

Haridasas of Karnatak

Shri. Mahipatidas : life and works

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1. Life :

During the Muslim rule in Bijapur (adilshahi), a prince married a Hindu woman. Hence non-muslims held high posts both in the army and the administration. Apart from Urdu, Kannada Marathi and Telugu were the state languages. People who knew them liased between the rulers and the ruled. Tax collection and keeping of accounts were important for the smooth running of administration. These departments were mostly manned by Brahmins. The more intelligent among them acting as vakils or ambassadors at the court. Because of this, there was lesser fanaticism, and holy people of all faiths, and places of religious worship flourished. One reason, why differences did not flare up was, the path followed by all the saints was that of devotion. In a way this was responsible for social stability, and the continuation of old traditions.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, there was a Brahmin couple at Aigali (Belgaum dist) . They had two sons, Venkatesh and Gururaj. Thinking they had a better chance of livelihood at Bijapur, they shifted to the capital. The father Koneri rao became a religious preacher, that helped him to support the family. He gave both his sons whatever education was possible. The elder went back to his place to become a village accountant. The younger had a religious bent of mind and studied the Sanskrit classics. With his fine voice he delivered talks on religious topics, and narrated stories from mythology, charming the people.

Koneri rao was friends with a well-known baron, and he introduced his son to him. Starting as a clerk, he very soon became his p.a., by his efficiency. His responsibility and office duties did not prevent him from performing his daily rituals. He married a girl, Tirumalabai, who cooperated with him in all his activities, and the family prospered.

One day when Gururao was on his way to his office, a naked fakir on the roadside beckoned to him. He was called "Nanga shah" (lit. naked king) and was a follower of the Sufi faith. He wandered about the city and sometimes was found in a trance. Rao was in two minds, should he go or not. It was said, whatever the fakir uttered came true. Reluctantly he went and sat before him. The fakir gave him a once-over, and saw a ring on rao's finger. He said "Why this fetter ?" Snatching it away he threw it in a deep pit before him. Rao was dumbfounded, for it was not a ring but the office seal. How could he enter the office without it ? The fakir began to guffaw, and said "Very fond of it aren't you ?" Receiving no reply, he straightway jumped into the pit and came up with as fistful of rings. Looking at them rao was thrilled, but could not make his choice, and nearly fainted. It was a traumatic moment for him. Without a word he advanced to touch the

fakir's feet. But he withdrew them quickly, and said "No, no don't do it. The time is ripe for you to go and see a guru, meet Bhaskar swamiji at Sarwad and he will guide you".

Gururao returned home and found his wife absent, she had been to a temple. When she returned in the evening, she was surprised to see her husband at home. When he told her what had happened, it was her turn to be excited. The fact was, being issueless she went to the temple everyday with the hope of meeting the swamiji to get his blessings. That day she had been able to do so and he had told her to come to him with her husband. Both were overjoyed at the turn of events.

Next day the couple went to the temple, and waited for the swamiji. When they were ushered in the swamiji straightway said "Six months since we came here, and you found time to meet us today. Perhaps it was because of your encounter with Nanga shah, isn't it?" The couple begged to be excused, and fell at his feet. Swamiji placed his hand on Rao's head, and it was a moment of spiritual illumination. Lights, sort of flashed in his mind. From that day onwards, he began to speak about his experiences, accepting Mahipati as his nom de plume.

This meeting made him a mystic and later he was blessed with two children.

Resigning his post, rao gave up his all to the poor, and settled down at Sarwad. He engaged himself in rigorous spiritual practices, and within a short time was able to get all the powers that accrue from such a routine.

The swamiji was happy at this achievement, but when the disciple wanted to stay, he sent him away saying he had work to do. He came to Bijapur, and had many followers. He guided them on the spiritual path. Shortly afterwards his wife gave birth to twins, and they were named Devaraya and Krishnaraya. The cosmopolitan atmosphere at their home was noteworthy, and drew people of various faiths, speaking different languages. All were welcome, and the saint-poet wrote for them in different languages.

Because of political unrest, and the raging plague he had to shift to Shapur for some time. When he returned he settled down at Kakhandiki, at the request of the people there. The elder son joined the state administration, but the younger one trod his father's path and stayed with him. Many land grants to Mahipati das, preserved in the archives, speak of his popularity.

After an active life of sixty five years he passed away on new moon day in the month of kartik (1705). His vrindavana is at Kakhandiki on the bank of Krishna.

The bulk of his works is available. Being a linguist, he studied mystic literature in all the languages. The vocabulary of his works is rich with terms belonging to all faiths. Because of this wide sweep, his works have been interpreted in different ways. But he has stressed the basic tenets of Madhwa philosophy in many of his works. So though he stuck to dualism, he was not squeamish about referring to other ways of god realization. In one

poem he asks, “Why bother about rhyme or metre while describing divine glory?” As though to prove his point, his poetry flows in different forms, to suit different people. Both the scholar and the common man (and woman also !) will find ample literary, spiritual fare there. Apart from the local dialects, we find in a single poem lines in different languages! A very difficult achievement, because in any language the poet finds it difficult to find words which suit the metre and rhyme.

This spiritual light, which burnt steadily, in an age of political and social turmoil, has it any message for our troubled times?

I wonder !

2. Works : selected, abridged

1.

How lucky the residents of Gokula, that are in
Govinda’s company !

To feed the Lord we perform
sacrifices, pray,
but (here) He calls the cowherds,
eats from their plates, and relishes it.

With fingers that hold Laxmi’s hand,
He plucks blades of grass, feeds the cows. calves,
pats them on their backs.

The sages repeat His name, pray,
and still miss him,
but when the cowgirls call, He readily joins hands !

Naughty our Mahipati, isnt He ?*

* is the poem about sayujya mukti ?

2.

Say Hari,
Where were you hiding ?
I consulted many, but they simply
shook their heads,
I passed through myriad lives,
but found not your trace,

I studied many faiths,
spoke to many pandits,
stood on my head,
but found not your grace.

Suddenly your form flashed before me,
swept away my doubts,
this glimpse of Mahipati,
drew me to Him, made me happy, ever.

3.

See the wonders , worked by this child !
He, brought up the scriptures, saved them,
bore the earth on his back,
conquered the earth,
smashed a pillar, came out,
covered earth and sky with his feet,
held a hatchet, finished the warriors,
bridged the sea, made love to many,
wandered naked in Tripura,
rides a horse and is ever present
before Mahipati. *

* the ten incarnations

4.

Forgive my sins, merciful one , master,
for I'm family.
Isn't it cruel to watch poor kids
drown and die ?
Isn't it cruel to hurt palms that gave ye
a knife and a pie ?
Protector of the poor,
stretch your hand, help me get up,
Mahipati.

5.

The real devotee * knows Vishnu
to be supreme,
dives in the streams of devotion,
has a glimpse of the lord by the grace
of the guru,
is above passions, hopes, disappointments,

happy always,
and leads me to Mahipati by the hand

Let our acts be in the spirit of service,
thinking we live in His presence.
Say our clothes, ornaments, food
are offerings to Him,
our spoken words hymns,
our movements circumambulations,**
our wives, sons and friends His flunkeys,
our assets, profits, losses presents to Him,
and then pray for humble acceptance !

* vaishnava in the context ** pradakshina

6.

You may study scriptures, logic
be a pandit, and argue,
be learned to be a monk,
but to get right knowledge,
it's difficult.

You may learn tricks, recite mantras to
remain under water,
but to get the key to freedom, release,
is difficult.

You may tour the earth, learn languages,
let go your fancy, write a poem,
pluck strings*, sing a song,
gamble and win money,
but still happiness may slip thro your fingers.

You may climb mountain tops, jump down,
swim across rushing rivers,
hold hissing serpents, be with wild beasts,
but to find the path of renunciation
is difficult.

You may hike in the country, discover things,
sit silent for hours,
but to earn the grace of simple Mahipati's lord
is difficult !

* of a musical instrument

8.

Mere clever talk not related to the
Supreme being is vain.

It is like,
a string of pearls, round a woman's neck
but without black beads*
a garden full of herbs, but without the life saver**
a meeting of the family, good people missing,
a fine body but without breath,
a show of piety without god-realization,
eyesight without a vision of Lord Mahipati.

* worn only by women married and husbands alive ** sanjivini

9.

Know thyself, till then talk not,
otherwise it'll be --
like the blind standing before the mirror,
like the coward holding a sword,
like the widow showing off her virtues,
like the eunuch marrying a thousand wives,
like the pundit who cant clear doubts,
or like the eyes, which haven't seen the feet
of Mahipati,
refulgent like a thousand suns.

10

Live with the divine cow,*
you wont be a heretic,
sit under the wish-yielding tree,**
you need not fear hunger,
dwell on the bank of the Ganges,
be free from sins,
stand in the sunlight,
fear no shadows,
touch the feet of Mahipati's guru,
get rid of worldly ties.

* kamadhenu ** kalpavriksha

11.

Pearls for sale, good people.

Pearls formed in the oyster of contemplation,
by the raindrops of the guru's grace
lying at the bottom of the ocean of knowledge,
and transported in the ship of devotion,

Pearls handled, sold by the jewelers,
the good the pious,
store them carefully, mind them always.

12.

To be free from sins, dip in the Ganges,
to feel cool walk in the moonlight,
to have wishes fulfilled, pray to
the wish-yielding tree,
but just* meet good people,
meet their glances,
and be, sinless, cool,
and prosper !

* for a change ?

13.

I bow to
The devotees, happy by the grace of the guru,
the wise who have mastered godlore,
the sages who have conquered ire, keep calm,
the learned aware of the differences,*
those who have crossed Tripura, conquering
the three and six,**
those who have conquered themselves, are happy
and are light-bearers to others,
and those elders, who have led me to
Mahipati's presence.

* panchabheda ** three--trigunas, six--passions

14.

The road to god realization is different,
It's not a show, of knowledge, learning,
skills, tricks,
it's not repeating Your name , or just keeping silent
or being buried in pits, fasting,*
it's not just wandering in different lands, countries,
wearing the guise of a mendicant,
but it is getting the grace of humble Mahipati's master,
refulgent like a thousand suns.

* hatha yoga

15.

.
Friends, come to the table, laid with dishes
of spiritual joy,
dishes enjoyed by sages,
dishes that bring not nausea.

Bring good company,
see, the lord himself serves,
look at the variety, but not left and right,
have your fill, eat and let others eat,
let not doubts, fears spoil your dinner,
feel blessed, and praise lord Mahipati

16.

Different people, different obsessions.

One is obsessed with acquiring wisdom,
another with the study of scriptures,
one is obsessed with the gazing of stars,
another with the gaining of wealth,
one is obsessed with the practice of sorcery,
another with the worship, of Shiva or shakti,
one is obsessed with building tanks, sinking wells,
another with the erecting of temples, monasteries,
one is obsessed with manufacture of drugs, medicines,
another simply with love and hate.
Obsessions simply to fool the world,
but my obsessions are You and your feet,
Mahipati.

17.

Grant me your grace Guru.

I cant repeat your name like kid Pralhada,
or make friends with you like Phalguna,
I cant appeal to you like the elephant-king,
or seek your shelter like brave Vibhishna,
I'm not a good devotee to show devotion
or sing your praise,
I'm just a flunkey among your flunkeys,
Accept me, refuge of the fallen,
Lead me to release.

18.

You stand before a mirror,
covered with dust,
the guru comes
to remove the rust
and lo behold, your bright bust !

Worms to their nests,
builder-wasps carry,
after some days, see the wasps,
fly out merry.*

Such is the guru's grace.

* people believe the worm turns into a wasp

19.

Brothers, don't fight over gods,
see the supreme, father of the creator,
have no doubts, walk the straight path,
and reach the truth.

See the harvest of knowledge, devotion,
and renunciation,
reaped by the good ,the pious,
to be happy.

20.

I'm your housedog , master,
and'll run after none.
my teeth, my pride you smashed,
your homily was a call to me, to come
to you tail wagging.

Faithful,
knowing my happiness lies here,
I'll stay,
no other faith'll lure me,
my barks come out as words of praise,
I lie at your feet, Mahipati,
happy always ! *

* notice the fine symbolism.

21.

Cut the talk, You and I cant be equal !
You are without parallel, ever perfect,
whereas I a doubter, grope in the dark,
You are above worldly affairs,
and I stuck in them.
You are mercy, grace incarnate,
and I a cunning paltry creature,
I'm a dullard, hold me by the hand,
Mahipati, lead me to you.

22.

The sun shines not nor the moon,
But still there's light.
Indra, other gods, the mystics
in their contemplative state* see it.
In the middle there's a form, beautiful stable,
brimming with joy.
look at it, and see how you
and I* disappear.

* turiyavastha ** ahambhava
(a mystic experience)

23.

I saw your feet today, Guru Bhaskar swami,
and they like the orbs of the sun and moon
dispelled the darkness in my mind.

I listened to Omkara and twelve other sounds*
and was no longer deaf.

I learnt the pranava,
--repeated thousands of times--
and rid my body of devils.

I sang your praise, uttered your magic name,
and was no longer dumb.

I saw your form, all mind **
and the chains of my ignorance, doubts fell away.

And listening to your pregnant words,
my cycle of birth and death broke .

Such is your grace, merciful one !

* shrutis and sound of different musical instruments
** chidrupa

24.

The divine cow* stands in our house,
showers her milk**, day and night,
the wicked know it not,
but the wise relish it and feel great joy.

No heating , no churning but
butter is ready,
come eat it with the sages,
and be fresh.

Here or anywhere, repeat the guru's name,
see its power , see its magic
be filled with joy.

* the guru ** spiritual joy

25.

See the lord enthroned in your heart,
The guru holds your hand, pushes aside the curtain
and leads you to Him.

Unaware of Him,
we pursue a shadow,
It is the guru's grace,
that proves it's a show !
Now touch the feet of the Lord,
and those of the guru, with all your heart.

26.

The sun of self-realization comes up,
brings, light that shines night and day,
and showers of immortality,
(as a result)
worldly bonds fall away
the lotus in the heart blooms,
conflicts in the mind are resolved,
sins past, present and future are destroyed,
and there's light and light,
joy and joy !

Om Tat Sat