

## ŚRĪ YĀMUNĀCĀRYA'S STOTRĀRATNA

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Śrī Yāmunācārya (A.D. 918-1028), popularly known as Ālavandār in Tamil, is the most prominent of all the predecessors of Śrī Rāmānuja (A.D. 1017-1037), the great systematizer of the Viśiṣṭādvaita school of thought. It may be mentioned here that all the works of Rāmānuja show the great influence Yāmuna exerted on him. Yāmuna wrote two lyrics — the *Śrīstuti* (well-known as the *Catuṣṣloki*) and the *Stotraratna*, as well as other works including the *Gītārthasaṅgraha*, the *Āgamaprāmāṇya*, the *Siddhitraya*, the *Puruṣanirṇaya* and the *Kāśmīrāgamaprāmāṇya*. Of these, the last two works are lost to posterity.

The *Stotraratna*, to a brief exposition of which this paper is devoted, is popularly known as *Ālavandār-stotram*. It consists of 65 stanzas composed in a variety of metres. The break-up of the metres is as follows: Anuṣṭubh — 1; Upajāti and Mālinī — 2 each; Upendravajrā — 5; Śikhariṇī — 6; Viyoginī — 8; Vasantatilakā — 15; and Vamśasṭha — 26.

Although a hymn of religious and devotional importance repeated by many Śrīvaiṣṇavas everyday as part of their holy chantings (*pārāyaṇa*), this *stotra* abounds in many philosophical statements of the school. Yāmuna is at his best as a poet in this hymn. A point of additional interest is that the *Stotraratna* was also popular with great rhetoricians like Appaya Dīkṣita and Jagannātha Paṇḍita (both of the 17th century) who have quoted one of its verses, viz., “tavāmṛtasyandini pādapaṅkaje. . .” (v. 27) as an instance of the Figure of Speech *Nidarśanā*, in their works. It has been traditionally recorded that Rāmānuja was attracted to Yāmuna after listening to this hymn, especially the following verse:

“svābhāvikanavadhikātiśayeṣitṛtvam  
nārāyaṇa! tvayi na mṛṣyati vaidikaḥ kaḥ?  
brahmā śivaśśatamakhaḥ paramaḥ svarāḍi-  
tyete'pi yasya mahimārṇava-vipruṣaste” (v. 11)

“O Lord Nārāyaṇa! which man believing in the authority of the Vedic texts fails to acknowledge in you lordship which is spontaneous, unbounded and unexcelled? Even other orders of deities like Brahmā, Śiva, Indra and ever-liberated souls are but mere drops in the mighty ocean of your supereminence”.

The philosophical importance of this hymn has been well brought out by the Tamil commentary of Periyavāccān Piḷḷai and the Sanskrit commentary of Venkaṭanātha (also known as Vedānta Deśika). According to these Commentators, this hymn describes the agony of the human soul aspiring for divine communion, and brings out very well the concepts of *Bhakti* (devotion) and *Prapatti* (whole-hearted surrender), the supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu and the position of Śrī as the inseparable consort of the Lord and the Mother of all the creatures in the universe.

After paying homage to his own grandfather Nāthamuni, sage Parāśara the author of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and to Nammālvār the celebrated Tamil saint, Yāmuna observes that the supremacy and lordship of Viṣṇu are implied in the fact that He is the prime cause of creation, maintenance,

dissolution etc., of the universe by His mere Will (*saṅkalpa*, called *avekṣaṇa*). He is the inner controller (*niyantṛ*), master (*svāmin*) and friend (*suhṛt*) of all the beings, full of concern for them (*vatsala*):

“nāvekṣase yadi tato bhuvanānyamūni  
nālam prabho bhavitumeva kutaḥ pravṛtīḥ?  
evam nisargasuhṛdi tvayi sarvajantoḥ  
svāmin na citramidamāśritavatsalatvam” (v.10)

“O Lord! If you do not will, these worlds cannot even come into existence. Where, then, is the question of their activity? There is, therefore no wonder that you, a natural friend of all beings, are full of parental care and concern for those who resort to you”.

The author is of the view that the supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu is the purport of all scriptural texts. The distinction of Viṣṇu over other deities lies in the fact that He is the source of even Lakṣmī's glory as Her beloved consort, that He is the promoter of the quality of *sattva* (serenity) which helps to achieve liberation and that He is of the same characteristics as possessing the “lotus-eyes” specially referred to in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (1.6.8: *tasya yathā kapyāsam puṇḍarīkam evamakṣiṇī* = “And the two eyes of that Divine Being are like fully-blown lotuses”). Viṣṇu is the Highest Being, an infinitesimal fragment of whose unbounded splendour is manifested as the wonderful cosmos of sentient and insentient entities.

“kaśśriṣṭriyaḥ? paramasattvasamāśrayaḥ kaḥ?  
kaḥ puṇḍarīkanayanaḥ? puruṣottamaḥ kaḥ?  
kasyāyutāyutaśataikakalāmśakāmśe  
viśvam vicitra-cidacit-pravibhāgavṛttam?” (v. 12)

“Who (else) is the source of prosperity for even the goddess of prosperity? Who is the repository of the highest degree of *sattva*? Who is the lotus-eyed one? Who is the best of the *puruṣas*? And from whose infinitesimal fragment of endless splendour has this wonderful universe attained its distinction of sentient and insentient entities?”

Yāmuna puts forth purāṇic episodes also as evidence to support Viṣṇu's supremacy over the rest of the gods by emphasising that He alone protected and blessed them on several occasions.

“vedāpahāra - gurupāta - daityapīḍā -  
dyāpadvimocana - mahiṣṭhaphalapradaṇaiḥ  
ko'nyaḥ prajāpaśupatiḥ paripāti? kasya  
pādodakena sa śivaḥ svaśirodḥṛtena?” (v. 13)

“Who (else), indeed, has protected Brahmā and Śiva from great dangers such as the theft of the Vedas, terrible sin (of *brahmahatyā*) and the attacks of demons, and had bestowed upon them great rewards? By the waters (Ganges) issuing from Whose foot has Śiva become a veritable Śiva (auspicious)?”

The supremacy of the Lord, points out Yāmuna, is clear from a number of factors — His boundless compassion, beatific form and benevolent activities, borne out by genuine *sāttvic* texts and the teachings of the god-minded seers.<sup>1</sup> This supremacy is, at the same time,

<sup>1</sup>See *Stotraratna*, v. 15. Edited by P.B. Annangaracharya. Kanchi: Vedāntadeśika granthamālā, 1940.

characterised by easy accessibility (*saubhya*) as the Lord is the abode of innumerable auspicious qualities such as power, generosity, mercy, straightforwardness and equanimity.

“vaṣī vadānyo guṇavān ṛjuśśucir  
mṛdur dayālur madhurassthirassamaḥ  
kṛtī kṛtajñastvamasi svabhavataḥ  
samastakalyāṇaguṇāmṛtodadhiḥ” (v. 18)

“O Lord! you are, by your very nature, full of control, magnanimous, virtuous, straightforward, pure, soft, kind, sweet by disposition, steadfast, equanimous, of high accomplishments, grateful, and (in short), a mighty ocean of ambrosia for all auspicious qualities”.

Yāmuna then expresses his total helplessness in getting over the world of transmigratory existence and surrenders whole-heartedly at the Lord's feet with unswerving conviction and self-abnegation.

“na dharmaniṣṭho'smi na cātavedī  
na bhaktimān tvaccaraṇāravinde  
akiñcano' nanyagatiśśaraṇya!  
tvatpādamūlam śaraṇam prapadye” (v. 22)

“O saviour! I am not steadfast in the performance of my duties (*karmayoga*); nor do I know about myself (*jñānayoga*); I am not even a true devotee of your lotus feet (*bhaktiyoga*). I have nothing to call mine own, and have no place to go. I seek refuge in your feet.”

Whole-hearted surrender at the Lord's feet, known severally as *Śaraṇāgati*, *Prapatti* or *Nyāsa* according to this school, is one of the two means of release, the other being the path of *Bhakti* or unflinching devotion.

The helpless human soul can only be saved by the overwhelming mercy of the Almighty.<sup>2</sup> Lord the saviour and the individual soul thus saved, are mutually complementary, the latter being in need of the Lord's grace and also necessary for bringing into display or for fulfilling His qualities of grace and affection.<sup>3</sup>

In a memorable verse Yāmuna states that with nobody other than the Lord to save him, he resigns himself to the Lord's care, even if he dislikes him, like a suckling child clinging to its angry mother.

“nirāsakasyāpi na tāvadutsahe  
maheśa hātum tava pādapañkajam  
ruṣā nirasto' pi śiśuḥ stanandhayaḥ  
na jātu mātuścaraṇau jihāsati” (v. 26)

“Though you may despise me, O master, I am not prepared to abandon your lotus-foot. Even if the mother out of anger keeps her suckling child away, the child never desires to leave her feet.”

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. v. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. v. 24.

It may be pointed out here that the above analogy of mother and child is borrowed by Yāmuna from Kulaśekhara Ālvār's *Perumāl Tirumoli*:

“ari cinattāl iṅṅa tāy akarriḍinum  
marraḷaldan aruḷ ninainde aḷum kuḷavi  
aduvēpōl irundēnē.”<sup>4</sup>

“Even if the mother, out of anger, keeps away the child, the child still believes in the compassion of its mother and keeps crying. I was exactly like that (O Lord!).”

One who develops loving devotion towards the Lord cannot think of anything else in the world as near and dear.

“tavāmṛtasyandini pādapaṅkaje  
niveṣitātmā kathamanyadicchati?  
sthite’ravinde makarandanirbhare  
madhuvrato nekṣurakam hi vīkṣate” (v. 27)

“How can anyone who has set his own self at your lotus-foot exuding nectar, desire other things? When there is a lotus full of honey, a bee, indeed, does not even look at an ordinary flower devoid of honey.”

It is interesting to note that this idea has been borrowed from Yāmuna by Potanā, a celebrated Telugu poet (15th century) who in his Telugu translation of the Sanskrit text of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, puts these words in the mouth of Prahlāda while referring to his inborn devotion for Lord Viṣṇu:

“mandāra makaranda - mādhyamuna delu  
madhupambu povune madanāmulaku?”<sup>5</sup>

“Does a bee, enjoying the sweetness of honey exuding from a lotus, ever go to an ordinary flower devoid of honey?”

Yāmuna then becomes restless and yearns for the beatific vision of the Lord's lotus feet, which are as it were, the very consummation of his prosperity:

“dhanam madiyam tava pādapaṅkajam  
kadānu sākṣātkaṛavāṇi cakṣuṣā?” (v. 30 c,d)

The author then enters into a detailed description of the Lord's beatific form, dress, ornaments, weapons and His highest abode called *Vaikuṅṭha* wherein are to be found the ever-liberated beings (*nityasūtris*) like Ananta, Garuḍa and Viṣvaksena, serving the Lord and His consort in different capacities, out of pure love and single-minded devotion. Śrī or Lakṣmī abides by the Lord permanently, and Her form, nature and activities are in full conformity with those of Her spouse by which She pleases Him every moment.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Decade 5, song 1. *Nāḷāyiradivyaḥprabandham*. Edited by K. Venkataswami Reddiar. Madras: Tiruvengaḍattān Tirumanram, 1973.

<sup>5</sup>*Bhāgavatapurāṇam* Sk. 7. Ch. 7. v. 59. Madras: Vavilla Ramaswami Sastrulu & Sons, 1958.

<sup>6</sup>See *Stotraratna*, v. 38.

This description makes us infer that Yāmuna is referring here to the *arcā* (iconic) form of the Lord installed in temples for worship.

According to the Pāñcarātra - āgama texts of the Śrīvaiṣṇava school, the Lord abides in five essential forms called *para*, *vyūha*, *vibhava*, *antaryāmin* and *arcā*. Of these *para* (highest) and the *vyūha* (distinguished) forms of the Lord are difficult to be seen by an ordinary man. Even the next, viz., the *vibhava* (glorious) forms of incarnations like those of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa cannot be seen by ordinary men, they having already come and gone. The *antaryāmin* (indwelling) form of the Lord cannot be seen due to its extreme subtlety. As such the only form which all mortals can now see and worship is the *arcā* or iconic form. What Piḷḷai Lokācārya (13th century) says in his *Śrīvacana-bhūṣaṇam* regarding these five forms is worth quoting in this context: “bhūgatam jalampōlē antaryāmitvam; āvaraṇajalam pōlē paratvam; pārkaḍalpōlē vyūham; perukkārupōlē vibhavangaḷ; atilē tēngiya maṭukkaḷ pōlē arcāvatāram.”<sup>7</sup>

“The *antaryāmin*-aspect of the Lord is like the water under the crest of the earth. The *para* — aspect is like the water surrounding the cosmic world. His *vyūha* - form is like the milky ocean; and His *vibhava* - manifestations are like the flooded river. His *arcā* (idol) form is like pools filled with flood-waters of the river”.

Ādiśeṣa, Yāmuna points out, serves the Lord in the highest abode (*paramapada*) in several capacities — as His abode, couch, seat, sandals, dress, pillow and umbrella.

“nivāsa - śayyaśana - pādukāṁśuko  
padhāna-varṣātapavāraṇādibhiḥ  
śarīrabhedaistava śeṣatām gatair  
yathocitam śeṣa itiryate janaiḥ” (v. 40)

This idea again is an echo of one of the songs of Poygai Āḷvār:

“ceṅṅāl kuḍaiyām, irundāl ciṅḡādanamām  
niṅṅāl maravaḍiyām, nīlkaḍaluḷ eṅṅum  
puṇaiyām, maṇivīḷakkām, pūmpaṭṭām,  
pulkum aṇaiyām, tirumārkaravu”<sup>8</sup>

“When the Lord walks, the Serpent (Śeṣa) forms the umbrella. When He sits, he acts as the throne. When He stands, he becomes the sandals. In the vast ocean he always serves (the Lord) as His boat, and acts as the torch of gem, silken cloth and pillow.”

The glorious qualities of the Lord all the more intensify the burning love of the devotee who pays his obeisance and prays to Him to bless him with the pleasure of permanent and unconditional servitude which makes him an *ekāntin* (a single-pointed servant), like Ananta and Garuḍa.<sup>9</sup> But instantly the thought that he has no eligibility for coveting such a position crosses the mind of Yāmuna.

<sup>7</sup> *Śrīvacanabhūṣaṇam*, Prakaraṇa 1, Sūtra 39. Edited and translated into Telugu by P.B. Annangaracharya. Madras: Sadgranthaprakāśana Sabhā, 1960.

<sup>8</sup> *Nāḷāyiradivyaprabandham*. Tiruvandādi 1, song 53.

<sup>9</sup> *Stotraratna*, v. 46.

“dhigaśucimavinītam nirbhayam māmalaḥḥam  
paramapuruṣa yo’ham yogivaryāgraganyaiḥ  
vidhiśivasanakādyair dhyātumatyantadūram  
tava pariḥanabhāvam kāmaye kāmaḥḥḥḥḥḥ” (v. 47)

“Fie upon my own audacious self, who am so fearless and shameless as to covet the status of being your servant, which is far beyond the imagination even of great beings like Brahmā, Śiva and Sanaka!”

Yāmuna then employs the *viyoginī* metre<sup>10</sup> to advantage to describe vividly the pangs of his separation (*viyoga*) from the Lord and makes an impassionate appeal to save him from the ocean of transmigratory existence by showing him the right path of conduct. It may be pointed out in this connection that in classical Sanskrit literature, poets like Kālidāsa have used the *viyoginī* metre as an appropriate medium of conveying the deep feelings of sorrow caused by separation.<sup>11</sup> A few verses may be quoted here to show the perfect mastery Yāmuna has over this metre:

“aparādhaśahasrabhājanam  
patitam bhīmabhavārṇavadare  
agatim śaraṇāgatam hare  
kṛpayā kevalamātmasātkuru” (v. 48)

“O Lord Hari! I am a repository of a thousand sins and I have fallen headlong into the midst of the terrible ocean of worldly existence. I have no way to go and I have whole-heartedly surrendered at your feet. Kindly make me your own.”

“avivekaghanāndhadinimukhe  
bahudhā santataduḥkhavarṣiṇi  
bhagavan! bhavadurdine pathaḥ  
skhalitam māmavalokayācyuta” (v. 49)

“O Lord! this worldly life is verily the rainy day on which I have slipped from my path. All the directions are blinded by clusters of clouds in the form of ignorance and it is constantly raining in the form of misery. O Acyuta! (“one who does not slip”) kindly show me the way”.

In a fit of remorse and feigned anger, Yāmuna tells the Lord that if He does not show his saving grace, He will not get a more deserving devotee:

“na mṛṣā paramārthameva me  
śṛṇu vijñāpanamekamagrataḥ  
yadi me na dayiṣyase tato  
dayantiyastava nātha durlabhaḥ” (v. 50)

<sup>10</sup>The scanning of the metre is as follows: *sa, sa, ja* and *guru* in the odd quarters and *sa, bha, ra* and *laghu* and *guru* in the even quarters.

<sup>11</sup>See for instance the *Kumārasambhava* Canto IV (vv. 1-38) and the *Raghuvamśa* Canto VIII (vv. 43-69), popularly known as the “Rativilāpa” and “Ajavilāpa” - sections respectively.

“O Lord! Listen to my solitary appeal first. There is no untruth in what I say. This is the hard truth: If you do not show me your grace, then you will find it very difficult to come across a more deserving recipient of your grace.”

Yāmuna prefers the birth as an insect in the house of Lord's devotees to the status of even the creator-god Brahmā, born elsewhere.

“tava dāsyasukhaikasaṅginām  
bhavaneṣvastvapi kīṭajanma me  
itarāvasatheṣu māsmā bhud  
api me janma caturmukhātmanā” (v. 55)

“Let me be born even as an insignificant insect in the houses of those who are intent on the bliss of serving you. I do not desire the birth even as the four-faced god (Brahmā) in the houses of others (your non-devotees).”

Here one may compare Kulaśekhara's hymns<sup>12</sup> addressed to the Lord of the Seven Hills (Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvara) which seem to have provided the inspiration to Yāmuna for the above statement.

Yāmuna then requests the Lord to put him in touch with ascetics who have given up even thoughts of their liberation in preference to having a glance of the Lord's wonderful form for once.

“sakṛt - tvadākāravilokanāśayā  
tṛṇīkṛtānuttamabhuktimuktibhiḥ  
mahātmaḥir māmaivalokyatām naya  
kṣaṇe' pi te yadviraho'tidussahaḥ” (v. 56)

“Please put me within the range of the sight of great souls who, out of a desire for having your vision for once, have disregarded even heavenly enjoyment and eternal release. For me, even a moment's separation from you is of unbearable pain.”

The state of devotion as described above, wherein a devotee feels restless even at the thought of a moment's separation from the Lord, is technically called *paramabhakti*.

For a true devotee, the Lord alone appears as the father, mother, child, friend, teacher and all that one cherishes as near and dear:

“pitā tvam mātā tvam dayita! tanayastvam priyasuhṛt  
tvameva tvam sarvam gururasi gatiścāsi jagatām  
tvadīyas tvadbhṛtyaḥ tvatpariḥjanas tvadgatiharam  
prapannaścaivam satyahamapi tavaivāsmi hi bharaḥ” (v. 60)

“O my dear! you are the father, mother, child, friend, teacher, ultimate goal and everything else for all the worlds. I belong to you. I am your servant, attendant and sole dependent. I have totally surrendered to you, and am therefore your own burden.”

<sup>12</sup>Vide *Nālāyiradivya-prabandham*, *Mudalāyiram*, Perumāl Tirumozhi, 4th Tirumozhi, songs 1, 2, 9 & 10 in particular.

This whole-hearted surrender to the Lord as pointed out earlier<sup>13</sup> is called *bharanyāsa*, *nyāsa* or *nikṣepa* in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition.

This school lays stress on man's responsibility for his own good or evil in life. The Lord gives a man the power of thinking and acting in the right way. If still there is more evil and suffering in life, then man is to blame his own self, but not the Lord.<sup>14</sup>

Yāmuna says that he was no doubt born in a family of great devotees of the Lord, but has somehow been sinking in the darkness of his own actions.<sup>15</sup> He admits that he had been all his life, a man of imperfections and sinful actions.<sup>16</sup>

But the author is fully aware of the fact that the Lord's compassion is unreserved as is evident from the incarnations as Śrī Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. Even a lesser degree of merit in a devotee, however sinful he might otherwise be, can invoke the Lord's mercy and save him:

“raghuvara! yadabhūstvam tādṛśo vāyasasya  
praṇata iti dayāḥur yacca caidyasya kṛṣṇaḥ  
pratibhavamaparāddhur mugdha! sāyujyadobhūr  
vada kimapadamāgastasya te'sti kṣamāyāḥ” (v. 63).

“O best of the Raghus (Rāma)! you became so kind-hearted towards the crow by the simple fact that he surrendered to you; and also towards Caidya (Śiśupāla) in your incarnation as Kṛṣṇa. O charming Lord! you granted salvation to these who sinned against you in every birth! Tell: Is there anyone who does not become an object of your all-embracing grace?”

Even if such a fragment of merit be absent in the devotee the Lord will at least take into account his descent from a line of His devotees and will thus save him. This only emphasises the extremely compassionate nature of the Lord.

“Akṛtrima-tvaccaraṇāravinda -  
premaprakarṣāvadhimātavantam  
pitāmaham nāthamunim vilokya  
prasīda madvṛttamacintayitvā” (v. 63)

“O Lord! Look at my grandfather Nāthamuni who is a man of self-knowledge, and who is, as it were, the ultimate limit for the natural love towards your lotus-feet. Show pity upon me, winking at my wretched life.”

The *Stotraratna* is thus a classical example of a devotional lyric combining in itself the charm of poetry and the warmth of philosophy.

<sup>13</sup>See p. 67 above.

<sup>14</sup>See Radhakirshnan, S. *Indian Philosophy*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1927. Vol. II. p. 693.

<sup>15</sup>See *Stotraratna*, v. 61.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*, v. 62.