

F O R E W O R D

I deem myself fortunate in being asked to write this Foreword to the *Citrakāvya* composed by Sri U.Ve. Sundapalayam Tirumalai Ramabadrachariar (AD 1840-1904), a great scholarly poet who was born in Sundapalayam near Coimbatore. He was proficient in Music and Astrology as well. He was the disciple of H.H. Sri Periyāṇḍavan Svāmī of Srirangam. His important Sankrit works *Hayagrīvamañitrayamālikā*, *Saṅgātiratnamālikā*, *Uḍurāsidasaka* and the *Citrakāvya*, the present publication, show him as a poet of a very high order. Being an ardent Srīvaiṣṇava following the Vaḍagalai tradition, he brought out the tenets of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Philosophy also in his works. The present composition has two Parts: the first Part consisting of 400 verses, has 24 different varieties of literary puzzles, riddles and conundrums such as *Praśnottaram* (where the question itself forms the answer), *Uttaraprasna* (where the reply itself becomes the question), *Bhāṣādvayottaram* (where the world forming the reply is the same in Sanskrit and other language – Tamil, Kannada and Telugu) and such interesting features, which are food for thought and immense delight for those who know the subtle twists and shades, nuances and niceties of the incredibly rich Sanskrit language. Undoubtedly a study of the present work will improve one's vocabulary in Sanskrit, equip one with worldly knowledge and amazing powers for quick repartee and for enlightening scholarly audiences (*sabhārañjana*). One remarkable feature about this composition is that nowhere the author appears to have strained himself. The words are all simple and straightforward. There are no out-of-the way, laboriously worked out and abstruse usages. This is certainly a great characteristic of a mahākavi. Of special interest is the tenth section called "Sūtraprasna" where the answer for specific questions constitute grammatical aphorisms of Pāṇini. Verse no. 67 may be cited as an illustration:

*Narakaḥ kasyāḥ sūnuḥ?* (Whose son was Naraka?)

*Ke vā kurvanti dānam arthibhyaḥ?* (Who carry out acts of charity for the needy?)

*Pāṇinisūtreṇaikena* (With one aphorism of Pāṇini)

*Uttarayugmaṁ sudhībhir iha vācyam* (both the answers should be given by the wise)

The single answer that applies to both the questions is : "bhuvāḥ prabhavaḥ". There are two words in this answer, which mean, "Of the Earth" and "the lords", respectively. Incidentally this is an aphorism of Pāṇini (I. iv. 31) which means "the source of the agent of the verb 'bhū' (to become) is called Apādāna." Unless one is a scholar and serious student of Sanskrit Grammar, one cannot answer these questions or enjoy the beauty of this verse.

One instance for the *Bhāṣādvayottaram*-kind of puzzle (v.52) may also be cited:

*Kim tṛṣṇāsamanam?* (What is it that quenches thirst?)

*Kim kṛtvā badhyate kacaḥ?* (By doing what, one knots the hair?)

*Girvānadrāviḍoktibhyāṁ* (Using Sanskrit and Tamil words)

*Ekamevottaram vada* (Reply in a single word)



The answer is: "vāri". This, in Sanskrit, means "water" and it forms the reply to the first question. It is also a Tamil word meaning "combing" and it forms the answer to the second question.

The second Part of this work is devoted to the more difficult and mind-boggling genre of composition called the Bandha (complicated pictorial structures). The poet has given here 100 such Bandhas classifying them as "The five weapons of Lord Nārāyaṇa (5), Chakra varieties (7), Mantra-varieties (4), Bhogopakarāṇa types (11), Senāṅga-types (6), Weapon-types (10), Gomūtrikā-bandha varieties (7), Sarpa-bandhas (7), Padma-bandhas (17), and Saṅkīrṇa-types (26)". One saving feature of this difficult variety of composition is that the author himself has given important clues and brief elucidation of all these varieties. It is a pity that the author's notes for verses 301 to 400 forming Part I are missing, so much so that an ordinary person may find it difficult to understand the meaning of this part of the work.

Now it may be worthwhile to make some observations about the difficult *Citrakāvya* in this context. Normally Figures of Speech (*Alamkāras*) are used by poets to embellish their compositions. These are twofold as Arthālamkāras (Figures of Speech of Sense) such as Simile, Metaphor, Hyperbole, Pun etc., and Śabdālamkāras (Figures of Speech of Sound) such as Alliteration and Yamaka. Great critics like Ānandavardhana (author of the *Dhvanyāloka*) have cautioned poets not to resort to the "cheap" varieties of Śabdālamkāras like Alliteration (Anuprāsa) and the much more difficult and complicated Śabdālamkāra like the *Yamaka* (See our author's *Citrakāvya*, vv. 385 to 400). The reason for such a warning is quite simple: One will be tempted to sacrifice sense for the sake of sound. Further, difficult permutations and combinations of words and syllables distract the poet from the main Sentiment (*rasa*) to be delineated. Rasa or Sentiment is the very life of Poetry and anything that brings in a break in the experience of the Sentiment is detrimental to the very purpose of composing a poem. A much more dreaded variety of Śabdacitra is the Bandha-type. The verses are composed in such a way that when the letters are arranged in a particular order, a "pictorial diagram" would emerge, resembling a drum, a lotus, an arrow, a palanquin, a conch, a discus, a club, etc. Composing the Citra-types is a very difficult art. Even accomplished poets will have to rack their brains to compose such verses. If that is the difficulty in composing such verses, imagine the difficulty faced by an ordinary reader who knows a little Sanskrit of course! One has to depend upon commentaries and lexicons to understand the meaning of a single verse. Sometimes it may take even an hour or so in understanding a verse!

Well, what happens then to the Sentiment which is the very life of the given poem? It will be completely cut off from the mainstream, so much so that such a composition becomes mere "acrobatics" or "gymnastics" in "sound". This no doubt reflects the amazing intellectual powers of the poet but it makes no sense to the man with an eye on the Rasa. But with all this said and understood, great poets still show their interest in composing such Citra-type of verses. We know that the great Kāidāsa tried his hand at the Yamaka in his *Raghuvamśa* (Canto IX). Bhāravi in his *Kirātārjunīya*, and Māgha in his *Śiśupālavadhā* (Canto XIX) and Vedānta Deśika in his *Pādukāsahasra* (Paddhati XXX) have shown their skill in composing difficult varieties of Bandhas. Why? These difficult



