

Yogācārya T Krishnamacharya, the Sanskrit Scholar

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Yogacharya, T Krishnamacharya (1888-1989) was a unique personality, an "avatāra-puruṣa". At present, he is very popularly known as the "Father of the modern day Yoga" and is acclaimed as such nationally and internationally. He is singularly responsible for the spread of Yoga in a way to take it to the 'door steps' of every home. Of all his contributions to Yoga, two outstanding features are the 'adaptation of yoga for the individuals' and 'yoga for therapeutic applications'. All inventions in Yoga are based on the fundamental principles evolved by him. Yet he remained humble to say that all his teachings are what he got from his teachers.

Shri Krishnamacharya was born to a family devoted to Vedic education with his father running a "Gurukulam" in which he had his initial education. His lineage is traced to Saint Nāthamuni, the third century Vaiṣṇava ācharya responsible for revival of the 4000 Tamil hymns and considered as the foremost among the teachers of the Śrīvaiṣṇavism. His family was followers of Parakāla Mutt, established by Svāmi Vedāntadeśika (1269-1370) Śrīvaiṣṇava ācharya of fame. His family deity was "hayagrīva" which is worshipped in the Parakāla Mutt.

When Krishnamacharya was 11 years of age, he lost his father and came under the tutelage of the Parakāla Mutt, where he continued to receive the Vedic education. He proceeded to the

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North India, particularly Varanasi where he received numerous degrees in various branches of Vedic education. The titles he acquired includes: (1) vedantavāgīśa (2) vedakesarī (3) sāṅkhya-yoga-śikhāmaṇi (4) Nyāyaśikhāmaṇi. All through his education has been in Sanskrit medium.

Thus Sanskrit became his language of expression. Apart from having the facility to converse in Sanskrit fluently, all his works were in Sanskrit; be it commentaries, hymns on deities, message of yoga, etc. He had the facility to compose Sanskrit poems spontaneously.

His published works in Sanskrit are: (1) Yogavallī – Commentary in Sanskrit for Yoga Sūtra Chapter 1 samādhipāda (2) yogāñjalisāram – Hymns on the message of Yoga (3) Dhyānamālikā – Hymns on 'Meditation' one of the tools of Yoga (4) Yogarahasya – Revival of the text on Yoga as expounded by Sage Nāthamuni (5) Ādiśeṣaṣṭakam - A hymn in praise of Ādiśeṣa whose incarnation is Patañjali.

His unpublished works in Sanskrit include: (1) Cidacid-viśiṣṭa-tattvamīmāṃsā- Commentary in Sanskrit for Brahmasūtra (2) Hymns on Hayagrīva, the God of Knowledge.

In every opportunity that came across to him he would converse in multiple languages familiar to the other person. He was very fluent in Sanskrit, Hindi, Telegu, Kannada, Tamil and English. His conversation with Dr R Krishnamurti Sastrigal (vedic & vedantic scholar former principal of Madras Sanskrit college) and Dr V Varadachari (Indologist and Scholar of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, French institute, Pondichery) used to be only in Sanskrit. In the valedictory function of an International programme conducted by Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram (KYM) in which Dr H V Hande, the then State Health Minister presided over,

Krishnamacharya gave his speech in Sanskrit which drew the attention of one and all.

Krishnamacharya had a unique way of establishing his belief system through debates and always won the same. In Varanasi once there was a debate about whether the deity that is primarily worshipped in Vedas is "Śiva" or "Viṣṇu". The debate went through for a few days. His scholarly intervention facilitated the amicable conclusion of the debate.

He was a non-compromising believer of Vedic system to be practiced with perfection. Though he brought in the contribution of "adaptation" in Yoga he will not permit even a slight deviation in pronunciation of vedic mantras. He was so strict that priests who conducted rituals in his house were doubly cautious about not committing any mistakes lest they will be reprimanded.

Krishnamacharya shared a special relationship with the Sage of Kanchi (Mahaperiyava), Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati (1894-1994). In all his philosophical treatises, particularly his commentary on Brahmasūtras he has argued against "Advaita" philosophy, but that did not deter him from showing respect to the great Kanchi Seer who also reciprocated it. For the 80th Jayanti celebrations of Kanchi Mahaperiyava, Krishnamacharya composed and sent a special composition called "Sandhyāsāram" which talks about the performance of Sandhyavandanam, the steps involved there in and above all the connection between the yoga and Sandhyāvandanam. In return Mahaperiyava sent special prasadam through special messenger.

Krishnamacharya has always highlighted the close link between Vedas and Yoga. In his teachings, he clearly states that it is the "samantraka- prāṇāyāma" which works in the application of yoga for therapeutic purposes. He has advocated how mantra can be properly chosen depending on the "adhikāra" of the recipient including their belief system. He never forced the use of mantras, vedic chanting or even the belief of God on those who approached him for learning yoga. However, he taught vedic chanting to ladies and explained saying that in Kali Yuga where Brahmins who are supposed to protect the Vedas have taken up other professions and teaching women would help in protecting the Vedas from total extinction. He used extensively vedic mantras for healing purposes.

Being a staunch Viśiṣṭādvaitin and follower of Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition; His unique contribution lies in linking Yoga with the philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita. In explaining Īśvara in the Yogasūtra(1.23) he states in his commentary "Yogavallī" Īśvara includes Īśvari and hence Isvara is "Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa".

One rarely comes across a Yogi who had the facility to make use of the Sanskrit knowledge to the full extent and takes the pride of place among the "Ācharyas" of yesteryears such as Śaṅkara, Rāmanuja and Vedāntadeśika.

Need of Sanskrit knowledge for better appreciation of yoga literature – A Linguistic perspective

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Introduction

*idamandhantamaḥ kṛtsnaṁ jāyeta bhuvanaṭrayam |
yadi śabdāhvayaṁ jyotirāśaṁsāraṁ na dīpyate ||*

'All the three worlds would be in blinding darkness, if the light of sound did not shine throughout this world'.

*na so'sti pratyayo loke yaḥ śabdānugamādṛte |
anuviddhamiva jñānaṁ sarvaṁ śabdena bhāṣate ||²*

'There is no comprehension possible in this world except as accompanied by speech. All knowledge shines, as if permeated by speech'.

Language is the most powerful tool of communication, and a means of transfer of knowledge through generations. Any discipline of knowledge owes its all to the language in which it has been propounded and discussed. Sanskrit has been the language of *Yogaśāstra*, in addition to innumerable other streams of science and philosophy, through the ages. Hence, it will be of utmost value for practitioners of Yoga to be proficient in Sanskrit, to be able to read and understand the various texts and commentaries on Yoga.

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