

Passionate about restraint and tolerance

The philosophy and religion postulated by Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa have one prominent feature. Both darśana and mata of his are passionate about restraint and tolerance. The restraint consists in walking on the middle path. It consists in striking judicious balance between two opposite views, real or seeming wherever possible; between the old and the new, traditional and contemporary, ‘Little Tradition’ and ‘Great Tradition’; between the use of sacred Sanskṛta language and the local vernacular language, for teaching and preaching; performing worship mentally and internally (Mānasi), without any external object or physically with all available objects.

It consists in giving proper weight¹ age to both the knowledge of God and the worship of God (Jñānamārga and Bhaktimārga) action and devotion (Karmamārga and Bhaktimārga), between moral approach and emotional approach to reach God (Dharma and Bhakti). Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa had acumen to introduce this approach during the first three decades of nineteenth century in Gujarāta. It has continued even today in the faith.

That is the reason why in many early manuscripts written during Vikrama Saṃvat 1870-1880 corresponding to 1813-1823 C.E., he is mentioned as the Buddha in the beginning and the end of the works. In a MMS no. 424 of Vikrama Saṃvat 1879 (1819 CE) there is the Śikṣāpatrī

of 145 ślokaś. The scribe is an ascetic named Ṛṣabhānanda. He writes, 'my greetings to all with Jai Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa. **Salutation to Śrī Buddha Swāmi.** Again and again, my salutation to all.

Śrī Kṛṣṇaswarupdāśa, wrote the biography of Nityānanda Swāmi, the great scholar of Sanskṛta and a reputed ascetic disciple of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa, in Śrī Haridigvijayakāvya, stating, 'among the leading sādhu-disciples of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa, Śrī Nityānanda was very firm about Śrīhari, Sahajānanda Swāmi, as the God in human form. But to strike a middle path and to be acceptable to all people, in a meeting called to decide and write about Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa, senior sādhu-disciples decided to describe Śrīhari as an incarnation of God like other incarnations, described in our scriptures. Śrī Nityānanda Swāmi vehemently protested. He had always considered Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa as the God of gods, avatāraī of all avatāras. But there was general understanding among many to consider him an avatāra and epitome of virtue and practice of non-violence and love he had for all living beings, many sādhus, scribes described Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa as the Buddha. For e.g. in MSS No. 424 Page 5 (Śikṣāpatrī of 145) of Ṛṣabhānanda, Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa is called as the 'Buddha', and 'Sugata' etc.

This clearly shows two strands or paths even at that early time of the faith that has continued in some way or the other, even today.

The main group of followers considered Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa as the avatārī. The first pontiff, (Āday-Guru), Śrī Guṇatītānanda Swāmi stated that 'this principle is the one accepted by Śrī Gopālānanda Swāmi and Śrī Swarūpānanda Swāmi. The principle (to consider Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa) as the Avatāra - Supreme God is like the drink of Soma Creeper (Somavalli) which can be digested only by released souls of Akṣaradhāma who have taken the birth on earth'. (Swāminivāto II-41, ed. Bālamukunda Swāmi). The ascetic disciple of Śrī Guṇatītānanda Swāmi named Śāstri Dharmatanayadāśa wrote a book called 'Śrī Hariswarūpanirṇaya in 1890 CE wherein he tried to prove the supremacy of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa as the

Highest Iṣṭadevatā. So within 90 years (Yamadanda of Śrī Niṣkuḷānanda Swāmi, written in 1804, described Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa as God and Avatārī Śrī Hariswarūpanirṇaya written in 1890 calls him the God of gods) through theanthropic teaching, followers of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa have firm conviction that the most exalted of the manifestations of God are in the human forms. He was the supreme when in the human form on earth and his present manifest human form as Akṣarabrahman, the Guruhari, is equally divine; worthy of worship and capable of granting final freedom. As stated about him in HVSS 249, corresponding to VGLS 26. 'He who has seen Akṣara has seen Puruṣottama. Therefore both are entitled to worship and devotion'.

Thus, through his continu^{ous}es and constant presence, the faith has remained vibrant and progressive.

This is a very interesting finding because it tells us something not at all evident in the standard texts of the philosophy of religion, about the way in which life and thought interact for devotees including those of Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa. It makes one reconsider the true function of arguments for the existence and continuity of God. Religion is essentially justified by faith and faith is entirely independent of reason. We can state that belief in God or his present manifest form is beyond proof.

