

Sri:
Srimathe Ramanujaya Nama:

An Interview with PBA Swamy - 1979

Interview conducted by Sri K.A. Manavalan and Sri T.A. Bhashyam - published in
Geethacharyan, March 1979 Issue
Translated from Tamil by TCA Venkatesan

Q. How did you get the name "prativAdi bhayankarar"?

A. This is not my name. It is the title given to our ancestor. His divine name was Prativadi Bhayankaram Annan. He lived at viLakkoLi sannidhi in Kanchipuram. He learned the general sastras from NayanArAchAryar, son of Vedanta Desikar. Later, after hearing the greatness of Manavala Mamunigal, he went to Srirangam and seeked Swami's divine feet. There, due to Mamunigal's grace, he learnt the special sastras and became one of his ashta dikgajas.

Q. Why did he get the name "prativAdi bhayankarar"?

A. When he was the disciple of NayanArAchAryar, he defeated a advaitic pundit in a philosophical debate. Upon which NayanArAchAryar celebrated him as "prativAdi bhayankararE". From that day forward, he and his descendants came to be known by that name.

Q. Were you born in Kanchipuram itself?

A. Yes. I was born in Kanchipuram in the household of my grandfather (mother's father - Shashti Jeeyar Swami).

Q. Can you tell us about your studies in youth?

A. My father's name was Annangaracharyar. During a very young age, I learned from him. I had upanayanam done when I was six years old. My father taught me 3000 divyaprabandhams before I was nine years old. Two years later, he performed samashrayanam for me and then taught me the Thiruvaymozhi thousand. These were taught to me in Kanchipuram as well as in our village of Chiththathoor Thiruvadi Rayapuram. In addition, I learned many works from my father's uncle Kidaambi Krishnamacharyar.

Q. Did you learn Sanskrit works also from your grand uncle?

A. I learned some works from him first. Later, I learned many Sanskrit works, including Sri Bhashyam, from Sri U Ve Jagadguru Gaadi Ananthacharyar Swami. When Swami went to North India, upon his order, I learnt from Ilangaadu Rangaswamy Iyengar Swami and Pudhupper Venkatacharyar Swami. In addition, I learned Bhagavad Vishaya Rahasyam, mUvAyira vyAkhyAnam, Tamil grammar, ancient Tamil works, Ashta prabandhas and Kamba Ramayanam from Shashti Jeeyar Swami.

Q. From whom did you learn the Vedas? When did you get the interest to learn them?

A. I learned some parts of the Vedas first from Narasimhacharyar. Later I stopped learning the Vedas as they were in the way of my Sanskrit education. After the age of nineteen, I started learning them again from Mamballam Sudarshanacharyar Swami. About 25 people learned with me. I created a pAtashala for us to learn Vedas and purchased a building for it. We started reciting the Vedas we learnt, in the divine streets around the temple. This was started in the year 1919 and stopped in 1964 when I had a heart attack.

Q. How many languages do you know? In how many languages have you written works?

A. I know Tamil, Telugu,, Hindi and Sanskrit. I have written works in all four languages. I have also performed upanyasams in all four languages.

Q. Till now (1979), how many works have you authored?

A. In the four languages, I have written about 1207 books. This room in which I am seated has many books - out of which only about 1/4th are not authored by me. The rest were written and published by me.

Q. Can you group the books you have authored so far?

A. They can be separated into 16 groups. Most importantly, I have published pUrvAchArya granthas. I published all of Ramanuja's granthas in a book called Ramanuja Granthamala; all of Vedanta Desika's granthas in a book called Vedanta Desika Granthamala; and all of Manavala Mamunigal's works in a book called Varavaramunindra Granthamala. In addition, I have published books authored by me, in 15 groups. Starting at the age of 19, I have authored extended meanings for the 4000 divyaprabandhams.

Q. In addition, you have also been publishing a journal, right?

A. Yes. I have been running journals in all four languages. I publish a journal called "Vaidika Manohara" in Sanskrit and Hindi. In Telugu, I publish a journal called "Ramanuja Patrika" and in Tamil "Sri Ramanujan".

Q. Are you the editor for all magazines or do you use representative for each of the magazine?

A. I am the editor for all magazines. I have not kept any assistant so far. These magazine have been running for 32 years.

Q. You said you know four languages. Do you also know English?

A. When I was learning at the Vanamamalai Patashala, my mother wished me to learn English. However, my father did not agree to it. Later, when my father was ill, a doctor came to see him. At that time, my father himself asked that I learn English from the doctor. I learnt English from him for about 1.5 years. I also learnt English for some time from a person called Venkataryan. Even now, while I cannot speak well in English, I can still read and write. My hand- writing is beautiful in all languages. Those who see my handwriting ask me if I am a B.A. I tell that I am a P.B.A (laughs).

Q. What's the reason for your greater affinity for dEva perumAL's ghoshti than for dEva perumAL Himself?

A. My father had ordered me that I should never give up ghoshti. It is due to his grace. I have never missed iyal ghoshti once nor have I offered obeisance to it once.

Q. What do you mean you have not offered obeisance to the iyal ghoshti once?

A. If one is present in the ghoshti when it starts, then one does not have to offer obeisance to it. Only if one joins it in the middle does one have to do that. I have never joined the ghoshti once in the middle. I will always be ready before the ghoshti starts. All this is due to the grace of my father.

Q. What is the reason for Divyaprabandha ghoshti to come in the front and Veda ghoshti to come behind, when perumAL goes about in the streets?

A. The Divyaprabandhams which are the Tamil Vedas tell us all about the Lord's divine auspicious qualities. However, the Sanskrit Vedas which started telling about these qualities, failed in its attempt and backed off ("yatO vAchO nivartante"). The same is stressed by Vedanta Desikar, Kambar and others. This is the reason why aruLis seyals are in the front and vEda pArAyaNam is in the back.

Q. Amongst all your works, which one do you consider is the best?

A. Amongst the works I have authored, I consider the work "Sri Bhashya Saram" in Thamzih, as the best. Also, all my vyakhyanam in Sanskrit for the 4000 Divyaprabandhams are very good.

Q. Do you recall your first work?

A. I was about 15 years old at that time. A scholar speaking at the Hundred Pillar mandapam in Kanchipuram stated that as the Divyaprabandhams were written in Tamil they cannot be respected. I wrote a 30 page book in Sanskrit called "Divyaprabandha Vaibhava Viveka:" rejecting his claim. That was my first book.

Q. Can you tell us when and where you gave your first discourse?

A. One time I had gone to Hyderabad (Sitarambag) for Udayavar Utsavam, along with my acharya Sri U. Ve. Gaadi Ananthacharyar Swami. I was about 16 years at that time. There some people requested Gaadi Swami to perform a discourse. Then, he ordered me to do a discourse. That order is the source for all my upanyasams. I performed my first discourse there on Udayavar Vaibhavam.

Q. Your voice is majestic till date. What is the reason behind that? Do you use any medicines to protect your voice quality?

A. The Lord's grace is the reason for my voice being good. I do not use any medicine for that. The Lord is the medicine.

Q. Even though you have helped the people of this world by performed many discourses, there is a complaint that you have not created any disciples who can follow in your foot steps....

A. I have written thousands of works. Even today, many scholars who perform discourses write to me saying that their discourses are based upon my writings. They all can be considered my disciples. Even though I have not created a few disciples, I have written thousands of works that will last hundreds of years. That is sufficient.

Q. Our sampradhayam is going down. In such a situation, who are you appointing as your heir?

A. When so many scholars such as Sadabishekam Govinda Narasimhachariar, Velukkudi Varadachariar, Pillai Lokam Bhashyakachariar, S. Krishnaswami Iyengar (Sudarshanam Publisher), Nallan Ramakrishna Iyengar, K.A. Manavalan and Sthallasayanaththuraivar are building the sampradhayam, it is wrong to say that the sampradhayam is going down. Therefore, it is not necessary for me to appoint someone as my heir.

Q. Can you say something about the Thenkalai and Vadakalai divisions within the Srivaishnava Sampradhayam. What was Vedanta Desikar's role in this division?

A. During Vedanta Desikar's time, there was no division within the Srivaishnava Sampradhayam. Why go that far? I will swear, wearing a Thulasi garland, that prior to 1800, there was no Thenkalai Vadakalai division. Vedanta Desikar gained great knowledge through upAsana. Therefore, he authored a great number of works. In these works, first he will reject a

notion of Pillai Lokacharyar. A few pages later, he would state that "this is the thought of such and such". A little later, he would agree with what he himself had rejected earlier. A certain group which came after his time, started following his earlier opinions. This is the cause for the Thenkalai Vadakalai division.

Q. When and where did you get the title "mahA mahipOdhyAya"?

A. In 1972, at Allahabad, seven people were selected as Saptha Rishis. At that time, this title was given to me by vice president Sri Pathak.

Q. We learn that you have gone on several divyadesa yatras. Have you been to all Sri Vaishnava divyadesams?

A. So far, I have done North Indian divya desa yatras alone 23 times. Out of the 108 Sri Vaishnava divyadesams, 106 are in this world. Out of them, excluding Salagramam and Thiruppirithi, I have worshipped at 104 divya desams.

Q. Many people of our sampradhayam go to work early and return late. Being involved in lowkika like this, they are unable to follow the Srivaishnava sampradhayam. Can you briefly tell what they can do?

A. After waking up and performing sandhya- vandanam, they must recite all 30 verses of Thiruppavai. If there is insufficient time even for that, then they must at least recite the "siRRam siRukAIE" pasuram. If they do this much, they would have followed the Srivaishnava sampradhayam.

Q. What do you consider as your greatest gift?

A. I consider the fact that I was born in Manavala Mamunigals' sampradhayam as my greatest gift. Just as Dasaratha prayed that Rama be born as his son for seven (all) births ("ninnaiyE maganAgap perRap peRuvEn EzhpiRappum nedunthOL vEndhE"), so too I pray every day that I gain Manavala Mamunigal as my acharya for seven (all) births ("ninnaiyE guruvAgap perRap peRuvEn EzhpiRappum yathIndhrap pravaNA").

Q. You have accomplished a great many things. Is there something that you feel you have not done yet?

A. Whatever you consider that I have accomplished thus far, if they remain without any problems, then that is sufficient.

Q. When you perform discourses, why do you ask questions toward the audience? Particularly, when it appears that you are questioning some scholars, it is said that they are bothered.

A. I do not ask questions to bother any one. I ask them questions so that the audience realize their knowledge. Also, if people who have knowledge of the Vedas and Divyaprabandhams come to me, I take them with me to my upanyasams. I do this for the benefit of the audience only - not to test them.

Q. As the editor of magazines, what is your wish for the magazine Geethacharyan (run by Sri M.A. Venkatakrisnan)?

A. Geethacharyan must grow greatly. It must increase its pages more. As it grows, I would like to stop my magazine "Sri Ramanujan" and take this as my magazine.