

**ADDRESS BY THIRU BANWARILAL PUROHIT, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF
TAMIL NADU AT THE 750TH JAYANTHI CELEBRATIONS OF SRI SWAMI DESIKAN
ORGANISED BY HAYAGREEVA VIDYA PEETAM AT SRINIVASA MINI HALL, TARAMANI,
CHENNAI ON 08.07.2018 AT 04.15 P.M**

Anaivarukkum Maalai Vanakkam

Thiru. N. Sankaran

Shri. U. Ve.Vidwan P.S.Venkata Varadachariyar

Dr. V. Kannan

Dr. T. N. Aravamudhan

Thiru. Mohan Parasaran

Thiru. S. Ranganathan

Distinguished Invitees

Ladies & Gentlemen

I am happy to be present here today at the function being held to commemorate the 750th birth anniversary of Sri Swami Desikan, who strode the field of contemporary religious and sastraic scholarship like a colossus in the 14th century.

Our history teaches us that dharma is the pivotal axis around which life in India revolves, contributing to the sustainability of our civilization. Dharma teaches us to make the right choices and to lead a righteous life. Whenever there is a need to revive dharma, a great acharya is born amongst us to reinstate the dharmic values and emancipate the masses. We have outstanding examples of such great acharyas who walked this land from times immemorial. One such illustrious personality was Swami Vedanta Desikan.

Sri Venkatanatha (more popularly known as Vedanta Desika) belonged to the post-Ramanuja period. His sole aim was to fortify the Vedanta system as explained by Sri Ramanuja through his monumental contributions covering different aspects of religion and philosophy, theology and literature. He wrote in Sanskrit in pure Tamil, in Manipravala i.e. Sanskritized Tamil and Prakrt. His

works can be classified as devotional lyrics (29), literary works (6), works on sastras (32), theological works (21), Tamil Prabhandhams (24) and there are in all, about 120 of them.

Appaya Dikshitar, the great mediaeval scholar appreciated Desika in the following manner.

"Even in the simple and soft compositions of this lion of poetry and lion of logic, there is poetic excellence evident at every step he took, and indeed in every word he wrote."

He had none to excel him either in debates covering abstruse sciences like Nyaya and Mimamsa, Sankhya and Yoga, or in the art of composing beautiful poetry. At the same time Vedanta Desikan was utterly unassuming and disarmingly simple. As an ideal householder he went about collecting his day-to-day "*bhiksa*" by way of alms from a few houses and never kept anything in store for the next day. He was an ideal man, never given to greed and temptations of power or pelf.

To state here in brief the basic tenets of the Sri Vaishnava philosophy as propounded by Swami Desika, it is important to trace its lineage. It was set forth for the first time by Nathamuni, protected by Ramanuja and reinforced by Sri Swami Vedanta Desikan. The contribution of Desikan to the development of Ramanuja's philosophy is monumental. While it may appear that Ramanuja is not explicit about the position of Saranagati (whole-hearted surrender irrespective of caste, creed, gender) as a means of liberation, Vedanta Desika made it explicit through his commentaries. Ramanuja's Sribhasya is pan-Indian in character whereas Vedanta Desikan's commentaries are meant for the smaller ring of followers of his tradition of whole hearted surrender. Explaining the point Desika stated categorically that "*Saranagati Gadya* is meant for those who are restless and impatient for liberation.

Vedanta Desikan's life reminds me of the letter that Swami Vivekananda wrote to Sharat Chandra on 3rd July, 1897 from Almora where he quotes a verse from the Kaivalya Upanishad, which has the following meaning, "Neither by rituals, nor by progeny, nor by riches, but by renunciation alone can people attain immortality". We can see this spirit of renunciation in the words and action of Swami Desika throughout his life.

In another beautiful verse in the Varadaraja Panchasat, Swami Desika says,

"As I constantly feast on your charm which is beyond the ken of thought and speech, I swear O Lord of the Elephant-mountain! I do not crave for life even in Vaikuntha"

Desika, despite his prodigious learning and multifaceted genius, was an embodiment of serenity. One evening at Srirangam, when Swami Desikan was returning home from the temple, one poet challenged him, out of jealousy, to compose a kavya overnight. He declared he too would compose a poem of 1000 verses at the lotus feet of the Lord (*pada-kamala sahasri*). Desika did not evince any interest in it, but when the provocation became too much to ignore. Desika took up the challenge with humility. By the grace of Lord Hayagriva, Desika composed the *Padhukasahasra*, a thousand-verse composition on the sandals of Lord Ranganatha in a single night. The opponent only ended up with 300 verses and had to admit his defeat.

There are very many incidents in Sri Desika's life which illustrate his humility and quality of total surrender to the lord.

A few admirers of Desika, feeling sympathy for Desika's voluntary poverty and abstinence, decided to mix gold coins along with the rice that went to his house as alms. Desika handed the alms to his wife, who promptly showed him the coins. Desika informed her that they were worms that had got mixed with the

rice and separated them using a blade of grass and threw them out without touching them.

A few envious scholars wanted to insult Desika. They strung a few shoes just outside his door. When Desika came out of his house the next day, the shoes hit his head. The watching scholars felt that Desika would become angry at being insulted. Instead, Desika exclaimed in great joy, “Oh, what good fortune do I have that the sandals of the great devotees of the Lord have blessed me by touching my head?” Incidents from Desika’s life teach us how he followed what he preached.

The world of scholars would remember him with gratitude for the role he played in saving the sole manuscript of Sudharsana Suri’s commentary of Ramanuja’s *SriBhasya*, the *Srutaprasika*, during the military invasion of Srirangam.

On this momentous occasion to commemorate the 750th anniversary of Swami Desikan birth. I am happy to release the following books ***Srimad Rahasya Traya Saarasaram, Desika Prabhandhathil Saranagathy – A Study, Desika Prabhandham (Tamil commentary), Sri Desika Stotravali (commentary)*** and ***Devaraja Daya Malika*** and would like to see many more such works to come out for the benefit of society. I would also like to congratulate all people who are associated in pursuing this noble mission of propagating the message of Vedanta Desikan.

As I hear heart of my speech by I wish to quote the words of Desika, which when translated into English from Sanskrit read as follows:

“The entire brotherhood should live and work in amity and without envy and jealousy, venom and rancor. Let us remember to nurture such noble thoughts and cut asunder those thoughts that create enmity and strife. Only small men discriminate saying: One is a relative; the other is a stranger. For those who live magnanimously, the entire world constitutes one family”. Swami

Vivekananda says “All differences in this world are of degree, and not of kind, because oneness is the secret of everything”. The statement is not just about peace and harmony among the societies in the world, but also about a truth that the whole world should live by some rules like a family.

I feel privileged in having had the opportunity to speak on a great son of India Swami Vedanta Desikan who through his deep understanding of philosophy illumined the path to be followed by all of us. Desikan’s writings and way of life will continue to serve as an inspiration for succeeding generations to come. I congratulate the Hayagreeva Vidya Peetam for having organized the function to celebrate the memory and contribution of Swami Vedanta Desikan and wish them well. I am sure that all well meaning people who wish for peace and prosperity to prevail will be benefitted by reading the teachings of Swami Desikan. May more people be benefitted by his words of wisdom and may the name and fame of this great Vaishnavite saint be remembered and respected for many more centuries to come.

Nandri Vanakkam
Jai Hind.