

Sri Ubha. Ve. Prathivadi Bhayankaram
ANNANGARACHARYA SWAMIGAL
His Life and Activities

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Jagadacharya Simhasanadhipathi Mahavidwan Sri. Ubha Ve. Prathivadi Bhayankaram Annangaracharya Swami is too well-known a figure—an institution by himself—to need any introduction to the religious-minded. He is a towering personality of unrivalled eminence in the spiritual world, a scholar of deep and extensive knowledge of the literature of philosophy and religion, as well as the literatures of the languages—prose, poetry, and drama (in Sanskrit and Tamil), besides a good knowledge of Telugu and Hindi. He is a unique combination of many things rarely found together in a single individual. These are, a mastery of the Vedas with regard to chanting of the text and a critical knowledge of their teachings as well as the language; a mastery of the

Tamil Prabandhams of the Alwars and the "Secret" teachings of the Acharyas of both text and available commentaries. He is a forceful speaker of rare eloquence, who can hold huge audiences spell-bound by his sonorous and metallic voice and sweetness of exposition. He is an equally forceful and prolific writer—the author of some five hundred books, big and small. He is a great bhaktha, eager to serve the Dieties in temples by group-chanting of the Vedas and Prabandhas. He has travelled the length and breadth of India many times, to worship the famous shrines and to propagate Sri Ramanuja Siddhanta. It is a unique piece of luck to live contemporaneously with this great soul. Though posterity would benefit by the wealth he has put down in his numerous writings, we have the good fortune of being with him and hearing his expositions of godly matters in a style, charming in its natural grace and expressive of the heart's intense emotions and which at once captures the minds of the listeners and sends them into raptures and makes their eyes tear-laden.

There was one Sri Mudumbai Nambi, a disciple and contemporary of Sri Ramanuja, who was installed by him as one of the 74 Simhasanadhipathis. Among the descendents of Mudumbai Nambi should be mentioned Sri Pillai Lokacharya, the author of the "Ashtadasa Rahasya". Prathivadi-bhayankaram Annan Swami was another famous Acharya from this family, being the grandson of Pillai Lokacharya's paternal uncle. Sri Annan swami was one of the eight "Diggajas" or Simhasanadhipathis installed by Sri Manavala Mamunigal. Sri Annan Swami was a native of Kanchee and had his early training under Sri Nainarachariar, son of Sri Vedanta Desika.

There have been many great scholars and Acharyas who were decendents of Sri Annan Swami. Men of great renown in the recent past, were the great Pushkaram Anantachariar Swami who flourished about a century ago and his grandson Jagathguru Sri Gathi Anantacharya Swami. These were great men who toured India several times to propagate Sri Ramanuja Siddhantha and attracted lakhs of disciples. Our Swami was born in 1891 in the Tamil month of Panguni under the star Visakham in the year Vikrithi, of Sriman P. B. Anna Rangacharyar Swami of this family. Sri Anna Rangacharyar was a scholar of no mean merit and was the chief pandit in the Kanchee Sanskrit Vidyalaya. He died at the young age of 43 leaving his only son, who was but 14 at the time. But in that

short period of less than 14 years, the father had given excellent instruction to his son in many branches of Sanskrit Literature and brought him up as an ardent, orthodox, and disciplined Sri Vaishnavite. The careful upbringing of the boy then devolved upon Jagathguru Sri Gathi Ananthachariar Swami, who instructed him in the Sanskrit sastras of Tarka (logic), Vyakarana (Grammar), Mimamsa and Vedanta. Besides his father and Sri Gathi Swami, he owes his learning to many other eminent scholars, chief among whom should be mentioned Sri Elangadu Rangachariar Swami of Kanchee, Elaiavalli Srinivasa Varadachariar and two Madhwa Scholars, Sri Ramachandrachar and Sri Vidyachar.

Even before he was born, Sri Annangarachariar's maternal grandfather had become a sanyasin and adorned the Alagia Manavala Jeer's place and was well-known as Shashti Jeer Swami. The Jeerswami was a great Tamil Scholar and well-versed in Srivaishnava Sampradaya. He took deep interest in our Swami's education and upbringing. He imparted him invaluable instruction. Our Swami learnt Tamil also from the well-known Tamil Scholar Sri V.M Satakopa Ramanujachariar. In his younger days the precocious youth was familiarly known as 'Jeer's grandson', in religious circles all over the south, and was looked up to with affection and admiration by many people. Even from boyhood days, Sri Annangarachariar used to write Sanskrit verse and prose and publish them in Sanskrit journals of those days and these were well-received by the readers.

By the age of twentytwo, he had completed a regular course of studies in Sanskrit and Tamil under eminent pandits. He was then filled with an ardent longing to acquire a knowledge of Yajur-Veda, both text and commentaries. A great teacher of Yajur Veda, Sri U. Ve. Mamballam T. V. Sudarsanacharya Swami was requested to go over and live in Kanchi for imparting the necessaay instruction. A vedic school called Veda Vedanta Vaijyanthi was founded by our swami with the help of many generous-minded philanthrophists, in 1913 and a band of ardent students, chief among whom was our Swami, began Vedic studies under the great teacher, Sri Sudarsanacharya Swami.

The Patasala thus established, in the Jeer Swami's Mutt with Sri P. B. Anna Swami as a foundation pupil shifted from building to building till it was established in its own spacious building and hostel by the

founder Sri P. B. A., built at a cost of over Rs. 20,000. The Patasala with Sri P. B. A. himself as the present Principal has been well endowed and is working well under a board of management of prominent businessmen of Madras.

As a result of his studies in the Vedas, our Swami wrote and published "Vedadhyayana Sarvasvam" embodying the results of his researches in Vedic grammar. This book has been hailed as a classic by eminent scholars, like the late Maha Mahopadhyayas, Sri Kapisthalam Desikachariar Swami and Sri Lakshmiapuram Srinivasachariar Swami.

The inauguration of our Swami as an upanyasaka took place in the presence of Sri Gathi Swami in the Sitarambath temple in Hyderabad when he was only 16, the subject of the discourse being "Emberumanar Vaibhavam". Since that time he has been delivering innumerable discourses all over India in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. Even in his teens, he used to deliver occasional discourses in Madras, particularly under the auspices of Sri U. ve Thirukkannapuram Pattappa Swamikal, who was regularly addressing Vaishnavite groups. There were many requests that the Swami should permanently reside in Madras and carry on his services to our Sampradaya orally and in writing. But such requests were in vain till 1931, when a sabha known as Bhagavathkatha Prasanga Sabha prevailed upon the swami to deliver weekly religious lectures. Recently, another Sabha, by name Sath Kalakshepa Sabha, has been started by many dignitaries of Madras, like Sri V. Rajagopalachari, Advocate, with the purpose of arranging our Swami's lectures. Under the auspices of these Sabhas, our Swami has delivered more than 3000 lectures on Sri Ramayanam, Sri Bhagavatham, the "Secret" texts of Sri Pillai Lokacharya and Bhagavathvishayam, the divine wisdom in the mystic and emotional out-pourings of Sri Nammalwar. Notable events in this connection are the Sattumurai of the Thiruvaimozhi "உலகமுண்ட பெருவாயா" in praise of Lord Srinivasa of Tirumalai, at Tirumalai and the Thiruvaimozhi "கங்குலும் பகலும்" in praise of Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam, at Srirangam. The whole Madras audience moved to these places on these occasions. In December 1931, lectures on Thiruppavai were begun under the auspices of the B. K. P. Sabha and this our Swami has been delivering, every year since then. In recent years he has delivered these lectures twice a day during the month of Margazhi, once at the usual place in G. T. and the other for

two years at T. Nagar and for an year at Sri Parthasarathi Temple in Triplicane. Our Swami's discourses are always eagerly awaited and largely attended. He holds his audience spell-bound with his fluent and clear exposition of whatever subject he chooses. Pramanas throng before him, competing to be used in the discourse. It is a treat to hear him and it is really due to extra-ordinary good fortune that many of us are his contemporaries and are in a position to enjoy his discourses. He has lectured in countless places throughout the length and breadth of this large country.

In his nineteenth year, when he had completed his study of the Diviaprabandhas, with the various commentaries and the Rahasya texts, he offered to take the "Soorkathi" test during the annual celebration of the Veda Vedanta Vardhini of Triplicane. He offered to answer any question asked in these fields both in the texts and in the commentaries and if he failed to answer any one question, to cut off his tongue on the spot with a sharp knife. He came out of the test unscathed and with full honours. The examiners had an extremely difficult task to find questions of a standard coming up to the attainments of the candidate! It was about this time that he wrote clear and lucid commentaries on the sthothras of Sri Kurathalwan and Sri Alavandar. It was during his nineteenth year that he started writing commentaries on the "Nalayira Divya Prabandham". These came in periodical form under the name "Divyaratha Theepikai". The first to be written was on "Ramanuja Nootrandadi" and by 1930, when the swami was hardly 40, he had completed commentaries on all texts except "Thiruvoimozhi". This was written and published later. These commentaries have now run into several editions. In these lucid commentaries in easy Tamil, based largely on the more terse "manipravala" commentaries of our great Acharyas, he has revealed to the readers all the riches and wealth stored by our Poorvacharyas in their books and utterances and thus placed the public greatly indebted to him. Our Swami has always been one of the leading exponents of the Visistadwaitha Vedanta from his very early years and he is a brilliant exponent of the ubhaya vedantas. Sri S. Gopalaswami Iyengar used to refer to him as the embodiment of the Vedas and upanishads, the Puranas, Sri Ramayana and Mahabharatha, the Divyaprabandam and the Rahasya texts. According to him it was not just one person that spoke. "It is a collection, a symposium, a rich heritage of the best of our ancient intellects we have come to witness. It is our ancient seers,

Vyasa, Parasara, Valmiki that speak through him; it is our most beloved saints from Nammalwar downwards who pour their divine outpourings through his blessed mouth; it is our revered teachers from Srīman Nathamunigal, Alavandar, Ramanuja, Bhattar, Nampillai, Lokacharya, Vedanta Desika and Manavalamamunigal that have come to relive in him and shed their combined wisdom through his prolific tongue. We are blessed with a thrilling experience. Hail! Hail! Hail! to this wonderful personality!

In a moment our Swami draws up the curtain and transports us, with our present physical bodies, to the ethereal regions of heaven to shower on us the bliss that is his as an insatiable nectar every moment. A rare quotation at a turn to the right, a unique sermon at a turn to the left, a moving incident which would melt the stoniest of hearts this moment and a humorous anecdote bringing forth rib-breaking laughter the very next moment, are the common features of his resplendent lectures, which go on with the same unabated flourish and sustained interest whether it be two hours or four, flowing like the Ganges from the Himalayas. Where else can we reap such a rich harvest and have such a sublime experience? It is worth travelling a thousand miles and waiting for hours together."

Naturally he deals here with his subject-matter in a more detailed and powerful manner than in his books. Eminent people like Mahamahopadyaya Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer, Sir S. Varadachariar, Sri V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar, Justice Patanjali Sastri, and Sri T. S. Natesa Sastri were frequent if not regular in attending the lectures.

Coming back to the subject of his books, it should be mentioned that our Swami has been writing and publishing in four languages—Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi and is publishing monthly magazines like "Vaidika Manohara" and "Sri Ramanujan", quite regularly. Reference has already been made to the Tamil Commentaries on the Sthothras, Rahasyas and Divya prabandam. Next in importance come his "Grantha Malas" or the publication of the complete works of four great authors—namely Ramanuja, Nambillai, Vedanta Desika and Manavalamamunigal, in beautiful globe editions. This is a gigantic achievement of a very high order, normally requiring the untiring work of large committees of scholars. Among the Swami's notable contributions to literature, must be mentioned his many researches bearing on the Vedas and Vedanta embodied in "Vedadhyayana Sarvasvam" (already

referred to), "Vedanta Sarvaswam" (essentials of Sri Ramanuja Siddhanta), "Tharkasatra Sarvaswam" (Indian Logic); and 'Dramidopanishad Prabhava Sarvawam' (Establishing by illustrative quotations the influence of Nam-malwar's Thiruvaimozhi and other prabandams on Sri Ramanuja as seen in the Sri Bhashya and Githa Bhashya). He has translated into beautiful Sanskrit verse all the Divyaprabandams and "Secret Texts" like Mumukshupadi and Sri Vachana Bhushana. That he is a poet of no mean order can be seen from these and also his inimitable pieces like "Sri Ramayana Dandakam" "Sri Ramabhadra Karnamritham" "Govinda Gitamritham", "Gopala Bakthamritham", and his one thousand verses in praise of Manavalamamunigal entitled "Sri Sailesa Paduka Sahasram", a work of priceless renown. He has written Sri Valmiki Ramayana in graceful and eloquent Tamil prose, chapter by chapter in an abridged form. His work in Tamil and Sanskrit have been so numerous and encyclopaedic in their nature, that he may be said to have accomplished, unaided, the task of a generation of pandits, often beset by the most violent and rancorous opposition. Motivated by malice and jealousy, many have tried to vilify our Swami, under some pretext or other. The title of his ancestors "Prathivadi Bhayankaram" fits in aptly with him. Many have been the vaada granthas (vaadam is argument or debate) that he has written. Such publications concern themselves with criticism, correction refutation and condemnation of (a) mis-statements or misinterpretations of sacred texts and commentaries (b) attacks on Visishtadwaitha Vedantha or Sri Ramanuja Siddhanta (c) attacks or slander of the Sri Vaishnava Poorvacharyas unfortunately indulged in by a group of persons.

Such arguments are never started by our Swami, just to spite others. He does so only when absolutely necessary. In his fidelity to truth, he has had to perform the unpleasant, but nevertheless bounden duty of exposing the hollowness of the false it has been his sacred duty to correct misinterpretations and mis-statements, without fear or favour, when they do not agree with the spirit of the teachings of our Acharyas. When the writer so corrected does not stand corrected, but tries to justify his stand, there arises a regular debate on the controversial issue. In such situations, he is not afraid of being hit, nor does he hesitate to hit back with vigour and persistency and with unflinching argument, which always carry the world with him. He cannot by nature brook an insult hurled at our Acharyas and he is the first to establish by cogent, lucid and

and convincing arguments, fully supported by the sacred texts, the pristine purity and truthfulness of our Acharyas.

Impartial critics have truly acclaimed that such controversies have been carried on without rancour or bitterness, with the sole purpose of establishing the greatness of our Acharyas and the truth of their teachings. In these polemic ventures he has fixed his gaze only on the intrinsic meanings of the great works and the innate beauties of the faith.

A superficial look at these publications may lead to the impression that our Swami is cantankerous and fanatic by nature. In fact, there has been much malicious propaganda by interested persons to this effect. Nothing would be farther from the truth than such an impression. He is essentially a man of peace and a lover of unity and concord. He has ardent admirers, and close friends among the two Vaishnavite sects and among people belonging to other folds of the Hindu faith. Such publications contain brilliant and masterly expositions of many subtle points and researches of a difficult nature, presented in easily understood terms. Lucid and correct interpretations of many terse texts appear from our Swami's pen and any possible confusion in the matter is resolved and the points involved made crystal clear. He has taken great pains to establish the identity of the views of the two great Acharyas, Pillai Lokacharya and Vedanta Desika, on whose teachings, the Thennacharya and Vadagalai sects respectively, of Sri Vaishnavism are based.

A well-known advocate of the Madras bar once wrote of our Swami "Sri Annangaracharya Swami has published hundreds of works. There is no one to excel him in the presentation of a topic. His subjects are many and drawn from varied fields. He shows great enthusiasm for argumentative debate. As can be expected the Swami's powerful personality has been the target of attack for hostile and adverse criticism from several quarters. It must be said to his credit, that he never felt vanquished in any verbal warfare and would always have the last word on any subject; there have been several such—in a very telling manner. Like a coconut split into two by one cut, the Swami's manner of presentation is always pertinent and to the point." There have been several such encomiums showered on our Swami by impartial observers.

Our Swami is a very ardent devotee of all Archa Sthalas in keeping with a deep-rooted faith in the teachings of our Alvars and Acharyas. He has travelled throughout India several times—thrice to Badrinath, and some twenty times to shrines in the north up to Rishikesh and Haridwar with parties of adhyapakas. His visits to shrines hallowed by the songs of the Alvars (divyadesa) in the south have been countless. But he is very partial to Sri Devaraja (Varadaraja) or Perurulalan of Kanchee. Except during brief periods of times he has been away, he spends all his life at Kanchi. And in Kanchi he never misses to participate in group chanting of the Vedas or Prabandas, as the case may be, during the processions of Sri Varadaraja or of the other Vishnu Temples of Kanchee. Any such Ghoshti or party chanters without Sri Swami is lifeless like "Hamlet" enacted without the Prince of Denmark!—so the residents of Kanchee feel.

In the year 1919 our Swami initiated the "Nithya Pradakshina Ghoshti"—a daily procession of a group of chanters of the Vedas along the main streets in Kanchee. This is a daily routine, not related to any temple procession. This has been kept up without even a day's break irrespective of weather conditions, to this day. Such chanting is a form of Vachika Kainkarya (Oral Service, which elevates the soul and pleases the Lord.

Close to Sri Varadaraja Swami Temple at Kanchi our Swami has built a shrine for Nampillai and herein have been installed the images of three great Acharyas, Nampillai, Vadakkuthiruveedhi Pillai and Periavachan Pillai, three among the great Poorvacharyas. These Acharyas have kept the Vaishnavite world deeply indebted to them by their commentaries on the Divyaprabandhams, but for which, Bhagavad vishyam or the Divine wisdom of the Alvars would have been lost to us. The shrine was built and consecrated in 1939 and endowments have been made to carry on the worship in the shrines for all time to come.

It was but proper and fitting that the Shashtiabdapurthy of this great and enlightened scholar and bhaktha was celebrated on a very grand scale by celebrations spread over several days each in Kanchee, Madras and Delhi in 1951. No other savant has been honoured by a grateful public as well as Sri P. B. A. Swami was. It was more or less like a national festival in Delhi, with meetings, the participants

including the prominent citizens of Delhi including union ministers, judges of the Supreme Court, high officials of the government and the general public.

In 1956, the Swami published an autobiography profusely illustrated with photographs of the many eminent scholars and devotees, who have either taught him, or have influenced him. There are pictures of friends and admirers. It contains a descriptive list of all his published works. Apart from intimate details connected with his own life, he has presented in this book, many details of life in his younger days, in orthodox surroundings—a way of life which, alas, has almost disappeared!

Sri P. B. A. Swami inherited a shrotrium Village Thiruvadi Rayapuram in North Arcot district, but this he had to forego as a result of the Inams Abolition Act. A good portion of the income derived from his publications and vidwat sambhavas for his lectures he spends on the Veda Vedantha Patasala founded by him and helping poor Sri Vaishnavite Scholars to the best of his ability.

Some years ago, our Swami lost his wife. He has two daughters and several grand children through them. He has adopted a grandson as his son—Sri P. B. Ranganathacharya (popularly known as Chellamani). His elder son-in-law is Sri U. Ve. T. A. A. Sampathkumaracharya Swami M. A., of Melkote an eminent Sanskrit, Hindi and Sampradaik scholar who is helping our Swami very much in his publication work. His younger Son-in-law is Sri U. Ve. Manavala Tirumalacharya Swami of Sriperumbudur, who has been helping our Swami in running the patasala.

It is nearly impossible in a brief account like this, to do full justice to the many-sided talents, ceaseless religious activities, and the amazingly prolific writings of our Swamy. We are singularly fortunate in having him in our midst as the leading torch-bearer of the Visishtadwaita faith. The best way to honour him is, by studying his works carefully and to listen to his brilliant discourses and try to live an ideal Sri Vaishnava.

I conclude with the humble prayer to the Lord that He may bless our Swami with many more years of healthful life so that he may go on adding to his great services for the spiritual advancement of our country and the propagation of Sri Ramanuja Siddhanta.