

Sanskrit Literature under Vijayanagara

Nalini Waghmare

Introduction:

The year 1336 A.D. is a landmark date in the history of India and in particular the history of South India and ought to be etched in the minds and hearts of all those who cherish the culture and heritage of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. For it was in that year that the foundations of the mighty Vijayanagara Empire were laid on the banks of the river Tungabhadra in Karnataka by two brothers named Harihara (Hakka) and Bukka. They were two of the five sons of a chieftain named Sangama and inspired by saint Vidyāranya of the Sringeri Mutt began the process of creating a very great and glorious empire in South India. The reason for doing so was to thwart the growing threat of the Muslim invasion of South India. Their capital was called Vijayanagara (city of Victory) which is now the ruined site of Hampi in Karnataka. The four dynasties that ruled over the empire are ¹ 1) Saṅgama dynasty (1336-1485 A.D) ,2) Saḷuva dynasty (1485-1505 A.D.), 3) Tuḷuva dynasty (1505-1567 A.D.), 4) Araviḍu dynasty (1570-1646 A.D.)²

The establishment of Vijayanagara empire in the 14th century is an epoch making event, not only in the history of South India, but of India itself. The main object of the founders was to protect the Hindu culture and Dharma from being molested by the alien invaders. As remarked by the eminent scholar S.Krishna Swamy Aiyangar, "The Vijayanagara empire came into existence for the purpose of saving South India being completely conquered by the Muhammadans to save Hindu religion and give it a chance for its natural development, at least in this corner of India without molestation from outside agencies, and to save for India as much of its culture and learning as it was possible to

do, with these objects before it, the empire came into being formally under Harihar II of Vijayanagara".³

The city of Vijayanagara thus founded about the year 1336 speedily grew in importance and fighting men of Hindus, beaten and driven out of their old strongholds by the advancing Muhammadans.⁴ In spite of the fact that South India has played a dominant role in the development of Indian culture.⁵ The Vijayanagara kings encouraged all languages without discrimination. Besides Kannada and Sanskrit, there was considerable growth in Telugu and Tamil literature.⁶ The Sanskrit language and literature found a tremendous encouragement at the hands of the rulers of Vijayanagara and some of them were scholars of distinction. Vedic and allied literature received much attention from Vidyāranya and his associates. Among the numerous saints and seers who lived in South India, the name of Vidyāranya stands out and will ever be remembered not only by the religious-minded, but also by students of the history of South India. Vidyāranya was a great scholar saint who lived in the 14th century and strove hard for the propagation of Hinduism.⁷

He is primarily remembered today for helping Harihara and Bukka, the sons of Sangama in establishing the famous Vijayanagara Empire and has thus been termed by scholars as a king-maker, patron saint and high priest. He served as a mentor and guide to three generations of kings who ruled over the Vijayanagara Empire and was held by them in great veneration and esteem. It was in 1336 A.D. that the foundation of the mighty Vijayanagara empire was established on the banks of the river Tungabhadra in present day Hampi (Karnataka). This city which was to become the capital of the empire spreading the four modern states of South India (Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala) was initially called Vijayanagara and also as Vidyāranyanagara, in honour of Vidyāranya, the preceptor

of Harihara and Bukka. Vidyāraṇya wrote the Parāśara-Mād- havīya, a commentary on Parāśara smṛti, which is lucid in its exposition and avoids lengthy discussion. The Pañcadaśī, a popular and comprehensive manual of Advaita Vedānta in Sanskrit was written by Vidyaranya. The Vijayanagara king Harihara I is believed to have constructed a temple in honour of Vidyāraṇya at Hampi. Vidyāraṇya's other works are Śa- ṅkara Vijaya, Rājakālanirṇaya, Sarvadarśana and Vedabhāṣ- ya.,

Sāyaṇa was one of the earliest commentators of the Vedas. It was Sāyaṇa who wrote the Bhāṣya (Commentary) on all four Vedas. Sāyaṇa and his brother Mādhava were ministers in the court of Bukka, king of Vijayanagara. It was under the patronage of Harihara and Bukka that Sāyaṇa and his brother inaugurated a period of great literary activity. Under their valuable guidance, available knowledge in all branches of Sanskrit study, secular and sacred, was systemized and written down in the form of manuals and text books. Sāyaṇa is also the author of an anthology Subhāṣitanidhi written in the reign of Kampaṇa. There is also a popular work called Dhātuvṛtti attributed to him. This work gives the forms of the roots in the various tenses with their derivatives. Ayurvedasudhānidhi, is a medical text written by Sāyaṇa. Sāyaṇa also wrote in Harihara II's reign the Yajñatantra-Sudhānidhi, a handbook on the Vedic sacrificial ritual. The Vedārtha Prakāśa, a monumental literary work of this period is a lucid commentary on the Vedas prepared by Sāyaṇa. ⁸ Sāyaṇa, was not only a learned man and author of several works but also fought several battles. The works of Sāyaṇa rendered a great help to modern scholars of the occident and the orient. The celebrated Indologist Max Muller has recorded his indebtedness to this great commentator. ⁹ Sanskrit studies received a great impetus under the patronage of the Vijayanagara rulers. The great scholar Sāyaṇācārya during

the 14th century wrote Bhāṣyas on Ṛg Veda Saṁhitā, Kāṇva Saṁhitā, Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa and Aitareyāranya. ¹⁰ Vyāsarāya (1478-1539 A.D) was another great Sanskrit scholar who flourished under the patronage of Krishnadeva Raya. Most of his works were devoted to Dvaita philosophy. Bhaṭṭa Akalaṅkadeva, a Jain pandit wrote a grammar of Kannada in Sanskrit along with a commentary.

Vedānta Deśika (pre-eminent Śrī Vaiṣṇava Preceptor) lived in the troubled times of the frequent invasions of the Tamil country by various armies. Deśika, whose original name was Veṅkaṭanātha, was born in a suburb of Kanchipuram called Tupul to Ananta Sūri and Totaramma in an orthodox Sri Vaiṣṇava family. He later moved to other Vaiṣṇava centres like Tiruvendipuram and the famous temple town of Srirangam, both in Tamil Nadu. This versatile genius was a prolific writer and composer and wrote more than a hundred and thirty works, in both prose and verse, in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Tamil and Manipravala (a unique system of writing which incorporates both Sanskrit and Tamil). He is believed to have composed a thousand verses in the duration of one night in praise of the sacred feet of Lord Raṅgnātha (Viṣṇu) of Srirangam whose ardent devotee he was. Some of his other well-known works are the Yādavābhyudayam which is a very long poem (Mahākāvya) in twenty-one cantos and the Haṁsa Sandeśa which is modeled on the famous poem ,Meghdūta of Kālidāsa. He has also written commentaries on the works of the Alvars or the Tamil Vaiṣṇava Bhakti saints. His works are read and appreciated even today, not only by religious Vaiṣṇavas, but also by students of Sanskrit literature for the splendid language and style. ¹¹

Madhavācārya was a well-known Sanskrit scholar who was intimately connected with the Vijayanagar royal family. He was also a minister at the court of Bukka I. He

was author of a large number of works including Parasarasmṛiti-Vyākhyā, Jīvanmuktiviveka (on Advaita Vedānta) and Jaiminīyanyayamālāvistara. Harihara II's minister, Irugappa Dandanatha, was a scholar of repute. His lexicon Nānāratharatnamālā is well known. Devaṅṅa Bhaṭṭa wrote in about 1445 A.D., the Smṛti-Candrikā, a handbook of Dharmaśāstra. Mādhavamantri, a commentary of Vidyāraṅya composed the Tātparyadīpikā, a commentary on Sūtasamhitā, a part of Padma Purāṇa.¹² Among women writers of this period Gangadevi, Abhirama Kamakshi and Tirumalamba represent respectively the early, middle and closing periods of the Vijayanagara rule in Karanataka. Gangadevi's Madhurāvijayam or Vīra-Kaṁparāyacarita may be regarded as the earliest available Mahākāvya of this period. She narrates in a simple and charming style, the successful expeditions of her husband Kaṁpana, the second son of Bukka I.¹³

Tirumalamba was probably one of the ladies-in-waiting in the Kṛṣṇadevarāya's palace. She wrote a Cāmpu-Kāvya called the Varadambikāpariṇayam, in which she describes the marriage of Acyuta with his queen Varadāmbikā. The Varadambikāpariṇayam seems to be important not so much for its literary merit but for its value as a source book of history; for the authoress appears to narrate the events of which she herself was an eye-witness.¹⁴ She was a scholar in many languages and knew many scripts.¹⁵ Saḷuva Narasiṁha was the first king of Saḷuva dynasty. (1485-1503).¹⁶ Saḷuva Narasiṁha was a scholar himself and a patron of letters. Aruṇagirinātha I of the Diṇḍima family wrote the Rāmābhyudaya and Mahāntaka. Rajanatha II of the same family wrote a poem Sāḷuvābhyudayam. Glorifying the achievements of Sāḷuva, his patron king. These works reveal the glorious political and cultural development under the Vijayanagara kings.¹⁷ Deva Rāya II is credited with the writing of Ratiratnadīpikā and

Brahmasūtravṛtti. Sāluvābhyudayam is a historical eulogy of the second dynasty. The defeat of Sāmbavarāya and the capture of Kanchi have also been referred in it. The Gaṅgādasaprāla Vilāsam of Gaṅgādhara is a contemporary drama which refers to the unsuccessful seize of Vijayanagara by the Bahamani's¹⁸ and the Gajapathi's of Orissa after the death of Devarāya II.

Kṛṣṇadevarāya, the best among the kings of Vijayanagara was a man of versatile genius. During his regime the name of Vijayanagara was heard everywhere trumpets of victory blared all round. People lived in prosperity and plenty. The reign of Kṛṣṇadevarāya marks the dawn of a new era in the literary history of South India. Himself a scholar, a musician, and a poet, he loved to gather around him poets, philosophers, and religious teachers whom he honored with magnificent gifts of land and money. He was so much attached to the company of learned men that he spent most of his spare time, when he was at the capital, in hearing their learned discourses and discussions. Kṛṣṇadevarāya was the author of the famous works Amuktāmalyada and Jānavati Kalyāṇam in Sanskrit. Amuktāmalyada reveals the political philosophy of Kṛṣṇadevarāya and his staunch belief in Lord Viṣṇu. It is more or less a political treaties which reflects the depth of his knowledge in the ancient scriptures like Śukranītisāra and others which contain the fundamentals of the ancient Indian political thought.¹⁹

Kṛṣṇadevarāya's Sanskrit works include Madalasaritra, Satyavaduprenanam, Sakalakanthasāra Saṅgraham, and Rasamañjarī. The Prime Minister of Sāluva Timma, was the author of Bālabharata Vyakhya.²⁰ One of the prominent scholars of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's court was Lolla Lakṣmīdhara, a vaidika Brahman of Kondavidu. Lakṣmīdhara spend his early days in the court of Gajapati king, Pratāparudra, at Cuttack. It is believed that he had a hand in the composition

of Sarasvativilāsa, ascribed to that monarch. He wrote commentaries on several workings including Śivānandalahari of the philosopher of Śāṅkara. The most important of his works is the Daivajñāvilāsa which he wrote in collaboration with another scholar, Kencam Yellaya, by name. The Daivajñāvilāsa is an encyclopedic work of the class of Basavara's Śivatatvaratnākara, containing much useful information on a variety of topics, which, if properly exploited, is bound to enrich our knowledge of the history of the sixteenth century.²¹

Another scholar who migrated from the court of Cuttack was the musician Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa. He easily won a footing at the Vijayanagara court owing to Kṛṣṇadevaraya's fondness for music. In his youth, it is said Rāya learnt to play upon the Viṇā from an eminent artist of the Mādhwa guru, Rāghavendra. When he ascended the throne, he appointed as the music master of his harem, Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa, who composed a treatise on music, called Saṅgītasūryodaya probably for the benefit of his pupils.²² The great minister Sāluva Timma and his nephew Nadinla Gopa were eminent Sanskrit scholars. The former commented on Agastya's Bhārata, and the latter on the well ūknown Sanskrit allegorical drama the Prbodha Candrodaya. Gopa was not only an author but a patron of men of letters. The poets Mallana and Ramakrishna first won recognition at his court in Kondavidu. The most prolific writer on religious and theological problems was Vyāsatīrtha, the head of the Mādhawa sect. He wrote a series of books on theology, logic etc., in order to condemn the tenets of rival sects and establish those of his own. He wrote Tarkatāṇḍava, Nyay-āmrta, Sudhā, Mandāramañjarī, and Mādhawatātparyacandrikā and commented on several Upaniṣads such as the Chāndogya, the Māṇḍūkya etc. Only two writers of the time of Acyuta are known to us at present. Rājanātha Diṇḍima, Acyuta's poet laureate wrote two poems, the Acyutarāyāb

yudayam and the Bhāgavata Campu. The former is an historical Kāvya, in which the author describes the early career and achievements of his master. ²³ The most important scholar at the court of Veṅkṭaṭa I, the later Vijayanagara ruler was Tātācārya. His famous works were Pāṇḍuraṅgamāhāt- mya and Sātvika Brahma vidyāvilāsa. Appaya Dīkṣita wrote 101 works. His celebrated work Śivārkaṃanīdīpikā shows his mastery over whole of Sanskrit literature. Vādirāja who flourished during 16th century is credited with 20 works including Vivaraṇavarāṇam and Padandakhandanam. ²⁴

Mention may be of the playwrights of this period such as Vāmanabhāṭṭa, Bāṇa, Veṅkatanātha, Narasiṃha, Bhāskara, emperor Kṛṣṇadevarāya, Mallikārjuna and Gururama. During this period works on alaṅkāra, saṅgīta and other Śāstras were written. Sāyaṇa's Alaṅkāra-Sudhānidhi, Kṛṣṇadevarāya's Rasamañjarī, Narahari's Naiṣadha-dīpikā and Kāvya prakāśa are some of the works on poetics. Vidyāraṇya, Gopa Tippa Bhupala and Devaṇṇabhāṭṭa composed works on Music. Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa's Saṅgīta-sūryodaya, Kallarasa's Kalanidhi, Lakṣmaṇapaṇḍita's Vaidyarāja-vallabha, Sāyaṇa's Āyurveda-sudhānidhi and Dhātuvṛtti. Lexicons compiled during this period were those of Mādhava's Ekākṣara ratnamāla and Iruguppa Dandadhīnātha's Nānārtha-ratnamālā. Vādirāja compiled a lakh of difficult words. ²⁵ Several works on different philosophical systems were written by eminent men of this period. The Advaita Vedānta under the leadership of Vidyāraṇya, his guru Bhāratīrtha, and his brother Sāyaṇa and others, came to be expounded through several works. The Viśiṭādvaita under Veṅkatanātha and others came to be treated in their writings. The Dvaita Vedānta was the subject of many works composed by Akṣobhyatīrtha, Jayatīrtha, the Ṭkācārya, Raghūttama, Śrīpāda, Vyāsarāya, Vādirāja and Vijayendra. The Śaiva Siddhānta was discussed at length by

Kriyāśakti Ācāryas and Palkurike Somanatha and others.
Śrīpatipandita expounded Śakti-Viśiṣṭādvaita.

Concluding Remarks :

Vijayanagara was established to protect Hindu Dharma in the peninsula from the inroads of Islam. This is well authenticated by numerous inscriptions and the writings of foreign travelers and indigenous authors. Although many of the works have been undoubtedly lost, the few that have come to light bear out the fact that the literary output in Sanskrit during the Vijayanagara period was varied and vast. This is only a meager sketch of the immense mass of literature in Sanskrit produced in the course of four hundred years of Vijayanagara rule. The importance of it cannot be gainsaid for the culture history of our country, if not for the world. This cultural tradition was carried on untarnished under the Peshwas, the Wodeyars of Mysore and the rulers of Tanjore and Madura. This glorious heritage is ours to be cherished as a source of constant inspiration and instruction. It's the duty of the historian to refer the above mention works and rewrite the glorious history of Vijayanagara with the Sanskrit sources and contribute to enrich Indian literature and culture.

End Notes

- 1) See for detail K. R. Basavaraja, History and Culture of Karnataka. Karnataka University, Dharward, 1984 pp. 140-175.
- 2) See for detail Henry Henry Horas, The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara. B. G. Patil & Co. publishers, Madras 1927.
- 3) K. Swamy Ayyangar. The Sultanate/of Delhi, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay.
- 4) Robert Sewell, A Forgotten Empire, A Contribution to the History of India. George Allen & unwin Ltd. London.
- 5) M.N. Venkata Ramanappa's Outlines of South India History with special reference to Karnataka, p.5.
- 6) Phalaksha, introduction to Karnataka History. Shashi Prakashan, Tiptur, pp.126-129.
- 7) Prema Kasturi and Chithra Madhavan, South India Heritage An Introduction, East/West Books, Madras, 2007, p. 299.

Sanskrit Sources of Indian History -III

- 8) K. R. Basavaraja, History and Culture of Karnataka, op.cit, p. 593.
- 9) Panduranga Bhatta, C. Contribution of Karnataka to Sanskrit, Institute of Asian Studies, Chemmanchery, 1988.
- 10) Ibid, p. 33
- 11) Prema Kasturi and Chithra Madhyava, South India Heritage An Introduction op. cit, pp,296-297.
- 12) K.R. Basavaraja, History and Culture of Karnataka, op.cit. pp.593-4.
- 13) Ibid, p. 594.
- 14) N. Venkata Ramanayya, Studies in the Third Dynasty of Vijayanagara. University of Madras. 1935, pp. 424-425.
- 15) K. R. Basavaraja, History and Culture of Karnataka, op. cit, p. 595.
- 16) Phalaksha, Introduction to Karnataka History, Shashi Prakashan, Tiptur pp. 119-120.
- 17) M.N. Venkata Ramanappa's Outlines of South Indian History with special reference to Karnataka, pp.5-6.
- 18) See the detail Hasoon Khan Sherwani. The Bahmanis of the Deccan, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Ltd. New Delhi, 1985.
- 19) Ibid, p. 6.
- 20) Prema Kasturi and Chithra Madhavan. South India Heritage An Introduction op.cit., p. 33.
- 21) N. Venkata Ramanayya, Studies in the Third Dynasty of Vijayanagars, University of Madras. 1935, pp. 422-423.
- 22) Ibid, p. 423.
- 23) Ibid, p. 424.
- 24) Prema Kasturi and Chithra Madhavan, South India Heritage An Introduction, op. cit, p. 33.
- 25) K. R. Basavaraja, History and Culture of Karnataka, op. cit. pp. 595.

References:

- Basavaraja, K.R. History and Culture of Karnataka, Karnataka University, Dharwar, 1984.
- Hasoon Khan Sherwani, The Bahmanis of the Deccan, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Ltd, New Delhi, 1985.
- Henry Heras, The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara, B.G.Paul & Co.publishers, Madras, 1927.

- Karmarkar, Vijayanagara Sexcentenary Commemoration Volume, Vijayanagara Empire Association, Dharwar, 1936.
- Majumdar, R.C. (ed), The History and Culture of the Indian people, Vol.I-XI, Bombay.
- Nayak H.M.,Gopal B.R., South Indian Studies, Geeta Book House, Mysore, 1990.
- Nilakanta Sastri K.A, A History of South India, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1892.
- Panduranga Bhatta.,C., Contribution of Karnataka to Sanskrit, Institute of Asian Studies, Chemmanchery, 1998.
- Phalaksha, Introduction to Karnataka History, Shashi Prakashan , Tiptur,
- Prema Kasturi, Chitra Madhavan (ed), South India Heritage an Introduction, Eastwest Books, Madras, 2008.
- Robert Sewell, A Forgotten Empire, A Contribution to the History of India, George Allen & unwin Ltd, London, 1924.
- Saletore, B.A, Social and political life in Vijayanagara Empire, Vols. I-II, Madras, 1934.
- Swamy Aiyangar K., The Sultanate of Delhi, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay,
- Venkata Ramanappa M.N,Outlines of South India History with special reference to Karnataka.
- Venkata Ramanayya N., Studies in the Third Dynasty of Vijayanagara, University of Madras, 1935,
