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- poems -

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Vedanta Desika(1269–1370)

Vedanta Desika (Swami Desikan, Swami Vedanta Desikan, Thoopul Nigamaantha Desikan) (1269–1370) was a Sri Vaishnava Guru. He was a poet, devotee, philosopher and master-teacher. He was the disciple of Swamy Sri Kidambi Appullar alias Sri Aathreya Ramanujachariar who comes in the lineage starting from Sri Ramanuja with Sri Thirukurugai Piran Pillan alias Sri Kurugesar, Sri Kidambi Aachan, Sri Aathreya Ramanujar, Sri Aathreya Rangarajachariar and many in the order. He is considered as an Avatar (incarnation) of the divine bell of Lord Venkateswara of Tirumalai by Sri Vaishnavites.

Birth

In the case Swami Vedanta Desika, certain oblique biographical references are available internally in his works, for example in the Prologue to his Sankalpa Suryodayam. Prathivadi Bhayankaram Annan (1300–1400), a junior contemporary of Swami Desika and a disciple of Kumara Varadhacharya (son of Swamy Vedanta Desika) gives some details about Vedanta Desika's parentage, education etc. in his " Saptati Ratna Maalika".

The birth of Vedanta Desika was in the Kali yuga year 4370, which corresponds to 1268 AD in the Tamil Year Vibhava, month Purattaasi, on the Dasami day of Sukla Paksha, a Wednesday, in the constellation of Sravanam (the same as that of Lord of Tirumalai).He was born in Thooppul, near Tiruttangaa (Himavanam) adjacent to the temple of Deepa Prakaasar in Kanchipuram, the birthplace of Poigai Alwar.

Early Life

Swamy Desikan was born in Thoopul, near Kanchipuram, (according to legend, on the order of Lord Srinivasa and Padmavathi Thayaar, the God and Goddess of the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple the divine bell of Narayana took the incarnation as Swamy), as the son of Ananta Suri and Totaramma. Swamy is also considered to be the incarnation of the 'Lord of Seven hills' known as Tirumala Sri Venkateswara himself. It is widely revered as Swamy is the incarnation of Baghavath Ramanuja to once again reform the Vaishnavism and to give the world about its elaborated was named "Venkatanatha" and belonged to the Vishwamithra gothra (lineage). He was educated and trained by a scholarly maternal uncle of his, Kidambi Appullalar who was a direct disciple of Nadadoor Ammal (Grand Nephew of Ramanuja). Appullalar also initiated Venkatanatha into Brahmacharya Upanayanam (sacred thread ceremony) at the age of seven and

then to the SriVaishnavaita school of philosophy through Panchasamskara and made him master the Vedas, Divyaprabandam, Puranas and Sastras. By the age of twenty he was a great scholar without peer in the history of Vaishnavism. He got married at the age of 21 to Tirumangai (also known as "Kanakavalli"). Vedanta Desikan rose to the status of an "Acharya" by the age of 27. Swami Desikan was conferred the title of Sarva Tantra Swatantra (one with the capacity for independent thinking and originality in any field), by Ranganayaki thaayar Herself, and Swamy was adorned with the title Vedantacharya by the Lord of Sri Rangam Sri Ranganatha, Himself.

After becoming the "Acharya" in the Ramanuja tradition, Swami Desikan left for Thiruvahindhipuram (near Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu), as per the orders of his Guru Swamy Kidambi Appullar and spent some years there meditating on Garuda and had the darshan of Lord Hayagriva, from then on, Sri Lakshmi Hayagriva became his personal deity. Swamy composed numerous works of Literature in the languages of Sanskrit, Prakrit, Tamil and works of Swamy Desikan live throughout the ages speaking about his mastery of language and excellence in the Traditional Knowledge known as Gyana. With the Divine Mercy upon him, he made pilgrimage to Kanchipuram, Tirupati, Brindavan, Ayodya and Badrinath preaching Ramanuja's philosophy through discourses and literary works. After many years of wandering from place to place (the list of which include Melkote and Satyagala, near Kollegal), Swami Desikan returned to Srirangam and settled there. Swami Desikan left this material world in the year 1370 after living for 101 years. Before leaving this world, he arranged for the continuance of the "Guru Parampara" by initiating his primary disciple, Brahmatantraswatantra Swami, and his son, Kumara Varada Desikan into the Acharya tradition, the many disciples of whom still continue the Ramanuja tradition through various ashrams and mutts.

Touring India

Swami went on a pilgrimage to several Kshetras like Tiruk Kadigai, Tiru Ayodhya, Kaasi, Mathura, Avanti, Badarikasramam, Puri, Brindavan, Dwaraka, Triveni, Gaya, Salagramam, Purushothamam, Srikoormam etc., (as can be seen from his description of these places in Act VI of Sankalpa Suryodayam) before returning to Kanchi, he also visited Tiruvallikkeni, Tiruvallur; Sri Rangam and allied chola Desam, Thirumalirumcholai, Srivilliputtur, Thiruppulani and allied Pandya Desam, Thiruvananthapuram and allied Malayala Desam.

Swami propagated the Vishistadvaita of Sri Ramanuja and guided people all along the length and Breadth of the nation. Even though he was a very great scholar, he remained humble. With Modesty he marks in one of his works as "Vedaanta Desika Padhe Vinivesya Baalam" which gives a meaning "Oh! How the

Lord had elevated me a mere boy into a competent Acharya."

Works

His writings include devotional works on deities and Acharyas, treatises on Vishishtadvaita, commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, secret doctrines of Vaishnavism, original Tamil poems, epic poems and allegorical dramas in Sanskrit, dialectical works such as Satadushani directed against rival religious schools, treatises on daily life and several other miscellaneous treatises. His gloss on the meanings of the Vedas, reconciling the teachings of the Alvars and the Prasthanatrayi created history because it exposed the Divya Prabhandham of the Alvars to a much wider audience and elevated it to a status equivalent to that of the Vedas in the eyes of the Tamil Vaishnava people.

As a critic, he was as searchingly critical as he was sympathetically tolerant. He ennobled his poetry through philosophy and embellished his philosophy through his poetry. He preached only what he practised and practised what he preached. He was a saint par excellence though he remained a Grihasta throughout. It is difficult to find such a harmonious blend - of Precept and Practice, of Exalted thinking and Simple living. He synthesized in himself an inimitable moral fervor and an inspired spiritual insight.

Works of Divine Hymns of Praise

During his stay in Kanchipuram, Swami took the opportunity to visit several shrines in and near Kanchi and composed lyrics of incomparable beauty on the Lords in the various shrines. Swamy personally involves himself in enjoying the divine beauty of the Lord of Kanchipuram known by name Sri Varadharaja Perumal in most of his works. Many of the following hymns are composed by Swamy in Kanchipuram and in Thiruvahindrapuram.

Legend says that when in Srivilliputtur, he composed "Godha Sthuthi", the presiding Deity of the town Sri Andal was so pleased that she ordained that the Stotra should be recited during her Utsavam days along with Divya Prabhandams. To this day, this recitation is being followed in said "Godha Sthuthi" remains as a Suprabatham for Sri Andal. In glorifying this Acharya there is a very big shrine dedicated for Vedanta Desika in Srivilliputtur and a separate festival for 10 days is being celebrated till today in the name of "Sri Gotha Sthuthi Uthsavam" in Srivilliputtur.

The Hamsa-Sandesha

Hamsa-Sandesha (IAST Haṣasandesha) or "The Message of the Swan" is a medieval love poem set in southern India. Lovesick Rama, the epic hero, petitions a swan to carry a message to his beloved Sita, who has been abducted by the demon king, Ravana. As the swan's route winds through South India, it honors the land which Rama and Sita made sacred, whose beautiful landscape and peoples it describes in full. The Swan shoots like an arrow across the ocean to the island of Lanka and there he sustains the pining and near-suicidal Sita with his message. But more than this, the poet also pays deep homage to Kalidasa's "Cloud Messenger". This work is four things: a fine poem in its own right; a suggestive retelling of the Ramayana; a pilgrim's guide to the holy sites of South India; and a work that develops the poetics of Kalidasa's "Meghaduta" and gives them a devotional and heroic twist.

Paaduka Sahasram

Paaduka Sahasram or "1008 Verses on the Sandals of the Lord" is considered to be Desikan's Magnum Opus. The whole work is a monument for supreme devotion and superb poetry, all in one night's intuition, - an overnight miracle of one thousand verses! It was done by him just as a fulfillment of a competition committed to as a challenge by his disciples. All this was composed by Desika (as he puts it, by the Grace of the paduka of the Divine) in just one quarter of the night, actually the third quarter. The earlier two quarters were devoted by him, as soon as he accepted the commitment, to yoga and yoga-nidra (=sleep induced by yoga and resulting in intuition).

Paduka Sahasram has 32 "Padhadhi"s. Reading each padhadhi everyday, thereby completing in 32 days. Many believed to have achieved their wishes by completing this exercise. Doing parayana of paduka sahasram helps to attain moksha. Wonderful language, chitra-padams were used in these slokas. Mainly sung on the padukas of Lord Rama, Lord Renganatha and Lord Krishna, praying for attaining Moksha.

Paduka Sahara Parayanam yields miraculous benefits and self-realization.

The Sloka for Moksha : Prathibhayaha Param Thathvam Bribrathi
Padmalochanam Pachimayam Avasthayam Paduke Muhyatho Mama
There are many stunning slokas like full sloka is constructed with word "ya".
Likewise one sloka has been constructed with a word "padapa".

Practicing / Reciting Paduka Sahasram takes one to Bhakthi Marga

Importance in Srivaishnava Tradition

A poet, philosopher, logician, and a scrupulous Anushtatha he took upon himself the task of upholding the concepts preached by Bhagavad Ramanuja. It is because of him that 'Ramanuja Darsanam' came to be recognized by the world. Swami Vedanta Desika was the brightest star in the firmament of Visishtadvaita next only to Bhagavad Ramanuja.

Vadakalai sect of Sri Vaishnavites consider that "No writer among the followers of Ramanuja fought for the rightful place for Divya Prabandhams as did Swami Desika" where as Thennacharya sect of Sri Vaishnavites consider Sri Manvala Mamunigal in equal reverence. His prolific compositions in pure Tamil, pure Sanskrit, Praakrit and Manipravala bear ample testimony to the fact of his genius. Even while young, he used to attend the Kalakshepam discourses of Nadaadur Ammal along with his maternal uncle, Appullaar (Kidambhi AppuLLaar-descendent of Kidambi Aacchaan- Ach-Arya Ramanuja's direct disciple) who was also his Acharya. Before the age of 20, he excelled in all that a person ought to learn. His exposure to Vedas, Divya Prabandhas and Sastras at a very early age provided him with an encyclopedic knowledge and this treasure house of knowledge was matched only by his exemplary modesty and humility- which rarely go together among scholars.

The Archa murthi of Hayagriva which was originally worshipped by Goddess Saraswati and handed over by her to Bhagavad Ramanuja was being subsequently worshipped by Pillaan and Pundarikaaksha. This Pundarikaaksha was the son-in-law of Appullaar, and was working as the Rajaguru of the Rayar Samasthaanam in the north. As ordered by the Lord, Pundarikaaksha handed over the murthi to Swami Desika with royal honors.

Defence and Recovery of Srirangam

In about 1312 A.D, during the Muslim invasion of Srirangam by Malik Kafur, the General of Allauddin, Sultan of Delhi and in 1323 A.D during the invasion of Ulugh Khan there was a great commotion. Fear gripped the minds of everyone as to what might happen to the temple and the Lords Archa murthis. To inspire his fellows, Vedanta Desika composed the poem "abhIti stava". The Acharyas deliberated under the guidance of the centenarian Master, Sudarsana Bhattar.

It was decided that one group under Pillai Lokacharya (who was equally advanced in age) was to take the Utsava Murthi and his consorts covered up in a palanquin to Tirupati. The party under Sudarsana Suri was to stay put at Srirangam, after erecting a stone wall in front of the Sannidhi of Moolavar to cover him from the sight of the marauders. Swami took Sudarsana Bhattars two

sons and the manuscripts of shruta Prakaasika (the elaborate commentary on Sri Bhashyam chronicled by Sudarsana Bhattar during the Kalakshepams of Nadadur Ammaal) to safety at Tiru narayana puram via Satya mangalam. But, before he could do that, the Muslim army attacked them and massacred many of them. Swami hid himself with his wards in the midst of corpses and spent the night. In the morning, they moved towards Satyakalam village in Karnataka en route to Tirunarayana puram.

After the sack, his old classmate Vidyaranya visited to assess the situation. Later, Vedanta Desika's mantra-disciple, the brahmin Gopanarya was among the three generals deployed by the founder of the fledgling Vijayanagara empire to recover the south from muslim forces led by the Madurai sultanate. Gopanarya, inspired by a dream involving Vishnu according to legend, vowed to restore Srirangam. Having first captured Gingee, he temporarily housed the Srirangam idols moved back from Tirupati. Then, having defeated the formidable horse archers of the enemy, he reinstalled the idols in Srirangam, and invited back Vedanta Desika. Vedanta Desika returned with his family, and composed a poem in praise of this accomplishment. This poem was inscribed on the wall of the temple upon its resanctification.

Salutation

A 'Thanian' is a 'laudatory dedication verses' composed on a 'Aacharya' (in simple terms [Guru]) in Sri Vaishnavism by one more great Aacharya who either being the pupil of the former or by a person who was greatly admired by the former. The 'Thanian' of Swamy Desikan are (in ITRANS)

"rAmAnuja-dayA-pAtraM j~nAna-vairAgya-bhUShaNaM |
shrImad-venkaTa-nAthAryaM vande vedAntadeshikaM ||"

This taniyan was composed by Sri Periya Parakala Jeeyar swamy of Sri Parakala Mutt on the day of star of Hastham, the star of Sri Varadharaja Perumal of Kanchipuram in the Tamil month of Avani. This taniyan is recited before starting Divya Prabandham — the works of Alwars by Vadakalayars. The meaning of this taniyan is "I salute the great Venkata Natha also called Vedanta Acharya and Lion among poets and logicians and who was well adorned by both Knowledge and discretion and who well deserved the grace of Athreya Ramanujar who also had the same name."

His son Kumara Varadacharya has composed a thaniyan on Swami Desika. This thaniyan is recited before reading Sri Bhasya of Sri Ramanuja and any Sanskrit stotra of swami desikan by Vadakalai sect of Sri Vaishnavites. In ITRANS, it is:

"shrImAn venkaTa-nAthAryaH kavitaArkika-kesari |
vedAntAcharya-varyo me sannidhattAm sadA hridi ||"

The meaning of this verse is "the great lion of poets and the great preceptor of Vedanta (that Swami Venkatanatha was) should reside in his heart always." It is good to note that, Sri Kumara Varadhacharya was a great scholar and has also composed "Pillai Anthathi" in Tamil and "Sri Desika Managalam" in Sanskrit, on Swamy Vedanta Desika. These two works are chanted in most of the Vadakalai Divya Desam till today. This has a recorded history of past 650 years.

"Seeronru Tooppul Thiruvengkata mudaiyan
par onra chonna pazhamozhiyul- OronRu
thane amaiyadhO Dharaniyil Vazhvorkku
Vanerap PomaLavum Vazhvu ||"

The meaning of this verse is "For a person who desires to ascend up to the Heavens, even a single statement of the great Acharya, Tooppul Tiuvenkadamudaiyan (Vedanta Desika) uttered by him for the benefit of humanity would be sufficient to lift him up to his desired goal".

Vazhi Thirunamam

Vazhi Thirunamam is a set of "Salutary Verses" that will be chanted in the Temples at the end, marking the closure of the day's Divya Prabandha Chanting. The Salutary Verses are sung in the Temples to ensure that these temples and the practices as established by the Acharyas and Sri Ramanuja would be followed for ever. Swamy Desikan's Vazhi Thirunamam is being chanted in most of the Vadakalai Divya Desam all over India. The Vazhi thirunamam with the English Transliteration is as following:

"Vanja Para Samayam Mattra Vandhon Vazhiye
Mannu Pughaz Bhoothooran Manamuhappon Vazhiye
Kanja Thirumangai Ughakka Vandhon Vazhiye
Kaliyanurai Kudi Konda Karuththudayon Vazhiye
Senjol Tamil Maraigal Thelindhu Uraippon Vazhiye
Thirumalai Mal Thirumaniyay Sirakka Vandhon Vazhiye
Thanja Parakadhiyay Thantharulvon Vazhiye
Than Tamil Thoopul Thiruvengkadavan Vazhiye!!!
Nanilamum Than Vaala; Naan maraigal Thaam Vaala
Maanagaril Maaran Marai Vaazha
Gyaniyargal Senniani Ser Thoopul Vedantha Desikane

Innum Oru Nootrandirum!!!
Vazhiyani Thoopul varum Vedathasiriyan
Vazhiyavan Paadhara Vindha Malargal
Vazhiyavan Kodhila Thal Malarai Kondadi Kondirukkum
Theethilla Nallor Thiral!"

The meaning of the Tamil Verses are as following:

"May Your grace live long; for you have changed many unrighteous paths to the righteous path

May Your grace live long; for you have lived a life as pleasing to Sri Ramanujacharya

May Your grace live long; for you have given joy for great men with your service

May Your grace live long; for you have been an embodiment of the words of Thirumangai Alwar

May Your grace live long; for you have presented the Tamil Vedas the Divya Prabandams very clearly

May Your grace live long; for you have proved your incarnation of being the Divine bell of the Lord of Seven Hills

May Your grace live long; for you are blessing us with the path of Salvation

May Your grace live long; for you are the Lord of Seven Hills whom came to elaborate the Tamil Verses"

"May our Swami Desikan live for one more century, for the well-being of the Worlds (The Earth, the worlds above Earth, the worlds below Earth and the Eternal world), for the well-being of Vedas, for the sacred text of Nammalvar's

Thiruvaimozhi to present glorious in sacred Sri Rangam; Oh Swami Vedanta Desika, the dusts from your holy feet

are being worn by the great Gyanis to get betterment in their Spiritual life; May You live one more century for our sake!"

"May Your grace live long; the grace of Swami Desikan who was born in Thoopul, who has no equivalent in knowledge; who is our

greatest Philosopher; Long live His Lotus Feet! Long live the sacred men who are divine and pious always meditating and

celebrating the grace of this Acharya and who are staying away from all sorts of evil deeds and who are always surrounded with

the good and sacred deeds!"

It is praiseworthy to note that, even though the 'Vazhi Thirunamam' is being sung for various Acharyas of Sri Vaishnava tradition. But it is for only Swamy Ramanuja and Swamy Vedanta Desika, this Thirunamam is apt, as only these two

great personalities lived in this material world for one full century and continuously practised and preached the Vishishtadvaita and have set the ideal models for a highly elevated living for the human beings.

Ascending the Divine Abode

Swami Vedanta Desika lived for 101 years and he realized that the time had come for him to reach the divine abode of Srīman Narayana during his stay in Sri Rangam. Sri Ranganatha of Sri Rangam was very happy with the service that Swamy Desikan had done for Ramanuja's Vishistadvaita by working with it thorough out his lifetime. Swami Desika consoled everybody and instructed all to continue their divine works and follow the Ramanuja dharshanam. By then, because of the grace and tireless service this philosophy of Sri Ramanuja this philosophy of Sri Ramanuja got the name "Desika Sampradhayam". Having lived a full and rich life for 101 years and being satisfied with his work on earth, Swami Desika cast his tabernacle of flesh, praying to Udaiyavar (Sri Ramanujacharya) and Kidambi Appullaar by placing their Paadukas on his head. With Swamy's Head kept on the laps of Nainarachar (Sri Kumara Varadhachariar) and his Lotus feet on the lap of Brahma Tantra Svatantrarar (Sri Periya Parakala Jeeyar of Sri Parakala Mutt, while his Sishyas chanted Tiruvoimozhi and Upanishads, He left for the Divine Abode of God-Head Srīman Narayana. He attained Paramapadam in Tamil Sowmya year in the Tamil month Kartigai in the star of Kartikai. In the Kali yuga year 4471 which corresponds to 1369 AD in Sri Rangam.

Later, Sri Ranganayaki thayar of Sri Rangam ordered that a sannidhi should be made for Swami desika close to her sannidhi inside the temple. Also it is believed that she ordered that no other acharya sannidhi will be made hereafter inside the temple as a mark of respect to this great acharya, which is being followed to this can see the desikan sannidhi in front of the thaayaar sannidhi in Srirangam.

Sri Vedanta Desika's Judgment on Tatvamasi

Sri Akshobhya theertha of madhva school had camped in the cave in front of the shiva temple on Hanchukallu betta in Mulubagilu and advaitin Guru Sri Vidyaranya in a cave even now called Vidyaranya guha.

The meaning of "Tatvamasi" shruthi was the topic of the debate. Akshobhya muni rejected Vidyaranya's interpretation of the shruthivakhya as per yukthi, with the help of nigama agama pramanas and established sarvajna sidhanta. It was a critical, specific, clear and a suited explosion of pramana vakyas. The judge shrI Vedanta Desika wrote his decision in the form of shloka and sent it.

"asina tattvamasina parajivaprabhedina | vidyara?ya? mahara?ya?
ak?obhyamuniraccinat ||" with the help of the sword "tatvamasini" which actually
means difference between jeeva and Brahma, Akshobhya yathi felled the dense
forest called Vidyaranya. To commemorate this event a victory post was erected
on that mountain top. The public debate between Akshobhya theertha and
Vidyaranya that took place and Vedanta Desika's judgment shloka were inscribed
for record on a pillar post and it was called as jayasthamba.

Ashtabhuja Ashtakam

Vedanta Desika

Bhagavad Dhyana Sopanam

Vedanta Desika

Bhu Stuti

Vedanta Desika

Garuda Panchasat

Vedanta Desika

Hayagriva Stotram

Vedanta Desika

Kamasika Ashtakam

Vedanta Desika

Paramartha Stuti

Vedanta Desika

Shodasaayudha Stotra

Vedanta Desika

Sri Stuti

Vedanta Desika

Varadaraja Pancasat

Vedanta Desika

Vegasetu Stotram

Vedanta Desika

Yatiraja Saptati

Vedanta Desika