

SRI RAGHAVENDRA SWAMY – HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Sri Rāghavendra Swamy has come to be known as the Kāmadhenu (the celestial cow) and the Kalpataru (the divine tree) of Kaliyug. He is a famous saint both in India and abroad since he has crossed the boundaries of caste, creed, language and nationality. He is accessible to every devotee through his invisible divine powers. He was a Brahmajnāni and a Yogi too. In this tension torn world of ours where life is full of complexities and problems, a visit to Swamiji of Mantrālaya which is surcharged with divinity, brings tranquillity and rejuvenation to the tired soul.

The source of literature to get a glimpse of the life and works of Swamiji are – (1) Sri Raghavendra Vijaya by Nārāyanācārya (2) Sri Raghavendra Stotra by Appannācārya (3) Guruguna Stavana by Sri Vādīndra Swamiji (4) Haridāsa literature (5) Vast and varied experiences of his devotees.

Raghavendra Swamiji (before Sanyās) belonged to Gautama Gotra. His great grandfather Kṛṣṇa Bhat was a musician in the royal court of Vijayanagar empire. His son Kanakachala Bhat followed the foot prints of his father. His son Timmaṇa Bhat following the tradition of the family became a famous musician and a Veda Vidvān also. He too received royal honours. Timmaṇa Bhat had a wife by name Gopikāmbā. After the fall of the Vijayanagar empire in 1565 CE the entire lot of scholars shifted to Tanjāvur where the ruler Cauvvappa Naik gave them shelter and offered them seats of honour.

Timmaṇa Bhat, after coming into contact with Vijayindra Tirtha, shifted his family to Kumbhakonam at the behest of Swamiji. He begot first a daughter (Venkatāmba) and next a son (Gururāja). Timmaṇa Bhat not being satisfied yearned for another son with extraordinary brilliance and divine blessings. He served Lord Srinivāsa with severe penance. Lord blessed them a baby in 1598 CE. He was christened by the name Venkatanāth who is the subject of this topic. In the third year, his caula ritual (first hair removing ceremony) and Akṣara Abhyāsa (learning begun first time) was performed. When Omkār was written on the sand for his practice Venkatanāth asked how these lines designate God. On his inquiry, every one present there were surprised. Timmaṇa Bhat performed the marriage of his daughter Venkatāmba with Lakṣminarayana of Kaśyapa Gotra. After a short time both the parents reached the heavenly abode.

Venkatanāth's education: Subsequent to the departure of the parents the responsibility of Venkatanāth squarely fell on his elder brother Gururāja. He performed Venkatanāth's upanayanam ceremony (sacred thread ceremony) in the year 1605 CE. For further education, Venkatanāth was sent to his brother-in-law Sri Lakṣminarayanaśācārya who was the Āsthāna Vidvān in Madhurai (scholar in the royal court). Venkatanāth studied Sanskrit Sāhitya (literature), Kāvya (poetry), Vyākaraṇa (Pañini grammar), Mīmāmsa, Dvaita Siddhānta and so on. Being endowed with sharp intellect and sound memory, Venkatanāth could grasp anything in the first instance itself. In about 8 to 9 years he completed his education and returned home as an edurite scholar. By then Venkatanāth was a handsome, educated and prospective bride groom. Gururāja arranged his marriage with a beautiful bride, from a

decent family, matching Venkatanāth in all respects. Their marriage was a simple ceremony in 1616 CE. A little later after marriage, Venkatanāth settled with his family in Kāveri-Patnam on the banks of river Kaveri. As a scholar he started imparting Sanskrit education to the eligible students. His home itself was a Gurukula.

For subsistence, Venkatanāth was gifted with a few acres of land. In the meantime, Venkatanāth was blessed with a son. He was named Lakshminārāyana. The family was in a happy state for some time but it was only a short lived affair. The misfortune struck the whole region. Famine prevailed year after year. It was too much for any family to bear, Venkatanāth's family too reeled under the dire poverty and adversities. Still Venkatanāth took it so calmly as though it was a gift or order of God.

Ever since Venkatanāth completed his first stage of education, he nourished a longing to pursue his advanced studies under the guidance of Sri Sudhīndra Swāmiji who was renowned for his scholarship. He was the pontiff of the Madhva Mutt at Kumbakonam after succeeding Sri Vijayendra Tirtha. Venkatanāth adjourned to Kumbakonam with this motto and approached the Swāmiji and prayed to accept him as a student for further education. The Swāmiji inquiring Venkatanāth's past training, gladly enrolled him in the Gurukula.

Venkatanāth's Higher Studies: In the Gurukula, he underwent intensive training in Vedānta, Vyākaraṇa, Nyāya and Mimāmsa. By his earnestness, humility, sincerity and hard work, Venkatanāth proved himself an outstanding student and won the affection and confidence of the Swāmiji. During the tour of the Swāmiji, scholars used to engage them in debates on various subjects. Swāmiji always preferred Venkatanāth to take the leading part in the debates. The scholarship of Venkatanāth was indeed admirable. He was a dialectician par excellence. In Rājamannār there was a debate on Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya. The opponent was silenced by Venkatanāth and he won the title '**Mahābhāṣyācārya**'. After reaching Kumbakonam, Venkatanāth wrote a Sanskrit commentary on Anumadhvavijaya of Nārāyaṇapanditācārya.

With the advancing age Sudhindra Swāmiji grew anxious about his successor to the Jnāna – Pīṭha. The answer to the problem was indicated in his dream wherein the great Gurujis drew his attention to Venkatanāth. Not losing much time, the Swāmiji moved the matter before Venkatanāth. At the first instance, the suggestion served as a shock to Venkatanāth and he flatly refused. Venkatanāth said “In Veda-Vidya at what height you are and where I am; fathoms below is my position. Moreover, I am young. My wife is still younger. My son is so young that he has not even attained the age of Upanayanam. Under these circumstances, if Sanyāsa is insisted on me, there seems to be no alternative except to quit this place”. Having said this he returned home.

Venkatanāth pondered over the matter throughout the night. At the dawn, he saw Goddess Saraswathi in his dream. She advised him that he should obey the ascetic order. She assured him that she would bless him the mastery of all the Veda-Vidyas, victory over opponents, preparations of commentaries and glosses on Bhāṣyas and Tīkas (literary activities), success

in all endeavours and many more. Having said this she disappeared. With this Venkatanāth's fear vanished and he got tremendous confidence.

Venkatanāth conveyed the strange experience to Swāmiji. He was stunned to listen to that wonderful experience of his disciple. Swāmiji's problem was further simplified. He asked Venkatanāth to perform the Upanayanam of his son Lakṣminārāyana and also convince his wife. Upanayanam ceremony was performed. It was tremendous task for Venkatanāth to convince his wife and take her consent. That task was also somehow accomplished. Venkatanāth invited his brother and requested him to take care of his family.

Conferring Holy Order on Venkatanāth: The Swāmiji and his mutt paraphernalia and Venkatanāth adjourned to Tanjāvur. The public and the Pandits having heard this news thronged the capital to witness the holy function. The consecration ceremony and all the rituals were performed in the presence of Swāmiji, King Raghunāth, distinguished scholars and the public with proper decorum in the year 1621 CE. Venkatanāth took to asceticism and was renamed as Sri Rāghavendra Swāmiji. He was profusely blessed by the Swāmiji for success in the tasks ahead. After the function, they all returned to Kumbakonam.

Rāghavendra served Sudhindra Swāmiji for next two years and also extensively toured with him. When they were camping in Hampi, Sri Sudhindra handed over the Mahā Samsthān to Rāghavendra and reached the abode of Lord Hari in 1923 CE. After completing the related functions, Rāghavendra returned to Kumbakonam.

After a while, Sri Yādavendra Tirtha who became an ascetic prior Rāghavendra returned to Kumbakonam after a long tour and a long time. Rāghavendra respected him and asked him to take over the charge of the Mutt. But Yādavendra was satisfied by one day puja and he requested Rāghavendra to continue in the seat. Yādavendra lived away separately performing penance, teaching and other honourable activities.

Sri Rāghavendra had an impressive personality which commanded reverence from everyone. The sublimity on his face was the index of every virtue. He possessed a calm and contented look. The saffron clothes announced his detachment from worldly life. But it also indicated his deep attachment to God, His knowledge, His service, His devotees, disseminating His knowledge, welfare of the society and so on.

The Swāmiji's daily routine consisted of tight schedules. The day started at 4.00 AM and closed at 11.00 PM. The activities broadly covered morning bathing, japa, philosophy classes, Pādapūja, midday bathing, Devatārcan, accepting Prasād, discourses, writing works, meeting the visitors, evening discourses, evening Pūja, reflection, writing, meditation etc. His two works – (1) Prātah Sankalpa Gadya and (2) Samarpana Gadya indicate his daily schedule of work and dedication of all the activities to God.

As per prescribed code for the Pārivrājaka type of Sanyāsin, Sri Rāghavendra Swamiji extensively toured from place to place. His first tour programme covered eastern sector. During his tour at Madhurai one scholar by name Nīlakanta Dīkṣit (Grandson of Appayya Dīkṣit) met Swamiji and placed certain points in Mīmāmsa for discussion. Swamiji discussed

and convinced him on all the issues. He also showed to Nīlakanta his work by name ‘Bhātta Sangraha’ on Jaimini Mīmāmsa Sūtras. The assembly of scholars honoured Swamiji. In Vijayanagar he defeated Virabhadra and Bhairavabhatta and was honoured with gold shower (Kanakābhisekam). He visited Udupi and had the darshan of Lord Kṛṣṇa. During his stay there, he prepared ‘Tantradīpikā’. ‘Nyāyamuktāvali’ on Brahmaśūtras and ‘Parimala’ on Srimannīyāyasudha and glossary ‘Prakāśa’ on Candrika of Vyāsatīrtha. He dedicated all of them to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Rejuvinating the Accidentally Dead: On his tour Swamiji reached Gadag (Karnātaka). Venkatarao Desāi invited Swamiji for Pūja. It was the month of May, the season of mangoes. For thousands of guests thick mango juice was prepared in big drums. Desāi’s only son while playing peeped into the big drum, slipped into it and sunk. After a short while the boy was traced. He lost his breath. Swamiji came to know of that. He exclaimed that no such thing can happen in Sri Rām’s presence. He instructed the boy to be brought before him duly washed. Swamiji sprinkled water (from Kamandalu) chanting Mantra. The boy woke up as if he was sleeping.

The only son of Savanur Nawāb died due to snake bite. He was also revived and rescued back to life. Several such instances go to the credit of Swamiji. There are miraculous events for a common man but are common to divine personalities.

The Glory of Vedic Literature: In the course of his tour Swamiji reached a town called Navalgund (Dharwad district). A prominent person by name Sirasangi Desāi had least respect for the Vedas. He always made derogatory remarks and condemned them too. Having heard this, Swamiji paid a visit to that place and the person also. Swamiji tried to educate Desāi. Arrogant Desāi was not prepared to listen even. He threw a challenge to Swamiji that if Veda Mantras are true, let the wooden wand grow as a plant. Although Swamiji knew that Veda Mantras are not meant for public show, the time warranted that the challenge had to be met for the sake of reinstating the public trust. Swamiji sprinkled water chanting Veda mantras. Shortly within a course of two-three days the wooden wand sprouted and bore tender leaves too. Desāi bowed down to Swamiji and heartily accepted the authority of the Vedas. The occasion proved Sri Rāghavendra’s Mantra Siddhi.

At one time when Swamiji was proceeding towards Pandarapur, a lady who was the wife of one of the staff member of the Mutt team, was heading for delivery on the way. The sun was scorching. Neither there was shade or water. The staff member begged Swamiji to save them from the situation. Swamiji begot water from his stick (Danda) from the ground. He threw his saffron cloth in the sky which provided enough shade. The lady delivered safely which brought happiness to everyone.

Venkanna was Blessed: Swamiji on his tour reached Kandanāti. There was a boy by name Venkanna. He was deprived on his parents in the early stage of his life and was neglected by the relatives. When Swamiji stayed there Venkanna served him and before departure Swamiji blessed his and said “if you are in difficulty at any time, remember me”.

One day Venkanna was sitting under a tree in the field. The Nawab of Ādvāni Siddimuddin Khān happen to pass by that way with his contingent of soldiers. In the meantime another soldier came on the horse and handed over a letter to the Nawab. Being unable to read, he looked around for someone who could read it. He spotted the boy (Venkanna). He called him and asked him to read the letter. Venkanna said “I am illiterate and can’t read. Nawab did not believe him. He shouted “Being a Brahmin, can’t you read this? You are telling a lie. Beware of dire consequences.” The boy shivered and promptly remembered Rāghavendra Swāmy. The power of reading was blessed instantaneously. Venkanna read the letter fluently. It contained the Nawab’s victory. Nawab was immensely happy. In a short time, he took him to Ādvāni and gave him an appointment. Seeing his noble qualities, in course of time the Nawab conferred him the rank of the Divān (minister).

Swāmiji’s Meeting with the Nawab of Ādvāni: Divān Venkanna invited Sri Rāghavendra Swāmy to visit Ādvāni. When Swamiji accepted, he made elaborate arrangements to receive and treat him as a royal guest. Venkanna highlighted the greatness of Swamiji to the Nawab. During Swamiji’s stay at Ādvāni a meeting was arranged in the palace of the Nawab. The Nawab received Swamiji with honour and respect. During their meeting and after a formal talk, the Nawab offered royal gifts along with non-vegetarian items. The intention of the Nawab was to test Swamiji. The silver plate was covered with a silken cloth. Swamiji sprinkled water (chanting Mantra) and asked the attendant to remove the cover. Nawab was eagerly watching. As the cloth was removed, everyone saw a plate of fresh fruits and flowers. The Nawab was stunned to see the total change. He repeatedly apologised to the Swamiji for indulging in such stupid act.

The Swamiji was least perturbed. He said politely ‘our worth would be better known to people only when persons like you test us’. The Nawabs, officials and family members realised the greatness of the Swamiji and struck with awe and wonder and prostrated to Swamiji in respect. Nawab declared that he was prepared to render any service desired by Swamiji.

Divān Venkanna informed Swamiji that the Nawab was prepared to offer any place or village as a gift to Mutt. Swamiji indicated, if that was so, his choice would be the village Mancāli on the bank of Tungabhadra river (present Mantrālaya). Although Nawab suggested better offers Swamiji expressed his satisfaction with Mancāli only. The Nawab happily offered. When asked what was the significances of the place, Swamiji mentioned that the very place where devotee Prahlād performed the Yajna in Krita-Yug. It is believed that Srī Rāghavendra Swamiji is the incarnation of Devotee Prahlād referred to in Bhāgavat seventh Skandha.

Entering Samādhi (Brindāvan): Sri Rāghavendra Swamiji having decorated the Jnānapitha for fifty years realised that a time has approached that the Pītha had to be handed over to a suitable successor. He decided with the consent of other scholars that his brother’s eldest son Venkannācārya possesses all the qualities and qualifications required by an ascetic. In 1671 CE a grand function was arranged by Divān Venkanna. Amidst a large gathering the rituals were performed the Swamiji handed over the Pītha to the successor and the new Sanyāsin was named ‘Yogīndra Tirtha’.

Arrangements were made with decorations where Rāghavendra Swamiji had to sit in Yogāsana and enter into the state of lasting Samādhi (meditation) once and for all. All people gathered there suffered in their mind the deep agony of separation. Swamiji's last message to the people was to follow the path of Sanāthana Dharma and faith of Sri Hari Vāyu. He said he would be there performing penance (Tapasya) for the good of humanity for the next 700 years. With a smiling face waving his hands at the sign of blessings to all, he sat in Yogāsana at a predetermined place (in the holy tomb- Brindavan) and began meditating. As per the instructions when the rosary counting was stopped the structure was closed. Even the stone for the Brindāvan was of his choice. He said 'that particular stone is selected for Brindāvan because Sri Rama sat on that stone for a while, when he was in exile'. On the top of the structure 700 Saligrāms were placed. The sun slided down the philosophical horizon.

Sri Rāghavendra Stotra: When Swamiji entered Brindavan at Mantrālaya his pet disciple was away in the village Biccāli, the other bank of Tungabhadra river. As soon as he heard the news, he swam across the river and reached the place. Swamiji was not visible. He composed a prayer on Swamiji consisting of 32 verses except the last two words. The last two words were completed by Rāghavendra Swamy from Brindāvan as a sign of approval of the prayer. This prayer is chanted like a Mantra. It reverberates almost in every devotee's house. The efficacy of this prayer has been realised by many devotees.

Brindāvans all over the Country: The mud (Mṛuttika) stored in holy Brindavan is supposed to have the divine power of Sri Rāghavendra. Devotees take the Mṛuttika from Mantrālaya and install Brindāvans at the desired towns. There are several such Brindāvans today. Devotees feel his live presence and practically experience his blessings. Generally, he gives visions in dreams or fulfils the desires of devotees. The anniversary is performed every year in the month of August.

Experience of Thomas Munro: This event occurred 150 years after Swamiji entered Brindāvan. Thomas Munro was a district collector of Bellary district (Karnataka) during British regime (around 1850). The government brought certain land reform rules. In that process the gifted lands of the temple were also affected. The temple authorities made a strong appeal to the Government to spare these lands as otherwise the temple activities would be adversely affected. Thomas Munro was deputed to visit the place and assess the situation. Accordingly he went to Mantrālaya. He was taken in front of Brindāvan. He removed his hat and bowed down and stood in front of the Brindāvan. Swamiji appeared before him and spoke. Munro also replied. The conversation lasted for a few minutes. None else saw or heard Swamiji except Munro. Swamiji blessed him, offered Mantrākṣata (sacred rice) in his hands and disappeared. Munro was stunned and stupefied. This event is recorded in the Madras Gazette in the year 1906 by Francis.

Blessings: During the life time of Swamiji, people from various walks of life and from different communities and nationalities used to approach him for various problems not able to solve individually or collectively. Just by giving them Mantrākṣata (sacred rice) the way of divine's blessings, people's problems got solved. After he became invisible in 1671 CE, people go to his Brindavan at Mantrālaya, which is a place of solace. Sri Rāghavendra

Swamy has been blessed with inexhaustible spiritual wealth by his devotion, severe penance and serving the Almighty with a moving love.

Illuminating the Literary Filed: Rāghavendra Swamy has made significant literary contribution in the field of philosophy. The total number of works is fifty (50), all in Sanskrit language except one. They are:

Śruti-Prasthānam

1-3: Vedatraya Vivruti: Commentary on three Vedas viz. Rig, Yajur and Sāma. These are independent works.

4: Mantrārtha Manjari: This is a commentary on Rig-Bhāṣya of Madhvācārya. The elaborate introduction gives a fair insight of the Bhāṣya. Swamiji has made difficult things easy which immensely helps in understanding the Tīka and Bhāṣya.

5-9: Commentaries on Five Sūktas: Puruṣa, Srī, Gharma Sukta, Hiranyagarbha Sukta and Manyu Sūktas.

10-19: Daśopaniṣat Khandārtha: There are independent works and very well explained. These explanations are on the lines of Madhva Bhāṣya on Upaniṣats. Commensurate with the title “Khandārtha” part by part texts are taken and explained in the simplest possible way. It is a splendid work.

Gīta-Prasthānam:

20: Gītartha Sangraha (Gītvivṛtti). This is an independent work based on Gītabhāṣya and Gīta Tātparya of Sri Madhvācārya. Hidden meanings, grammatical points, etymological explanations and new approaches are expressed in the most simple and elegant style. A separate article is written on the subject vide -5/543650 – Gīta Vivṛtti.

21. Glossary of Prameyadīpika: Prameyadīpika is the commentary on Gītabhāṣya of Sri Madhvācārya.

22. Glossary of Nyāyadīpa: Nyāyadīpa is the commentary of Gīta Tātparya of Madhvācārya.

Sūtra – Prasthānam:

23. Tantradīpaka: This is a direct work on Brahmasutra. It is very helpful guide in understanding the Sūtra and Adhikaranas clearly.

24. Nyāyamuktāvali: On each Sutra and Adhikarana the work consolidates the essence of Nyāyas, Yuktis (reasoning) presented in different texts by Ācārya. One can have a consolidated view of Ācārya.

25. Bhāvadīpa on Tatvaprakāśika: Tatvaprakāśika (Tīka) is the commentary of Madhva Bhāṣya. Bhāvadīpa explains the Tīka at crucial points. Special attention is paid to grammatical points.

26. *Tatvamanjari*: A direct commentary on *Anubhāṣya*. In 32 stanzas *Anubhāṣya* collects 223 *Adhikaranas*. Such a concise work needs apt elaboration. This work has greatly satisfied such a need.

27. *Parimala*: A glossary on *Srimanniyāyasudha* which is an exhaustive commentary on *Anuvyākyāna* of *Madhvācārya*. It is hailed to be the best glossary of *Srimanyāyasudha*. It throws light where one stops.

28. *Prakāsa*: Explains *Candrika* of *Vyāsatīrtha* which is a glossary of *Tatvaprakāśika*.

Other Works:

29. *Bhāvasangraha* of *Mahābhārata Tātpyanirṇaya*: *Mahābhārata Tātpyanirṇaya* of Sri *Madhvācārya* consists of 32 Chapters and 5000 stanzas. *Bhāvasangraha* has epitomised this great work in just 32 stanzas. This work is one of the marvels.

30 -39. Glossaries on *Tikas* of *Daśprakaraṇa*: 10 *Prakaraṇas* are the words of *Madhvācārya*. On this *Tīkācārya* has written *Tikas*. Sri *Rāghavendra* has prepared the glossaries on *Tikas*. They are simply the excellent guides which are essential to understand the *Tikas*. The title of these *Tippaṇis* is known as *Bhavadīpa*.

40. Commentary on *Tarkatāndava*: *Tarkatāndava* is the work of *Vyāsarāja*. These are the most advanced works in dialectical expositions. This work is an analysis on *Nyāyaśastra*.

41. Commentary on *Vādavali*: This is the work of Sri *Jayatirtha*. This work is a collection of arguments appearing in various *Prakaranas*. Particularly in ‘*Khandanatraya*’. It is a work of high dialectical skill. Sri *Rāghavendra*’s commentary is immensely helpful.

42. Commentary on *Pramāṇa Paddhati*: This is the work of Sri *Jayatirtha*. Based on *Pramāṇalakṣana* and other works of *Ānandatīrtha* this work is compiled. Sri *Rāghavendra*’s analytical commentary is a must for a thorough comprehension.

43. *Rāmacārītrya Manjari*: This is an independent work. An epitome of *Ramayana* story. This work consists of only 12 verses. In each stanza the matter is highly compressed still one can understand it.

44. *Kṛṣṇa Cārītrya Manjari*: This is an independent work. An abridged version of *Mahābhārata* story. It consists of 28 stanzas. As one reads the two *Manjaris* events of the epics quickly pass through on the memory screen.

45. Commentary on *Anumadhvavijaya* of *Nārāyaṇa Pandita*: This was written before he became an ascetic. Though written at an early stage it has attained a scholarly standard. *Sudhindra Avāmy* appreciated it.

46. *Bhatta Sangraha*: An independent work on *Jaimini Mīmānsa Śutras*. The clarity of expression is evident to all readers.

47. Prātah Sankalpa Gadyam: In the morning, a follower of Sanāthana Dharma makes a resolve (Sankalpa) as to what all activities he carries out as per the Veda Vidhi which are the orders of Lord Viṣṇu. All activities are done by the inducement of Viṣṇu and to his satisfaction (Viṣṇu Pratyatham).

48. Samarpāṇa Gadyam: All activities are dedicated to Lord Viṣṇu at the end of everyday or even time to time on completion of every Karma.

49. Prameya Sangraha: A collection of tenets of Madhva Siddhānta. One has to often refer to this work. It is so useful.

50. A composition in Kannada: His composition in Kannada language is a contribution to Haridāsa literature. The song is quite appealing. It is a popular song sung by many even today.

All these works are actively studied even today. Scholars and students that it is a delight to study these works. Swamiji's literary contribution is an asset to the literary field. Majority of his works are glosses (Tippaṇis). Just like Jayatīrtha is called Tīkācārya, Sri Rāghavendra is called **Tippaṇnācārya** which depicts his literary merit and profundity.

Though Sri Rāghavendra Swamy is beyond the human vision, his divine presence is vibrant in Mantrālaya and in all his Brindāvanas. His devotees are certain, by their experiences, about his presence and visit the Brindāvan regularly for peace and solace. May Sri Rāghavendra Swamy's divine presence and kindness continue, in the times to come, to shower his blessings on his devotees.

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