

17. The Golden uttaraNi that was missing!

Several years ago, Kanchi Maha SwamigaL was camping in an old choultry called the RMM Choultry in the Mahadana Street of Tiruvidaimarudur. Bhaktas (devotees) from the surrounding villages arrived daily to have darshan of Maha SwamigaL. adiyEn (I) was then studying in school. Since my father was an official of the local Kanchi MaTham, he used to go to Tiruvidaimarudur often and come back after having darshan of AcharyaaL. He would also take me during my school vacation. On such occasions, it was a sukhAnubhavam (pleasant experience) to have darshan of SwamigaL with bhaya-bhakti (intense devotion) and receive his prasAdam!

One Sunday. It could have been eight o' clock in the morning. Along with my father I prostrated to AcharyaaL and got up. There was not much crowd. Calling my father near him, SwamigaL said, "Santhanam, aren't the people of your village coming here? Ask everyone to come. No one should go back empty. As ChandraMauleesvara prasAdam, they all should have their vaisvadevam (bhojanam, food after offering it to God) and then only go... What, you've understood?" SwamigaL gave his orders with a smile, with the compassion of a mother.

My father said with humility, "Periyavaa uttaravu (orders)" and prostrated. adiyEn too prostrated. Periyavaa did not leave it at that. Looking at my father he ordered, "Today you have darshan of ChandraMauleesvara Puja, have your vaisvadevam here and then go!"

Father and myself finished our afternoon bhojanam and had some shrama parikAram (rest) in the choultry thiNNai (raised portico). It could have been three o' clock in the afternoon. Suddenly, there was a bustle in the choultry. The MaTham people ran here and there and searched for something in wild hustle. We did not understand anything, so we inquired.

A man of the MaTham said, "It is nothing else. When Periyavaa does ChandraMauleesvara Puja, for him to offer arghya, pAdyaM (waters in honour and for washing feet), and a notable from Kummaanam (Kumbakonam) had given an uttaraNi in gold. Would be about three sovereigns! Till yesterday it was in Periyavaa's puja. Today it is not found there. We are searching all nooks and corners. Not yet informed Periyavaa, he does not know about it yet!" and continued on his search.

SriMaTham kAryastA (in-charge) said with worry, "Before this reaches Periyavaa's ears, it should somehow be found and placed (where it belongs to)." He called the sippantis (clerks) one by one and conducted his inquiry. Everyone said that they did not know anything about it.

"Everyone has been interrogated...only one man remains," said the kAryastA. "Call Ramanathan who does the ugrANa kaingkariyam (kitchen service)!"

A man went to the kitchen and came back. He said, "The cook assistant Ramanathan is not there. They say he had gone to TepperumaNallur to call on his mother who was not well. He can be expected only in the evening," and moved away.

It was five in the evening. Maha SwamigaL came out of his ekAnta (private) room. Letting his gaze wander in all the four directions, he stood for a moment. Then he sat on the Asanam (seat) made for him at the entrance of his room, adjacent to the wall. Sometime later, a youth who does pUja kaingkariyam came by the side of the hall. Calling him near, AcharyaL asked with a smile as if he knew nothing, " EndAppA (my boy)... I am witnessing it all since this noon. The chatram (choultry) is all allOlakallOlam (hullabaloo, great noise), what samAcaram (news)? Any romba periya manushA (VVIP) is coming here today?"

Prostrating shASTaangam (with eight limbs), the youth said, "Nothing of that kind, Periyavaa", and swallowed.

SwamigaL did not leave him. He asked smilingly: " oNNumillEnnu solliptA epdidAppA (how come you can say it is nothing)! The whole choultry is in amarkaLam (great bustle as in a war), what else is the viSayam (news)?"

Swallowing again, the youth said feeling sorry, "When you do ChandraMauleesvara Puja, to offer arghya, pAdyaM , won't you be having a pavun uttaraNi (golden spoon)? It is not found Periyavaa. That is why they are all searching every nook and corner of the choultry."

Periyavaa next threw him a bait. " EndAppA , is there a suspicion on any of our manushyA (people)... any talk on those lines?"

"I have no idea Periyavaa! Only the kAryastA mAma (man in-charge) was saying several things. Only he should be asked to know it all!" said the youth.

"Alright, you go and ask the kAryastA mAma to come here and then go (your way)!"

Standing in a corner there, our hands folded across the chest, Father and I watched the proceedings.

The kAryasta who came to the hall prostrated shASTaangam to PeriyavaaL. Periyavaa asked him laughingly: " EndAppA, seems the pavun uttaraNi in the puja is missing?"

"Yes, Periyavaa."

"When from it's missing, any knowledge about it?"

Hesitatingly, the kAryasta said, swallowing his words, "For two days, we did not take the uttaraNi for use at ChandraMauleesvara Puja, Periyavaa! When we looked today, it was missing."

"Alright, what you think?"

"What seems to me is that somebody must have taken it Periyavaa."

"Alright, can you do the anumAnam (inference) as to who could it be?"

"Can't say that way with dIrgham (certainty), Periyavaa. Still there is suspicion on one pErvazhi (person)."

"Who is that pErvazhi ?"

The kAryasta wavered and hesitated. "There could be nothing unknown to PeriyavaaL. Still I shall tell you what strikes my mind!" He dragged on his words.

"Tell me, I shall also know about it."

"My tirmAnam (conclusion) is that it is the cooking assistant Ramanathan!" Before the in-charge could finish his sentence, SwamigaL countered him: "How do you say that?"

"For the last ten days that Ramanathan was pestering me: 'My mother is not well. I need to admit her in KummaNam Municipal Hospital for treatment. I want an advance of three hundred rupees.' Not only that Periyavaa. He was also annoying me daily to give an increment in his salary. Therefore..."

Interrupting him, AcharyaaL said, "So you have come to the conclusion that he should have done this kAryam (act) since he has paNamudai (financial shortage)!" and laughed.

SwamigaL continued: "Alright, alright. Where is that Ramanathan now? Bring him here saying that I called him."

The kAryasta said in submission, "He has gone up to TepperumaNallur to have a look at his mother saying that she is very unwell, Periyavaa."

"Let it go... You say he asked for an advance and increment. You have given them?"

"No, Periyavaa."

"Then what did you do?"

"I told him, 'For those two viSayam s (things) you asked, now it will not be saukaryam (practicable) in the MaTham', Periyavaa!"

When he heard this, SwamigaL lapsed into thinking for sometime, closing his eyes.

A while later he said to the kAryasta , "Right, you do one thing. When that Ramanathan returns from TepperumaNallur, come to me and bring him with you; you understand?" Giving him this order, he went back to his ekAnta room. We all were standing with folded hands forgetful of ourselves. Time was ticking on.

It was eight in the night. Ramanathan arrived from TepperumaNallur. The in-charge came to the hall with him. As if he was foretold, PeriyavaaL also

opened his door and came out and sat down (on his Asanam). Ramanathan fell down shASTaangam and prostrated to SwamigaL.

PeriyavaaL at once inquired him with vAtsalyam (affection), "Ramanathaa! I heard that your mother was unwell. How is she now?"

With reddening eyes Ramanathan replied, "They say a tumour has cropped up in her stomach. Could only be treated with an operation, admitting her at the KummaNam periyAspatri (government hospital)."

Before he finished, SwamigaL inquired, "You asked kAryasta for an advance for that purpose?"

"Yes, Periyavaa!"

"You also wanted increment it seems?"

Ramanathan did not reply to this (question).

"Why do you not reply (to my question)? What salary you get every month now?"

"Sixty rupees, Periyavaa."

"What increment do you now expect?"

No reply. Periyavaa too did not leave him at that.

Ramanathan hesitated and said in a feeble voice with persuasion, "Ten rupees every month Periyavaa!"

"Every month you want a salary of seventy rupees. Is that so?"

No reply to this too. SwamigaL looked at the kAryasta . "He asks for a ten rupee increment. What you do, you give him an increment of fifteen rupees and give him a salary of seventy-five rupees. Also give him the advance he asked for... what, you understand?" SwamigaL gave his orders.

"Shall do as you say, Periyavaa!" said the kAryasta .

"What Ramanathaa, aren't you happy now?" asked SwamigaL.

Ramanathan brought a palm before his mouth and nodded his head in affirmation.

Looking at his audience in the hall, Periyavaa said suddenly, " EndAppA ! You people said that you have searched every nook and corner for the missing pavun uttaraNi . Tell me if you searched in the place I am going to tell you about now." Periyavaa stopped with a suspense.

The audience looked at one another, and then looked at SwamigaL with uncertainty.

SwmigaL continued laughingly: "You have missed searching at an important place. I shall tell you now, listen. You people discard the nirmAlya puSpams (used flowers) of the ChandraMauleesvara Puja every day in a place in the backyard where they won't be walked on by human legs? Should you not search for the pavun uttaraNi in that heap? But then don't go in search now in this night! There might be some pUcchi pottu (insect or worm) there. Go and look in kArthAla (the morning). It will be found there due to ChandraMauleesvara's kRpA (compassion)."

SwamigaL got up briskly saying this as if in sUcaka (indication) to someone. We all prostrated to him and took leave.

The next morning. I entered the Mahadana Street choultry with my father, in anticipation. My father inquired the MaTham kAryasta about the golden uttaraNi . The in-charge replied with a happy laugh: "As Periyavaa said, we went in the morning and rummaged the nirmAlya puSpams. In that was found the shining golden uttaraNi ! But then how it came there is a satyam (truth) known only to ChandraMauleesvara and PeriyavaaL."

This adiyavan stood transfixed in wonder when I heard it!

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