

MADHURAKAVI ĀḶVĀR

INTRODUCTION

Madhurakavi ĀḶvār is considered to be one of the āḶvārs since he discovered the āḶvārs and indeed the supreme āḶvār Śaṭhakōpa, whose disciple he became. The story goes that Madhurakavi who was searching for the highest master in the North saw the star, even like the Magis who saw the star of Bethelam, but in the South. Following its course southwards, the land of Agastya, he reached the City–Tirunagari– which since then had the honour of being called ĀḶvār Tiruṇagari, Under a big and huge tamarind tree¹ was seated the eternally youthful Śaṭhakōpa wrapt in supreme contemplation of the Divine Kṛṣṇa who had permitted Himself to be caught up in the loving embracing meditation of the devotee, even as he did when his mother Yaśōda tied him up. The sage-āḶvār Śaṭhakōpa who had conquered the circle of births opened his eyes when the searching disciple Madhurakavi found that the star he had been following stopped just above the tree. Madhurakavi in reverence having done obeisance asked him "*Śettattin vayarṛile śiriyadu pirandāl ettattinreṅge kidakkum*". (When the soul is born of the Inconscient (*śettatu*) (or Matter, acit) what enjoying where does it be?) Śaṭhakōpa replied "Enjoying that it remains there" (*attaittinraṅge kidakkum*). On hearing this, knowing that the saint seated under the tree to be omniscient, Madhurakavi placed himself under him for the sake of attaining salvation.

Madhurakavi's compositions might have been many as his name signifies. But we have only ten verses–*Kanninum Śiruttāmbu*, these are the only verses that have come down to us. It is considered that these ten verses reveal the supreme Poetic quality of the poet we are considering. The original melody of the verses I am afraid cannot be transmitted through any translation. I shall first place before the readers a translation of the ten verses and then try to point out the philosophical implications of the poem.

- I. Leaving the Great wonderful Lord Father who permitted Himself to be bound by the many-knotted short piece of cord by the gentle damsel,² seeking refuge in the seer of Kurukūr,³ if one recites his name, then the tongue trained to taste from

¹ The tamarind tree is associated with St. Śaṭhakopa who is well-known as the greatest Tamil Hymnist and musician per excellence in earliest times. We find that Than Sen the most celebrated poet and musician of Rajputana was also connected with a tamarind tree. His grave is overshadowed at Gwalior by this tree and it is considered that he who takes these leaves would get a portion of his immortal harmony, cf. Popular Poetry of the Hindoos by Thomas Duer Broughton 1814.

² Yaśōdā! the foster mother of Śrīkṛṣṇa.

³ Śaṭhakopa or NammāḶvār

beginningless time inferior enjoyments, will begin to taste nectar.

- II. Praising him with my tongue, (have I) gained the Good: his golden feet attained: verily I know of no other Godhead.
Sweetly singing the hymns of friend of Kurukūr⁴ I shall wander.
- III. Wandering thus I have attained the vision of the form of the blue-hued Lord of the Gods with the beautiful Śrī.
This indeed is the gain that I have got by devoting myself to the Āḷvār of Kurukūr city.⁵
- IV. Verily am I deemed as wretched by the very well-versed in the four Vedas. Therefore is Śaṭhakōpa who is my mother and father and ruler, the abolisher of my sorrows.
- V. Previously had I desired the supreme self-realisation of the transcendent Lord: and desired too chaste ladies. (But now) having sought refuge with love in the Āḷvār of Kurukūr of golden and shining mansions, I have become realised.
- VI. From now on and in future my master has favoured me with the command to sing his excellent qualities. The Āḷvār of the mountain girt Kurukūr of big houses at all times is looking at me (showering his grace on me) behold!
- VII. My master Āḷvār who was of the Kāri-family seeing me, accepting me and abolishing my age-long sins has displayed his love (to me).

I proclaim aloud the love of Śaṭhakōpa alone who sang in Tamil so that persons in all diverse directions (in Tamil-land) may hearken.
- VIII. (The Āḷvār) who has adored the love of God, proclaimed with joy the meaning of the well-known Vedas. You have seen the love that lover of God who has sung on Him thousand essenceful hymns in Tamil: In this world they are beyond comparison.
- IX. He (Āḷvār) having sung the esoteric teaching of the Vedas of the eminent Brahmans fixed them well in my mind: Absolute loving service of him alone is the adequate offering to my master Śaṭhakōpa.
- X. Though there is no gain for you (from us): though we are unwilling to hearken to the good, yet by thine actions hast thou trained us fully well, O Āḷvār of Kurukūr girt with gardens resounding with koil-cries and thine songs! I seek thine excellent feet out of love (for thee)
- XI. In these songs by the devoted Madhurakavi on his master of beautiful Kurukūr, who

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

is the lover of all those who have sought refuge at the feet of the lover of all (God), those who have faith, will verily attain Vaikuṅṭha.

The first hymn speaks of the wonderful enjoyability of the Āḷvār who is god-intoxicated person, who has indeed roped in the Divine Lord by his praise and hymn. The dynamic quality of the hymns is such that it is capable of weaning away the soul from its lesser enjoyments and tastes and goals. The second hymn shews that the Kavi attained the realisation of the fullest being who in himself contains the Godhead. The God-realised soul is indeed the Godhead for the devotee, the living truth and expression of the Divine. This incessant worship of the God-realised leads to the vision of the Supreme through the grace of the Divine Master. This is the truth enunciated in the third hymn, and the fourth reveals that for such a person who is devoted to the God-realised being, in whom the Divine indwells by special presence, eternally and inseparably, that Master becomes the mother and the father and redeemer and ruler. Indeed the Master is all, however low he may be in the estimation of the learned. God is not so enchanting as the God-possessing Master, and so sing the praises of the Divine-Fulfilling Master at His behest is the only duty. The Master is not a tyrant but a sweet lover, teacher of the truth. Man's offering in return for that overwhelming love of the Master to all his disciples, is to love Him by loving adoration and service. His selfless love for us demands from us a selfless return; and devotion is the essence of this offering.