi is taboo. In the same manner in the branch of philosophy called ‘ShivAdvaitam’, they talk of oneness with Lord Shiva, but they make a similar exception, for the same reason of propriety. All this is because, the destination in both these schools of philosophy is a couple, such as ‘Narayana-Lakshmi’ or ‘Shiva-Parvati’. The very fact that one has to

make an exception throws a shade of doubt on the other statements of objectives.

One would like not to make any exception at all. That is where this *shloka* (#22) opens the door for us. It says: ‘Don’t aspire to become Narayana or Shiva; Don’t have your object of meditation the divine form of Narayana or Shiva, with the purpose of becoming one with it. Pray that you should become one with the form of the Mother, that is *ambaal* or Lakshmi. In their capacity of universal Mother, they will not only accept your prayers but will also give you that identical oneness with them. That Lakshmi or that *ambaal* are themselves internally in oneness with Vishnu and Shiva respectively. So when a *jIva* merges in the Mother, the Mother takes him along with Her and merges the *jIva* in either the Vishnu-form or the Shiva-form, thus granting you the Vishnu-*sAyuujyam* or the Shiva-*sAyuujyam*’. This *shloka* therefore gives the right strategy for us to become one with the Almighty at the same time not transgressing the elementary propriety of *pati-patni*.

To say it shortly, first you become the mother then the father. So first it is the oneness of filial affection. When the mother becomes one with the father, it is the apex of all *bhakti* attitudes, namely the attitude of *nAyika*. And that is what takes us to the ultimate advaita – so say the great rishis and saints who have gone through it all! Go back now and enjoy the imagery in *shloka* #12, where the divine damsels in order to understand the beauty of *ambaal*, imagine their oneness with Lord Shiva and expect to get a glimpse of the full beauty of *ambaa*.

Thus in this single *shloka*, the Acharya has brought in advaitam and dvaitam, philosophy as well as a delightful pun, service to the Lord as well as the concept of the *nAyika* (beloved of the Lord) *bhAva* -- all blended together.

To top it all we have one more thing to enjoy about this *shloka*. This is in the fourth line. It talks about the Divinities like Vishnu, Brahma and Indra falling at the feet of the Goddess and the divine feet get the *nIrAjana* (Reverential waving of Lights) from such great Gods. In fact Soundaryalahari has three such *nIrAjanas*. One in this *shloka*, one in *shloka* #30 and one in the very last *shloka* (#100).

The situation in #30 is not the accidental utterance of words of *shloka* #22, which meant identification with the Absolute in the generous interpretation of the poet. There it is not just any one, ‘*yah*’. He is not even just a devotee and a scholar. It is far more than that. He has risen above the ‘*dAsohaM*’ stage and has reached the ‘*sohaM*’ stage. It is the stage where the conviction that ‘I am one with You’ (= ‘*tvAm-aham iti sadA bhAvayati yah*’). He lives in that continuous identification with the Absolute. To such a one, says the Acharya (in #30), even the Cosmic Fire of Dissolution is just a *nIrAjana* (waving of Lights) only. Because it is so to the Mother Goddess. And it is therefore also so to one who has continually identified with Her.

The third '*nIrAjana*' comes in the very last *shloka* where the Acharya offers this Soundaryalahari itself as a waving of Lights to that Sun-like Light, that is the *ambaa* Herself in Her capacity as the Source of all Speech and Learning. The words of the Soundaryalahari are words which emanated from Her. So Her own words form the *nIrAjana* to Her.

These three *nIrAjana*s can be classified as one for Creation, one for Sustenance and one for Dissolution. But not in that order. They come in the order: Sustenance, Dissolution and Creation. The *devi-praNava* is '*umA*'. The letters come in the order: '*u*' (which is the letter for Sustenance, for it represents Vishnu); '*ma*' (which is the letter for Dissolution, for it represents *Rudra*) and '*a*' (which is the letter for Creation, for it represents Brahma). The first *nIrAjana* talks about the worship by Vishnu, Brahma and Indra. It is significant that this listing of the divines begins with Vishnu, thus indicating that we are talking about the *nIrAjana* meant as an offering of the Sustenance function. The second *nIrAjana* (#30) corresponds to the Dissolution function is already built into the very words 'the conflagration of Cosmic Dissolution proves only to be the *nIrAjana*' ("*mahA-samvartAgnir-viracayati nIrAjana-vidhiM*").

How does the third *nIrAjana* (#100) correspond to the Creation function? I shall explain this now.

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(Digest of pp.974- 979)

The waving of lights that is mentioned in the last *shloka*, the third *nIrAjanaM* of the whole work, has a specific reason. The Acharya says that the entire work is actually Hers, and therefore it is fitting, he says, to visualise the work itself as a *nIrAjanaM* to the goddess. Mother Goddess created this universe out of Her own wish and imagination. In the same way though the poet may have created this work, the words are actually Hers and so She is the Origin for the work. So from that Infinite source of Light, a fragment of a lighted camphor is taken out and used as *nIrAjanaM* to Her, through this work. In other words the whole work shows only a fragment of Her Infiniteness. And that is why the third *nIrAjanaM* (*shloka* 100) corresponds to Creation. Thus Soundaryalahari has three wonderful *nIrAjanaMs* built into it.

Let us now come back to *shloka* #22, where the first *nIrAjanaM* is taking place. The *nIrAjanaM* here is nothing but the dazzle of the crowns in the heads of Brahma, VishNu and Indra.

The interesting point here is the omission of *Rudra*, the third of the Divine Triad. If you are talking of the divine cosmic functions, the triad must include *Rudra*, certainly. But the purpose here is different. It is to show the supremacy of Mother Goddess over everything. The three

divines mentioned here are, Indra, the King who maintains the divine world, Vishnu, the One who maintains the entire world, and Brahma, the One Creator to whom all the divines and all the universe make their first appeal, whenever there is a universal crisis. So the maintenance of the created world is the thing in question here. That is why I told you earlier that this *nIrAjanaM* is the '*sthiti-nIrAjanaM*' (the waving of lights corresponding to the Sustenance function). For that very reason also, *Rudra*, the God of Dissolution function, is not mentioned.

Further there is an esoteric purpose. The attributeless *Brahman* transcends the three qualities *satva, rajas and tamas*. Of these three, the first is usually associated with the Sustenance Function and with Vishnu. The second, with the Creation function and Brahma. The third is associated with the Dissolution function and with *Rudra*. In the case of *jIva*, the same three are the waking state (where we do the maintenance function of carrying on the activities of life), the dream state (wherein we, out of our own mind, create endless varieties) and the deep sleep state (wherein all is quiet and is dissolved). But even in that deep sleep state, there is a life within, which is unaffected by any of the three; that is the *turIyaM*, familiarly called '*caturthaM*' (the fourth) in Mandukya Upanishad. The three states of awareness – waking, dream, sleep – pertain to the *jIva*; therefore it is what happens in the microcosm (the '*pinDa*'). The three states of Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution, pertain to the *Ishvara*; this is what happens in the macrocosm (the '*aNDa*').

The fourth, '*turIyaM*', is common to both. That '*turIyaM*' or attributeless *Brahman*, which is the substratum behind the *saguNa-Brahman*, that is *Ishvara*, is the very same 'turIyam' that lies as the 'Atman', the substratum of the three states of the *jIva*.

Why did I get into all this metaphysics? It is to tell you that the '*samhAra*' state, namely 'Dissolution' is what is nearest to the *turIya*, the Brahman. Neither in the *jAgrat* (waking) nor in the *svapna* (dream) is the *jIva* as restful and unperturbed as in the *turIya-samAdhi* state. But he is so in the *sushhupti* (deep sleep) state. But again that calm that he obtains in the *sushhupti* state is not an 'experiential' calm. It is so only in the '*samAdhi*' state. That is of course true. However, when compared to the *jAgrat* and *svapna* states, the *sushhupti* state is the one nearest to the *turIya-samAdhi* state. In the Cosmic level also, it is the *samhAra-rudra* that is nearer to the peace of *para-Brahman* than the Creator Brahma or the Maintainer Vishnu. It is that *para-Brahman* that is called '*ShivaM*' in the *ShAkta* literature. *Rudra* is *samhAra-mUrTi*, *Ishvara* is the *tirodhAna-mUrTi* who is responsible for the *MAYa* phenomenon and SadAshiva is the *anugraha-mUrTi*, responsible for the grant of *mokshha*. And then beyond the three there is the *para-Brahman* that is *ShivaM*. In spite of this classification, in general parlance and tradition, *Rudra, Ishvara, SadAshiva* and *ShivaM* are usually identified as the same

whereas the creator brahmA and the *sthiti-kartA* Vishnu are taken only as brahmA and VishNu.

What we have said about Shiva also applies to Mother Goddess. The *para-shakti* which is the fullest dynamic expression (*shakti*) of *para-Brahman*, is usually talked about as identical with Parvati, the consort of *Rudra* but not Sarasvati or Lakshmi. Even in Soundaryalahari She is addressed as '*hima-giri-sute*' or '*tuhina-giri-tanaye*' and not as Sarasvati or Lakshmi.

The bottomline of it all is this. It is only for Rudra there is an identity with Shiva; not for the murtis BrahmA or VishNu. Here the context is the *nIrAjanaM* in the form of the crowns falling at the feet of *ambaa*. And in this context it was not decent to bring in Shiva or *Rudrain* this part of Soundaryalahari where the emphasis is on philosophy and tantra. In the later part, where there is a free licence for poetic imagination, we have instances where even Shiva falls at the feet of the Goddess, the context however being that of Love.

It may be pointed out, in objection to what I have said above, that even in this first part, in *shloka* 25, it says: "It is enough to make one offering at Your feet. That itself is equivalent to an offering to the divine triad. Because they have placed their heads at your feet in obeisance, the offering at your feet to your feet is also automatically made to those three."

But a careful study of *shloka* #25 tells a different story.

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(Digest of pp.978 - 981)

I was telling you about the non-mention of *Rudra* in *shloka* #22. And that led me on to *shloka* #25, which we shall scrutinise now in order to understand that, in keeping with the esoteric nature of Anandalahari, the subtlety of the *pati-patni* relationship between the murtis of shiva and *ambaa* has not been damaged there. For there is not even a loophole therein to bring the identity of *Rudra* and Shiva.

(Note: Though the Mahaswamigal does not get into *shloka* #25 in detail, in order for the understanding of the key point he makes about it, a word-by-word translation of #25, is given below.)

*trayANAM devANAM triguNa-janitANAM tava shive
bhavet-pUjA pUjA tava caraNayor-ya viracitA /
tathA hi tvat-pAdodvahana-maNipIThasya nikaTe
sthitA hyete shashvan-mukullita-karottamsa-makuTAH // 25 //*

yA pUjA : The worship
viracitA : done

tava caraNayoH : at They Feet
bhavet : becomes, as it were,
pUjA : the worship
trayANAmM devANAM : of all the three deities (Brahma, Vishnu
 and *Rudra*)
tava triguNa-janitAnAM : who were born of Thy three guNas
tathA hi: Indeed it is this way.
Ete : These gods
sthitAH shashvat ; are stationed, ever,
maNipIThasya nikaTe : in proximity to the seat of gems
tvat-padodvahana : that bear Thy feet
mukulita-karottamsa-makuTAH: with their joined palms held (in
 salutation to Thee) above their diademed heads

[Now we shall go back to
the Mahaswamigal's explanations]

The three divinities mentioned here are referred to as “*triguNa-janitAnAM*”, meaning, ‘those who have their origins in Thy three guNas, *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*’. *Rudra* is the only one who has the *tamas* as the source. Since he is said to ‘be born’ (*janitAnAM*) of *tamas*, it is tantamount to saying that he is ‘born’ of Her and therefore He is Her offspring. And this justifies his falling at Her feet. Since the topic here is to say that the *pUjA* of the Divine Triad (born of Her *guNas*) is actually embedded (included, implied) in the *pUjA* of Mother Goddess, the deity *Rudra*, who is generally equated with Shiva, has to be included here. But whenever one wants to develop the theme that even great divines worship the *devI*, (as in *shloka* 22) one uses Mukunda, BrahmA and Indra without mentioning any of the names *Rudra*, Shiva or Ishvara which names are identified with Shiva. All the divines disappear in the Grand Dissolution, while the one who doesn’t disappear even at the time of the Dissolution, is not here at the scene of falling at the feet!

Lest I forget, let me now itself dwell on a subtle point regarding the *nIrAjanaM* corresponding to the Grand Dissolution (*mahA-pralaya*) (*shloka* 30).

[Again, as before, given below are the *shloka* #30
and its meaning, though the Mahaswamigal
does not choose to give the word-by-word meaning]

svadehodbhUtAbhir-ghRNibhir-aNimAdyAbhir-abhito
nishhevye nitye tvAm-aham-iti sada bhAvayati yaH /
kim AshcaryaM tasya trinayana-samRddhiM tRNayata
mahA-samvartAgnir-viracayati nIrAjana-vidhiM //30//

nitye : Oh the Eternal One,
nishhevye : Oh the One adored by all,
yaH : He who
sada : always

bhAvayati : thinks of (meditates on)
tvAM : You
abhitaH : (You, who are) surrounded
ghRNibhiH : by rays
svadehodbhUtAbhiH : emanating from one's own body
aNimAdhyAbhiH : such as aNimA and the like,
aham iti : as "I",
kim Ashcaryam : What wonder is there (meaning, No wonder) that
tasya : for him
triNayata : (who) makes into insignificance
trinayana-samRddhiM : the glory of the three eyed (Shiva),
mahA-samvartAgniH : The Great Fire of Dissolution
viracayati : is (only) a performance of
nIrAjana-vidhiM : the rite of waving of Lights.

The content here is this: Those who meditate with a complete (advaitic) identification with *ambaa*, are themselves offered the *nIrAjanaM* by the Fire of the Grand Dissolution. But in an earlier *shloka*, (#26), it is said that Brahma, Vishnu and all other divines disappear at the time of that *mahA-pralaya*, but Shiva alone remains, sporting with Her. The question now arises: How come, in *shloka* #30, it talks as if the '*tvAm-aham*' worshippers (that is, those who have identified themselves with Mother Goddess) survive during the Great Dissolution and receive the *nIrAjanaM* of the *mahA-pralaya*?

Yes, it is alright --, in the following sense. If they had been different from *ambaa*, they would have certainly been destroyed in the Dissolution. But they are in advaitic oneness with *ambaa*. They are the '*tvAm-aham*' upAsakas. They are the 'I am one with You' entities. In other words they are one with the *devI*. Of course this *devI* is not the attributeless (*nirguNa*) one. How can there be a *nIrAjanaM* for the *nirguNa*? The first line of *shloka* #30 means 'You who are surrounded by divine powers like *aNimA*, which are all rays emanating from Your own body'. This itself says we are talking of the *saguNa* form only here. The identity or oneness (*sAyujyaM*) that is talked about here is the same as the '*bhavAni-tvam*' idea of *shloka* #22.

But again one may question: 'Then, why are they talked about as separate and as if they are separately receiving the *nIrAjanaM* of the Fire of Dissolution?'. Though they may, in their identity with the Mother, have a feeling that they are themselves doing the play of Dissolution, along with that, there will be a symbiotic feeling of appreciation and bliss at the sight of the divine *leela* taking place right before them.

Let us note clearly that never can a *jIvAtmA* attain the identity of being the doer of Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution. To be in that kind of complete oneness with the *saguNa-brahman* in total advaitic

identification is an impossibility. The peak of experience can only be the 'feeling' as if it is itself doing the activities of the *saguNa-brahman*. *The feeling can be very deep and profound. But never can it become the original.* In order to compensate for this gap in complete identification, one is graced by *Ishvara* with this apex-like experience of being witness to the divine deeds. In fact, let me venture to say, that the very purpose of being a *saguNa brahman* may well be to grant this experience to that single one in a million!

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(Digest of pp.982 - 987)

The very deed of *ambaa* in keeping some people on the border of duality and non-duality is probably for the purpose of making them see the Cosmic Play of Dissolution. Naturally such people will not be engulfed in that play of Dissolution, because they are themselves privileged spectators of the play! These are the "I-am-one-with-You" people (of *shloka* #30). Even when it is said in *shloka* 26 that He (Shiva) is the only one who survives the *praLaya*, the "I-am-one-with-You" people who are those in identification with *Shakti* are, by the very reason of their being very privileged spectators of the *PraLaya*, are not consumed by the *PraLaya*. They are one with Her. There is no contradiction between the *shloka*s.

This concept of 'being consumed by *PraLaya*' needs further clarification. Though we use the word 'Shiva' generally, so long as He is the '*Kameshvara*' or the attributeless 'shivam' He cannot be consumed by *PraLaya*. But when He is one of the divine triad, as the *Rudra* in charge of Dissolution, or the *Maheshvara* in charge of the '*tirodhAna*' function, or the SadAshiva of the '*anugraha*' function, he will not be there after the *PraLaya*, because there is no *pancha-kRtyam* (the five Cosmic Functions) once the *PraLaya* is over. The *Kameshvara* who is non-distinct from *ambaa*, and the *nirguNa-shivam* which is the substratum of them both are the only ones which are there. The eternal truth and existence of *nirguNa-satyam* need not have to be re-emphasized or re-affirmed. So when we talk of who survives the *PraLaya* it is only *ambaa* and the *Kameshvara*-Shiva who is One with Her. This is what is referred to in *shloka* #26 when it says "*viharati sati tvat-patirasau*" (meaning, 'Your husband alone is in the play'). Read along with the word "*para-brahma-mahishhi*" (*shloka* #97), we should have meant only the *para-Brahman* by the word '*tvat-patiH*' in #26. But in the case of *para-brahman*, there is no question of any action like 'playing or sporting' ("*viharati*"); that is why the interpretation of '*Kameshvara*-Shiva' (who is non-distinct from *ambaa*) for "*tvat-patiH*" in *shloka* #26.

In the *shloka* where it talks of the 'I-am-one-with-You'-people it says even the 'wealth or prosperity' of Shiva Himself is nothing before

them. With great gymnastics of sound effect it says: “*trinayana-samRddhiM triNayataH*” (that is, even the majesty of the three-eyed One is like straw before the wind). Why was it said like this? Shiva might be *Ishvara*; but the ‘*aishvarya*’ (Wealth) that gave Him that name, came from the *para-shakti*. Without Her action, there is no Shiva, no Wealth of any kind for Him. Even if there was anything in terms of authority or jurisdiction, He shares it with so many other divinities to each of whom She has allotted responsibilities as well as the associated authority and wealth of Power. On the other hand, the ‘I-am-one-with-You’ people are one with Her and so they enjoy all Her *aishvarya* in fullness. So they are the greater ones!

I must warn you here. Let us not be carried away by this poetic devotional exaggeration. There is no separate identity for either of *Ishvara* and *devi*. In fact what is Hers is His and what is His is Hers.

A final subtle point. I just talked about the greatness of the ‘I-am-one-with-You’-people. But notice that they are not saying ‘You are one with me’; that is where there is also a modesty revealed. One of the *mahA-vakyas* is ‘*aham brahma asmi*’ that is, ‘I am *Brahman*’. Another is: ‘*ayam Atma brahman*’, that is, ‘This Atman, in other words, what is cognised as *jIvAtman*, is nothing but *Brahman*’. These two *mahA-vAkyas* and the essence of ‘I-am-one-with-You’ of *shloka* 30 are all the same. However, those who look only at the word-sequence of the *mahAvAkyas*, are likely to misunderstand them as saying : “The person who is in this *jIva-bhava* is calling himself *Brahman*’ – instead of correctly understanding: “It is *Brahman* that is this *jIvAtmA*”.

But when the *mahAvakya* comes forth from the mouth of the Guru it creates no such confusion. Because it says: “That is what you are” and clearly implies ‘That has become you’. In fact it indicates “Without you there is nothing to be called ‘I’”. And thus modesty is automatically oozing out here. This is what the conviction ‘I am one with You’ also disseminates. Along with it, there is also the grandeur of the association with the *aishvarya* of the Almighty. All these ideas have gone into the Acharya’s expressive line ‘*trinayana-samRddhiM triNayataH*’.

The bottom line is this: The *jIva* which is in identity with the Mother Goddess and the Lord who is non-distinct from Her, both are ever there.

I referred to *shloka* #26 above. It talks about how when everything and every one gets dissolved in the *PraLaya*, only the Lord Shiva along with *ambaa* are remaining in sport. It mentions the disappearance of the others one by one. The Creator Brahma reaches his end. Vishnu arrives at a dead stop. The God of Death (“*kInAsha*”) himself dies (“*vinAshaM bajati*”). The Divine Treasurer (“*dhanadaH*”) also perishes without any help from all his wealth (“*nidhanam yaati*”). Notice the gymnastics in the poetry here, which describes the gymnastic sport of the divine couple during the process of Dissolution of the Universe. Even during such a

great *PraLaya* (*mahA-samhAra*), *ambaa*'s spouse (“*patiH*”) alone survives!
Reason: Your *tATanka-mahimA*. This is what is taken up in *shloka* #28.

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(Digest of pp.987 -993)

sudhAm-apy-AsvAdya prati-bhaya-jarA-mRtyu hariNIM
vipadyante vishve vidhi shatamakhAdya divishhadaH /
karALaM yat kshhvelaM kabaLitavataH kAla-kalana
na shambhos-tan-mUlaM tava janani tATangka-mahimA // 28 //

AsvAdya api : Even after having consumed

sudhAM : the nectar

prati-bhaya-jarA-mRtyu-hariNIM : (which) eradicates the dreadful old age and death

vishve divishhadaH : all the divines

vidhi-shatamakhAkhyaAH : like Brahma, Indra and others

vipadyante : meet their end (at the time of *PraLaya*).

Yat : (But) the fact that

shambhoH : for Lord Shiva

kabalitavataH : who had consumed

karALaM kshhvelaM : the terrible poison (of KalakuTa)

kAla-kalana na : there is no submission to Time

tan-mUlaM : has its reason (in)

janani : Oh Mother

tava tATangka-mahimA : the Glory of Your ear-ornament (*tATangka*).

We have always been led to believe that some one who has consumed the most dreadful poison has to meet his end, whereas some one who has taken the nectar will be immortal. What is happening here is exactly the reverse. All the divines who had partaken of the nectar have all to disappear at the Deluge whereas the Lord who has consumed the most dreadful *hAlAhala*, is standing as the lonely survivor after the Deluge.

What is more, this partition of the Lord on the one side and all the other divines on the other side is also happening in the context of Service to the Mother Goddess. Mukunda, Brahma and Indra and all those divines fall at Her feet with their crowns touching Her feet (#22), while the crownless dweller of the burial ground is distinguished as unique. The punchline of this remark is that those who fell at Her feet are destroyed in the *praLaya*, but He who did not so prostrate before Her is unaffected by the *praLaya*!

There is even another *shloka* (#29) which says that She runs to welcome the one who did not serve, and while so running, tramples on the crowns of those that chose to serve Her and fall at Her feet!

[Since the Mahaswamigal elaborates rather lengthily

on this reference to *shloka* #29 here,
I am giving it here with meanings and all,
though he has not yet finished his discussion of #28.]

kirITaM vairinchaM parihara puraH kaiTabha-bhidaH
kaThore koTire skhalasi jahi jambhAri-makuTaM /
praNamreshh-veteshhu prasabham-upayAtasya bhavanaM
bhavyasyA-bhyutthAne tava parijanoktir-vijayate // 29 //

vijayate : Remarkable (= to be noted) are
tava parijanoktiH : the words of your maids-in-attendance,
abhyutthAne : at the hasty stir to welcome
bhavyasya : Lord Shiva
upayAtasya : (who) had come
bhavanaM : home
prasabhaM : suddenly, unannounced.
praNamreshhu eteshhu : “Amidst all these prostrating (divines)
parihara : avoid
vairinchaM kirITaM : the crown of Creator Brahma;
purah : in front (of you)
skhalasi : you are trampling (over)
kaThore koTire : the heavy crown
kaitabha-bhidaH : of ‘the enemy of Kaitabha’ (= ‘Vishnu’)
jahi : (also) avoid
jambhAri makuTam : the crown of ‘the enemy of *jambha*’ (= ‘*Indra*’).

Among the many names of the Creator Brahma, the Acharya most often uses the name ‘*virinchi*’ (See *shlokas* #s1, 2 and 12 for example). The word ‘*rinchati*’ means ‘creates’. The prefix ‘*vi*’ before the word adds a special effect to that action indicated by ‘*rinchati*’. In other words, Creator Brahma does the creation work most effectively and with dedication. Therefore he is ‘*virinchi*’.

‘*Kaitabha-bhit*’ denotes the One who vanquished the *asura Kaitabha*; therefore it is Vishnu. When He was in *yoga-nidra*, the *asuras Madhu* and *Kaitabha* attacked Lord Brahma, patent in the region of the divine navel of Lord Vishnu. And Brahma sang a song of praise of lord Vishnu so that He may wake up. The Lord obliged by shaking up the Goddess *Yoga-nidra*, and vanquished the two *asuras*. Goddess *Yoga-Nidra* is none else but the Mother Goddess. It is quite fitting therefore that Vishnu is remembered here as *Kaitabha-bhit*; because it is *Kaitabha* that connects Vishnu, Brahma and *para-shakti* in the same cosmic event.

His (Vishnu’s) crown is not just an ordinary one. It is solid, not hollow in its material. Why is it solid? The reason comes in the *stotra* called ‘*Vishnu-pAdAdi-keshAnta-stotra*’ of the Acharya himself. “*kRta-makuTa-mahAdeva-linga-pratishhTe*’ meaning thereby that the crown of

Vishnu is in the form of a *shiva-linga*. Now comes the ironical situation!. It is this crown that the maids-in-attendance of *ambaa* are wanting her not to trample over. It is the *shiva-linga*-formed crown on the head of Vishnu that is now at the feet of *ambaa*! And that is what She is about to trample, in her hurry to welcome Her Lord, when He arrives home suddenly. When *Bhakti* and Love are in full flood, as in the case of Kannappar's behaviour, none can default any action, even if it looks like one that is faulty!

The context in which this happens is still more interesting. *Bhava* is returning to his *bhavanaM* – this is the context. *Bhava* means Shiva. *BhavanaM* means home. He is returning home unexpectedly and *ambaa*, as soon as She became aware of this, hastens to welcome Him – in the tradition of a traditional *pati-vrata*. '*prasabhaM*' means 'in great haste and excitement'. And here comes a word '*abhyuthAnaM*' that has great significance.

'*abhyuthAnaM adharmasya*' – does it not ring a bell? It is the Lord's promise in the Gita, that he will come whenever there is a damage to *dharma*. In that context, '*abhyuthAnam*' means 'rising to the occasion'. But now Soundaryalahari adds another meaning to that word 'abhyuthAnaM'. It also means 'rising to welcome' or 'welcoming'. This sets up an interesting thought in my mind. Why not we appropriate this meaning in the *shloka* of the Gita also. Then it would mean:

abhyuthAnam adharmasya = the welcome offered by *adharmas*.

In other words, to make the Lord come down as an *avatAra*, a welcome strategy would be *adharmas*. It was the *adharmas* of a Ravana, of a Hiranyakashipu, of a Kamsa that brought in three great *avatAras* of the Lord!. But let us not carry the analogy too far. We should also remember what finally happened to these carriers of the welcome banner!

We have strayed too far from the *shloka* #28, which was our main discussion point. Let us go back to it now.

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(Digest of pp.996-1000, 1015)

The feat that Shiva survives even the *kAla-kUTa* poison, that stays in his throat is the glory of the ear-ornament of *ambaa* – this is the content of *shloka* #28. In other words *Shivaa* (meaning, *ambaa*) is the medicine for Shiva. This thought goes back to the Vedas. In the *Rudram* chapter of Krishna Yajur veda, the 2nd *mantraM* of the 10th *anuvAkaM* says: Oh *Rudra*!, You have a form which includes the most auspicious form of *parAshakti*, which is a cure for the entire universe and which is in total unison with your form, let that bless us to live a full life. In other words, it says there are two bodies for the Lord; when it shows up as *Rudra* it is frightening ("*ghora*"). When it shows up as Shiva it is

“auspicious”, because He has also this other body which is the one in unison with *Shivaa* (*ambaa*).

[Note : The Mahaswamigal does not usually quote vedic passages in public during his speeches, though he may give the purport of such passages.

This is the *mantram* that he is referring to:

yA te rudra shivaa tanuuH shivaa vishvAha bheshhajI / shivaa rudrasya bheshhajI tayaa no mRDa jIvase //

In the world of duality, there is good as well as bad. Both come from the same Absolute Reality that is God. It is not as if one comes from God and the other comes from Satan. This is not acceptable to our scriptures. The same Almighty is the *Rudra* of destruction and is also the most compassionate, most peaceful Shiva.

When we talk of the '*ghora*' form, the word '*ghora*' includes all that is bad like 'anger', 'sorrow' etc., though the direct meaning of '*ghora*' is 'frightful'. The opposite form called '*aghora-mUrti*' includes all that is good. When we look at worldly life, we have the feeling that it is 'bad' which is predominant. That is why our elders call this '*samsAra*' a '*ghora-samsAra*'. But it is not totally '*ghoraM*' nor does it end as '*ghoraM*'. Now and then some peace, some happiness is mixed up with it. This is like a medicine which is graced to us by the Lord. Probably it is divine will that this worldly life has to be a mixed life of good and bad. Maybe 'bad' is intended to be more in abundance, so that we would all want to get away from this and reach our Real Nature of Atman. I said 'Maybe' because how can anybody know what was the 'divine intention'?

Just as there are medicines for diseases, for this '*ghora*' events of life, there is a medicine of '*shivaM*'! But even that does not cure the illness totally. We get hungry and we eat to satisfy the hunger. But hunger is not for ever satisfied! Again we get hungry and again we have to eat! So also the '*ghora*' part of life comes again and again and the *shivaM* part gives us the medicine every time. That medicine is called '*SHIVAA*' -- say the vedas. They say: "Oh Lord! Do you know what converts your *Rudra*-body into the 'shiva-body'? It is the 'extended shiva', namely '*SHIVAA*'. Therefore '*SHIVAA*' is also the universal cure for everything!" This is the declaration of the *mantraM* from *RudraM* referred to above.

The matter does not end there. She is not just "*vishva-bheshhajI*". The Shruti continues: "She is also '*Rudrasya bheshhajI*', the medicine that will bring down the '*roudra*' (frightening) nature of *Rudra* and transform it into a '*karuNa*' (compassionate) nature".

Indeed we think that *Shivaa* is just the consort of Shiva and that is why She has been called *Shivaa*. But the above words of the vedas go to the extent of saying that only when the medicine of '*Shivaa*' is applied to *Rudra*, *Rudra* becomes 'Shiva' ! It is further confirmed by the fact that the auspicious form of *Rudra* is not referred to by the masculine term '*Shiva tanuu*' (the Shiva body) but it is declared to be the feminine word

‘*Shivaa tanuu*’. Thus the body is the one coming from the Mother concept. So the attitude is that of the mother, and the physical form is the father’s. It is the *Shivaa bheshhaji* that converts *Rudra* into Shiva.

The incident of Shiva drinking the poison that came out from the Ocean of Milk, and retaining it in his throat, for the purpose of saving those of the world outside, namely all the divines and those in his Cosmic stomach, namely the entire universe, is graphically pictured in a Sivanandalahari *shloka* (#32), wherein the poet-author (The Acharya) wonders “Was it a ‘*siddha-gulika*’ that you put into your mouth?”. *Siddha-gulika* refers to a medicine from the *Siddha-vaidya-shAstra*. It is interesting to note that this links well with the ‘*bheshhaji*’-word (*bheshhaja* – medicine; *bheshhaji* – Doctor) that is being used here in the veda-*mantra*.

This idea that the Lord has within Himself another body which is wholly that of *Shivaa* and the usual idea that the Lord has an *ardha-nArishvara* (half-male, half-female) form are together combined in another *shloka* (#23) where *ambaa* is branded as one who has appropriated for Herself the entire body of Her husband! :

tvayA hRtvA vAmaM vapur-aparitRptena manasa
sharIrArdhaM shambhor-aparaM api shangke hRtam abhUt /
yad-etat-tvad-rUpaM sakalam aruNAbhaM trinayanaM
kuchAbhyAm AnamraM kuTila-shashi-chUDAla-makuTaM //23//

yad-etat : The fact that
tvad-rUpaM : this form of Yours
sakalam aruNAbhaM : is fully red
trinayanaM : (and) having three eyes
kuchAbhyAm AnamraM : (and) is bent because of the breasts
kuTila-shashi-chUDAla-makuTaM : incomplete-moon-hair dress-crown , meaning, (and) having a crown of hairdo with the half moon in it,
shangke : makes me doubt (that)
vAmaM vapuH hRtvA : having taken the left side of the body
aparitRptena manasa : but not being satisfied (with it),
aparaM sharIrArdhaM : another half of the body
shambhoH : of Shiva
api : also
hRtaM abhUt : has been appropriated
tvayA : by You