

Sanskrit Stalwarts of the city of Mysore¹

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Sanskrit scholars, in the past, maintained a view and a way of life known for discipline and austerity. Their book of guidance was what is known as *Sruti*. It is a work handed down to mankind through recitation and hearing. At no time was it regarded as a work of the wise who had the gift of intuition. On this score it was believed to be *apauruseya*, not a product of any *purusha*. In this category is included *Parama Purusha*, God, the Supreme Person. Though He is the ground, the guide and the goal of all existence, in exercise of His Power and Wisdom, He is not taken to be the author of *Sruti*. *Sruti* is co-eval with Him. It is therefore not a product. It is spontaneous as His breathing. It is not the result of His intention, desire or effort. *Sruti* is, therefore *nitya*, eternal. For the same reason it is infallible and most sacred. It has come to be known as the Veda, that which throws light on aspects of the aim of life and its means, *purusartha* and its *sadhana*, far beyond the reach of endeavour based on mere perception and inference. The Veda is mainly concerned with the *alaukika anubhava*, the Super-secular experience. Even with regard to experience which is worldly, and therefore, secular, the means prescribed is unique and strange.

The Veda prescribes a way of life here and hereafter. If the prescription is followed, the supreme aim of life can be realised. It++ will be missed only when man becomes a helpless victim of passions and temptations which are not alluring for all times. Hence a man who is after wisdom and insight adheres to the mode of life enjoined in the Vedas. He does not resist the call of the Vedas. Nor does he yield to the attractions of the world. He has, therefore, chosen to be regarded as a *vaidika* and he is proud and happy on that account.

II

The *vaidika* selects a calm, secluded place abounding in trees and streams so that he can pursue the life of meditation. He would be particularly happy in the vicinity of a temple for that would keep him in 'godly environment' far from the 'madding crowd'. His demand on Nature is limited. He is content to live by the riverside, where he could take a refreshing bath, perform the ablutions and drink the pure water. He would be satisfied with the yield in the *parnasala* in the form of roots, fruits and corn. And inside the temple he would not allow his mind to be distracted towards the vast enchanting world.

III

The city of Mysore came into prominence only after of the fall of Tipu Sultan at the close of the eighteenth century. The capital was shifted from Srirangapattana to Mysore. Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar III choose to live close to the famous Chamundi hills where his patron deity Sri Chamundesvari is installed and worshipped. The Maharaja wanted to transform Mysore into a famous city. He had a great desire to be in the company of scholars. But scholars would not easily accede to his wish. Mysore was not attractive to the *vaidikas*. They would at best spend a day or two to prove their loyalty to the king but would soon go out of the city to some secluded water-resort or a holy place.

Keen on getting the great scholars to settle down in the city of Mysore Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar III got a few temples built in the fort area and provided the great pandits houses in *agraharams*, and libraries

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and choultries. The *vaidik* needs being met, many scholars migrated from their villages to Mysore and, in course of time, the city became famous as the home of Sanskrit culture.

IV

The measures adopted by the Maharaja to improve the status of the city of Mysore were as varied as they were of lasting significance. Strong and sturdy of body, alert and active of mind, the Maharaja lost no time in inviting and inducing persons of outstanding skill and scholarship to stay in Mysore and help him in fulfilling his cherished desire. It is a matter of great pride and satisfaction that his descendants continued with undiminishing zeal the tradition of the 'founder' of the city of Mysore.

V

The first contribution was in the field of medicine. Numerous Ayurvedic Pandits of accredited ability were engaged in making a thorough study of medical treatises, such as, the Caraka, the Susruta and the Astanga Hrdaya. They prepared pills and powders which did not suffer in quality with the passage of time. It may of interest to observe, in passing, a particular type of pill commonly termed *Kuppi matre*, a heavy stone-like lump, generally of the size of a pebble. It is used in case of emergency. The use is simple and the effect startling. Rub the pill gently a couple of times on a small stone slab with the juice of lemon or ginger or sugarcane. Smear the light paste on the tongue. Within minutes health is restored.

A very large quantity of such pills were prepared at that time and were stocked in almost all the houses. Even today the pills are available in many houses. The original size of the pill does not seem to be reduced! The pity is that, with the exception of Ayurvedic doctors of experience, at the present time, few are able to prepare the pills in the prescribed way. There is fear among people that use of an improperly made pills may spell disaster.

VI

The next field of enterprise was education. The great epic, the Mahabharata of Sage Vyasa was made available to the lay public. A team of Sanskrit scholars set to themselves the task of rendering the monumental work in Kannada, the language of the region. In addition, the Adi Kavya of Valmiki, the Ramayana, was printed in Kannada script, possibly with the intention of encouraging the public to acquire familiarity with the Sanskrit language. During the regime of the present Maharaja, all the Puranas were made available to the public in Kannada script with explanatory notes wherever they were considered necessary.

But the greatest and most lasting contribution was the publication of the Rig Veda by a band of Sanskrit scholars. This work extending over several bulky volumes is printed in the Kannada script. The commentary of Sayana and others, and the views of contemporary orientalisists are considered, assessed and incorporated in an appropriate manner.

VII

To preserve and spread the influence of religion the Maharaja initiated the institution of Parakala Matha, the pontiff of which was accepted as Raja Guru. The institution was maintained by the ruler and the members of the royal family. A magnificent building was got constructed for the *matha* to offer worship to the presiding deity, to teach the pupils, to feed the people and to hold conferences periodically. One or two outstanding heads of the *matha* may be mentioned in this connection. Sri Krishna Brahmatantra Parakala Swami has left behind him the Sanskrit classic, Alankara Manihara, a treatise on the Alankara Sastra.

As the Asthana Pandit of the *matha* there was a mighty scholar by name Anandalvar. Son of a reputed grammarian of Melkote, Mahabhashyam Singarachar, Anandalvar, in his teens, mastered the Nyaya and the Vedanta Sastras, and joined a Jain institution at Sravana Belagola in the State of Mysore. He taught the Nyaya Sastra for a number of years. As ill luck would have it, he was too poor to live a decent life. Credit goes to one of the pontiffs of the Parakala *matha* to have discovered the scholar and to have patronised him. An unassuming scholar of unrivalled ability, Anandalvar was looked upon as a terror to the opponents in debates and discussions. He wrote several works, the memorable one being the Vedanta Vadavali, a terse logical treatise substantiating the philosophy of Sri Ramanuja.

Another pontiff of the *matha* who passed away a few years ago was Abhinava Ranganatha Brahmatantra Parakalashwami. A native of Atmakur in Andhra Pradesh, Sri Rangacharya, as he was known prior to his sanyasa, administered the *matha* for over forty years. A great logician and vedantin, in addition to being a disciplinarian to the core, the Swami spent the whole of his life time in penance and study.

During the later period of his life the Swami visited Benaras, Calcutta and many other important cities in the north and, during discussions and expositions he demonstrated the power and polish of true Sanskrit culture. Of his many works mention may be made of Gudhartha Samgraha, a critical annotation on the import of the classical work of Sri Ramanuja. He may be considered the last chip of the old block among the Sanskrit stalwarts in the city of Mysore.

VIII

A Sanskrit college was started in the city in the last quarter of the last century and an Oriental library was also added. A notable figure in the Institute was Panditaratnam Kasturi Rangachar. A Tarka Tirtha, Rangacharya was a versatile scholar. He taught a large number of students in almost all the Sastras. He was chiefly responsible for publishing many ancient works relating to the Mimamsa and the Vedanta.

A favourite and admired student of Kasturi Rangacharya was Mahamahopadhyaya Panditaratnam Mahavidwan Lakshmiapuram Srinivasacharya. A Catus-Sastra Pandita of extraordinary talent Srinivasacharya served the oriental Library, moved to the Sanskrit College as Professor of the Visishtadvaita Vedanta and served as part-time Professor in the Maharaja's College. He was also a Dharmadhikari of the royal house. Versatile in the real sense of the term, Srinivasacharya had the unique privilege of accompanying the famous Jagadguru Gadhi Anantacharya Swamin of the Prativadi Bhayankara Matha of Kanchi during his *digvijaya yatra* in northern India. Of his numerous works on different subjects *Manameya Rahasya Slokavartika Mimamsa Bhashya Bhusana* and *Darsanodaya* deserve mention. Admiring the range and depth of his scholarship, Hiriyantha and Radhakrishnan spent some valuable time with him seeking solution to several philosophical problems.

Mahamahopadhyaya Vidyanidhi Virupaksha Sastri was a scholar of great erudition. He succeeded as Professor of Advaita Vedanta another great Vedantin Mahamahopadhyaya Panchapaksha Sastri. Virupaksha Sastri was hailed as the most impressive and towering scholar by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and the title *Nyaya Pancanava* was conferred on him when he visited Benaras. Virupaksha Sastri became the pontiff of the Kudli Matha and Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV had the privilege of studying Vedanta with him. The Swami's Samadhi is converted into a holy shrine in the compound of the Sanskrit College where arrangements are made for daily worship.

Another scholar deserving mention is Pauranika Ratnam Holavanahalli Seshacharya. A specialist in Dvaita Vedanta, Seshacharya was unrivalled in the exposition of Puranas.

IX

Other branches of study were represented by *Veda*, Dharmasastra, Tarka, Purvamimamsa, Sahitya, Jyotisha, Vyakarana and *Agama*. Many a ghanapathi has been recognised and rewarded by the Maharajas. The chanting of the Veda by the Vedic scholars in the college during Ganesha festival would draw crowds which would remain all the time spellbound.

Coming to the subject of Jyotisha, mention must be made of Narahari Josyer, Sampath Krishna Jois and Karur Seshacharya, all of them brilliant scholars, experts and writers.

In the field of Sahitya the first name which is remembered is Periswamy Tirumalacharya. He taught Sanskrit in the Sadvidyasala. He would explain any verse or passage without prior preparation, all that was needed was that it must be read before him for once. The ease and grace with which he would explain the passage created a sense of wonder among the listeners.

Narasimha Sastry of Hassan was another professor of Sahitya in the Sanskrit College and a part-time Professor in the Maharaja's College.

X

The institution of Dharmadhikaris was founded by the royal house of Mysore. Scholars residing in Mysore were selected. They would function as counsellors in matters of religious observation. They played a useful part in the maintenance of social order. Chakravarthi Iyengar, Sringeri Krishna Sastri, Navinaru Ramanujacharya, Lakshmipuram Srinivasacharya, Tiruvallore Srinivasa Raghavachar, Karur Seshachar, Sampath Krishna Jois and Holavanahalli Seshacharya are the notable among the Dharmadhikaris.

Among the Vedantins of the Visishtadvaita School two branches have been recognised. One of them is the Sanskrit branch of which the classic is the Sri Bhashya of Sri Ramanuja. The other is known as the *Bhagavad Vishaya* devoted to the Dravida Vedanta. The two together constitute a single unit and the term Ubhaya Vedanta is used to refer to this unit. The Dravida Vedanta is in the Manipravala language. It is a blend of Sanskrit and Tamil. The propagation of the Ubhaya Vedanta philosophy and culture is the main mission of Sri Vaishnava. Experts who mainly resided in Melkote, some 30 miles northwest of Mysore usually camped in Mysore periodically for some months at a stretch and taught the Ubhaya Vedanta to large batches of devotees and students. Mention must be made in this connection of a great scholar and guru, Tiruvaimoli Tirunarayana Perumal who was hailed as the Sarva Sastra Ratnakara. It is said that this scholar was to the Visishtadvaitins what Raju Sastri of Mannargudi in the State of Madras was to the Advaitins. After him his son, Tiruvengada Ramanujacharya decided to stay permanently in Mysore and continued the work of his revered father and guru. A notable scholar in this field was Alkondavilli Govindacharya Swamin who wrote valuable works in English on the subject of the Ubhaya Vedanta.

XI

Many writers in Kannada have been recognised as stalwarts in Sanskrit. Their aim was to bring the best of Sanskrit within easy reach of the masses. A famous scholar in this direction is Kavi Basappa Sastry of Sakuntala fame. Members of Aji family in Mysore have made their contribution on this sector of learning.

XII

Stalwart scholarship in Sanskrit has hoisted its flag in the University of Mysore. R Shama Sastry, Curator, Oriental Library was a profound scholar. He published the Artha Sastra. He was awarded the title Mahamahopadhyaya.

Another famous scholar was Professor M. Hiriyanna. He was a professor of Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy in the Maharaja's College. He was known for precision, clarity, modesty and brevity. A saint in life, his contribution to the Indological world is very significant. Of his numerous works mention may be made of Outlines of Indian Philosophy, Art Experience, Ista Siddhi (edited) on the Upanishads, translated into English with commentary.

XIII

Talking of the present position one feels somewhat sad that all is not well. The devotees of the deity are slowly moving towards the dollar. The contentment and discipline manifested in the past do not appear to retain their original vigour. The atmosphere is less congenial to the pursuit of Sanskrit studies to maintain the heights of traditional culture. The Vaidikas in temples and maths, etc. are finding it hard to see the bright side of life for reasons beyond their control and even comprehension. All the same it is hoped that the city of Mysore will regain the past glory and continue to be the home of Sanskrit stalwarts.
