

Golden words

The following are excerpts from the discourses Sri Bharati Vidya Tirtha delivered at various places:

- Desire and anger are two great enemies of man. While desire is one’s longing for an object, anger results from non-availability or deprival of the object.
- What does one lose by uttering respectful words? But many speak harsh words and hurt the feelings of others.
- The three fetters that chain a human being to samsara - Loka vasana, Sastra vasana and Deha vasana.
- The life of a man who does not help others is worthless. Thus great importance is given to Paropakara, which scriptures refer to as compassion.
- “I do my duty and am happy with what I get.” - this should be the attitude.
- Be content with whatever comes to you of its own accord. Practise equanimity when experiencing the pairs of opposites, such as pleasure and pain. Shun envy.

(Culled out from ‘Golden Words of the Glorious Guru,’ published by Sri Sringeri Sarada Pitam - 577139, Karnataka ph: 08235250123 -- and distributed at a subsidised price of Rs. 35.)

Seat of WISDOM

SEER It is with disarming simplicity that Sri Bharati Vidya Tirtha speaks profound philosophy.

GEETHA VENKATRAMANAN

“Jivan and Iswaran are the same but with a difference. An empty pot contains space, but not quite the same that prevails all around. You break the pot and they merge to become the same entity,” the audience listens spell bound to this simple explanation of a profound theory of Advaita as Sri Bharati Vidya Tirtha of Sringeri Sarada Pitam speaks high philosophy.

Both theory and the *akasa* and *ghata-akasa* analogy are Sri Adi Sankara’s and only a mind that has not completely understood the concept of Truth gets confused that leads to arguments. The make-shift hall of ‘Sudharma’ (124, Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai) where the Acharya is camping to observe Chatur Masya Vrata is packed, as Swamiji’s lecture draws both the lay and the elite. Sri Bharati Vidya Tirtha, who is on Vijaya Yatra, is following in the footsteps of his predecessors, who believed in educating the uninitiated.

A scholar, the Acharya’s talk in fluent Tamil is interspersed with apt quotations



ACHARYA: Sri Bharati Vidya Tirtha of Sringeri Math (right). PHOTO: K. V. SRINIVASAN AND ARCHIVES

from several sources. At 15 he became an understudy of Sri Abhinava Vidya Tirtha and ascended the throne as the 36th head in 1989 but not before acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of the Vedas, Upanishads, Mimamsa, Tarka and so on. The wisdom comes across in the simple style that he adopts. “Some of

you may not understand the subtleties, but try and get the larger picture,” he says not without kindness.

Sri Bharati Vidya Tirtha is visiting Chennai after nearly 20 years. Does he find any change? “Well, from one place to another it took about 10 minutes but these days it takes 30,” laughs the

Acharya referring to the heavy traffic, in a private interview.

Thousands throng temples and rituals are done with a never-before fervour and frequency. But negative forces seem to be gaining the upper hand? In other words, life has become a challenge for those who tread the path of honesty. “Good and bad have always co-existed,” observes the Acharya, gentle surprise lacing the tone. “Ravana lived at the same time as Rama. The latter went through immense sufferings because of the Lanka ruler. Rishis doing penance were disturbed and hurt by demons...”

But scriptures speak of divine intervention...

“Sure. One must wait. Do your duty with a clean mind and things will fall in place,” he says.

On youth and discipline

The dialogue turns to children and youth. With distractions at every turn and lifestyles having undergone a massive change, it is tough to instil discipline in them. The Acharya believes they have the potential to ring in positive changes.

“Earlier moral instruction was mandatory in schools. Now parents should assume that role and guide their offspring,” he says.

Easier said than done, considering the questioning spirit and the I-know-what-I-want attitude. Why, there is no scope for bed-time storytelling what with the heavy

burden of home work, TV shows and Internet.

“Yes, television has played a significant role in all this. Young people are mesmerised by TV. I wonder if it has any beneficial effect on their minds,” observes the Acharya, who again underlines the duty of parents. “Sit with them. Talk about our country’s great heritage and culture. Make them understand that they may not get the answers for all their questions. They will understand as they grow up.”

Is bhakti necessary for a person to lead a clean life?

“Yes, prayer and rituals offer solace and strengthen the mind. Your faith in the path that you have chosen gets reaffirmed.”

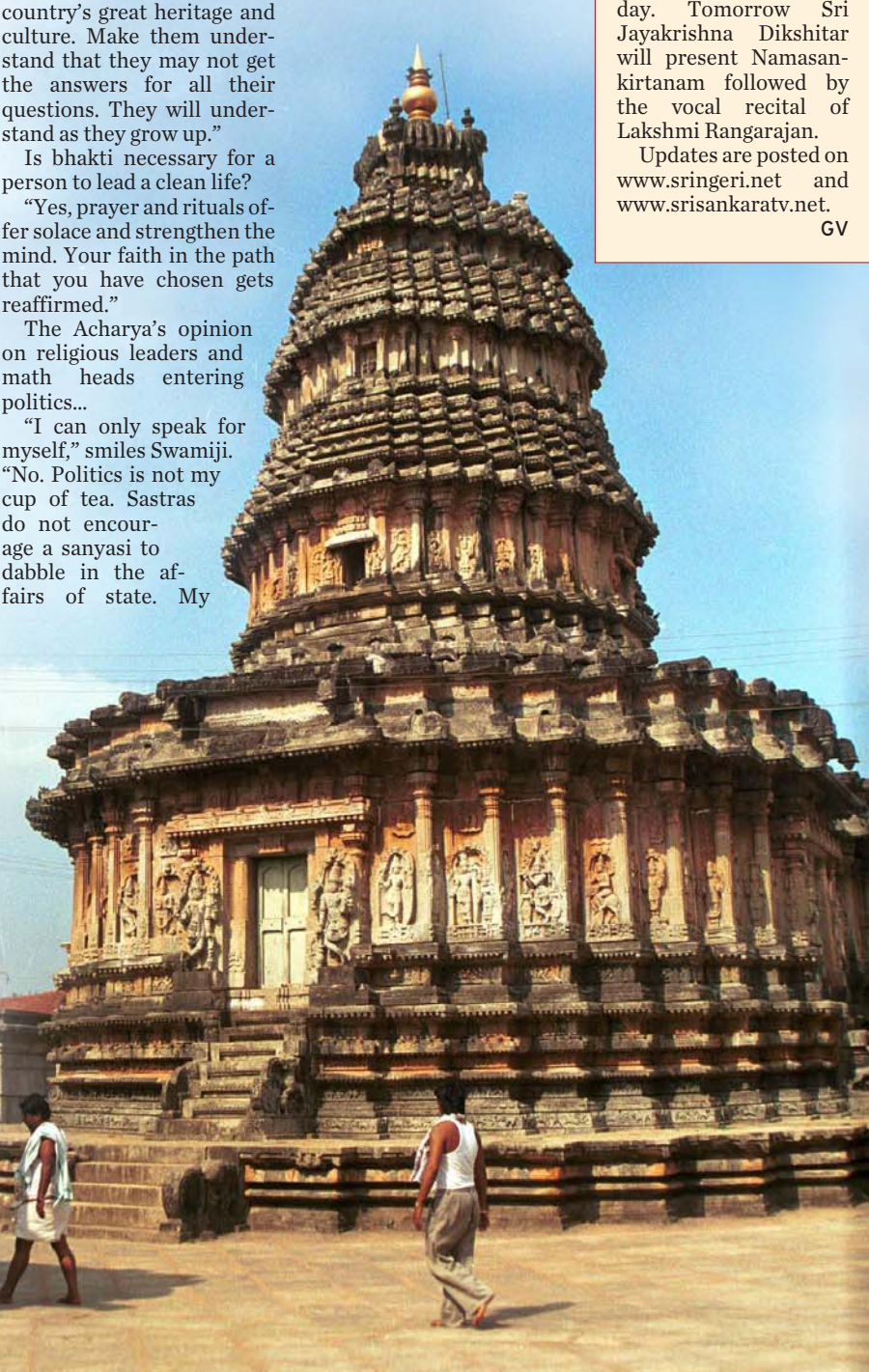
The Acharya’s opinion on religious leaders and math heads entering politics...

“I can only speak for myself,” smiles Swamiji. “No. Politics is not my cup of tea. Sastras do not encourage a sanyasi to dabble in the affairs of state. My

predecessors did not do it, nor will I.”

Message for *The Hindu* readers...

“Let every one do their duty with sincerity. Never try to hurt or harm others with word or deed. On the other hand try to be as helpful as possible. Don’t fail to pray or observe *nityakarma*.”



Dissemination of knowledge

Located on the picturesque banks of the Tungabhadra in Sringeri, Karnataka, Dakshinamnaya Sri Sarada Pitam, founded by Adi Sankara, runs many Veda patasalas. It is generally said that the Vedas have no takers and the number of learners is dwindling. “Wrong,” smiles the Acharya. “In fact the number of students, who receive the certificates at our patasala has been increasing,” he says. “No compromises there,” informs a volunteer

in an aside. “Even a slight error is enough to disqualify a person. The standard is high.” The Pitam conducts Veda Sammelans and sastra sabhas across the country.

The Veda Poshaka Sabha and Sastra Poshaka Sabha encourage young learners to excel in their studies. Elderly scholars are given monthly honorariums.

Under the scheme of Gita Gnana Yagna, individuals who recite all the 700 slokas of the Bhagavad Gita receive a certificate and a

cash award of Rs. 21,000.

Sri Sankara Advaita Research Centre publishes literature in the subjects of Vedanta, Vyakarana and Nyaya. Knowledge is disseminated through journals such as *Tattvaloka* (English), *Shankara Kripa* (Kannada and Telugu), *Amman Darisanam* (Tamil).

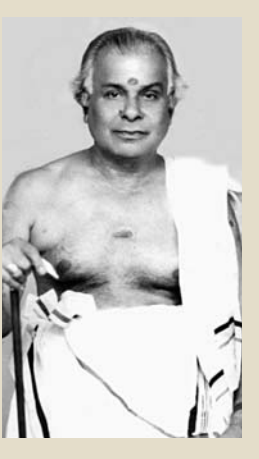
Sringeri Vidya Bharati Foundation has units in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, the U.S., and Toronto, Canada.

GV

He broke barriers for art

HOMAGE
A maverick and visionary, Paimkulam Rama Chakyar’s 32nd death anniversary falls on July 31.

K.K. GOPALAKRISHNAN



(Chelakkara, Thrissur) where, since 1946, the annual performance right has been his family’s by a special order of the then Kochi King.

“Once Chakyar asan was invited for a performance at Manjeri (Malappuram) and he took me too. When the local authorities came to know that I would be participating, they opposed it. He told them politely but firmly, ‘if this place is forbidden to my disciple, whatever may be his caste, I think I am also incompetent to perform here,’ and led us back without performing,” reminisces Sivan Namboodiri.

In 1949, Paimkulam defied another tradition to

perform Koothu or Chakyarkoothu, for three days at a Namboodiri house in Kollam district as he happened to be staying there.

He performed it without percussion or a Nangiar. The issue of costume was solved by using what was available. This drew the wrath of his clan. Only Chathakkudam Krishnan Nambiar (Usha Nangiar’s father) supported him and was a source of inspiration to Paimkulam throughout his life, along with Peruvannam Narayana Chakyar, an ayurvedic physician, and Peruvannam Raman Nambiar.

In 1956, Paimkulam performed Koodiyattam at a function held in Kozhi-

kode under the aegis of All India Radio. This event and the debut Koodiyattam performances of Mani Madhava Chakyar’s sons (hailing from the Nambiar community and who handle the percussion by virtue of following the matriarchal system) in 1955 were considered the primary attempts to take the art form outside the temple.

His inspiration
Later Paimkulam recorded that the inspiration for these acts came from the words of the late Malayalam litterateur, Prof Joseph Mundassery (who later became the state’s Minister for Education), spoken in 1943, on how non-Hindus and lower class Hindus were deprived of the chance of watching this ancient, intellectual art because it was confined to temples.

From 1977 onwards, when his pupils became capable of handling lead roles, Paimkulam reduced his performances to give them the opportunity instead and proudly watched their act. “Bhagavadajjukam,” based on Bodayana’s farce (seventh century), is one of his celebrated choreographies. “His expertise in choreographing a new play, editing an existing one and composing the slokas for Vishushaka in Sanskrit and Malayalam are discernible in all the plays that he had worked on. He was also praised for his acumen in

editing a play to shorter durations (of one to three hours) at a short notice as per performance requirements duly retaining all the essential ingredients,” recalls Kalamandalam Rama Chakyar.

‘Jatayuvadhram’ second part, ‘Kalyanasoughandigam’ first part, ‘Mayaseethangam, Naganandam’ third act and the two acts of ‘Swapnavasavadatham,’ were among his known choreographies.

The present day status of Nangiarkoothu is credited to Paimkulam. At the Kalamandalam where more girls started taking up Koodiyattam (and when admission to dance section became full), he worked on developing Nangiarkoothu to get them performance space. He also initiated the reformation of the entire Koodiyattam costumes and one such classy endeavour is the present day headgear of Nangiarkoothu and the female roles of Koodiyattam. He also modified some of the mudras.

For fear of aesthetic corruption, the Chakyars were forbidden to watch other performing arts, especially Kathakali. Paimkulam broke this custom, by encouraging his disciples to watch and appreciate other art traditions. He also ensured that his students read newspapers and were up to date on general knowledge and socio-political developments.

“After all, a Chakyar’s job is being a social critic as well”, was his justification. (The writer is the Director, Centre for Kutiyattam, Thiruvananthapuram, of the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi)

Shraddha’s new plays

Shraddha’s latest presentation, a collection of three short plays, will be staged from August 2 and 5, 7 p.m., at Narada Gana Sabha, TTK Road. The plays -- ‘Madi Neruppu,’ ‘Irandavathu Maranam’ and ‘Andharangam’-- are written by Anand Raghav. Each story, about 30 minutes long, deals with three scenarios which bring out the conflicting influence of faith and doubt on the protagonists.

‘Madi Neruppu’ looks at with the effects of urbanisation on individual lives. Siva’s peaceful life is shaken by the murder of his neighbour and long time friend. From a position of comfort and peace, Siva is pushed into paranoia and fear. The play is directed by Kathadi Ramamurthy who also acts in it along with V. Ramesh, T.D. Sundarajan and Shivaji Chaturvedi.

‘Irandavathu Maranam’ narrates the agonising wait of a loving son at his father’s death bed. The poignant story also talks about how extraneous circumstances affect our conviction. G. Krishnamurthy is the director of this play with Girish and Suchitra Ravi playing the main roles.

‘Andharangam’ opens with an unusual situation. Deepti and Nikhil, a newly wed couple, who have not yet found the limits of their personal space, encounter a unique problem. This play, the author’s favourite, promises to be an intriguing, multi-layered portrayal of human emotions. Swaminathan directs this play and also plays Nikhil. Kavitha plays Deepti.

Balaji, Sridhar, Chandru, Bala, Haripriya, Venkat, S.L. Naanu, Anand Raghav and Cheenu and others play small but powerful characters in the three plays.

Chandrashekar, a senior guitarist, is the music director. Lights will be managed by Chetta Ravi and Kumar is in charge of make-up.

The plays are sponsored by Kartik Fine Arts Club, Narada Gana Sabha, Parthasarathy Swamy Sabha and Brahma Gana Sabha. Tickets are priced at Rs. 100 and Rs.200 and are available at Narada Gana Sabha. For details, contact Shivaji Chaturvedi at 98402 08583.

International music festival

Brahma Gana Sabha will conduct, for the first time, an International Music Festival from July 30 to August 1, at ARKAY Convention Centre, Mylapore. Talented youngsters from all over the world get an opportunity to perform with leading and up-and-coming musicians/accompaniments from India. The first performance will be by Umayalpuram Bhairav, disciple-grandson of Umayalpuram Sivaraman and Kamalakiran Vinjamuri, disciple of Kanyakumari, who will accompany some of the artists. Haridwaramangalam A.K. Pazhanivel, member Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, will be the chief guest on the inaugural

day. The schedule is as follows: **July 30, 6.30 p.m.:** Subhiksha Rangarajan with K.P. Nandini (violin) and Umayalpuram Bhairav (mridangam). **July 31, 6.30 p.m.:** Sandeep Narayanan with Kamalakiran Vinjamuri (violin) and Umayalpuram Bhairav (mridangam) and **August 1, 6.30 p.m.:** Amrutha Murali with Kamalakiran Vinjamuri (violin) and B. Ganapathy Raman (mridangam).

Drama festival

The annual Aadi Nataka Vizha begins on August 2 at , Dakshinamurthy Hall (P.S.High School), R.K.Mut Road, Mylapore. For details call 9444444767

Government support

Since the 1980s, the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi has been supporting Koodiyattam, thanks to the efforts of a few aficionados

Thanks to the efforts of Milena Salvini of France and Sanskrit scholar turned diplomat, Christopher Briskly from Poland, Koodiyattam, the ancient performing arts tradition sustained only in Kerala, made its first trip abroad to Poland and France. The four-week tour during May-June, 1980, was under the leadership of Guru Paimkulam Rama Chakyar (1904-1980).

There was displeasure among Chakyar’s clan and the traditionalists, who felt it was an unholy act to take the dance form out of the temples and abroad. They saw Chakyar crossing the sea as a crime that warranted making him an outcast. By ignoring opposition, Paimkulam was laying the foundations for change.

“A strict vegetarian, he lived on fruits during the tour,” recalls his disciple-cum-grandnephew and a leading exponent of our times, sexagenarian Kalamandalam Rama Chakyar, who was among the 13 members of the group. The tour was followed by tragedy. The fruits the thespian ate made him acutely diabetic and on July 31, he passed away. (His disciples will be commemorating his death anniversary on Tuesday next.)

Today, his clan, including those who had opposed him, are enjoying the result of his endeavour. Now Koodiyattam is not only presented outside the temple, but in other States and abroad.

who formed Margi, Thiruvananthapuram, under the leadership of the late D. Appukkuttan Nair. The Delhi-based scholar, Dr. Sudha Gopalakrishnan’s painstaking attempt resulted in the submission of a project proposal to the UNESCO that in 2001 earned the art recognition as ‘the masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity.’ This substantially improved the situation as some sort of regular funding for the sustenance of the art and artists began to be given by the union government through its cultural bodies. This helped the artists, who, in the past, had to rely on the insufficient income that came from their performances in the temples.

The Koodiyattam faculty at the Kalamandalam was started under the leadership of Paimkulam Rama Chakyar in 1965. He began to teach the dance to non-Chakyars and non-Nangiaris, in 1965 and 1970 respectively.

Kalamandalam Rama Chakyar and Sivan Namboodiri, this year’s Padma Sri recipient, were the first two students; the latter being the first from outside the communities. Kalamandalam Girija followed Namboodiri and became the first woman and non-Nangiar to learn the art. Today, she is the head of department of Koodiyattam at the Kalamandalam.

Paimkulam dared to give performance space to Sivan and others like him at the Venganallur temple

PAIMKULAM DEFIED TRADITION TO PERFORM KOOOTHU FOR THREE DAYS AT A NAMBOODIRI HOUSE.