

Bharanidharan

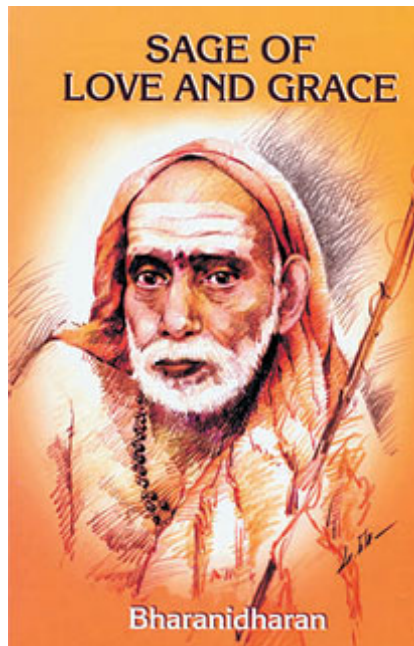
Sage of love and grace

Extrait du livre

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Éditeur : Homoeopathic Medical Publishers



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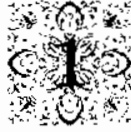


Sage of Love and Grace

by

Bharanidharan

HOMOEOPATHIC MEDICAL PUBLISHERS
Mumbai



THE year was 1961. The place – office of the Ananda Vikatan. Production of the prestigious Vikatan Deepavali special number was in full swing. A few pages were all that remained to be printed. Matter for the customary dedication to the ‘Goddess of Letters and Arts’ by the Editor was getting ready. Just then, I got a call from the Assistant Editor, Sri Gopalakrishnan. When I met him, he told me that I should proceed to ‘Ilayathangudi’ (near Karaikudi in Ramnad district) the same night and obtain the benediction message from The Kanchi Maha Swamigal who was camping there.

Whenever I got an opportunity to have the Maha Swami’s dharsan my heart invariably jumped with joy. Now, here was a rare opportunity but I was weighed down by a certain hesitation! A journey, which I was trying to avoid for some months, was being thrust on me. I could not avoid it. There was a struggle in me between a feeling of resistance and the call of duty. There was a reason for the same.

A few weeks earlier I had written an article captioned ‘Lava Kusa in Mylapore’. It was a frank comment on the *Ramayana* discourses then being delivered at Mylapore Vidya Mandir by the popular duo, Sri Sengalipuram Anantharama Dikshidhar and his brother Narayana Dikshidhar. As I was listening to the discourse, I noted that, in an otherwise excellent exposition, certain observations not so relevant had intervened with a jarring note. My critical article took shape the same night. I had joined the Editorial staff only a year ago and a new enthusiasm combined with strong feelings resulted in the comment turning out to be rather harsh. The Editor received a number of letters highly critical of my article. But, there were many more which were on my wavelength and congratulated me for boldly recording in print what was actually agitating their minds but hesitated to express openly lest they should be labeled infidels.



THE first conference on *Agama* and *Silpa sasthanas* and ancient arts was held in Ilayathangudi in 1962. This was conceived and guided by Periyava. Under his auspices and blessings, it turned out to be a grand success. Several delegates from other parts of India and even from abroad – scholars, experts in various fields and the spiritually great – participated. Of the many original and purposeful plans of Swamigal, this one was unique and important. I had received an invitation to attend the conference but to my great regret I could not make it.

When the second conference was held next year at Narayanapuram near Madurai, I could go there but could stay only for a day or two. I was, therefore very keen to attend the third conference held in Kanchipuram in 1964 and benefit from it by participating in all the events. I completed all my assignments for the next week in advance and proceeded to Kanchipuram determined to attend all the sessions. But my plan fizzled out and what happened was entirely different.

The inaugural function was a grand affair. The *Maharaja* of Mysore – Jayachamaraja Wadiyar who inaugurated the conference made a brilliant speech. Swamigal spoke at great length on the objectives of the conference, focusing on our ancient arts and the cultural heritage etc. When I went to him next morning to pay obeisance, Swamigal asked me “Did you listen to the Maharaja’s speech yesterday?”

“Yes. I did”.

“Did you notice that he spoke four lines extempore which were not part of the prepared text?”

“No. I missed it”.

“ I asked two or three persons. No one seems to have noticed it. Do one thing. Keep the printed copy of the speech with you and listen to the recorded version in the tape. Compare the two and find out what those four lines were. You must do this immediately and meet me”. Swamigal entrusted me with this urgent task.



MY friend Sri K.M. Rangaswami of '*Dinamani*', a Tamil daily, had come to cover the conference as a special correspondent. I could gather from him, information about all the proceedings at the conference and benefited greatly. Just a day or two was left for the conference to conclude. Next morning, before going to the conference venue, I went to have dharsan of Swamigal. There was not much crowd around him and he appeared relaxed.

"I wish to bring something to Periyava's notice", I said.

"Yes. Go ahead"

"I had been to Ekambareswarar temple. I found a board there indicating that a fee of ten paise has to be paid to go inside and have dharsan. I was pained. As it is, tickets are to be purchased for '*abishekam*', '*archanai*' etc. Is that not enough? I feel it is very wrong on the part of the temple authorities to collect a fee for mere dharsan also".

"Is that so?", asked Swamigal in surprise.

"Yes. There is also one more objectionable thing. A screen has been kept near the '*Dwajasthambam*' (Flag staff). I was told that this was to prevent people from having dharsan from outside without paying the ten paise. There is so much talk about inculcating bhakthi among people and making temple worship flourish. Yet this is what is happening".

"It is very wrong", said Swamigal.

Next day, Periyava participated in the meeting of the Executive officers of the Hindu Religious Endowment Department held at the sadas. In his concluding remarks he said, "I have to refer now to an important issue. I believe that in Ekambareswarer temple people can have dharsanam only on payment of ten paise. A young man who saw a board to that effect was extremely upset and reported it to me. I believe a screen has also been put up near the '*Dwajasthambam*' to prevent people having dharsan from outside free of charge. I do not know under whose

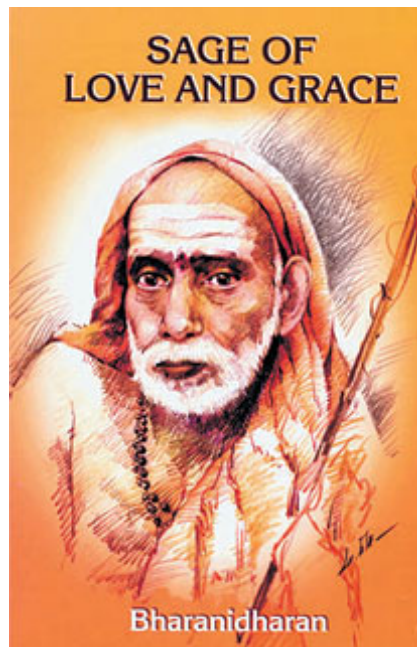


I RECEIVED a remuneration of a thousand rupees from the Sahitya Academy for my Tamil translation of R.K. Narayanan's very popular novel 'The Guide'. Swamigal was camping on the outskirts of Chennai then. I wanted to make a small offering to him. I decided that on the next Anusham day (Which is Swamigal's birth star), I would offer him a flower garland and also one hundred and one rupees in coins by placing them at his feet. Till then I had never gone to him with a garland and had never made any monetary offerings.

With a jasmine garland and the silver coins I went to the Sri Mutt on the previous night itself. My plan was to offer the garland and the cash to Swamigal at the time of 'Viswarupa dharsan' early next morning as his Birthday presents.

The night pooja over, Swamigal rounded off his dharsan to devotees and retired for the night. Doors of the room were closed. It was ten in the night. Opposite the Swamigal's room stood a 'Pavazhamalli' tree. I sat under the tree with a bamboo plate in which I had placed the jasmine garland and the coins. I had resolved to keep awake through the night so that I would be the first to offer the garland to Periva as and when he came out. I thought to myself 'If Periva accepted my offerings first, I would feel confirmed in my mind that my devotion to him is pure and genuine and that I have his full grace.' In a sense, I voluntarily subjected myself to this test. I never thought for a moment how much I would be affected if things did not turn out the way I had desired. I was immersed in the holy japa "Hara hara Sankara....Jaya Jaya Sankara", right through the night.

Whenever I heard even a faint sound indicating some movement near the room, I rushed forward thinking that Swamigal had got up. Finding the doors still closed I would return and resume my place under the tree. It was nearing four in the morning. The chirping of the birds could be heard. A few 'Pavazhamalli' flowers with sweet pleasing aroma



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110 pages, broché
publication 2005



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