

Sringeri Mutt as a fostering of Religious and Spiritual Institution

Virupakshappa. H

Associate Professor, Department of History,
Government First Grade College, Harihar-577601

Abstract: When peace eludes you, when the world is too much for you, when the fever of life torments you, go to Sringeri”, is the introduction to this holy place in the Sri Sharada Pitha’s book, “The greatness of Sringeri”. Set in a picturesque locale, surrounded by mountains and forests, the Tunga gently flowing in a serpentine fashion is this little town - Sringeri. ‘Tattvaloka’ a monthly publication published an interview with the current Pontiff of Sringeri, Sri Bharati Teertha. This is the *tapobhumi* of the great sages Vibhandaka and Rishyasringa . There is sanctity in the earth upon which a great saint has trodden. How much greater *Sannidhya* would attach to a place in which they have lived. Sringeri has been blessed by these rishis. That this place has radiant energy as well as great purity was also seen by Shankara”. Sri Adi Shankaracharya is credited with establishing the ‘Dakshinamnaya’ Sri Sharadapitha at Sringeri and appointing -Sri Sureshwaracharya as the first Mathadipati. Since its inception the succession of gurus in the Pitha is regular and uninterrupted. Though historical evidence of the first nine gurus have not been unearthed as yet, literary works like Guruvamshakavya of Kashi Lakshman Shastry and Gadyavallari from distant land of Bihar mention lineage and they are remarkably similar.

Introduction

When peace eludes you, when the world is too much for you, when the fever of life torments you, go to Sringeri”, is the introduction to this holy place in the Sri Sharada Pitha’s book, “The greatness of Sringeri”. Set in a picturesque locale, surrounded by mountains and forests, the Tunga gently flowing in a serpentine fashion is this little town - Sringeri. ‘Tattvaloka’ a monthly publication published an interview with the current Pontiff of Sringeri, Sri Bharati Teertha. To a question: “What is unique about Sringeri Peetham and what contributes to its sanctity”? He replied, “Sringeri is a place where great saints have done *tapas (Meditation)*. This is the *tapobhumi* of the great sages Vibhandaka and Rishyasringa . There is sanctity in the earth upon which a great saint has trodden. How much greater *Sannidhya* would attach t? a place in which they have lived! Sringeri has been blessed by these rishis. That this place has radiant energy as well as great purity was also seen by Shankara. Sri Adi Shankaracharya is credited with establishing the Dakshinamnaya Sri Sharadapitha at Sringeri and appointing -Sri Sureshwaracharya as the first Mathadipati. Since its inception the succession of gurus in the Peeta is regular and uninterrupted. Though historical evidence of the first nine gurus have not been unearthed as yet, literary works like Guruvamshakavya of Kashi Lakshman Shastry and Gadyavallari from distant land of Bihar mention lineage and they are remarkably similar.

Although, the gurus lived in such a remote spot, far in the wild, away from public view, their spiritual influence and learning was so pervasive that they drew devotees from far off comers of the country. Their presence and preaching proved inspiring and rejuvenating to all those who came in contact with them. Guru Sri Vidyashankara, the master yogi, to whom such a beautiful temple is dedicated, is acknowledged by the devout to be still present in His yogic posture to guide and bless the mission of this sacred monastery. The role played by his shishya Sri Vidyaranya in the establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire is still a matter for debate and controversies but it can be said that the symbiotic relation shared by the newly formed Vijayanagara *Samrajya* and the well established Sharadapeetha proved beneficial to both. The lands, gifts in the form of money and kind for the Matha and its various activities, changed the face of the hermitage forever enabling its growth and transformation into a Samsthana. Similarly, the blessings, guidance and support of the Sringeri gurus gave it a newly formed kingdom legitimacy and moral support. The gurus who presided over the sacred Dakshinamnaya seats were possessed of such divinity that their spiritual guidance was what the royalty needed.

A Spiritual institution is a place of training for suitably equipped temperaments and mature minds towards the acquisition of higher knowledge of human life and for inculcation of those principles in one's life. Spirituality is the comprehensive understanding of the fundamental values of life to seek solutions to all human problems. Places like Sringeri are examples of the spiritual philosophy which they project and propagate. This led to the followers to believe that they could also become the best in anything they believed in.. The noblest element in a person is brought out by the technique of spiritual living with Truth, Tolerance, Non-violence and Purity. If a State has to be happy prosperous and develop in all spheres of life, it needs political stability. The ruler has to be ethically inclined, chaste, powerful and cautious on all fronts. If the ruler does not follow the principles, which our ancestors have put so succinctly and comprehensively in the small word, "*Dharma*", the result is the plummeting of values. This is the reason why a leader, an intelligent leader, seeks and surrounds himself with people of high caliber and integrity so that walking the straight and narrow path with a calm and purposeful stride becomes easy.

It is for this reason the Sringeri Matha has been revered from time immemorial till today. Adi Shankaracharya was successful in weeding out unsavory practices and reinstalling the glory of the Vedas. He preached in a methodical manner, inspiring both the learned and the unlettered. Most importantly, he set in motion an excellent administrative mechanism. He gathered around him the very best dedicated and committed souls to propagate his work, establishing the Advaita religious seats where rules were well laid out and strictly adhered to and where succession from one acharya to the next was a smooth transition.

In many ways, the fourteenth century is a very important milestone in the history of Sringeri. The tenth Acharya, Sri Vidyashankara Tirtha, Sri Bharati Tirtha and Sri Vidyananda's association with the Sangama brothers saw the Vijayanagara Empire take roots and prosper for the next three hundred years. It also saw the small hermitage turn into a major samsthana. This relationship saw gifts in the form of villages, lands and money pouring into the Matha for its varied activities. Some were to feed the Brahmins, some to build temples, some for the daily puja and some for the extensive tours, travel and stay of the Shankaracharya. The title *Karnataka Simhasana Pratishthapanacharya* and many bestowed on the Sringeri Jagadgurus by the Vijayanagara emperors is listed in the *Guruvamshakavya*.

The Saluva and Tuluva accession of the Vijayanagara Empire saw a decline of material gifts of land or money to the Matha but the regard and concern for Sringeri remained undiminished and their relations with it continued to be cordial.

The seventeenth and early eighteenth century witnessed many changes in the Karnataka region. Wars, revolutions and changes in dynasties created political instability. The Samsthana too saw a see-saw in the fortunes. Deprived of one central authority, it lost some of the villages it had been gifted. However, the Nayakas of Keladi, who managed to establish an independent state and also managed to hold on to power for almost two and a half centuries, supported the Jagadgurus of Sringeri although they were of Veerashaiva faith. As political leaders, they did not let personal difference in religion become a barrier to their interaction with the Sringeri Mathadhipatis. They were inspired leaders who took care of all the citizens in an unbiased manner. Reciprocating it, the Jagadgurus blessed them with prosperity and happiness.

Haider Ali, Tipu Sultan and the Nizam of Hyderabad, all Muslim rulers, had the utmost respect for the Sringeri Jagadgurus. Apart from genuine respect, which all of them had for them, it was also very good diplomacy on their part. If they wanted to establish themselves in a predominantly Hindu area and rule over it, making obeisance to the most respected Hindu spiritual leader and making the right gestures went a long way in winning the trust of the Hindu populace. This, of course, helped the Matha too as protection from pillagers and marauders were of utmost importance to it, and since neither interfered with the working of the other, harmony prevailed.

On the religious front, the main purpose of the Sringeri Matha is to protect and propagate Sanatana dharma and Advaita philosophy. Despite the changing fortunes of the dynasties supporting it, the Matha steadfastly kept up its tradition. When the Mathadhipatis ran out of funds, they went on Vijaya Yatras. This again had a two fold advantage. First, people who were unable to travel the distance to Sringeri got the golden opportunity to see and hear the great seers and second, the money which the bhaktas so willingly gave was used to further the spiritual message. Towards this end almost 130 branches of the Sringeri Matha have been till now established all over the country. Each has a shrine where all the pujas and festivals held at Sringeri are performed. This gives the bhaktas immense joy. More money also meant giving awards of appreciation to

vedic scholars and recognizing their contributions to the spread of knowledge. Right from Vijayanagara times the practice of rewarding the pandits has been an important agenda for the Matha.

In Sringeri too festivals are held regularly, Navaratri festival being one of the most important. Sringeri gets decorated like a bride at that time. People from all over the country pour into this temple town. Every devotee is fed in the huge halls specially constructed for mass feeding. Even on non-festival days daily feeding 3000 people have become very common. Cultural programmes like music and dance are also held to entertain and educate the bhaktas.

The concern for the common man has seen the founding of a school and college in Sringeri. The Sharada Dhanavantari hospital is a specialty hospital. Though not religious institutions, these were a social necessity which the Matha has attempted to fulfill.

conclusion

I would like to say that the influence of the religion spiritual institution, "The Sringeri Matha" was an extremely positive one. It is often said, and, I believe rightly, that democracy is upheld by the three strong pillars called the Legislature, Executive and the Judiciary. As long as these institutions adhere to Dharma the foundations of the State shall remain unshaken. Upholding Dharma is the crucial role played by Sringeri Matha. Sringeri Matha knew it then, and knows it now, what the boundaries are and what dharma is. Hence.it never interfered with the rulers, whoever they might have been, or whether they agreed with their policies or not. Yet when the need arose, like any citizen would, they turned to the rulers for help. But, interfering with the rulers, taking advantage of their closeness or indulging in politics has always been anathema to the Gurus of Sringeri. Their mission in life is to spread Vedic knowledge and protect Dharma, a mission they are pursuing assiduously and with single minded devotion.

An European scholar has said: "The greatest organization founded by Shankara has withstood unshaken by conquering armies, and when we consider the great learning and high philosophical training of its living followers we may be confident that the closely knit association will in no way be weakened by contact with western thought".

References

1. Kashi Lakshmana Shastry: Guru Vamsha Kavya Sri Rangama -1966.
2. Shivanna. K.S. - Karnataka Charite Vol. -3. 1336 -1760 A.D. Prasaranga Hampi Kannada V. V., Vidyananya. 1997.
3. Sheik Ali: Karnataka Charite Vol - 5. 1760 -1800 A.D. Prasaranga Hampi V V., Vidyananya, 1997.
4. L N Shastry: Shankara Dakshinayana Peetha Mattu Shaakha Matagalu, Vidya Shankara Prakashana, Mysore,-2005.
5. Sringeri Sri Sharada Pitada Itihasa, Vidya Shankara Prakashana, Mysore -2005. Hayavadana Rao. C.: Mysore Gazetteer, Vpol - 2, 3, 5, Govt. Press, Bangalore 1930 - Vol. 1 -1943 vol-1946.
6. Gururajachar S.: Some Aspects of Economic and Social Life in Karnataka (1000 - 1300 A.D.). Prasaranga, Mysore VV Mysore-1974.
7. Filoget Vasundara: La Epigraphy, the Vijayanagara, Paris, 1973, Vol. 1958, Vol. 1968, Vol.-1971.
8. Shettar.S. Archeological Survey of the Mysore, Annual report 1910-11. A study by Department of History and Archeology, Karnataka V V., Dharwar -1976.