

CONCLUSION

India is standing to-day on the threshold of a new era. She is preparing to make her contribution to the world of the future. In the past she produced her great culture, and in the present age she has an equally important role to play in evolving the culture of the New World which is emerging slowly from the wreckage of the old. This is a momentous period of her history, pregnant with precious possibilities, when any disinterested offer of co-operation from any part of the West will have an immense moral value,

the memory of which will become brighter as the regeneration of the East grows in vigour and creative power. It is up to the youths of our present generation to come out of the narrow shell of factions and party-politics, and illuminate the track of humanity by holding high the lamp of their ancient wisdom, by giving form and shape to the great and noble dreams that were cherished by the immortal prophets and philosophers of the past, so that the whole world might declare that the light has come from the East and saved the West from doom and destruction.

ŚRĪ VEDĀNTA DEŚIKA

SWAMI HARSHANANDA

I

There was a great commotion inside the temple of Lord Venkateśvara at Tirupati. The bell used at the time of daily worship in the *sanctum sanctorum* was missing! The temple authorities were holding an emergency enquiry and were trying to fix the responsibility on the poor priests who were pleading innocent. Just then word was received of an extremely strange happening in the township. A pious Brāhmin couple, pilgrims from Kāñcīpuram (Anantasūri and Totadryambā by name), had had a wonderful vision the previous night in which an exquisitely beautiful divine child appeared with a bell in its hand, commanded the good lady to open her mouth, put the bell into it and asked her to swallow it! Attempts at verification ended up in confirmation. The great God himself put the seal on the episode by revealing that everything had happened in accordance with His own will!

So the commotion subsided. And the story began.

This pious couple had trekked all the way from Kāñcī to pray to the Lord of the Tirupati hills to bless them with a worthy son. The Lord had granted their prayer. So they returned.

In course of time a son was born to them. They christened him Venkateśvara, after the great Lord of Tirupati.

The boy underwent the various sacraments, sanctioned and sanctified by thousands of years of tradition. He grew into a fine young man highly educated in the sacred lore and equally refined and cultured. Even before twenty he made a mark as a great scholar, poet and philosopher. Though married, he lived practically like a recluse, never caring for the comforts and enjoyments of the world. The only ambition that consumed his soul was the systematization and propagation of the teachings of Śrī Rāmānujā, the great Ācārya who preceded him by two centuries.

He is said to have lived the full human life span of one hundred years. Like the

bell of the Lord, whose incarnation he was supposed to be, he sent the message of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta ringing to all the corners of his country. He travelled extensively, preached intensively, wrote profusely and worked vigorously to fulfil the mission of his life. While journeying through life he had to weather many a storm: now arguing and convincing, now spoiling the machinations of unscrupulous rivals, now organizing the traditional centres of his religion—all the while keeping his head absolutely cool and the heart fully warm. His prodigious learning was matched only by his simplicity and humility. His wide fame was equalled only by his intense renunciation. No wonder that his contemporaries honoured him with such names as Vedānta Deśika (the teacher of Vedānta), Sarvatantra-svatantra (the knower of all sciences and arts), Kavi-tārkika-simha (poet and lion among the logicians) and so on.

He passed away peacefully at a ripe old age.

This was the end of the story, but the beginning of a new page in history.

2

His was a peerless personality. It is really very difficult, if not impossible, to state which of his innumerable virtues and gifts was more dominant than the rest. However, since we have to begin somewhere, let us begin with his astounding scholarship.

His knowledge of the ancient texts on religion and philosophy as also some of the sciences and arts, was extensive as well as deep. His writings are prolific. In quality, they are a class unto themselves.

To combine dry philosophy with exquisite poetry is like squaring the circle. But he achieved it to an admirable degree! In his works, like *Tattva-muktā-kalāpa*, it is difficult to judge whether poetic grandeur supersedes philosophical acumen or *vice versa*.

He also wrote purely literary works which are sometimes extolled as next only to Kālidāsa's.

Learning often begets pride and egoism. But he was a unique exception. He was humility personified. His humility was born out of a deep conviction that whatever virtue he possessed was due to the Lord's grace alone. Once a great poet of his times challenged him to compete with him in composing one thousand stanzas in one night. The proud poet chose the Lord's feet as his subject. Deśika chose the Lord's footwear! Praying intensely for the Lord's grace and drowning his little ego in His current, he effortlessly poured out one thousand verses (now well-known as the *Pādukā-sahasra*) before daybreak whereas his illustrious opponent after great struggle could compose only three hundred! But even in his victory Deśika was humble and magnanimous. 'Well, your composition is like the young one of the elephant whereas mine is like the brood of pigs'!—this was the tribute he paid to his opponent!

His devotion to God was remarkable. It was not a sentimental feeling nor a mere emotional upsurge. It was intense love welling up from the depths of his soul, because of enlightenment wrought about by hard austerity and deep meditation. It is said that he was blessed with an idol of Lakshmī-Hayagrīva by Garuda Bhagavān, which he worshipped throughout his life. This idol is cherished in the shrine of the Parakāla Maṭha of Mysore even today.

Another important trait of his was his spirit of supreme renunciation resulting from his utter dependence on God. Vidyā-ranya, another great soul of his time, tried his best to honour him through the king of Vijayanagar, but in vain. Though living practically on alms he considered the honours conferred by kings as mere straw compared to the joy of utter dependence on the King of kings.

It was exactly this that made him absolutely fearless. He stuck to truth. He clung to God. What fear had he of mortals? It was the other way. The ordinary mortals who cared little for truth or for God were mortally afraid of him!

With all his humility he was not meek and submissive, much less cowardly. When challenged he responded vigorously, rising to the occasion. Several disputants tasted defeat at his hands. Even persons well-versed in black magic could do little harm to him!

He was a philosopher, a poet, and a saint all rolled into one. He was a versatile genius of the highest order. He was the 'salt of the earth'.

3

Putting Śrīvaiṣṇavism along with its philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita on a firm foundation was the main achievement of his life. In this he was next only to Rāmānuja.

This necessitated a prolific production of high quality works in which logic, philosophy, devotion and ritualism blended harmoniously. They number 107. Several of them are in Sanskrit and the rest in Tamil.

Among the works which describe the essence of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, *Arthapañcaka* seems to be the most popular. It deals with the doctrine of Prapatti or self-surrender to God.

However it is in *Rahasyatrayasāra* composed in the maṇipravāḷa language (Sanskritized Tamil) that we find a magnificent exposition of all the aspects of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. In a way, this may be called as the *magnum opus* of Deśika. The exposition of the aṣṭāksarī and dvaya-mantra as also the carama-śloka (Gītā XVIII, 66) are simply marvellous.

Yatirāja-saptati (a hymn on Rāmānuja) and *Pādukā-sahasra* are the best known among his hymns.

Yādavābhyudaya, composed as a challeng-

ing reply to the *Rāghavābhyudaya* of Diṇḍima Kavi (of Vijayanagar) as also *Hamsa-sandeśa* and *Saṅkalpa-sūryodaya* are works of exceptional literary merit. The last one was composed on the lines of *Prabodha-candrodaya* of Kṛṣṇa Miśra who was defeated in a disputation, whereas *Hamsa-sandeśa* was an imitation of the *Megha-sandeśa* of Kālidāsa.

Among his independent works on Viśiṣṭādvaita special mention must be made of *Nyāyapariśuddhi* and *Tattvamuktākalāpa-Śatadūṣaṇī* is another work which levels 66 arguments (and not 100 as the name implies) against Advaita.

He has also written commentaries on *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad* and other standard works. *Tattvaṅkā* and *Tātparyacandrikā* are commentaries on Ramanuja's *Śrībhāṣya* and *Gītābhāṣya*.

4

Dharma has got two aspects: the personal and the social. They are complementary to each other. A society in which the former is forgotten disintegrates. A society in which the former is developed *at the cost of the latter*, paves the way for its own destruction by alien forces. This latter has been the fate of our society, at least during the last thousand years.

The century in which Śrī Vedānta Deśika lived was a period of great stress and strain to the Hindu society. Often it was a question of life and death, a question of sheer survival. It was here that a judicious combination of the characteristics of Kṣatriya and that of Brāhmaṇa was absolutely necessary. The latter seeking out the former, inspiring it and solidly supporting it—that was the need of the hour. Śrī Vidyāranya the great contemporary of Śrī Deśika fulfilled this need.

Since this great king-maker, who was himself an equally great ascetic, knew Śrī
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WHAT
INSPIRES ME
MOST IN
HOLY
MOTHER'S
LIFE

NANCY POPE MAYORGA

The only way to live a great life, the sages tell us, is to have a measure of self-knowledge. It is a noticeable fact that as soon as a man begins to search out his self, he begins to take on stature. This searching can be done by all, and is done by a few. But truly great ones are different. They, by God's grace, know who they are from the beginning. They are born full-grown, as it were. Such a great one was Sarada Devi of Jayrambati. The ideal virgin wife, she became the mother of all.

The role of women in the lives of divine incarnations is always deeply meaningful and touching. There were Chaitanya's mother and his young wife, who gave him up to God, and by that act inspired some of the most beautiful Bengali poetry, and the lovely girl who was Buddha's wife and became his first disciple, and Radha who recognized Kṛṣṇa and loved him as more

than man, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, who knew from the beginning that she had no ordinary child. Along with these, playing a most meaningful and moving role of her own, is Sarada Devi, the wife of Sri Ramakrishna.

There are two things that set her off from the others. In the first place, we know more about her. We know almost everything about her, for she belongs to our own, self-conscious age which is always careful to keep records. Many people wrote in loving detail about her. In the second place, she knew more about herself and the part she had to play. Modest and retiring as she was, this self-knowledge gave her an incontrovertible authority. And considering her humble background, her complete absence of formal education, her lack of familiarity with the world, this quiet self-assurance is one of the most impressive things about her.

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Deśika's capacities and capabilities, it was but natural for him to try to get the latter also associated with the badly needed work of regeneration of the Hindu society. That Śrī Deśika refused royal honours is understandable. But could he not, with his sharp insight, gauge the motives behind that

princely honours? Did he place his vairāgya above the welfare of the nation? Could he not have utilized his talents better by working for the Hindu society as a whole instead of toiling only for his sect? Would not have the results been far better if he had accepted the royal help?

Well, these are for the wise to decide!