

SYMBOLISM OF VINAYAGAMURTHY.

Sri Vinayagamurthy is one of the chief deities of worship (Upasanamurthis) among the Hindus. From the Himalayas to Cape Comorin wherever we go in India, we meet with this deity, in Siva or Vishnu temples, on the roadsides, on the tank bunds, at the foot of trees, Banyan, Asvatha or Margosa. There is no village without the image of this deity, carved in stone or granite. Every ceremony should be begun by the Hindus with invocation and worship of this deity. Every author, in Sanskrit, Tamil, Malayalam, &c., used to begin his work with a stanza or two in praise of this deity, because he is the remover of all obstacles or evils that may stand in the way of our business. So universal and compulsory is the worship of this Deva, that when we cannot have the regular image of the deity, any improvised cone of sandal paste, saffron powder, or even cow-dung, is made to serve as the object of worship.

Various are the versions of His history. He is the Son of Siva and Parasakti. As one Purana says, Siva and Parasakti looked at their images in a mirror, and when the two images coincided with each other, this mighty Deva, Vinayagar appeared *at the point of junction*. There is also a *Upa Purana* about the exploits of this deity; which also recites how Upasakas – worshippers of this Deva, acquired psychic powers (*Siddhis*) and also attained *Mukti* or salvation.

Such a universally worshipped Deva is described as having a peculiar form, half man and half beast – elephant's head and trunk placed upon a human body, with a big belly, and holding in His hands *chakram* (wheel or circle), *Sulam* (trident), *Sangam* (conch) and *Pasangusam* (goad) riding on a mouse with an army of ants, fond of eating *mothangams* (sweet cakes) and called by different names. Vinayagar, Ganapati, Vigneswara, &c. Let us see whether there is any esoteric meaning intended to be conveyed by this deity.

First, as regards the form – the trunk of the elephant serves as the face of the Deity and the body is human. Vinayagar is considered by our Maharishis as Pranava “AUM.” This syllable “AUM” is indicative of Brahman. Although there are many names of Gods, but AUM is regarded as the most appropriate of all names. In the first place AUM has several meanings. Secondly it is made of three parts, each of which conveys various meanings expressive of Brahman. Thirdly it has been sung in all the Upanishads and Yogasastras. Fourthly, it is uttered before the commencement of the reading of the Veda Mantras. Fifthly it is eternal and unchangeable as Brahman Himself since the component letters AUM of which it is composed are eternal; lastly because it is the soul of the Vedas. This one is the best support for a worshipper. There cannot be any better support than this. Those who realize the essence of one become great and attain Brahman. Such being the case, we worship Vinayagar. Besides the syllable AUM is written alike in all Indian languages and has the same form. This letter resembles elephant's face with its proboscis. The sound of AUM and of an elephant are also alike. So His form of an elephant's face with human body illustrates

SYMBOLISM OF VINAYAGAMURTHY

His Pranava Srupa or form and the want of one tusk in His face makes it appear as the *Shuli* of Pranava.

Another explanation for this peculiar form is said to be this: “In our religious literature *Manas* (mind) is compared to the elephant’s proboscis – in the peculiarity of *restlessness*. For *Manas* is restless, impetuous, strong and difficult to bend. It is as hard to curb as the wind. *Manas* is the separative principle in man, always moving from one object to another and making differences. The vehicle of *Manas* is the cerebro-spinal nervous system, in the human body. The greater the development of this nervous system, the greater is the manifestation of mental powers – intellect. High intellectual powers are generally associated with the large development of the head. The *Indo-Aryan* forms the first substance of the 5th root race. It is in him that the intellect – rather *manas* began to develop itself, to a great extent. The cerebro-spinal nervous system in man is in its shape like the elephant’s head and trunk; or it may be that the Rishis said in their inner vision the prototype, i.e., thought form, of the cerebro-spinal system in the form of the symbol of the deity. This became the chief characteristic of the race – as the development of the sympathetic nervous system was the peculiarity of the 4th race – the Atlantean. This characteristic became an object to be sought for, then an object of worship.”

Secondly, *as regards His big belly*: His big belly illustrates that the whole universe is contained in it, so says the Sruti.

Thirdly, *as regards having a circle (chakram) in His hand*: Just as a circle is contained only by one line, which has no beginning or end, so Vinayagar is *the only one* having no beginning or end. He surrounds the whole world just as circle envelops the whole space within it.

Fourthly, *as regards His Sulam or trident*: A trident is an instrument having one ending at the bottom and three endings at the top i.e., the one becomes three. His having this trident implies that He is the only one that He is the cause of the Universe possessing the three gunas or qualities, Satva (goodness), Rajas (wickedness) and Thamas (ignorance), that from Him appeared the triumurthis – Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra, that He is the Pranava Srupam AUM and that He is the creator, the protector and the destroyer.

Fifthly, *His Sangam or Conch*: If we place the conch topside the other way, it will appear as *Aum*. If we blow the conch, it will have the same sound as that of pronouncing *Aum*. The one who knows that Vinayagar is Pranava Srupa can alone attain salvation. No sound can be made without this *Aum* sound.

Sixthly, *as regards Pasangusam*: Just as an elephant is curbed or ruled by goad, so the ignorant souls though bound by *pasa* – bond or impurity – are directed by His angusam and are made to enjoy happiness or misery according to their deeds or karma.

Seventhly *His riding on a mouse with an army of ants*: It shows that He is the triflest of the trifles and the greatest of the great, that He pervades through all beings-low and high and that He is the lord of all creation and thus all beings live under His control.

SYMBOLISM OF VINAYAGAMURTHY

Eighthly, He is fond of *mothagams* or sweet cakes, *mothagam* means *Ananda*. People eat sweet cakes &c., during the time of merriment. So this is a sign of mirth and gladness. This illustrates that Ganesha is *Ananda* – mirth and hence bliss and that He gives bliss to all the beings in the universe.

Thus we see from the above that great truths lie hidden in these symbols. Let us next enquire into the meaning of His several names.

Vinayagar means one without a master. He is the efficient cause of all.

Ganapathi is the *pathi* or God of *Ganas* i.e., all beings. He is the protector of all beings. Another explanation is: “Ganapati is the Pathi i.e., lord of *Ganas* i.e., names and forms. It is by *Manas* (mind) that names and forms (*Nama Rupa Prapancham* i.e., the world of names and forms) are produced. In the location of the several *chakras* or whorls in the human constitution, Ganapathy is placed at the lower end of the cerebro-spinal nervous system – called the *muladhara*. The force on energy or life of the cerebro-spinal nervous system is focused there, control of this center or conquest of this center as it is called enables one to go to the highest state of bliss; i.e., if *manas* be conquered, you attain the *summum bonum* of life. It may be here noted that the flag-staff called *Dwajasthamba* in a Hindu temple (which itself is only a huge symbology of the Microcosm and Macrocosm) represents the spinal column. The three-colored yarn (red, white and black) wound round the flag-staff, especially during the Mahotsavam – the big festival – represents the *three-fold vital* air of *Kundalini shakti* which are made to rise through the hollow of the special cord by yogic process. At the foot of the flag-staff, you have the image of Ganapathy marked.”

Vigneswarar: (Vignanam Eswara) means one who removes or conquers all obstacles in the way of good and one who puts obstacles in the way of bad deeds. That is why we first insert Pillaiyar shuli whenever we begin to write or invoke the blessings of this Deva whenever we begin any work or ceremony. By worshipping this deity and getting his grace, we are enabled to obtain our wishes. His subtle form is *Pranava*. We must practice *Pranava Upasana*. *Pranava* is the life potential of the manifested and manifesting Universe. What it is and what it signifies is explained in the Mandukya Upanishad. By this *Upasanai* or worship we transcend the form side of nature – we transcend the three lokas, Bhu, Bhuv and Swarga. If we succeed in this, we become the lord of our mind (*manas*) – whatever we think, whatever we wish, every *Sankalpa*, every thought or every desire, becomes transmuted into action, reality on the physical plane.

The image of the deity is frequently found at the foot of the *asvatha* tree along with the serpent symbol. The *Asvatha* tree represents the stream of Samsara. The deity is the fountain, the source of the form side of nature. The serpent represents the serpentine *Kundalini*.

We also find in some of our temples an image of this deity with a vessel at the folded end of the trunk and a beautiful damsel by his side, sometimes on the lap of the deity. The vessel indicates the *Amrita kalasa* – pot of immortality; the beautiful female by the side is an aspect of shakti, i.e., *Kundalini shakti* which is located near the *Muladara Chakra* in the

SYMBOLISM OF VINAYAGAMURTHY

human body. The pot of immortality is the bundle of interminable potentialities of names and forms which form the *bijam* or seed of the manifested and manifesting worlds.

Let us now consider the necessity of this worship of this deity on all occasions. The Hindus knew the power of *Manas* or thought. What we think, so we become – says the Chandogya Upanishad. Therefore every ceremony should be first commenced with a *Sankalpa*, i.e., with will to do a thing in a particular manner for a particular object in view. This is preceded by *Pranayama* or restraint of breath. The object of *Pranayama* is to still the restless mind and to bring it to quietude. The view of the Raja Yogis is, “Where mind is, there Prana or breath is.” Conversely it is held by Hatha Yogis, “Where the *prana* or breath is, there the mind is.” Therefore it is enjoined on the worshipper on the physical plane that he should restrain the *pranic* current and thereby still or calm down the agitations of the mind. Yoga is *Chitta Virthi nirodham*, i.e., yoga is inhibition of the agitations of *Chitta-manas*. When this is attained, i.e., when *manas* attains calmness, its power is at its height and hence its *sankalpas*, i.e., wishes, become easy of realization. When our mind is reduced to quietude, then if we invoke the devas for any help or for any object to be gained you promptly succeed. When the mind is subjugated by *Pranayama* or restraint of breath, the favor of the deity presiding over mind is said to be assured. Ganapathy is therefore the deity to be worshipped on all occasions.

We pray to Vinayagar – the Almighty Lord – the remover of obstacles in the way of our work, the pati of all souls – and invoke His blessings upon our brethren for peace and harmony among them.

J. M. D.
