

Sanskrit Academy, Madras

(Presidential address on 01st February 2003 at Platinum Jubilee Celebrations of Samskrita Academy, Madras)

I deem it an honour and privilege to participate in the Platinum Jubilee of the Samskrita Academy Madras started in the year 1927 by eminent men of deep erudition, wisdom and incomparable foresight like V.V. Srinivasa Iyengar, the doyen of the Bar in his days Sir S. Varadachariar, who rose to the position of a judge of the federal court of India, Shri T.K. Venkatarama Sastry who had to guts resign the office of Executive Councilor under the Diarchy when he was deprived of the portfolio of Law and the inimitable orator and the incomparable parliamentarian Satyamurti.

They had the foresight to see that with the introduction english as the medium of instruction by Macauloy, who was interested in recruiting a large number of writers, clerks attendants and assistants for the administration of this vast country that had come under their colonial control, the ancient heritage of India, its invaluable lore of Vedas, Upanishad and books on astronomy, medicine, songs and dances in Samskrita will vanish very soon and that unless positive efforts were undertaken to preserve Samskrita, it would perish from the country of its origin.

Sanskrita is, first and foremost, the language of our immortal values. The four Vedas and the commentaries on them, namely, the *Upanishads* are the founts of Samskrita literature. Since the time those great works were composed, a vast body of literature – philosophical, narrative, lyrical, dramatic and technical has appeared in Samskrita language.

Our *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Puranas* were followed by the epics Ramayana of Valmiki and Mahabharata of Vyasa, dramas of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti, the codes of Yajnavalkya and Manu; treatises on the act of governance by Kautilya, on music and dance by Bharata, on grammar by Panini and Patanjali; on astronomy by Aryabhata and on medicine by Charaka and Susruta.

Sanskrita works, whether religious or secular, whether in the form of epics, lyrics or drama have permeated our consciousness. The great works of Vyasa and Valmiki have, in particular, held sway over the hearts and minds of the people of India in a manner, which has few parallels in history. The characters of those epics have offered paradigms of conduct, thereby shaping the thoughts and actions of our people. The Ramayana and Mahabharata have also served to draw the world's attention to that unique concept, the concept of Dharma, which India has contributed to human thought;

About thirty years ago, the Paramacharya was talking to a group of devotees about Dharma. He then turned to me and asked me to give an english equivalent to word Dharma. Dharma means, charity, justice, fairplay, religion, ones duties and obligations like Raja Dharma Grihasta Dharma, Sanyasa Dharma. Considering all these things, I said righteousness may be approximate to Dharma. The Paramacharya floored me saying that righteousness does not include charity (Dharma). I then said that there is no equivalent word in English because they had no concept equivalent to Dharma. There can be no word without a concept. Dharma is a spectrum of values ennobling human life. It is India and its ancient language Samskrita that gave the concept of Dharma not only to this country but the whole world.

The Gitacharya says :

*Dharma sumsthanarthaya
Sambavami uge uge*

For restoring Dharma I come into being from Age to Age.

Though the word Dharma is originally from Samskrita every person in India practically uses it. By the spread of languages through millennia these words get absorbed in their own respective languages. The Queen of England who hosted a Banquet for me during my state visit to the country said in her Banquet Speech that there were 900 Indian words in the Oxford English Dictionary. They have become in English usage in their country because of the Indian association. There are many words in Tamil Thirukural that share its lineage in Samskrita.

It is therefore the duty of scholars to promote the expansion of their respective languages with as many adaptable words as necessary.

It will take a long time to recount the invaluable services rendered by eminent stalwarts and erudite scholars who had headed the Academy during the last 75 years. But a few Presidents have left indelible imprint on the institution. Prof. Kuppuswami Sastriar an eminent Samskrita scholar and an indologist of international reputation was President for 16 years from 1927 to 1943 laid solid foundation and gave a direction and substance to the Academy's work. Later K. Balasubramania Iyer illustrious son of the renowned father Justice V. Krishnaswami Iyer, held office for 16 years from 1954 to 1970 and strengthened the academy in all directions. Sri Balasubramania Iyer was a well-versed scholar in our ancient scriptures and devoted himself to the spread of Dharma. His Holiness the Paramachariar of Kanchi Kamokoti Peetam Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Swamigal conferred the title of "*Dharma Raksha Mani*" on him in 1932. I had the privilege of knowing Sri Balasubramania Iyer for a long time. For ten years we sat on opposite sides in the Madras Legislative Council, I, as the leader of the House and he as the Dy. Leader of the opposition. He was a model legislator, critical where Government went wrong, Constructive when Government took up welfare schemes. He always maintained the dignity and decorum of the House. I am glad that his son Madhavan is following the footsteps of his illustrious father and conducting the affairs of the Academy with competence. I wish him all success.

I now come to the pleasantest part of the function namely to confer the title of *Astika Ratna* on the Doyen of Carnatic music and known amongst musicians Sangitha Bhishma Pitamaha Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. For his talents in music, the Republic of India conferred on him *Padma Vibhushan*. At the same time Semmangudi mama is austere practitioner of Ritual and Seva Dharma.

Gitacharya says: *Sreyohi Jnam Abyasath*. Better than Abyasa – Anushtana is Jnana. It recognizes that carrying out Anushtana is one of the paths to salvation. Semmangudi mama is a quite unostentatious devotee of the deities of the Hindu pantheon and leads an exemplary pious life. The title *Astika Ratna* fits him in every way. He is two years older than myself and I therefore adorn him and not confer the title on him. Let us all pray that he may live a hundred years in health and happiness.