

Acharya Madhwa - A brief note

- Prof. D. V. Potdar

Madhwa Jayanti was celebrated recently and scholars must have spoken at length on the life and works of this great master.

I have had the privilege of reading only a few works of this saint but have been very much impressed by them. In the following few lines, I wish to give my reasons for this admiration.

Being a student of literature, I read great works in the languages I know - English, Kannada, Sanskrit and Hindi. I analyze them and try to understand the reasons for their greatness. During my high school days, I was introduced to two great Indian classics - the Ramayana and the Mahabharata - thanks to the summaries of the books written by C. Rajagopalachari. Madhwa had realized that these two were necessary reads for his followers. But when he looked at the texts of the books available, he found that they were corrupted and contained interpolations and omissions. So the first thing a correct text - and then he found that it was necessary to write a new narrative summarizing both the classics. A stupendous task! But Madhwa did it successfully and the Mahabharata Tatparya Nirnaya is unique - it has no parallels in any literature of the world. When we read it, we are amazed at Madhwa's capacity to grasp the essentials and put them in a poetical, quick moving narrative. The readability of the work, its lucidity, skillful use of different meters suited to the occasion, the different styles etc cannot be described but appreciated only while reading the book. This single work, read by any person is sure to make him exclaim, "My God! This Madhwa is a genius, I have never come across this type of work before!"

Time and space available to me being short, I will just consider one or two more works of Madhwa here. The Vedas, Upanishats and Puranas etc are oceans of spiritual knowledge and wisdom. If one can dive and go to the bottom, one can come up with handfuls of pearls and gems. But how many of us are able to do so? Vedavyasa realized this and has done the diving for us. He has come up with bucketfuls of precious stones which he has preserved for our perusal. The Brahmasootras are aphorisms in which spiritual

knowledge and wisdom have been crystallized, but a glance at them will puzzle the reader - these capsules have been so tightly packed by Vyasa. So a scholar has to come to our aid to unravel what was in Vyasa's mind when he wrote each aphorism. Here again, Madhwa comes to our help. He quotes extensively the sources which go in the making of the sootras. One is astonished by his scholarship and memory because the sources are so many and so scattered. Madhwa's capacity to read Vyasa's mind correctly is also amazing. Perhaps the explanation is - Vyasa is Vishnu's avatar and Madhwa is Mukhyaprana - an inseparable pair. Hence Madhwa's commentary is so lucid and illuminating. Shankara and Ramanuja have also written commentaries, but not being familiar with them, I do not wish to make any remark here.

Again we have a difficulty - the sootras and the commentary run for pages. Has the common man the time and energy to go through them daily? Madhwa anticipates this and once more does us a favor - he summarizes the contents of the sootras and the commentary in just thirty two stanzas. Amazing! This work, Anubhashya is for daily recitation and can be easily memorized. What a great benefit to the devotees - to have the treasure house of spiritual knowledge at the tips of their tongues. When we see these two works, we gasp with wonder at Madhwa's capacity to summarize and also to expound.

The Acharya's skill in building up the tenets of his faith and in crushing the arguments of his opponents can be clearly seen in a simple work like Dwadasha stotra.

Thus we see, a person who has read a few works of the master can enthuse over them. What about scholars among you who have studied his entire works? You can talk about him not for hours, but I think for years.

I am happy this work is being done here in the USA during weekly satsangas. My humble prayer is that it should continue for the benefit of the devotees in the long run.

OM TAT SAT.

Note: This write-up was published on 10/17/2005 on the occasion of Madhwa Jayanti.