

Haridasas of Karnataka

Shri Vyasaraya : Life and works

- Prof. D.V Potdar

1. Life:

In the middle of the fifteenth century, Shri. Bramhanya teertha was camping at Bannur (dist. Mysore). A woman came and prostrated herself before him. He blessed her," Live long with your husband". She was both happy and surprised, because her husband Ramacharya had just died, and she wanted to immolate herself on her husband's pyre. When she told the swamiji what had happened he went with her, recited the Dhanwantri mantra, and sprinkled water on the body. Ramacharya sat up, and the swamiji blessed him "Beget a worthy son".

In course of time the woman became pregnant, and delivered a male child. He was named Yatiraj, and was educated in the village. After upanayana, the swamiji, who had an eye on him took him under his wing .He was very fond of him, because of his brightness, eloquence, courtesy and devotion. When he was seventeen he ordained him and named him Vyasa teertha.

Then he was sent to Kanchi, a vedant university in those days. His argumentative skills made him well-known there, and he defeated many a pandit. It was during such an occasion that he summed up the tenets of Madhwa philosophy in a quartet. Shripadraj wanted him at Mulbagil, so he went there. The guru took up this disciple, and it was a rare combination, profitable for both. Once during pooja time, Shripadraj. was a bit late in attending, and Vyasaraya opened a tin kept shut so far. An idol of Gopal Krishna emerged, and Vyarsaya felt it was dancing. He was in an ecstasy, and kept tune by hitting together two shaligrams..Watching this, his guru was fascinated and happy.

Since Brahmanya teertha was pretty old, he called Vyasaraya to him and declared him as his successor.

At this time the affairs at the Tirupati temple were in a mess. Saluva Narasimha, the king wanted Shripad raj to take charge. He in turn deputed Vyasaraya for the job. He remained there for twelve years and brought about many reforms which have been recorded. The king showered him with gold and jewels, which were gifted to the poor and deserving.

When Saluva Narasimha became the emperor of Vijayanagara he declared Vyasaraya as his guru, so he had to shift to the place. Krishnadeva raya, the successor also continued the same the honours.

Vyasaraya installed Hanuman idols in many parts of south India.

During his tour of north India as an envoy, he argued and defeated, a) Pakshadhara Mishra who came all the way to Mulbagil to pay his respects to Shripad raj ,

b) Laxmipati whose disciple started the Chaitanya pantha in Bengal c) Basava bhat, who presented him with a shivalinga, worshipped in the math even today.

During Vyasaraaya's stay at Hampi the place attained the status of a university.

Once the conjunction of three planets was to have an evil effect on the king, in fact dethrone him. So he requested Vyasaraaya to sit on the throne to ward it off. He did so and was showered with jewels, which he gave away to the learned.

In spite of his busy schedule Vyasaraaya found time to ordain disciples. They are Purandara, Kanaka, and Vijayeendra. Vadiraja, of Sondha was not his disciple, but he had a lot of regard for him.

Somnath, a great poet, but a follower of monism was impressed by Vyasaraaya at his very first meeting. He has written a biography of the swamiji. The following interesting points may be noted,

- a) The Vijayanagar kings took political advice from the swamiji.
- b) The swamiji built many Brahmin colonies for the propagation of religion and knowledge.
- c) Because of his hold many other heads of maths could visit Vijayanagar.
- d) Even Muslim kings honoured him.

Thus Vyasaraaya, who was a notable figure in matters spiritual and secular passed away on the fourth day of the dark half of the month Phalguna (A.D. 1548). His memorial is in Nava vrindavana, Anegundi, (Dist. Bellary)

Tributes:

a)

I had a glimpse of the lotus feet
of Vyasaraaya,
as a result of the fruition of the merit
of many lives,
All my ancestors were blessed,
And free from defects, by the grace of saints
I became worthy to worship Shreesh.

-- Purandara das

b)

Here floats a strange cloud, Yogi Vyasaraaya,
leading us to the feet of Vishnu.

The 'star' heretics it covers,
moves like the wind,
settles the dust of passions,

thunders, “ Vishnu is supreme” ,
flashing eyes, that dispel ignorance,
irrigates the crop of right knowledge,
and floods the minds of the devotees
with the stories of the Lord,
this guru of Vijayeendra !

--Vijayeendra teertha

2. Works - Selected, abridged:

1.

When an elephant called,*
You woke up, leapt from your serpent-bed,
brushing aside, Laxmi, and Brahma’s
extended hand,
jumped over sandals rushed by Hanuman,
refused Garuda’s services,
and never turned back.
Favour me in like manner,
Siri Krishna.

* Gajendra moksha

2.

The Lotus-born*, worships him, as her lord,
Brahma as his father,
Sarswati as her father-in-law,
The pinaka-holder** as his grandfather,
And we all as our master,
But even he bows down to Ugrasena ! #

* Laxmi ** Shiva # (born a human behave as one)

3.

Butter stolen, you prefer to
sacrificial offerings,
You prefer to beg,
rather than accept the gifts of the learned,
You prefer a bowl of pounded rice,
to the services of Laxmi,
You gloat over the invitation of Vidura,

Strange are your ways, Siri Krishna.

4.

Siri Krishna,
I know not the path that leads to you.

Is it taking a bath, meditation?
look at the frog in the pond and the stork,

If it is repeating your name,
my mind wanders,
If it is fasting, look at the serpent
that seldom eats,

Is it asceticism ? look at Ravana,
Is it giving a daughter in marriage?
Look at Jarasandha, father-in-law of Kamsa,

Is it blood relationship ? See Diti's sons turning
out demons,

Is it wealth ? look at the fate of Duryodhana,

Is it kinship ? look at Shishupala, your cousin,

I conclude, all these are dead ends,
Only service to you leads to redemption.

5.

Wise people listen,
Here's a patent medicine for all
worldly ills.

Our wise sages searched for it in all shastras.
and have found it effective.

No forests were dug, nothing powdered,
It's not bitter on the tongue,
rich or poor can try it,

No restrictions regarding food or drink,
no physicians need be consulted,
daily doses are invigorating,

No minerals to be powdered, no roots to be distilled,
No botheration with oils, or ashes,

even divine beings try it,

One dose washes away accumulated sins,
brings joy,
It's just uttering the words
Siri Krishna !

6.

I stand in the presence of the lord,
no more fear of hell for me.

My eyes watch his figure,
My ears listen to his story,
Day and night I contemplate him,
My body swirls in ecstasy.

My hands sweep his house,
My head bows,
My legs take me around him*,
My nose smells his musk-mark**

My tongue utters his name,
I'm drunk with the nectar of devotion,
I see Siri Krishna, in my mind's eye.

* his idol ** on the forehead

7.

Hari,
Brahma, Shiva, and the myriad souls
that pack the many worlds,
know not your greatness,
like flies swarming figs,
or donkeys standing under,
the beginning or the end of the tree,
like the ants living in their nests,
the vastness of the world,
or like the insects and birds
that fly in the sky, its depth.

8.

He is born blind indeed,
who sees not Hari in his heart,
He is a dullard, and deaf,
who listens not to His story.

He has hands withered,
who worships Him not,
He is lame,
who dances not in joy.

He is a dish licked by a dog,
who sprinkles not holy water on his head
He eats like a pig,
who eats food not offered to Him.

Acts not dedicated to Him,
Are like the vows of an unfaithful wife.
Charity that pleases Him not,
is a widow's necklace.

Songs that praise Him not,
are the brayings of a donkey.

Drink nectar, that frees you from
birth, old age and death,
not toddy.
Sip the milk of the divine cow,
not that of a pig.

Ride an elephant or a horse,
not a donkey that overthrows,
Serve Siri Krishna, who grants highest bliss,
not humans, never !

9.

This child, since birth crawls,
does not walk.
Did rain, river, darkness frighten him?
Being handsome, is he planet struck ?
Did some evil eye fall on him
during early moonrise ?
Was his mother careless
while feeding him ?
Did his mouth go dry while
devouring butter ?
Is it because of the poison of
Pootana's milk ?

Or do you simply fear your brother
Siri Krishna ?

10.

Moonlight floods the woods,
But there is no sign of Krishna.

Winter's over, spring comes,*
the koel calls, the mango tree sprouts,
jasmine buds burst, and dazzle the eyes.

The bath water cools, the garland fades,
and I'm love lorn.
Like a forest pond drying up,
the water un drunk,
like the un trod path, overrun with grass,
like the wildflower un plucked, unworn,
my life runs to waste.

The bed prepared is un slept,
sweat spoils my make-up,
my heart beats fast,
but there is no sign of the lord,

My body, mind and eyes,
like the veena and cymbals,
are ready to orchestrate his arrival,
and I'm thrilled.

But anxiety wilts me now,
For there is no sign of Siri Krishna.

* Gopi's lament

11.

You're happy to bow to the wishes
of your devotees, Siri Krishna.

To keep Bhishma's vow.
You took up arms,
Sovereign of the three worlds,
You washed people's feet for Dharmaraj,
Commander of the gods,
You drove Partha's chariot,
Though beyond the ken of Brahma and others,
You became Bali's doorkeeper,
Consort of Shri and Bhru,

You make love to cowgirls!

12.

What can you grant me, god among gods ?
A house ? you dwell in the forest,
A bed ? you rest on a leaf,
A damsel ? you are a celibate,
Friendship ? you dwell in my heart,
Food, clothes ? you have to go, steal,
Ornaments ? you are content with a feather*, a leaf**,
An army ? you are a cowherd,
Charm ? you are cloud blue.

Your energy you have spent on the cowgirls,
Truth you have bestowed on devotees,
Ah ! there is one thing you keep away,
Release#, grant i me that, and make me happy,
Siri Krishna.

* of a peacock ** tulsi # moksha

13.

My body is worn-out, but greed remains,
My eyes and ears have become dull,
but my love of land and women lingers,
My legs and hands have gone limp,
but enjoyments still tempt me,
Old age, diseases keep people away,
but my will to live remains,
My sins are galore, but repentance is far away.

Days pass, I feel lost,
I pray for your grace, be merciful,
Lead me to you, Siri Krishna.

14.

Fearsome is the road to hell,
Painful the torture there,
Horrible the flunkeys of Yama,
But your devotees need fear nothing,
If they just bow and shout your name
Siri Krishna,
The flunkeys take to their heels,

remembering their master's orders.

15.

From sunset to sunrise,
I throw dice, watch plays
eyes unblinking.
But the moment I take up a book
to read your story,
or to listen to it with devotion,
I doze, I snore!

Like a cat crawling on mice,
sleep creeps on us,
spoils our vigil, Siri Krishna.

16.

I try to meditate,
but cannot concentrate.

Like a wife in the embrace
of her husband,
thinking of her lover,
My mind well-versed in shastras,
is lured by evil, ever.

Like the tongue cloyed with sweet dishes,
craving for toddy,
Like the elephant in the Ganges,
hurling mud over his body.

Pure and perfect one,
let my mind be chained to your feet,
oblivious of the surroundings.

17.

Burst not with pride,
you paltry human.

For can you compare with--
Hanuman in renunciation, Bhishma
in bravery ?
Narada in song, and Rama in charm ?
Harishandra in truthfulness,
and Vishwamitra in will-power ?
Wali in strength, Karna in charity ?

Meru and Mandara in grandeur,
Bharata in devotion ?
Kala (time) in might, and the sun in heat ?
Mahesh in wrath, or our Siri Krishna
in grace ?

18.

In the cycle of birth and death,
Who will be the mother, who the father,
Who will be the wife, and who the sons,
Who will be the kith and kin,
And who will be born to whom, we know not,
I pray for your grace, Siri Krishna.

19.

Moral lapses ? Just remember
Gopi's paramour,
Be free .

Sins of stealing ? Just remember the
butter stealer,
Be free.

Sins of cruelty ? Just remember
the uncle slayer,
Be free.

For your daily sins,
Just remember the uplifter
of the fallen,
Be free.

20

Of what use,
wearing clothes,
eating food offered to you,
if my sins pursue me ?

Of what use worshipping you,
if I wallow in worldly affairs,
and suffer ?
It is like sunrise or sunset for the blind,
Siri Krishna.

21.

People who utter not your name
Siri Krishna,
Are like, wells gone dry,
villages without temples,
trees without shade, creepers without fruit,
donors without funds, masters without pity
devotion without awe, or the strong who just idle.

22.

Either in secret or for fun,
Either in mockery or for show,
Either asleep or awake,
Just bow, and shout Siri Krishna,
The shout'll be the bridal music of
Dame release!*

* mukti kanya

23.

Gopi said--
Krishna can you not sleep, because,
You listen to the pleasantries whispered
by your favourite queen,
resting in your bosom ?

Are you kept awake by the
recitation of the Vedas,
by Brahma nestling in your navel ?

Or is it because of the squabble of
the devotees in your belly ?
Krishna was shamed, shut his eyes!.

Om Tat Sat

I am indebted to Sri. B. N. Upadhyaya for lending a copy of the book.