

paramāratha ke kārane sādhuna dharā sarīra

The saints incarnate in a body for the good of everybody. (Hindi couplet).



Early Life

Birth

Jagadguru Rāmānandācārya Svāmī Rāmabhadraācārya incarnated in a most pious Sarayupārīṇa Brāhmaṇa (Brahmin) family of Vaśiṣṭha Gotra in Shandikhurd village of Jaunpur district in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. He took birth in the wee hours of the Makara Saṅkrānti day of January 14, 1950 (Māgha Kṛṣṇa Ekādaśī, the eleventh day of dark fortnight of the eleventh month of the Vedic calendar), born to mother Śacīdevī Mīśra and father Paṇḍita Rājadeva Mīśra. He was named Giridhara (a name of Lord Kṛṣṇa) by a cousin of his grandfather, the venerable Paṇḍita Sūryabalī Mīśra.

Loss of physical eyesight

The one Lord of the universe, Śrī Rāma, wished him not to see the horrors of Kaliyuga, but regale in the sight of mother Sītā and Lord Rāma through divine internal vision; the very same vision with which Arjuna and Saṅjaya saw the universal form of the Lord in the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. At the age of two months, the infant Giridhara developed Trachoma in his lotus-eyes. Modern medicine was unavailable in the village in those days, and local treatment was tried. Giridhara lost his physical eyesight for ever, and has since then perceived everything through his divine sight. He never had to read or write in any way, and nor did he have to ever use the Braille system. Mastering a scripture by

listening to just a single recitation and composing beautiful poetry by dictating is nothing for somebody who has the grace of the Lord.

Initial Education

The child Giridhara's initial education was from his grandfather at home. Possessing a remarkable memory, Giridhara had memorized the entire Bhagavad Gītā in Saṃskṛta (approximately 800 verses) with chapter and verse numbers by the age of five years. By the age of eight years, he had memorized the entire Rāmacaritamānasa of Saint Tulasīdāsa (approximately 10,800 verses) assisted by the efforts of his grandfather. Later, he went on to memorize and master the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, major works of Saṃskṛta grammar, and all works of the poet-saint Tulasīdāsa. His Upanayana Saṃskāra was performed on the Nirjala Ekādaśī day of June 24, 1961. On this day, besides being given the Gāyatrī Mantra, he was initiated (given Dīkṣā) into the mantra of Rāma by Paṇḍita Īśvaradāsa Mahārāja of Ayodhyā.

Higher Education

In 1966, a teenaged Giridhara Miśra joined the Ādarśa Gauriśaṅkara Saṃskṛta Mahāvidyālaya in Jaunpur to study Saṃskṛta grammar and other subjects for five years. Possessing an exceptional ability to memorize everything by listening to it just once, he topped his class for five years, and in 1971, the handsome and saintly young Giridhara enrolled at the Sampūrṇānanda Saṃskṛta Viśvavidyālaya in Vārāṇasī for higher studies. In 1973, he visited New Delhi to participate in various national-level Sanskrit competitions in the Akhila Bhāratīya Saṃskṛta Adhivēśana (All-India Sanskrit Conference), and won five out of the eight gold medals in Vyākaraṇa, Sāṅkhya, Nyāya, Vedānta and Antyākṣarī. Impressed by his unparalleled abilities, the then prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi, offered to send him to the USA for treatment of eyes, but Giridhara Miśra politely turned down this offer.

In 1973 and 1976 respectively, he topped the Śāstrī (two years' Bachelor's degree) and Ācārya (three years' Master's degree) examinations in Saṃskṛta Vyākaraṇa from the Sampurnanand Sanskrit University with gold medals. In a rare and unprecedented feat, he was also declared Ācārya of all subjects taught at the university for his all-round scholarship. Working with Paṇḍita Rāmaprasāda Tripāthī, he completed his Vidyāvāridhi (PhD) degree in 1981 from the Sampurnanand Sanskrit University with the Saṃskṛta dissertation titled "Deliberation on the non-Paninian usages in the Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa". Later in 1997 he was awarded the post-doctorate Vācaspati (DLitt) degree by the same university for the Saṃskṛta dissertation named "Investigation into verbal knowledge of every Sūtra of the Aṣṭādhyāyī". In this work Giridhara Miśra explained the grammar of Aṣṭādhyāyī in lucid verses.

Life after Virakta Dīkṣā

Tulasī Pīṭha

Dr. Giridhara Miśra did not enter into matrimony, and has followed Vīravrata - the vow of the brave - lifelong Brahmacarya. He took Vairagī initiation (Virakta Dīkṣā) in the Rāmānanda Sampradāya on the Kārtika full-moon day of November 19, 1983. Following the tradition of the Sampradāya, he was given an apt Vaiṣṇava name - Rāmabhadradāsa, meaning the servant of the auspicious Rāma. In 1987, he established Tulasī Pīṭha (the seat of Tulasī, the plant dear to Vaiṣṇavas) in Chitrakut, modern-day Uttar Pradesh, where Lord Rāma spent twelve out of his fourteen years of exile. As the founder of the seat, the title of Śrīcittrakūṭatulasīpīṭhādhīśvara was bestowed upon him by saints and intellectuals.

Jagadguru

Jagadguru (Saṃskṛta, literally the preceptor of the world), is a term used in the Sanātana Dharma used for somebody who possesses complete knowledge and understanding of scriptures. The term has traditionally been conferred upon Ācaryas of Vedānta who composed Saṃskṛta commentaries on the three principal scriptures of Vedānta (also called the Prasthānatrayī - the Brahma Sūtra, the Bhagavad Gītā and the principal Upaniṣads). In medieval history, there were five such Ācaryas who were bestowed with the title of Jagadguru - Śaṅkarācārya, Nimbārkaācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Rāmānandācārya and Vallabhācārya. After Vallabhācārya, the Jagadguru tradition in Vedānta was lost - nobody wrote Saṃskṛta commentaries on the Prasthānatrayī for almost the next five centuries.

Jagadguru Rāmānandācārya founded the Rāmānanda Sampradāya. He was Lord Rāma's incarnation in Kaliyuga.

rāmānandaḥ svayaṃ rāmaḥ prādurbhūto mahītale

Rāmānandācārya composed the Ānandabhāṣya on the Prasthānatrayī. Svāmī Rāmabhadradāsa was chosen as the Jagadguru Rāmānandācārya by the Kāśī Vidvat Pariṣat in 1988, and this decision was unanimously accepted by the Rāmānanda Sampradāya in 1989. He was ritually anointed as the Jagadguru Rāmānandācārya by the Digambara Akhada in Ayodhyā on August 1, 1995. He then wrote Saṃskṛta commentaries titled Śrīrāghava-kṛpābhāṣya on the Brahma Sūtra, the Bhagavad Gītā and the eleven Upaniṣads. Svāmī Rāmabhadradāsa thus not only revived the Jagadguru tradition after five hundred years, but also gave the Rāmānanda Sampradāya its own second interpretation of Vedānta in Saṃskṛta after Ānandabhāṣya.

Āśukavi (Spontaneous poet)

As a young child, Giridhara used to compose poetry in Prākṛta and Saṃskṛta effortlessly. While listening to the epics from his grandfather, he used to compose verses reflecting his emotions and view on the subject. Throughout his life, Jagadguru Rāmānandācārya Svāmī Rāmabhadṛācārya has been a profound and spontaneous Saṃskṛta and Hindi composer and poet. He composes verses in the longest and most complex of Saṃskṛta metres, without any effort. He has composed more than 80 books in Saṃskṛta and Prākṛta.

A university solely for the differently-abled

Jagadguru Rāmabhadṛācārya has himself been through the harsh ways our society treats the disabled, took a decision to establish an institution of higher learning solely for the physically disabled students. With this aim, he established the Jagadguru Rambhadracharya Handicapped University in Chitrakut in 2002. Svāmī Rāmabhadṛācārya is the life-long chancellor of the university. The university offers graduate and post-graduate courses in Sanskrit, Hindi, English, Sociology, Psychology, Music, Drawing and Painting, Fine Arts, Special Education, Education, History, Culture & Archeology, Computer & Information Sciences, Vocational Education, Law, Economics and Prosthetics & Orthotics. The education is provided at nominal cost to the visually impaired, deaf and/or mute, physically disabled and mentally disabled students as defined by the Disability Act of the Government of India, 1995. To date Jagadguru Rāmabhadṛācārya guides the day-to-day functioning of the university.

Deposition on behalf of Lord Rāma in Ayodhyā case

In the year 2003, Jagadguru Rāmabhadṛācārya deposed as an expert witness for religious matters in the Allahabad High Court. As the infant Rāma is a minor, Jagadguru Rāmabhadṛācārya, being a descendant of sage Vaśiṣṭha and thus a Brāhmaṇa from the Gurukula of Lord Rāma, defended the Lord in the case. Portions of his affidavit and cross examination are quoted in the final judgement by the High Court. In his affidavit, he cited the ancient Hindu scriptures (Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa, Rāmatāpanīya Upaniṣad, Skanda Purāṇa, Yajurveda, Atharvaveda, et cetera) describing Ayodhyā as a city holy to Hindus and the birthplace of Rāma. He cited verses from two works of Tulasīdāsa - eight verses from the Dohā Śataka which describe the destruction of a temple and construction of mosque at the disputed site in 1528 CE, and one verse from Kavitaṭvālī which mentions the disputed site. Refuting the theory of the original temple being to the North of the disputed area (as pleaded by the pro-mosque parties), he described the boundaries of the Janmabhoomi as mentioned in the Ayodhyā Māhātmya section of Skanda Purāṇa, which tallied with the present location of disputed area as noted by Justice Sudhir Agarwal. The verdict on September 30, 2010, ruled in the favour of Lord Rāma – the prayers of crores of Hindus were answered, and Jagadguru Rāmabhadṛācārya's testimony was vindicated.

Critical Edition of the Rāmcaritamānasa

The Rāmcaritamānasa, consisting of around 10,800 verses, was composed by Tulasīdāsa in the late sixteenth century. Over 400 years, it became extremely popular in northern India. Numerous editions of the epic are in existence, including older editions like the Venkatesh Press and Khemraj Prakashan editions, and newer editions like the Gita Press, Motilal Banarsidass, Kaudorama, Rameshvara Bhatta, Jvalaprasad, Kapurthala and Patna editions. Commentaries include Mānasapīyūṣa, Mānasagūḍhārthacandrikā, Mānasamayamka, Vināyakī, Vijayā and Bālabodhinī. There are many places where these editions differ in the number of verses, the original text, and spelling and grammar. Some editions, including the Motilal Banarsidass edition, contain an additional eighth Kanda as a supplement. In the twentieth century, critical editions of the Mahābhārata and Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa were published by Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute and Maharaja Sayajirao University, but no critical edition was available for the Rāmcaritamānasa, an epic of similar importance for crores of Hindus. Svamī Rāmabhadraṇḍyā, who has done more than 4,000 recitations of the entire Rāmcaritamānasa since childhood, took upon this onus. He came out with a critical edition of the Rāmcaritamānasa, after studying as many as fifty different editions during eight years of his research. This edition is known as the Tulsi Peeth edition and was printed in 2001 is believed by the Rāghava Parivāra to be the exact word of Tulasīdāsa.

Saint of our times

Saint, commenter, poet, visionary, leader, orator, singer, educationist, reformer, example for the disabled - the list is endless. *neti neti*. Not thus, not thus.

No description of Jagadguru Rāmabhadraṇḍyā can be ever perfect and complete. To sum it up, he is the saint of our times and we are honoured to see him in flesh and blood.