

SANGAMA

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Kudos:

- Congratulations to Sarayu Kumar on her High School Graduation from Holmdel High School and joining University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
- Dr. Raghesh Sambasivan, son of Sarjapur Sambasivan and Sujatha of New York, is married to Dr. Priyadarshini, daughter of Mr. K.N. Prabhakar and Shantha of Bangalore, on Feb. 10th, 2010 at ISKON Temple Bangalore. VSNY wishes happy married life to the couple.

Featured Article:

ADVAITISM OF VEERASAIIVAS

by *Linga Raju*

Veerasaivas (VS) are advaitins/advaitas in general; they believe in only one Absolute Reality – Sunya (1). Monism is the western term that refers to the view that Reality is basically one. Sunya encompasses the whole universe. For a commoner to understand this further, it seems that VS have adopted Siva (male component) and Sakti (female component) to represent Sunya. Sakti is Siva's Consciousness Force. The universe and the worldly existence were created by Sakti in Siva's Consciousness. The activities are being played out as Lila (sport, game, play, play acting) in Siva's Consciousness. It is believed that Siva, not only is tranquil, but also has active consciousness at the same time (1). Hence God is real and everything else is real within God's Consciousness – that way everything is still one – one Reality.

The Oneness philosophy is practiced by many Hindu groups of which VS are one such group. **Hinduism accommodates both theistic (belief in the existence of God) and atheistic (belief that there is no God) ideas.** Based on the Vedas, there are six major religious philosophical systems which were developed by Hindu sages at different periods of time (2). In addition many other systems have been adopted by other Hindu groups. All these systems are so diverse that each one may qualify to be a separate religion. The most ancient of all the schools of Hindu Philosophy – the **Sankhya System – is atheistic;** but still it can help people attain spiritual liberation (2). This system recognizes two types of ultimate realities – Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is pure spirit, and there are as many Purushas as there are conscious beings. Prakriti is primordial matter. Sankhyas are not advaitas since they believe in two realities.

The original treatise of the Uttara Mimamsa or **Vedanta Philosophical School** is known as **Brahmasutra**. It was written by none other than **Vyasa** who is the compiler of the four **Vedas**, and the author of **Mahabharata** which includes **Bhagavad-Gita** (2). Several famous Philosophers – Sankaracharya (788 to 820 AD), Ramanujacharya (11th century AD) and Madhvacharya (1199 to 1278 AD) – have written their versions of commentaries on Vyasa's Brahmasutra. **Sankaracharya's Advaita Philosophy** is the one that is usually referred to as Advaitism. Here Brahman is the only Reality (Satya), and everything other than Brahman is

Mitya (false) (3). Brahman is neither male nor female, and has no active consciousness. It is pure knowledge. The Jiva or the Individual Soul is Brahman itself. There can be no real birth, death or origination for the Jiva – it is described as being in par with the Jiva in a dream (3). From Brahman’s standpoint, the world has not really been created; it is real to those who are under the spell of Maya (illusion). A rope in partial darkness may appear to be a snake to an observer; at that moment the observer perceives the snake to be real. But when the light shines, the misperception disappears. Both Sankara’s and VS’ advaita philosophies agree with the concept of oneness and that God is real, but they disagree with regard to whether God has active consciousness or not. Both systems believe that one can attain oneness with the Absolute, even when alive. The spiritual aspirant has to first go through various moral and ethical practices, worship of personal God, etc., and then go through intense meditation which enables the aspirant the knowledge of the inner Divine Self. Both systems believe that worship of, or meditation on the monosyllable **OM** can lead to the highest knowledge. When ignorance is completely eliminated, and all sense of I or Thou is wiped out, oneness is attained.

Ramanujacharya’s version is known as **Visishtadvaitism**. It is a qualified monism. It holds the view that three entities – God, soul and matter – are steady factors, and the three form inseparable elements of one (4). “It is one and not two, and still that one is made up of the three, a unity of trinity and therefore it is known as Visishtadvaitam” (page 2 of reference 4). If so, some state that, it can be categorized as traitism, not advaitism (3). Visishtadvaitins believe that only bhaktimarg/bhaktiyoga can lead to Moksha (salvation). They also believe that a person can attain Moksha only after the person’s death. This Moksha means living blissfully in Vikunta (god Vishnu’s abode), subservient to god Vishnu, not becoming one with God. **Madhvacharya’s** version of the Vedanta Philosophy is dualistic – **Dvaita Vedanta**, and thus not advaitism.

Another major philosophical system - **The Yoga School** – was founded by **Patanjali** who is the author of the **Astanga (eight-limb) yoga**, the practice of which results in the Union of the Individual Self and the Universal Self. Astanga yoga is very similar to **Sivayoga** of VS.

It appears that **Veerasaivism** and **Lingayatism** are synonymous, and are used interchangeably. However, the Lingayat version applies/uses the term Linga for everything to emphasize the oneness philosophy. Sunya is Linga. The Universal Self is Mahalinga. The Individual Self is Atmalinga. The personal god Siva is Istalinga (portable form) and Sthavaralinga (fixed version at a temple). In the other older religious philosophical systems, the soul is said to be enclosed in five sheaths that form three bodies. The outer sheath forms the gross body Sthulasarira; the middle three sheaths form the subtle body Lingasarira; and the innermost sheath forms the causal body Karanasarira. The triple body – the gross, the subtle and the causal – are known in Veerasaiva terminology as tyaganga, bhoganga and yoganga. The respective Lingayat equivalents are Istalinga, Pranalinga and Bhavalinga (page 194, volume III of reference 1).

Sunyasampadane compilations are considered by VS to be what the Bible is to the Christians. The compilations consider VS philosophy to be Siva-advaita philosophy - Sivadvaitism. However some others have raised controversy, stating that it is Shaktivisishtadvaitism (5). This term is not mentioned anywhere in Sunyasampadane. Professor Sakhare in his book (5) states that the philosophy of Lingayatism is the same as that of Kashmere Sivadvaitas. Siva is characterized and distinguished (visishta) by His power (Shakti) or capacity to work. Kashmere philosophers imply the visishtatva of Siva, but do not express it in so many words; but Lingayats do – this is the point of difference in terminology only (page 281 of reference 5). He continues – Lingayat philosophy of Maya is an improvement upon Kashmerean theory where there is no explanation of what the real Maya is (page 290 of reference 5). He admits that misconception is possible if the content of Parasiva, the unmanifest condition of the universe in his consciousness (Shakti) is stressed; and

that this could be construed to be similar to the philosophy of Ramanuja's school of Visishtadvaita (page 290 of reference 5). By emphasizing Shakti and using the term visishta in his proposal of Shaktivisistadvaitism as the philosophy of Lingayats, he may be causing too much of a confusion, and his concept may be misconstrued.

As to the practice of Veerasaivism – Sunyasampadane is replete with the use of the terms Sivadvaita and Sivadvaita-bhakti in the practice of Veerasaivism where the worshipper and the worshipped are one and the same. Despite the above controversy it appears that Siva-advaita philosophy is generally accepted to be the philosophy of VS. If there is a need for another term to differentiate VS from others, may be Lingayatadvaitism or Veerasaiva-advaitism could be used.

1. Sunyasampadane, volumes I through V, Karnatak University, Dharwar, India
2. The Essentials of Hinduism, Swami Bhaskarananda, Viveka Press, Seattle, WA 98102
3. Sankara's Advaita, R. D. Karmarkar, Karnatak University, Dharwar, India
4. Hinduism In The Light Of Visishtadvaitism, C. Duraiswami Aiyangar, Lecture delivered before the Inter Religious League, Printed at The DT. Printing works, Chittor, 1933
5. History and Philosophy of Lingayat Religion, M. R. Sakhare, Karnatak University, Dharwad, India.