

CONTRIBUTION OF SRI RĀGHAVĀNANDA TO SANSKRIT LITERATURE

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The state of Kerala has a great claim to be proud of its unique contributions to various branches of Sanskrit language such as philosophy, literature, Śāstra-s etc. The Keralite authors had also contributed much to the commentatorial literature. Śrī Śaṅkara, the great Advaita philosopher and commentator had achieved a prominent position among the commentators in any language. Following the path of this Keralite sage, others like Sri Rāghavānanda etc. have also contributed their mite to commentatorial literature. This study highlights the contributions of Rāghavānanda, the famous Keralite philosopher, commentator and poet who flourished in the beginning of the 14th century AD.

Rāghavānanda has a prominent place in Keralas Sanskrit literature, especially as a commentator. He was a Nampūtiri Brahmin by birth. After his preliminary education he became an ascetic. So he got epithets like Athyāśrami, Yogi, Muni etc. He was the follower of Kṛṣṇānanda, the great ascetic of the 13th century AD. From Rāghavānanda's works we get some reference to this preceptor who lived in Nāgapura. Rāghavānanda was a devoted and favourite student of Kṛṣṇānanda. Rāghavānanda's house was situated on the banks of the river Bhāratapuza (Niḷā) in south Malabar in Kerala. This is evidenced by the verses that appear at the end of Kṛṣṇapadī, his commentary on Śrīmadbhāgavata:

tatpādapadmabhramareṇa seyam
 śrīrāghavānanda munīśvareṇa/
 śrīmannilātīrasamudbhavena
 turyāśramam mṛtyubhayādītena//
 govindamātmani adhigamyasākṣāt
 bhaktiprabhedairapi yogabhedaiḥ/
 tatprītikāmena kṛta cirāya
 jīyāt kṛtiḥ kṛṣṇapadī pṛthivyām// ¹

He got his fame as an eminent scholar, commentator, Vedānta philosopher, poet, Yogin and scholar of Tantra and Mantrāśāstras. The works of Rāghavānanda reveal that Advaita was of the supreme concern for him. His regard for Bhakti also ranks as much. However, it cannot be said that he considered Advaita and Bhakti as if they were two separate compartments. In fact, his works seemingly integrate Advaita philosophy with Bhakti. Besides, the original work Sarvamataśaṅgraha, he wrote commentaries on six important texts. He became popular among scholars and devotees through his famous commentary of Śrīmadbhāgavata named Kṛṣṇapadī, a simple, lucid and scholarly exposition. This work throws light on his greatness as a famous commentator, Advaita philosopher and faithful follower of Śrī Śaṅkara. Thus he had created an important niche among the commentators and critics after Śrī Śaṅkara.

He combined in him the superior virtues of a good commentator, such as wide knowledge of various books, scholarship in various sciences (Śāstras), ability to assess the depth of poetic talent. He had been endowed with the special gift to capture the spirit and essence of the original text (Mūlagranthas) and the ability to convey the same to his readers. Further, he is himself a poet of merit as evinced in many of the verses of his commentary which are excellent specimens of his poetic skill and talent.

Date

Scholars have difference of opinion on the date of Rāghavānanda. Prof. K. Rāmapiṣāroṭi² places Rāghavānanda in the 17th century AD on the assumption that he was a contemporary of Mānaveda of Calicut. But he could not substantiate his stand. From available evidences Kṛṣṇānanda, the author of Siddhāntasiddhāñjana, who lived in the 17th century, was a native of the Chola country, while the preceptor of Rāghavānanda was born in Nāgapura on the banks of the river Ganges.

Vaṭakkumkūr Rājarājavarma³, the celebrated Sanskrit scholar and historian of Sanskrit literature, identifies Rāghavānanda with the legendary Kokkunnattu Svāmiyār of Peruñcellūr, whose date is traditionally believed to be 1310 AD, in accordance with the Kali year suggested by the expression "puṇyāṭavyāmyatissyāt". According to Rājarājavarma, the date of Rāghavānanda is 1250-1325 AD.

Ullūr S. Paramesvara Iyer⁴, the famous poet and literary historian does not agree with this view on the ground that the Svāmiyār was not famous either as a scholar or as a poet. According to Ullūr, the date of Rāghavānanda is the first half of the 14th century AD.⁵

K. Kunjunni Raja⁶ establishes the date of Rāghavānanda with the help of the following arguments. In the Kṛṣṇapadī, the commentary on Bhāgavata, Rāghavānanda refers to Rāghava, a king of Kolattunāṭu -

vivekanikaṣopale vahati rāghave kolabhūmagho-
nyalaghu vikramaihya avanacakrarakṣādhuram/
akuṇṭhamatīvaibhavād pṛthagārttavaikuṇṭhataḥ
satī kṛtiriyam munerajani rāghavānandataḥ//⁷

Divākara, the author of the Amogharāghavacampū, praises a Rāghava who is also a king of Kolattunāṭu -

iti dhrtarasasāraigadyapadyairudāraiḥ
kavituraviturasyaśrāvyamākārṇya kāvyam/
bhṛgupati vijayaśrīcihnamahnāya tuṣya-
nnabhilaṣitamamuṣyāmoghayadrāghavenduḥ//⁸

The Campū was written by Divākara in 1299 AD. If these two kings are identical, the date of Rāghavānanda must be around the beginning of the fourteenth century. S. Venkita Subrahmonia Iyer⁹, assigns sage Rāghavānanda to the beginning of the fourteenth century AD.

On the basis of the above evidences, it can be concluded that Rāghavānanda lived in the beginning of the fourteenth century AD.

Life and identity

After Śrī Śaṅkara, Rāghavānanda has the pride of place in the heirarchy of commentators that Kerala has given birth to. Historians have given conflicting opinions on Rāghavānanda's life history and the period to which he belonged.

Vaṭakkumkūr Rājarājavarma¹⁰ has said that Rāghavānanda was born in the Kokkunnathu illam of the famous Periñcellūr village. This illam still exists near the Taḷippraṅampu temple. After his education, he in his youth became a Sannyāsin there by violating the Āśramadharmas and pursued his life as a Śivayogi. Hence the epithets Śivayogin, Śivāṅgal, Athyāśrami were applied to his name. During the last years of his life, he underwent a life of penance in the forests and attained salvation.

But Ullūr S. Paramesvara Iyer refutes the view that Rāghavānanda was born in Kokkunnattu illam of Taḷippraṅampu, on the strength of the evidences got from Rāghavānanda's Kṛṣṇapadī commentary on Śrīmadbhāgavata -tatpādapadma-bhramareṇa syeyam...¹¹ etc.

From this we find that Rāghavānanda was born on the banks of the river Bhāratapuṣa (Niḷā). Since this river flows a long distance away from Tali-pparaṃpu, there is no possibility that Rāghavānanda was born in Talipparaṃpu. From the concluding verses of Kṛṣṇapadī, we learn that Rāghavānanda's patron was a king by name Rāghava and that he ruled in Kolattunāṭu.

vivekanikaṣopale vahati rāghave kolabhū... etc.¹²

According to K. Kunjuni Raja,¹³ this Rāghavānanda is usually identified with Kokkunnattu Svāmiyār whose date is traditionally given by the chronogram "puṇyāṭavyām yatissyāt" denoting the 'Kali' days corresponding to 1310 AD. There is no proof for this identification. Rāghavānanda was a devoted student of a Kṛṣṇānanda. His house was situated on the banks of the Bhāratapuṣa (Niḷā) in Kerala. He took to asceticism and became a great Yogin and an ardent devotee of Viṣṇu. The commentary on the Bhāgavata was composed by him when king Rāghava was ruling over Kolattunāṭu.

Vaṭakkumkūr Rājarājavarma¹⁴, in his Keralasāhityacaritram - Carcayum Pūraṇavum, says that the view of the prosodists of Kerala is different from the above views. He quotes Kochi Rāmavarma Parīkṣit Tampurān: "keraḷeṣu ponnānitālūk pallikkaragrāme ālaṅgoṭṭukara ceṛumukku iti nāmadheyakhyāte bhūsurottamakuleṣu janmalebhe/ etadvamśyāccedānīm ceṛuvannūr (Shornur) ityasmāt deśāt sārhdakośaparimite deśe vasati."¹⁵

Bhāgavata Bhaktas of Kerala adheres to the above view. Rāghavānanda is famous as "Cerumukkil Atyāśrami."

Rāmavarma Parīkṣit Tampurān¹⁶, the former Mahārāja of Cochinchina, states in the introduction to Śrīmadbhāgavatam with Kṛṣṇapadī, the commentary of Rāghavānanda: 'It is accepted without contradiction

that our author's (Rāghavānanda's) Pūrvāśrama was Alaṅgoṭṭukara, Cerumukk in the Pallikkara village, Ponnāni Taluk, South Malabar. Tradition has it that his father desires of getting an unusually brilliant son, visited the famous shrine Mūkāmbikā in South Canara Dist. and after performing penance there, returned home and before long, had his wish fulfilled. Early, the boy showed signs of great intelligence and deep love for God. With advancement of age and wisdom, he reached such a stage of 'Jīvanmukta' that he had no regard for material welfare. For him there was no distinction of caste or creed and he used to take his food from whomsoever he got it. This wounded the feelings of the orthodox set and they nick-named him Atyāśrami (non-observer of the duties of Āśrama). Even now he is known by that name among Kerala Brahmins. Once he happened to visit Kūṭallūr Mana, a centre of Sanskrit learning in Kerala, once famous as the home and school of many Pandits. He asked one of them to lend him a copy of Śrīdhariyam for perusal. Thinking him an outcaste, his request was not complied with. This incident goaded him to write this commentary; he handed it over to them and was not seen or heard off thereafter.'

It could be stated in the light of the above facts of history and geography that Rāghavānanda could not have been born in Taḷippaṅgampu, and that he was born on the banks of Bhāratappuḷa, as can be ascertained from his own verse tatpādapadma... etc.¹⁷ Rāghavānanda became famous among the renowned scholars of the day, mainly due to the commentary he wrote on Śrīmadbhāgavata. So elaborate and Advaitic a commentary had not been written before Rāghavānanda's time, and the only previous commentary that had recognised as a major one was Śrīdhara's Bhāvārthadīpikā. Hence Vaṭakkumkūr calls Rāghavānanda "Kerala Śrīdhara".¹⁸

Preceptor

Rāghavānanda's preceptor was Kṛṣṇānanda, who was a Sannyāsin. He refers to his preceptor in most of his works. In Kṛṣṇapadī commentary he gives some details about himself and his preceptor. Kṛṣṇānanda was a native of Nāgapura. Properly instructed in the Yajurveda, Kṛṣṇānanda took to asceticism in his early youth and went on a pilgrimage to the south. At Padmanābhapuram he studied Vedānta under Śivāmṛtaparamahansa and later went to Trissur where he looked after the spiritual well-being of the people. He attained Samādhi at Tṛcchammaram.¹⁹

Disciples

Rāghavānanda had a disciple called Vināyaka. He wrote Siddhāntapañjaram dealing with Advaita principles in the form of questions and answers.²⁰ He had another disciple named Rāmānanda. He wrote the Bhāṣya on Tripuropaniṣad known as Tripuropaniṣadbhāṣyam.²¹

Works

Rāghavānanda has contributed seven works to Kerala Sanskrit literature. They are six commentaries and one original work, Sarvamatasāṅgraha. It is a manual of all systems of Indian philosophy. He became famous by his Kṛṣṇapadī commentary on Śrīmadbhāgavata. In his Tātparyadīpikā, the well-known commentary on Mukundamālā of Kulaśekhara, he gives Advaitic interpretations to the verses. His other works are, a commentary on Paramārthasāra of Ādiśeṣa, a commentary on the Laghustuti of Laghubhaṭṭāraka, a commentary on the Viṣṇubhujāṅgaprayāstotra of Śrī Śaṅkara and Dhyānapaddhati, the commentary on Gopālamantra.

Sarvamataśaṅgraha

Sarvamataśaṅgraha deals first with the eight Pramāṇas such as Pratyakṣa (perception), Anumāna (inference), Āgama (verbal testimony), Upamāna (ana-logy), Arthāpatti (presumption), Abhāva (non-existence), Sambhava (equi-valence) and Aitiḥya (tradition). The Darśanas or schools of philosophy like the Lokāyata (Cārvāka), the Kṣapaṇaka (Jainism), the Sugatha (Buddhism), the Kāṇāda (Vaiśeṣika), the Akṣapādika (Nyāya), Seśvaranirīśvarasāṅkhya (Yoga and Sāṅkhya), Prābhākaraḍimīmāṃsaka (Prābhākara and Bhāṭṭa), Saguṇa-brahma, Nirguṇabrahma and Paurāṇika systems are also explained.

His classification of different systems is different from that in other treatises. Of the six systems the Lokāyata (Cārvāka), Kṣapaṇaka and Bauddha are the non-Vedic schools and the Tarka, Sāṅkhya and Mīmāṃsā are the Vedic ones. The Bauddha school is again sub-divided into Mādhyamika, Yogācāra, Sautrāntika and Vaibhāṣaka. The non-Vedic schools become six fold; similarly, the Vedic schools also will be six, if the Tarka is split into Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika, the Sāṅkhya into Seśvarasāṅkhya and Nirīśvarasāṅkhya, and the Mīmāṃsā into Brahmamīmāṃsā and Karmamīmāṃsā. The systems of Prābhākara and Kaumārila are dealt with under Karmamīmāṃsā and the Aupaṇiṣada and Paurāṇika schools are described under Brahmamīmāṃsā. The doctrines of Nirguṇabrahma and Saguṇabrahma of the Aupaṇiṣada schools are then considered and the work then closes with a description of the Paurāṇika school.

At the end of the work, the author Rāghavānanda observes that the whole Prapañca of duality (Dvaitaprapañca) is endowed with Māyā and the one Brahman alone is real.²² In the conclusion of the text Rāghavānanda presents his own Advaitic views. He establishes the unity between Jīva and Brahman. Thus Sarvamataśaṅgraha is helpful to

understand the essentials of various systems of Indian philosophy in a nut shell.

Kṛṣṇapadī

Rāghavānanda's Kṛṣṇapadī is an elaborate and scholarly commentary on Śrīmadbhāgavata. Kṛṣṇapadī has attained great popularity in Kerala. The commentator has given attention to highlight the devotional aspects as well as the philosophic thoughts in the original text. At the beginning of the commentary, in fifteen Ślokas, he salutes the Gods, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, Gaṇapati, Brahmā and Goddess Sarasvatī and sages like Nārada, Vedavyāsa, Śuka, Śaunaka and Śrī Śaṅkara, and his preceptor Kṛṣṇānanda. In Kṛṣṇapadī Rāghavānanda's reverence for Śrī Śaṅkara Bhagavadpāda and his words shows that he is a commentator who follows the path of Śrī Śaṅkara.²³ He states that he has written it for the sake of 'Ātmaśuddhi' and that he has given the name Kṛṣṇapadī to this commentary because those who study it will reach Kṛṣṇapāda.²⁴ Kṛṣṇapadī gives importance to Bhakti, and at the same time exposes the tenets of Advaita. It is a speciality of Kṛṣṇapadī that the ideas of the original text are faithfully explained in a lucid style. The commentator's scholarship and skill in writing are expressed in Kṛṣṇapadī because he has included in it relevant material from authoritative texts. He has enriched it by passages from Śrutis, Smṛtis and Pramāṇas from Vedas, Brahmasūtra, Upaniṣads, Purāṇas and Bhagavadgītā. Rāghavānanda's ability in prose writing is also notable. Assessed from any point of view, Kṛṣṇapadī is far better than other commentaries on Bhāgavata.

Commentary on Paramārthasāra

Paramārthasāra of Ādiśeṣa with the commentary of Rāghavānanda, was published by the curator, T.S.S. No. 12, Trivandrum. Paramārthasāra is a short manual dealing with the essential principles

of Advaita philosophy. It is written in the form of a dialogue between a preceptor and a disciple. Rāghavānanda has made his commentary on Paramārthasāra in detail based on the principles of Advaita Vedānta. Before explicating each Śloka the commentator has given a brief note on the subject of the Śloka. The commentary establishes the principle by introducing the Pūrvapakṣa and then rejecting it by reasons and Pramāṇas. The commentator deals in this book also with the unity of Jīva and Brahman (Jīvabrahmaikyam)²⁵ itself which is the subject of Advaita Vedānta philosophy.

Tātparyadīpikā - The commentary of Mukundamālā

Tātparyadīpikā²⁶ of Rāghavānanda, a vivid and elaborate commentary on Mukundamālā, is a scholarly production giving Advaitic interpretation to the verses. He blends the Advaitic system of metaphysics with the Bhakti cult making Viṣṇu the Saguṇabrahman. Rāghavānanda admits that he is commenting on Mukundamālā for self purification. In his commentary we can see that the well known Vedānta topics are slightly touched upon.

Commentary on the Viṣṇubhujāṅgaprayātastotra

The incessant production of lyrics in Kerala has enriched the Sanskrit language and literature. Śrī Śaṅkara deserves special credit for his contribution to Stotra literature. The most important of his Stotras is Bhujāṅgaprayāta written in the metre of Bhujāṅgaprayāta. Viṣṇubhujāṅgaprayātastotra of Śrī Śaṅkara contains fourteen stanzas. The commentary of Rāghavānanda begins with the Śruti of Bhaviṣyapurāṇa, that Śaṅkara will incarnate along with four disciples for the well-being of the world : caturbhissahitaśśiṣyai śaṅkaro'vataraiṣyati.²⁷ Rāghavānanda made the commentary to this Stotra with scientific carefulness, without causing any deviation from the meaning of the text.

Commentary on Laghustuti

Laghustuti, is a Stotra in praise of Sarasvatī, the Goddess of learning, by the poet Laghubhaṭṭāraka. The text with commentary of Rāghavānanda was published by the Curator, T. S. S., No. 60, Trivandrum. Among the authorities on Mantra-Tantra, from Kerala, Rāghavānanda has an important place. The commentary of Laghustuti reveals his greatness as a scholar of Mantras. From various sections of the commentary of Laghustuti, it can be understood that Rāghavānanda is a scholar of unique quality and erudition in Mantra and Tantra literature. Illuminating the Brahmatattva, Rāghavānanda concludes the commentary. The great power mentioned in different forms is really the one form of everlasting bliss, the Brahman itself.

Dhyānapaddhati, a commentary of Gopālamantra

Rāghavānanda has written a commentary on Gopālamantra in verse namely Dhyānapaddhati.²⁸ The palm-leaf manuscript of the Dhyānapaddhati is incomplete. The work is written in Malayalam script. In this work Rāghavānanda pours forth his ecstatic devotion to Lord Viṣṇu.

The readings of Rāghavānanda are highly appropriate. He has accepted the Keralīyapāṭha in Kṛṣṇapadī, the famous commentary on Śrīmadbhāgavata. Rāghavānanda was a commentator of great merit and an erudite Advaita scholar. He holds an equally eminent place as a poet of remarkable originality. Rāghavānanda's commentatorial works deserve a better treatment from philosophers of Sanskrit literature in Kerala.

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