

GURU TATVA

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सदाशिव सभाशुभां शकशजायैभद्यमामू !
अस्मदायेपयन्त वन्देगुपस्पशपशमू !!

eminent thinkers and Sages as Sri Gaudapadacharya and Sri Govindapadacharya.

The Guru as defined in the Sastra is a spiritual Master who removes the darkness of ignorance from the heart of his disciples, a darkness which defies the brilliance of the Sun, Moon, fire and other luminous bodies. The light capable of dispelling such a darkness must be a supernal and super-physical one. A patient suffering from gastric trouble cannot possibly get any relief from a doctor who is having that trouble himself. A trite Sanskrit passage says "How can a man who is unable to cross a stream help others to cross it?". The Guru therefore must have himself transcended all darkness and be free from ignorance and bondage if he is really to help other to be equally free.

Light by itself is never perceived or practically useful unless it manifests itself in a visible form through a lamp or other concrete thing. The actual factor that illuminates the surrounding space is the bright flame in the lamp; but it has to appear in a wick, be fed by oil and be located in a vessel. The wick, oil and Bessel are in no sense luminous, but without them there can be no perceptible light. The wicks may vary in their materials; one may be cotton thread and another plantain fibre. The oils may be of various sorts; one may be cocoanut oil and another kerosene. The vessels may be made of different substances; one may be made of gold and another of mud. These differences do not materially affect the capacity of the light shining in the several lamps to dispel darkness.

Sri Sankara Bhagavatpadacharya was certainly a spiritual luminary of a very extraordinarily high order. He was so not only because of his being an incarnation of Lord Mahesvara Himself, but because he traced his spiritual heritage through a long line of succession beginning with the Lord and ending with such

With a view to perpetuate for ever his spiritual line for the benefit of posterity, he established four Mutts in the four directions of this sacred land at Sringeri, Jagannath, Dwaraka and Badari, and placed at the head of each of them one of his well-known disciples Sri Sureshvaracharya, Sri Padmapadacharya, Sri Hastamalakacharya and Sri Totakacharya to carry on the light of Vedantic knowledge.

Each one of them was great in his own way, one for unrivalled erudition, another for intense devotion, the third for deep introspection and the fourth for devoted service to the Guru; but they were all equally great in the illuminating knowledge of the Self which it was their prime function to transmit on, pure and unsullied, to their successors so that they also in turn keep aloft the torch of spiritual illumination for the guidance of earnest aspirants.

A burning lamp can light up other lamps and any any of the latter may in turn light up others. It may be that in some the light is soft and in some others dazzling. We must not forget that though the several lamps vary ever so much in their material, oil or wick or even in the intensity of light given out, they all share the common characteristic of being able to dispel darkness.

Similarly among the successors of Sri Sankara Bhagavatpadacharya in the Sringeri Peetha, some may have been tall and handsome personalities and some others short and plain. Some may have been proficient in Vyakarana or Tarka and some others in Meemamsa or

Sahitya; some may have attained great fame and some others led quiet lives. But they have all had the essential characteristic of having the light of self-realisation which is indispensable for a spiritual Guru.

Besides being eminent scholars and realized souls, many of the Acharyas have been also writers and poets of no mean order, and many have been adepts in Yoga and mantra Sastra. Sri Vidya Tirtha who is still believed to be in Lambika yoga in a cellar beneath the wonderful structure known as Sri Vidya Sankara Temple at Sringeri and Sri Vidyanaraya well-known as the founder of the Vijayanagara kingdom and credited with being carried in a palanquin borne by invisible celestial beings are striking examples of those who combined in themselves all the excellences known to the Sastras.

Coming to recent times, we have had Sri Narasimha Bharati, a yogi of a very high order and the stories current about his miraculous powers are numberless. His successor Sri Satchidananda Siva Abhinava Narasimha Bharati reputed to be an incarnation of Sri Sankara Bhagavatpadacharya himself was of a softer mould and more inclined to popularize the teachings of the Great Master, made Kalady the birth place of Sri Sankara a valuable pilgrim centre for all India and founded Sanskrit colleges at Sringeri and Bangalore.

Sri Chandrasekara Bharati, who succeeded him, was of a sterner and more serious turn of mind and, though he added to and improved the several institutions for the propagation of learning, set more value on individual perfection and demonstrated by his own life how one could be self realization and

pregnant silence materially influence and benefit the world.

His Holiness Sri Abhinava Thirtha Swaminah, the present Acharya, has on the other hand, realized and equal important, especially in these days, of closer personal contact with the people for their spiritual education and uplift.

As pointed out before, the variance in the temperament, mental outlook or method of influencing does not make any difference in the power of the several Acharyas to dispel darkness and doubt from the minds of earnest devotees who approach them for spiritual guidance is as they have equally inherited the power from their predecessors through an unbroken line of succession from God and Sri Sankara Bhagavatpadacharya.

It is well to remember that if a burning lamp lights up another lamp, the latter lights up still another lamp and so on successively, the light burning in the latest lit lamp though seemingly its own is really the same as was found in the original lamp. On the same principle the light of knowledge now radiating from the present Acharya of Sringeri is verily the light of Sri Sankara himself which again is not different from the primordial light of God the Ultimate source of all Knowledge. That is why the devotees include in their daily prayer a stanza equating the Guru with the Tirmurtis and the supreme reality which transcends all name and form and is Pure being, consciousness and Bliss.

गुस्त्रह्या गुस्विष्णु गुस्दैवी महेरवर :!

गुस्साक्षात् मर्तु ब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुश्चे नम : !!
