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Dr. R Suresha

Guest Faculty, D.O.S. in
Sanskrit, University of Mysore,
Karnataka, India

Astounding life and literary contributions of sage vidyaranya

Dr. R Suresha

Abstract

The paradox of Indian history is, it was invaded and enslaved by the foes for around two millenniums despite having rich cultural heritage, tremendous natural resources, high philosophical thoughts, unbroken lineage of traditional wisdom, host of thinkers, revolutionaries, philosophers, social reformers and so on. At the same time it is also true that, but for these social reformers, India would not have witnessed political freedom. In this context, the contributions of Sage Vidyaranya are conspicuous. The Srirangam Inscription refers to him as Aparamiva Shankaracharya i.e. Shankaracharya Incarnate. This single reference speaks volumes about his literary accomplishments. He was born to Mayana and Srimati in Pampakshetra (modern-day Hampi) in 1268 CE. Another account has it that he was born in Ekasila Nagari (modern-day Warangal). He was known as Madhava / Madhavacharya in his early days before he took to the Holy Order of Asceticism. He was a Bharadwaja Gotra (spiritual lineage), Bodhayana Sutra, Yajus Shakra, Smarta Brahmin. Veda commentator Sri Sayanacharya and poet Bhoganatha were his brothers. All his personal details are available in the beginning of his work, Parashara-Madhaviyam. Sage Vidyaranya's literary contributions comprise works on Vyakarana, Mimamsa, Smriti, Purana, Astronomy/Astrology, Mantra Shastra, Music, Darshana and Advaita Vedanta. The more important of them are Jaiminiya Nyayamala, Parashara Smriti Vyakhyana, Smriti Sangraha, Vyavahara Madhava, Sri Vidyatirtha Dipika, Vivaranaprameya Sangraha, Panchadashi, Jivanmukti Viveka, Drig Drishya Viveka, Aparokshanubhuti Tika, and Six Upanishad-Dipikas. Of these, Panchadashi is an important work in Advaita Vedanta, so called because of its division into fifteen chapters, dealing with topics of metaphysical and spiritual importance. In the Brhadaranyavartikasara, Sage Vidyaranya summarises Sage Sureshwaracharya's work. Dipikas on Aitareya and Taittiriya Upanishads and Sage Shankara's summary of the twelve principal Upanishads, are also attributed to Sri Vidyaranya.

Madhaviya Shankara Vijaya is the work of Sage Vidyaranya. Because of its high poetic merit and objectivity, it is considered the best for recitation during Shankara Jayanti. Drigdrishya Viveka is considered a combined work of Sri Vidyaranya and His predecessor, Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha. The works of the two Jagadgurus are among the greatest treatises in post-Shankara Advaita literature and both of them occupy a unique place in the history of religion.

Keywords: Astounding life, literary contributions and sage vidyaranya

Introduction

Vidyaranya was a great saint, writer, statesman, spiritual leader of a throne that lasted for more than two centuries, and preceptor of that Vijayanagara empire's first three sovereigns. As a saint, he ranks with the greatest of the great followers of Sri Shankaracharya. While describing the liberated soul, as the readers can easily comprehend, without such a complete freedom of spirit, it is highly impossible to enumerate the full state of bliss.

Personal Life

Madhava (the generally accepted pre-ascetic name of Sri Vidyaranya) was the elder of two Brahmachari brothers belonging to a poor but learned Brahmin family of Ekasila Nagari (present-day Warangal). The younger of the two, wandering south in search of true knowledge, reached Sringeri when the great Vidyashankara Tirtha was the reigning pontiff. On seeing the innate greatness of the young Brahmachari, Sri Vidyatirtha readily gave him sanyasadiksha

Corresponding Author:

Dr. R Suresha

Guest Faculty, D.O.S. in
Sanskrit, University of Mysore,
Karnataka, India

with the ascetic name of Bharati Krishna Tirtha in 1328 A.D. In the meanwhile, Madhava left home in search of his younger brother. After much wandering, he finally reached Sringeri where he found his brother as the junior pontiff Bharati Krishna Tirtha. At the junior pontiff's request, Sri Vidyatirtha readily gave Madhavasanyasadiksha in 1331 A.D under the ascetic name of Sri Vidyananya, in other words, verily a forest of knowledge. Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha, though younger than Vidyananya became his senior by virtue of his earlier ordainment into SanyasaAshrama and came to be known as the senior Sripada and Vidyananya the junior. Sri Vidyananya then started on a pilgrimage and reached Kashi. At the direction of Sri Vyasa, he went to Badrikashrama where the great sage himself initiated him into Sri Vidya. Returning south, he retired to Matanga hill, near Hampi, where he immersed himself in intense meditation. It was at this time that the two brothers, Madhava and Sayana, the sons of Mayana of BharadwajaGotra, approached Sri Vidyananya and sought his blessings. Sri Vidyananya graciously gave them his unfinished Veda bhashyas and some other works. He blessed them to complete the works in their own names as Madhaviyam and Sayaniyam. Later, both the brothers served as ministers in the Vijayanagaraempire under Bukkaraya and Harihara I and II. At Sringeri, Sri Vidyatirtha attained Mahasamadhi by entering into Lambika Yoga Samadhi and Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha succeeded him as the 11th Jagadguru of the Sringeri Mutt and reigned from 1333 to 1380 A.D. Sri Vidyananya then resumed his pilgrimage to Varanasi. While he was there, Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha at Sringeri had already started construction of the magnificent Vidyashankara temple over the tomb into which his guru Sri Vidya Tirtha had entered into Lambika Yoga Samadhi.

Bukka and Harihara who were sharing the responsibilities of ruling their empire and were marching from victory to victory, went to Sringeri in 1346 for the blessings of Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha. They celebrated the occasion with a land grant to the senior Sripada. Bukkaraya communicated all the details to Sri Vidyananya in Kashi, forwarding to him Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha's srimukha. It desired his early return to Sringeri, which Sri Vidyananya complied with, reaching Sringeri via Hampi, accompanied by Bukkaraya. At Hampi, Sri Vidyananya had built a Mutt near the Virupaksha temple, for his use. After Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha attained videhamukti, Sri Vidyananya assumed charge of the Sringeri Mutt and reigned as Jagadguru for six years from 1380 to 1386. The Acharya initiated the emperor into the mysteries of Advaitic meditation, and in 1386 attained videhamukti. Shortly after this event, Harihara visited Sringeri and founded the agrahara of Vidyanyapura in memory of the guru. Sri Vidyananya was indeed a unique personality, scholar and sage, rightly regarded as a great thinker in the post-Shankara period. No wonder he was extolled and virtually raised to divinity by kings Bukka and Harihara when making royal grants.

Mutts

Under Sri Vidyananya's direction, the emperors made endowments to Mutts founded by him or by Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha in different parts of South India, some of which rose to importance as branches of the Sringeri Sharada Peetha or as subordinate monastic establishments. Prince Chikka Raya (afterwards Virupaksha I) made a grant to Satyatirtha of Muniyur Mutt which marks the origin of the Sakatapuram or Bandigade Mutt. Hariharapura, an agrahara about six miles from Sringeri was founded by Harihara II, and

Sri RamachandraSaraswathi was the first Acharya of the Mutt established there. The Tirthamuttur Mutt (Tirthahallitaluk) and the Kudali Mutt also came into existence some centuries later under the guidance and encouragement of the Sringeri Gurus and the emperors. The agraharas of Sringapura and Vidyanyapura were laid out by Harihara II.

Temples

A vritti was allotted to the Sri Janardana temple. Of the new temples built during this period, the Vidyashankara temple was the grandest. It was during Sri Vidyananya's time, that Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha substituted the present golden image of Sri Sharada for the one in sandalwood originally consecrated by Sri Shankara over a Sri Chakra on a rock and over which a small temple had been raised. The temple was enlarged. The BharatiRamanatha temple was built over the samadhi of Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha and the Vidyavishweswara temple in memory of Sri Vidyananya. Sri Vidyananya made grants for the worship of Gopinatha in Paschimavahini, a few furlongs from Sringeri on the westward bend of the Tunga, and consecrated lingas and Sri Chakras in several places.

A New Epoch

Vedic dharma, which had received a rude shock under Muslim rule in the North found a bulwark in the South. The re-emergence was on all fronts. On the political front, Sri Vidyananya's grace helped in the formation of a Hindu empire. On the socio-religious front, to begin with, worship that had been suspended in several temples, including the famous temples of Srirangam and Madurai was restored. Mysore inscriptions speak of grants to temples under the direction or in honour of Sri Vidyananya. From now on, Vijayanagar emperors and their vassals carried out renovations, with extensions on a lavish scale of hundreds of temples.

Till this period in the history of the Sringeri Sharada Peetha, the Jagadgurus had been concentrating on imparting Brahmavidya to the elect, and training spiritual aspirants. Since Sri Vidyananya, the Jagadgurus also took upon themselves the tasks of prescribing proper modes of divine services, in temples and guiding the socio-religious activities of the millions of disciples so as to bring them under the discipline of religion. The Resplendent Jewel amongst Jagadgurus: Sri Vidyananya was the head of the Sringeri Mutt for only a short span of six years. But because of his association with Sri Bharati Krishna Tirtha (his predecessor Jagadguru and poorvashrama brother) for over five decades, he left an indelible mark on the spiritual life of his times. The Vidyashankara 'Bharati Krishna Tirtha 'Vidyananya epoch marks the rise of the SharadaPeetham to the highest of eminence and led to the emergence of the spiritual institution as the torchbearer in sustaining Sanatana Dharma. Sri Vidyananya is rightly considered as one of the brightest jewels in the illustrious line of Sringeri Guru Parampara.

विद्याविद्याविवेकेनपारंसारवारिधेः। प्रापयत्यनिशंभक्तान्तंविद्यारण्यमाश्रये॥

Homage to this serene Vidyananya who holds aloft the torch of discrimination, Knowledge of the Real form unreal and helps the devoted across the sea of birth!

The Incredible Contributions

JivanmuktiViveka—It describe the process of liberation according to Advaita Vedanta. The enlightened souls continue

to live detached life on this earth until the prarabdha karma seizes. With extensive references from the Vedas and Smritis, the work tries to establish that after attaining Brahma Jnana (Supreme knowledge) the jeevatma becomes paramatma.

Panchadashi – also called as Vedanta Panchadashi. Full moon day is called Panchadashi. It throws light on all aspects of Advaita Vedanta. Some scholars opine that it was authored by Sage Vidyaranya and BharatiTirtha.

Vivarana Prameya Sangraha – Sri Shankaracharya's commentary on Brahmasutra is fantabulous. Profound thoughts are presented in lucid language. The first four sutras are said to be the essence of the entire work. Though Sri Shankaracharya wrote the commentary in great length, without depending upon his work, Sage Vidyaranya wrote independent commentary.

Anubhuti Prakasha – Comprises twenty chapters in the form of verses. The essence of Aitareya, Taittiriya, Chandogya and other major Upanishads are brought out with precise clarity.

Brahmaid Ashirvada Paddhati – It deals about the patterns of blessings bestowed by Brahma Jnani. Self realization is the purport of it.

Jaiminiya Nyayamala & Jaiminiya Nyayamala Vistara – These two works belong to PurvaMimamsa; while the former is in the form of poetry, and the later is in prose. The logics presented in MimamsaShastra are described here.

Kalamadhaviyam – A work on astrology, discussing the time factor.

Parashara Madhaviyam – An elaborated commentary on Parashara Smriti. One of the authentic works of Dharmashastra.

These are some of the works of Sage Vidyaranya. Most of the works of Vidyaranya are carrying the name 'Madhaviyam'. It refers to the work authored by the person called Madhava. It is important to distinguish between Madhava of Bharadwaja Gotra and a contemporary Madhava of the Angirasa Gotra who was a highly erudite minister of Goa. Sayanacharya's son was Madhava who wrote SarvadarshanaSangraha. Since we have three popular and contemporary Madhavas during Vijayanagar Empire, it is difficult to identify the works of Sage Vidyaranya.

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