

PERSONAL GROWTH THROUGH THE STUDY OF ASHTA -AVATARAS OF GANESH-from the Mudgala Puranam.

INTRODUCTION

There are eight special and interesting incarnations of Ganesh that occur in both Mudgala puranam and Ganesha puranam. These manifestations are conveniently conceived for our personal growth. It is a well understood fact of life that the greatest obstacles to man's evolution comes from internal blocks. On a daily basis we know that the powerful forces of Rivalry, Passion, Greed, Anger, Infatuation and Arrogance dominate our interactions with the world. These forces seem to bring the worst of our nature. The eight special avatara stories of Ganesh drive home the subtle role of these forces.

The stories are very simple and are quite repetitive in many parts. To avoid monotony only the first story will be detailed. Specific mantras are highlighted in each story. The stories amply prove that the power locked in mantras are totally unbiased. Mantras are powerful. They are holy and sacred only in the hands of those who are integrated. The perverted mind can wield any mantra for destructive and non- conducive purposes. The chief asuras in these stories are also interesting. They are born from devatas and are only subjugated, never killed. A good bit of confusion can be avoided if we remember that the word devata is not the word god as such in English. English is a language that is very restrictive to express the finer and deeper nuances of Divinity. One has to be patient enough to use several indicators in the English language to reveal the purport of a single Sanskrit word at times. The frustration involved in using English to explain Hinduism is like using crayons to draw Rajasthani miniature paintings. The lack of patience shown by many an English speaking translator may be described by the following example. If for instance we wish to demonstrate the beauty of Shankaraabharanam ragam of classical Karnataka music and what we do is to take a nearby piano and simply hit the seven notes of the major Western scale and say "Here, this is Shankarabharanam !!!" That is what we would be doing to our concepts of the Divine by merely finding the first convenient English meaning..

It is very important to remember that the study of the puranas must be based on certain premises. The Mukhyadevata – the embodiment of the Chief Illuminating Principle that occupies the central theme of a particular puranam or a puranic story must be considered the main deity of that text. It is this deity that points to the Transcendent Divine Principle through the workings of the Immanent Divine Principles. All other devatas even though they embody illuminative truths must be considered subsidiary or secondary in context. Thus Vishnu will be the main for the Bhagavat, Devi for the Devi bhagavat and Siva for the Siva puranam. If this is understood then and only then can one access the deep truth that is being illumined in that particular story. Ambivalent thinking that involves confusions regarding the superiority of one's personal or ishta devata has no place here. Forces that are part and parcel of creation whose function is simply to block illumination, to hide the truth are the asuraas. A-sura= opposing the good. They provide the rubbing stone for polishing the good. Both devataas and asuraas are cosmic principles that have inherent conditionings or limitations. Life's leelas cannot be staged without these conditionings.

Here Ganesh alone represents the Center, the Transcendent, and the Brhman. Following this tradition therefore Sri Ganesh is the main deity for these stories. When studying these stories one must not compare one story with the other. Each story is complete in itself. Comparisons will result in drifting away from the specific truth that the story wishes us to absorb.

Story 1-Putting Rivalry in place.
The avatara of Vakrathunda

Vakrathundaavatharascha dehaanaambrahmadhaaraka .
Matsaraasurathantha sa simhavaahanagah smrithah.

Indra becomes consumed by thoughts regarding his position as ruler of the devatas. He feels that he must outdo all other devatas in their power holdings. At that moment was born from him a creature of asuric proportions. This is Matsaraasura, the asura of Rivalry. Matsara's desire to conquer the three worlds increases day by day. Finally he approaches Shukracharya, the preceptor of the asuras for advice. Shukra advises him to worship the three eyed Lord Siva. He tells him to take to tapas and the japa of the siva panchaakshara, Om namah sivaaya. The preliminary shodashopachaara puja being completed, Matsara undertakes intense austerities over a period of 10,000 years. Siva and Parvati appear at the end of this ordeal to bless him. Falling at their feet Matsara requests the boon of trailokya vijaya or victory over the three worlds, bhu, bhuv and svarloka. News spreads fast about Matsara's gain. Other asuras flock to his kingdom. Encouraged by this popularity Matsara begins to build up a huge army of asuras. He conquers all other powerful asuras and turns his attention on to the kings that rule the earth. Having defeated them he moves on to Naagaloka and subjugates king Shesha and his subjects. From there he goes to Paataala, then on to Indra's Amaraavati, then to Varuna's Surapura. All come under his sway of power. Enraged by this behaviour, Kubera and Yama try to combat Matsara in battle. They too suffer defeat. Though driven out of Amaraavati. Indra tries a hand at battle. After a torturous encounter the vanquished Indra flees to Brahma with complaints. Brahma takes him to Vishnu stating that he has more experience in dealing with asuras. Vishnu deciding that only the one who gave the boon could solve the problem, leads the contingent to Siva. Siva explains to them the cyclical nature of time. He continues to elaborate on the interconnections between events past and present. At this time Matsara arrives in Kailas. He seizes Siva with his noose. Matsara's son Sundara priya is enthroned as ruler of Kailas. Soon Matsara takes over Brahmaloaka and Vaikuntam and installs Vishayapriya, his other son to take charge. The kingdom-less devas approach rishi Dattatreya for advice. He advises them to pray using the mantram gaum and perform tapas in order to facilitate the avatara of Vakrathunda. He alone could remove their fears. As advised they perform all austerities in earnest and are blessed with the appearance of Vakrathunda riding on a lion and accompanied by a host of ganas. News of Vakrathunda's intention to battle reaches Matsara. He sends an army to him with a message that he who has conquered the Thrimurtis has no fear of the elephant deity. The ganas successfully destroy the entire army. Next Matsara sends his two sons to

battle. They too are defeated. Matsara himself enters the battlefield. There face to face with Vakrathunda, Matsara gets the warning that he will incur defeat. Vakrathunda reveals to him the fact that the very tapas he has misused is soon to become a powerful and strong noose to him.

Intimidated by these words Matsara consults his ministers as to the proper mode of action. They advise him to take refuge in the one who is certainly more powerful than him. Accordingly in the battlefield itself Matsara begs for forgiveness and asks for unfailing devotion. Vakrathunda advises him to return to the devas, nagas and to the others all that he had usurped. He asks him to "remain only where his rightful place is and not to go beyond". There he should remain in devotion to Him.

Reflections

Vakrathunda as Dehabrhma- Dhaaraka means that this Universe is a CORPUS_ INTELLIGENT whose support is none other than the brhman. The power of the universe is regal like the lion. The universe and its workings are to be studied for our evolution. This fact was utilized very well by our rishis. This universe is an expansion of the Divine after all. Here the effect is in the cause and not separate from it and vice versa.

For us, the jeevas, our bodies contain the atman, which is the representative of brhman. This body too is holy. This house often considered a limitation is really a very powerful for divine purposes.

Indra is the lord of our senses. Our identification with this body must be carefully tended. If we allow this identification with the body to control us or get to us then it can bring about powerful forces by way of impulses. These impulses need to be tempered or else they will get out of hand. One such a force, which is natural to the body, as part of its survival instinct, is Matsara or rivalry. When rivalry is tempered we refer to it as healthy competition. This is why the asura is asked to -remain where he should- at the end of the story.

Untempered rivalry can get blind in its mission. The area that matsara finds its play, is in things that are aesthetically pleasing, and in accumulating the same. It therefore is qualitative as well as quantitative. These then are the sons of matsara. A single power unleashed with no restraint brings a host of other powers that are not conducive to progress. This is why in the story other asuras flock to matsara's kingdom.

All competition must be evaluated for its limited role in the maintenance of life- this is what is meant by remaining in devotion. Everything must be subjected to the test of the divine. The corporate world today has its foundations on ruthless competition. Often modern families are moulding their lifestyles on blind competition. If the sense of competition goes out of bounds then even heads of missions, ashrams, temples and churches etc are no longer in the daivic path. Our asuric nature is our lower nature and our suric nature is our higher nature. One belongs below in paataala and the other above in devaloka. This is the request made in the Shri suktam where an appeal is made to Shri to remind us of the value of friendship with the devas - "Upaithu maam deva sakha "

Vakra= curvaceous/dextrous and adaptable. Thunda= pointed instrument. Vakrathunda then is a tool that is capable of bending and curving. It is also a tool that is and

dextrous and selective. The trunk of the elephant is a perfect example of this. It is very sensitive and highly skilled. It can pick up huge logs as well as small pins with equal ease. It can hurl boulders out of the way or shower itself for purification. Morsels of food can be ingested as well. In man it is the sense of discrimination (intelligent choice preceded by evaluation) or viveka buddhi that is our vakrathunda. It is a pointed instrument that acts like the proboscis. It has been chiselled to indicate the divine and lead us to the divine by using it well.

The lion mount teaches us that often the power of viveka must be used in a ferocious manner to handle our own feline ferocious and powerful nature. This avatara being “dehabrhma dhaaraka”, can be used for contemplation by those who wish to use their body for divine purposes. “ vyashema devahitam yadaayuhu”

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Story 2- Managing Conceit **The avatara of Ekadanta**

*Ekadanthaavathaaro vai dehinaam brhmadhaarakah.
Madaasurasya hanta sa aakhuvaahanagah smritah.*

Rishi Chyavana, a brother of Shukracharya, consumed by certain thoughts of self -glory becomes conceited. At that moment was born from him Madaasura , the asura of conceit. Madasura questions his father as to his domain and what he should do. Chyavana asks him to go to his brother, Shukracharya, chief advisor of the asuras. Madaasura finds Shukracharya in the realm of Paataala. Approaching him he mentions his relationship and expresses his wish to become his disciple. He also states that his desire is to rule the entire brhmaanda. Shukra advises him to perform the japa and tapa on the maayaa beejam “hream”. Accordingly he begins a series of intense fasting and other austerities. His body gets reduced to mere bones and eventually gets covered by termite mounds on which vegetation thrives. Parvati appears at this juncture and blesses him. She gives the boons he desires, namely lordship over brhmaanda, freedom from disease and periodic fulfillment of other desires.

With the power gained he begins to set up his kingdom. He marries Saalasa (sloth) and brings forth three children, Vilaasee (wantoness), Lolupa (avarice) and Dhanapriya (love for accumulating wealth).

With the help of other asuras that join forces with him, Madaasura conquers Prthvi, Svargaloka and Kailas. His word becomes the law. No longer could one hear the sounds of svaahaa, svadhaa and vashat, the holy mantras that accompany fire offerings. No longer were ishvara pujas performed. No one followed vedic dharma.

The troubled devaas approach the young muni Sanat kumaara for help. He advises them to take to the japa of the ekaakshara mantra “gaum”. They are asked to address their fear to Ekadanta avatara as eka stood for suth and danta for maaya. For a hundred years they do tapas to invoke and bring down Ekadanta. At the end Ekadanta appears before them and promises to free them from their troubles.

Naarada muni meanwhile takes the news of Ekadanta's intention to Madaasura. In spite of being warned about the futility of his going to war, Maadaasura decides to fight. He sends his army first. His army fearful of the awesome form of Ekadanta and the manner in which he wields the noose or paasa abandon the battlefield en masse. Mada decides to confront Ekadanta. Even as he draws his bow and arrow, the arrow gets pulled away by a strange force. Ekadanta then hacks at the asura with his parasu or axe. The asura swoons. On waking up as he tries to hold the axe and thus block the blow. Miraculously the axe flees back to Ekadanta. The asura realises then the greatness of his adversary and falls at his feet. He asks for unfailing devotion and mercy. Ekadanta asks him to return all that he had usurped. He warns him to stay away from areas where worship of Ekadanta is conducted. The asura is asked to go to Paataala to exhaust the rest of his asuric karmas and remain there in joy.

Reflections

Conceit can surprise one at any time, even to a great rishi like Chyavana. It is natural for a thought regarding one's capacity to do something well, to take hold of the mind for a while. If however that thought is allowed to remain too long or rises up too often then it develops into the asuric power of conceit. Once such a power has come into being then the producer can no longer handle the outcome. Chyavana though a rishi was helpless at this juncture. Only a tough advisor like Shukra who is accustomed to the ways of asuras can give professional advice. It is ideal to be able to do away with these forces completely. This is not that easy. Complete elimination comes only as a result of intense introspection, with the help of sakshi chaitanya bhava (an attitude the mind where it is witness of itself 24 hours a day) and yoga. For the lay man the best way to manage conceit is to send it to the lower regions of the psyche, Paataala. It is better to deal with conceit head on as soon as it presents itself. It will automatically shrink and subside below. It fails to develop or gain in strength and proportions this way. This does not mean that it will not show its head again. Asuric forces tend to rise at moments of least anticipation. At least we can decrease the number and intensity. Man becomes helpless with his fits of asuric behaviour that releases forces that seem to take on a personality of their own. It takes one on to endless usurpations into areas that bring only more negative, non- progressive and asuric connections. Conceit commands a kingdom that demands total subservience. Life then conforms to an order set by an individual for other individuals. Secondary vices begin to come into the picture. A lack of sensitivity to the fact that this is a shared world order brings about sloth. Conceit tends to be gripped by its own power plays that usher in a wanton behaviour. Constantly wishing for more than one's share in life and grabbing to satisfy those cravings is avarice. Dhana can be wealth of any kind. It is anything by which other things can be obtained.

The asura uses the maaya beejam, hreem to usurp. Only Ekadanta could subjugate him for according to Sanatkumaara, Eka represent suth (Reality) and danta stands for maayaa (Projection of that Reality). They go hand in hand. The created is subject to maayaa. The hrellekha mantram ' hreem" goes like a cry from the created to the creator. This is the shakti pranava mantram. To get knowledge of brhman one has to go through maayaa. There is no other way. The very trappings of maayaa if properly directed can be used for understanding life's true purpose. The obverse is Vidyaa, i.e. brhmavidyaa. Maayaa and

Vidyaa are two sides of the same coin. The tusk of the elephant is for fighting and for extracting the branches for food. It is a tool. Maayaa then becomes the single tool to get to brhman and therefore there is no need to dismiss it. The call is for arhatha (affirm and manage)rather than neti (negate and control). Maayaa can be used to our advantage.

The avatara ekadanta is said to be the brhman represented as the indweller "dehi" in the body. One is reminded of the Geeta verse " dehi nityam avadyoyam dehey sarvasya bhaarata", " the dehi that resides in the deha (body) that is in all, is eternally indestructible oh arjuna." Ekadanta is dehibrhma dhaaraka.

The story of this avatara reinforces the sadhana of those who wish to be cognizant of the atma and its workings in man's mind-body equipment.

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Story 3- The Lure of Passion **The avatara of Mahodara**

*Mahodara ithi khyatho jnaanabrhma-prakashakah.
Mohaasurasya shatrurvai aakhuvaahanagah smrithah.*

Siva was doing intense during which time Paarvati in the guise of a beautiful tribal Bhilini girl approaches him. It is at this moment that Kaamadeva discharges his arrow towards Siva. On seeing the beautiful girl, Siva is overcome by a strong force of passionate attraction. Immediately from him issues a powerful creature called Mohaasura (the asura of passion). Even before Siva perceives him, Moha is seized by Shukraacharya. Under Shukra's tutelage the asura learns to propitiate the sun. The mantram " ghrini suryaadityaaya om" is recommended. With his tapobalam he decides to pray for invincibility and lordship over all. Surya blesses him with trailokya vijaya as requested. The asura having set up his kingdom marries Madira (bewitchment). Like the asuras in the previous stories Moha wages wars and seizes many a kingdom. Dharma and proper karma have no longer a valid place in daily life.

The devas turn to Surya himself for help. He advises them to pray for the Mahodara incarnation of Ganesh who rides on the mouse. The dashaakshari mantra of "gam kshipra prasaadaaya namah" is suggested. Naarada takes on the mission of warning this asura of his impending doom. Vishnu too speaks to him of the wondrous presence of the avatara Mahodara. Mohasura gets convinced of the futility of fighting with Ganesh. He invites Mahodara instead to his kingdom. There he offers shodashopachaara puja and begs for forgiveness and asks for unfailing devotion. Mahodara grants both the wishes but warns him to remain in Paataala.

Reflections

One of the fastest powers that can be handled is moha yet it does draw however other forces like madira that can intoxicate and therefore cause a temporary blockage to reasoning.

The connection to the sun in this story is that the foremost of luminaries lights this world for us. This light however must lead us to the ultimate Source of all light. “ Thameyva bhaantham anubhaathi sarvam, thasya bhaasaa sarvam idam vibhaathi”. These are the concluding lines often uttered during the camphor arathi at pujas. All luminaries such as the sun, moon, stars, lightning and fire all shine by borrowed light as it were. These luminaries are there as indicators to the Ultimate Divine. All knowledge is illuminative in nature. This the Jnaana we must have of the Brhman. Ultimately it is only through Spiritual Knowledge that we can realise who we truly are. This is the Knowledge that really matters. All others are just knowledge and only reflections at best.

Mystical, secret treasures are found in the manifested world. This is the massive belly (mahaa+ udara= mahodara) of none other than the divine. All the intricacies of a super intelligent and beautiful cosmos is right there in his belly. In this great belly we will find gems of wisdom that will provide us with various rays of truth that will help lead us to our ultimate goal.

The mouse or aakhu, a small creature is a massive destroyer. It can get into any nook or cranny. With its powerful teeth it can destroy a host of things. The methodology that we choose to work at our system to improve must be inspired by the behaviour of this small creature. We must learn to work at larger issues by handling the smaller ones in a consistent and determined manner a little at a time.

If we place improper value on knowledge and substitute that for the Ultimate Knowledge, then it can intoxicate or entice us beyond reason. This is similar to how results of many a scientific research today keeps contradicting previous results all the time. It can blind one to the truth. Someone who is in such a daze needs to be snapped out of it. Thus kshipra prasaada bhagavaan or the lord that blesses instantly on being invoked, is resorted to.

This avatara being “jnaana brhma prakaasaka” aids those who wish to recognize the divine everywhere and in everything and yet be blessed with the wisdom to know the Ultimate Divine who is also beyond all this.

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Story 4- Mastering Greed
The avatara of Gajaanana

*Gajaanana sa vijneyah saankhyebhyah siddhidaayakah.
Lobhaasurapraharthaascha mooshakagah prakeerthitah.*

When Siva and Paarvati were sporting in the Himaalayaas, Kubera happened to see them. He was so drawn to the beauty of Paarvati that he wished to acquire her. At that moment from him was born Lobhasura, the asura of greed. He too like the others gets despatched to Shukra. There he learns to use the siva panchakshara, “ om namah sivaaya” to gain his

desire for trailokya vijaya through tapas. Siva grants him this boon. His behaviour in taking over others is very asura like. The devas approach Raibhya muni for help. Raibhya advises them to do the ekakshara japa of "gaum" and invoke Gajaanana who is said to ride on the mouse.

Siva himself goes to warn Lobhasura. He explains to him the cosmic nature of Gajaanana. Having heard this and advised by Shukra, Lobhasura abandons all thoughts of battle and takes refuge in Gajaanana. The world becomes once more in peace with this asura remaining in paataala.

Reflections

The term ga in gaja is defined as "samaadheena yogino yatra gajati", where the yogis go to in samaadhi. The term ja is defined as "yasmaat bimba-pratibimbatayaa pranavaatmakam jagat-jaayatey", from where the essence of om proceeds in the form of this jagat just as the reflection proceeds from the reflected. The face or aanana is the most important part of the body. In sadhana terminology the face can be turned outwards as in bahirmukha or inwards as in antarmukha. This suggests a dual method, one when we turn inwards during meditation. Here we move away from distractions and quietly link with the internal, core of divine. The other is when we interact with the jagat actively with our faculties all functioning. We are reminded that the manifested world is also divine. This interaction must therefore be coloured with a willful awareness of the divine. This leads to mastery or siddhi.

The tendency to hoard is often called a Kubera mentality. Kubera, the deva of the north is depicted as the possessor of the best of all gems and the guardian of all treasures. The passionate need to acquire the best things in life can often take on asuric proportions. Then we find ourselves behaving in a manner detrimental to our spiritual evolution. Everything in the universe is proportioned. Time and again we should question if we are wanting more than our share from this world. Many first world countries have now established a legacy in this behaviour of hoarding.

Creation in which we find ourselves an integral part is fashioned out of Tattvas or Essential Principles. The process of the formation of the universe from Dynamic Prakrithi Tatvam that issues out of the Silent Purusha Tatvam is detailed in Saankhya Darshana. By a process of evolution, division and combination the universe is said to be made up of many categories of tattvas. These are both subtle and gross. The tattvas i.e the blueprint for construction, the material for construction and the manner of construction of manifestation is all part of Saankhya darshana. The value of paying attention to details is symbolised by the mushaka or mouse vehicle.

Raaja yoga, Chakra Vidya, Mantraayana are some examples of established ways where this darshana provides the support for mastery. This is also the choice that king Suraththa of the Devimaahaatmyam opted for. If the sadhak has a mind that is intrigued by the appearance and workings of this world, and finds the need to master very compelling, then these techniques become valuable. Thirumoolar's Thirumantiram has many vachanas that indicate that proper siddhi over oneself and the environment is a legitimate pursuit of the divine.

Those who wish to evolve by using in their sadhana, the building blocks of the manifested world, of which they are an integral part, for them the avatara Mahodara being "saankhyebhya siddhidaayaka" becomes the giver of siddhi or mastery.

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END OF LESSON 1 PART 2 of GANESH TATTVAM
