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Who said Sourashtra Language does not have literary value ?

SRIMAD KAVI VENKATASURI'S SOURASHTRA SANGITA RAMAYANA

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For centuries, the Ramayana epic has deeply influenced the life of the people in India. It has served as a silken bond among the people throughout the length and breath of this country. "Probably no work of world literature, secular in



Thanjavur Varakavi Srimath
Venkatasuri Swamigal
(1818 - 1890)

origin, has ever produced so profound an influence on the life and thought of people as the Ramayana" says A.A. MacDonell in the "Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics". The epic inspired people not only in the past but it continues to do so in the present. As Rajaji says. India cannot be India without Rama and Krishna. Almost all Indian languages including Sourashtra have their version of Ramayana.

Kavi Venkatasuri was a linguist and he is the author of many works in Sanskrit, Telugu and Sourashtram. Apart from his magnum opus - Sangita Ramayana, he has written Nauka Charitra in Sanskrit which has earned him the name of Dakshin Kalidasa. Nauka Charitra is the Sanskrit version of Saint Tyagaraja's work by the same name in Telugu. He is

also the author of many literary works in Sourashtra language like Amara Kosam, Bala Ramayana, Vyakaranu, Uraiyyur Nachiar Satakam, Asaveha Nirnayam, and Dhup Tirtharya Swami Charitra. His disciples include Kandadai Ramudu

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Bhagavathar, Lakshmana Bhagavathar, Salem Buddha Alagararya (author of Nauka Charitra in Sourashtra language). Vandavasi Kuppusami Bhagavathar has given an exhaustive commentary on Sangita Ramayana. Palayamkottai Ramasami Bhagavathar who was giving discourse on Sangita Ramayana has also written a commentary.

The poet is an expert in conjuring dramatic situation and depicting all varieties of sentiments and excels in the portrayal of humour and the erotic. The majestic flow of the fine verses and the perfect blend of the diverse components of the language exercise and hypnotic effect on his reader.

The language is Sanskritised but the style is racy and it attains heights of inspired utterance while dealing with profound philosophical problems and singing the glory of God. Full of poetic beauty, this gem of a classic has occupied the highest place of reverence in the hearts of Sourashtras.

Sangita Ramayana is a piece of good literature in Sourashtra language. It is at once a poem of outstanding literary merit and an authoritative book for usage. Naturally the author is held in high esteem among literary men. Even a casual reader can find in him a fascinating poet.

Suri Ramayana is a thing of beauty for literary students and a joy for ever. This lyric is, "a string of cut gems with glittering facets sparkling at each turn". The devotional poem in the form of songs possess a rich musical quality. Importance is given more to the music and lyric than the narrative.

The author of Sangita Ramayana, Sri Venkatasuri was born at Ayyampettai, Thanjavur District in 1818 to Sri Narayana Sarma and Renganayaki. He was named Venkatasubbu. His marriage took place at Paramakudi where he stayed for five years before leaving for Thanjavur.

At that time Thanjavur was ruled by Maharashtra King Sivaji who patronised fine arts. Having learnt about the scholarship and erudition of Venkatasubbu the king sent for him and patronised him. On the occasion of the marriage of the king's daughter he recited Mangalashtakam in Sourashtra language and blessed the couple. Pleased with his skill and ability the king presented him the title of "SURI". From that time he was known as Venkatasuri.

After the king's demise, Venkatasuri left for Madurai where he was engaged in teaching at Drawpadi Amman temple. At the request of elders of Madurai, he composed Sangita Ramayana. He was invited and honoured in all the places where Sourashtras were living. Later he left his son in Banaras for studies and undertook a tour of Nepal. From there he came to Sri Ranga temple on the bank of Yamuna where he spent his last days.

Sangita Ramayana was first published in 1905 in Madurai. It runs to about 600 pages. It contains 592 slokas and 300 kirtanas in Vritham metres and has also dwipadis. Only two talas Adi and Ata tala chapu are mainly employed. The work commences with invocation to deities.

Suri follows the original story of Ramayana closely. For each song or daru is prefixed by a verse indicating the substance of what is to follow. The author is well

versed in Valmiki and Kambar. He keeps to Arunachala Kavi's Rama Natakam as his model, although his medium is Sourashtra language.

His style is delightful and end rhyming is unerring. His main aim in writing Ramacharita was to purify himself and to help devotees to avoid re-birth.

"phiri janmuk avunasto paramabhaktu sangu
dheri Ramacharita kari pavanu mi hoye".

LAALI GEETUN

Among the most popular songs of Sri Ramayana, the Laaligitun, praising the qualities of Rama occupies the pride of place. It is sung at the namakarana (naming) of the child among Sourashtras even to-day. The song narrates the heroic deeds of Sri Rama as Bhagwan Maha Vishnu.

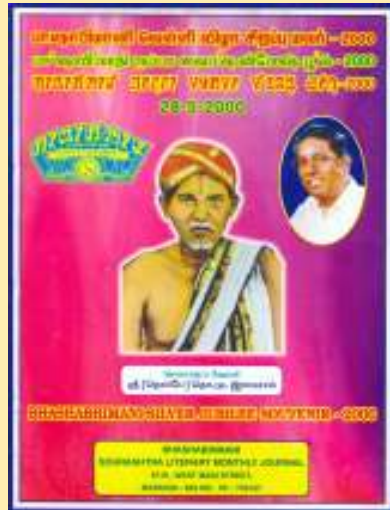
After mentioning the names of the four brothers, Rama, Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrughna, it praises Rama for coming to this world to relieve Mother Earth's worries due to the atrocities of Rakshasas. "The child is Vedantaswarupa, Nadanta navyalepa and Akhilanda nayaka. He gives fortunes to his devotees. He is the person who has taken various avatars including Macha, Kurma, Varaha, Vamana, Parasurama, Balarama, Krishna and Buddha".

In the last two lines, the poet says,

" Katinun nas gaves aneku-sukavi Venkatasuri
Vimala vaku
Gutan amrtu rasunveku-Sourashtra guruvu hoye
Jayarama laali"

Poet Venkatasuri has composed many poems and works which are pure with words of wisdom and full of amriturasa in praise of Sourashtra Guru Jayarama.

To be continued ...



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- Editor

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