



ISSN 2583-9020

An Electronic Veda Journal

वेद वाणी

(vEda vaaNee)

Volume 2, Issue 2, July 2024



Printed and Published by

Veda Samskruti Samiti

Malkajgiri

Hyderabad TS

Guru Purnima - Vyasa Jayanti

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Abstract

‘Guru Purnima’ is observed on the full-moon day in the month of Ashadha. Traditionally, on this day, one remembers and worships his/her Gurus. ‘Guru’ refers to a spiritual guide who enlightens disciples by imparting knowledge and guides them on to the path that leads them to reach their goals. In our Indian culture, the ‘Guru-Shishya’ (Teacher - Student) relationship is most revered and its importance can be understood through the Veda mantra – ‘*Sahana vavatu....*’ Parents are the ‘*Prathama Gurus*’, who impart first lessons to their children. Guru Purnima is also known as ‘Vyasa Purnima’ and this day is commemorated as birth anniversary of Maharshi Veda Vyasa. He was the author as well as a character in the Epic Mahabharata.

Matṛ devōbhava, Pitṛ devōbhava, Achārya devōbhava are the *mantras*/liturgies first revealed in the Yajurveda texts (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad, Sīkṣā Vallī*, 11-20). This implies that after mother and father, it is the ‘Guru’ (Acharya) who must be worshipped. A Guru must be respected and treated as equivalent to God. The word ‘Guru’ has been explained in the ‘Guru Gita’ as noted below:

गुकारस्छन्धकारस्तु रुकारस्तन्निरोधकृत् ।
अन्धकारविनाशित्वात् गुरुरित्यभिधीयते ॥

– गुरु गीता

*Gukāraschandhakārastu rukārastannirodhakṛut |
Andhakāravinaśitvāt gururityabhidhīyate ||*

– *Guru Gītā*

‘**Gu**’ means darkness and ‘**Ru**’ means the remover of the darkness. On account of the power of removing darkness (*ajñānam*), the **Guru** plays a major role in human life and guides us on the spiritual path.

The grammatical root words (*dhātu*) for Guru are:

- 1) **gr** + **ku**, ‘*girati ajñānam*’ – meaning ‘one who removes ignorance (*ajñāna*)’.
- 2) ‘*grñāti upadiśati vēdavidyāṃ ācāraṃ ca*’ meaning ‘He who expounds Vedic knowledge and ritual’. Father is the first Guru who preaches ‘*Gayatri Mantra*’ during Upanayana (thread) ceremony.

According to the Hindu calendar, the *Āṣāda Śuddha Purnima* (the Purnima that happens/occurs in the month of July as per English calendar), is being celebrated as ‘Guru Purnima’, and is dedicated to Veda Vyasa Maharshi. This is aptly celebrated as ‘Vyasa Purnima’, for his Epic contributions to the Sanaatana Dharma. And hence Vyasa is titled ‘Prathama Guru’. Vyasa is the Guru of all Gurus. This day is believed to be his birth anniversary and also called as ‘Vyasa Jayanti’. Vyasa Maharshi compiled the wealth of spiritual literature, which leads individuals from *Ajñāna* (the fetters of ignorance) to *Jñāna* or *Jñāna Jyoti*.

The word ‘Vyasa’ is derived from the grammatical root words (*dhātu*) are:

- 1) ‘*Vyasaḥ*’ meaning *vi + as + ghañ – ‘vyāsaḥ viśēṣēṇa asyati vistārayati vēdārtham’* meaning ‘One who spread and propagated the essence of Veda’ is Veda Vyasa.
- 2) *vi + as + ghañ, ‘vyasyati tasya bhāvaḥ karma vā’* meaning one who teaches Puraṇa. Vyasa acquired his knowledge from the four Kumaras (Sanaka, Sanaatana, Sanandana and Sanatkumara), Narada and Lord Brahma himself.

Birth and Names of Veda Vyasa

Vyasa is the son of Sage Parāśara and great grandson of Sage Vaśiṣṭha. Prior to Vyasa’s birth, Parāśara had performed a severe penance to Lord Shiva. He granted a boon that Parāśara’s son would be a *Brahmarṣi* equal to Vaśiṣṭha and would be famous for his knowledge. Parāśara begot Vyasa with Satyavati. Vyasa in his adulthood left home and promised his mother that he would return whenever she needed him. *Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana* is another popular name given to Vyasa Maharṣi. Since he was dark in complexion, *Kṛṣṇa*, and was born on an island (*dvīpa*) of River Yamuna, he was given the name *Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana*.

व्यासाय विष्णुरुपय व्यसरुपय विष्णवे ।
नमो वै ब्रह्मनिधये वसिष्ठय नमो नमः ॥
– श्री विष्णु सहस्रनाम स्तोत्रम्

*Vyāsāya Viṣṇurupāya Vyāsarupaya Viṣṇave ।
Namōvai Brahma Nidhaye Vasiṣṭāya Namō
Nama: ॥*

– *Srī Viṣṇu Sahasranāma Stotram*

In the popular images, we see ‘Vyasa Bhagavan’ as slender build, dark in complexion and with hair-knotted on top of his head.

Classification of Vedic Texts

Poet Vyasa got the name ‘Veda Vyasa’, since he collected all the extant Vedic hymns and classified them (*vyas* also has the meaning ‘to divide’) into *Chaturvedas* (four Vedas), well-known as the *Ṛgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda* and *Atharvaveda*. He distributed these four Vedas to his four disciples - *Ṛgveda* to the Sage Paila, *Yajurveda* to the Sage Vaiśampayana, *Samaveda* to the Sage Jaimini and *Atharvaveda* to the Sage Sumantu to propagate them through oral tradition from generation to generation. This is how these four Vedas took shape.

Vyasa Maharṣi’s Role in Mahabharata

Vyasa is a cosmic entity born in every age to propagate the scriptures. He is the author of the great Epic, the *Mahabharata*, and also the eighteen *Purāṇas* (mythologies) and the *Brahma Sutras*. Ganeśa in His young age is said to have been Vyasa’s scribe who took down the Mahabharata as he dictated it. This Epic is considered as the ‘*Pañcama Veda*’ (fifth Veda).

King Śantanu and Satyavati had two sons, named Chitrāngada and Vicitravīrya. Chitrāngada was killed by Gandharvas in a battle, while Vicitravīrya was unhealthy and ill all the time. Satyavati requested her step-son, Bhiṣma, to find a wife for Vicitravīrya. Bhiṣma attended the *swayamvara* conducted by the king of Kaśi (for his three daughters), and defeated all the kings. Amba openly rebutted the *swayamvara* as she was in love

with the prince of Shalva. Later Bhiṣma came to know that King of Kaśi was not aware of his elder daughter's love for Shalva, so Bhiṣma allowed Amba to meet her lover and marry him. But unfortunately, she was rejected by the Prince Shalva. Later, she came back to Bhiṣma and asked him to marry her, which he could not agree due to his vow of celibacy. Amba being left alone in anguish took a vow to kill Bhiṣma. Bhiṣma reached the kingdom along with Ambika and Ambalika to be wedded to Vicitravīrya. Unfortunately, during the wedding ceremony, Vicitravīrya collapsed and died. Satyavati was shocked and left clueless on how to save the perishing clan. She turned to Bhiṣma to marry both Amba and Ambalika. Bhiṣma reminded Satyavati about his promise made to her of remaining unmarried and thus refused to marry them. At this point, Satyavati revealed to Bhiṣma, about the child born to her with Parāśara before her marriage to Śantanu. She then requested him to bring her son, Vyasa Maharṣi, to Hastinapura. On Vyasa reaching the kingdom, Satyavati narrated the happenings and requested him to save the Kuru clan.

Sage Vyasa had a radiant *aura* along with a fierce personality. Ambika was the first to be presented before Vyasa Maharṣi. On seeing Vyasa's fierceness, Ambika got scared and closed her eyes. As a result, their child born blind, who was named Dhṛtarāṣṭra. The other queen, Ambalika, turned pale upon seeing Vyasa, which resulted in their child, Pāṇḍu being born pale. This alarmed Satyavati who requested Vyasa to meet Ambika again for another progeny. But, Ambika instead sent her maid to meet Vyasa Bhagavan. The duty-bound maid was calm and composed in the

presence of Vyasa. This resulted in the birth of a healthy child, popularly known as Vidura.

Origin of Bhagavata Purāṇa

Veda Vyasa Maharṣi was not content with his great literary contributions. When Brahmaṛṣi Narada met Vyasa, he expressed his unhappiness to him. Then Narada suggested Vyasa to praise Narāyana and write stories on Viṣṇu while revealing the greatness of Lord Viṣṇu. Sage Vyasa composed the 'Bhagavata Purāṇa' or 'Srimad Bhagavata' in praise of Lord *Kṛṣṇa* solely to express his devotion to the Lord by describing the incarnation of *Kṛṣṇa* and His glory extensively. Srimad Bhagavata (to know the essence of the Lord) also known as '*Bhagavata Purāṇa*' is one of the greatest Purāṇas in Hinduism. In Bhagavata, *Kṛṣṇa* declares that He is God himself – '*Kṛṣṇastu bhagavan svayam*' (1-3-28). The synopsis of the contents of Bhagavata as available today has been divided into 12 *Skandas*, 335 *Adhyayās* and with little more than 14,000 *Ślokas* or verses. However, originally, the Bhagavata is considered to contain 18,000 verses.

Other Literary Contributions

Vyasa Maharṣi's other literary works such as 'Srimad Bhagavad Geeta', 'Viṣṇu Sahasranama', 'Lalitha Sahasranama' and others are of great importance for the elevation of human life towards divinity and to attain liberation.

Vyasa's Spiritual Heir

The legacy of Vyasa Maharṣi was continued by his children, the great Śuka Maharṣi and daughter Jābāli, who were his true spiritual heirs. Śuka Maharṣi was a

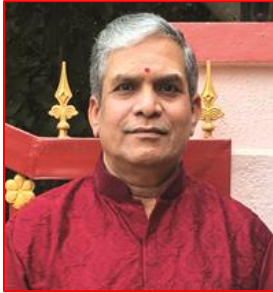
spiritual guide and Guru to the young Kuru princes. Śuka Maharṣi narrated the *Bhagavata Purāṇa* to King Parikṣit (grandson of Arjuna), who was destined to die after seven days due to a curse. Mahabharata also narrates how Śuka was sent by Vyasa to King Janaka for guiding him in spirituality. Later, this guidance helped King Janaka on attaining liberation while still in human form (*Jivanmukta*). Śuka was tutored by the guru of gods, *Bṛhaspati* and his father Vyasa Bhagavan. Later, Śuka went on to surpass his father, Vyasa Maharṣi, in spiritual attainment.

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरुः साक्षात् परब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

*Gururbrahmā Gururviṣṇuḥ Gururdēvō
Mahēśhvaraḥ...।
Guruh Sākṣhāt Para Brahma Tasmai Shrī
Guravē Namaḥ... ॥*

– OM Tat Sat –

About the Author



Dr. Raghava S. Boddupalli, MSc., PhD – Worked as a scientist in the field of Plant Biology for over 35 years. In the last thirteen years, he has completed studying the Krishna Yajurveda. This has inspired him to publish several research articles on Vedas in relation to Botany in national and international scientific journals. He has also completed two Veda Projects titled, ‘*Plant Biology of Yajurveda*’ and ‘*Plants of Atharvaveda - Their Descriptions and Uses*’ sponsored by the Indian National Science Academy (INSA), New Delhi. He has edited and published three Veda books namely, ‘*Taittirīya Yajurvēdīya Āśīrvāda Manjarī*’, ‘*Abhiśravaṇa Mantrah*’ and ‘*Agnimantra Manjarī*’. Dr. Raghava is presently serving as an Editor-in-Chief for the VEda vaaNee e-Journal.



Veda Samskruti Samiti

13-1-62 & 13-1-47/1

Veenapani Nagar, Malkajgiri

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Veda Samskruti is an inherent intellectual property of Bhaarata dEsham. It is the basic duty and right of every citizen in Bhaarata dEsham to protect this Intellectual property. Indian Constitution and Law provides provision for protection and preservation of its culture, its monuments, architecture etc.

The Chaturvedas said to have 1131 shaakhaas right up to the time of Aadi Shankaraachaarya and thereafter during last more than ten centuries, many shaakhaas are out of practice due to various reasons and presently only seven shaakaas are in the practice of Guru shiShya parampara.

There is a need to continuously preserve these available shaakhaas which may likely to disappear in future due to various external forces acting in the country vigorously with the power of money and global politics. It is time for the intellectuals of Bharata dEsham to wake-up and work collectively to protect and preserve Veda Samskruti of Bharata dEsham, by empowering the Youth of Bharat dEsham, the future care takers of this great Indian Heritage , with suitable education of our correct history and culture.

The above background lead to formation of this Veda Samskruti Samiti which is registered under Societies acts of Government of Telangana, with Regd. No. 961/2016 by Sri A.H. Prabhakara Rao, who is the Founder and President of the Samiti.

The vEda vaaNee e-journal, [ISSN 2583-9020](#), is now publishing its **Volume 2, Issue 2, July 2024.**