

**ADDRESS BY THIRU BANWARILAL PUROHIT, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF TAMIL NADU
AT THE 750TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION OF SWAMI DESIKAN 'DESIKA BHAKTHI
SAMRAJYAM' AT VANI MAHAL, T.NAGAR, CHENNAI ON 08.07.2018 AT 06.30 P.M**

Anaivarukkum Maalai Vanakkam

Thiru. Mohan Parasaran

Thiru. A.P.N. Swami

Thiru. Deccan Murthy

Thiru. P.N.K. Sriranganathan

Distinguished Invitees

Ladies & Gentlemen

It is a matter of happiness and joy to address all of you on this special occasion of the 750th Birthday Celebrations of Swami Vedanta Desikan organized by SARAN and Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha.

Sri Vedanta Desika is an important figure in the history of Indian philosophy as his works are an invaluable mine of information concerning his predecessors and what came to be later christened as Visishtaadvaita.

This school of Vedanta has been largely influenced by the shape Sri Vedanta Desika gave it. His is a work of great synthesis that includes the Vedantic viewpoint and the theology of the Alwaars and the ritualistic aspect of the agamas. He was the first among the early teachers of his school who wrote theology in the Tamil verse form.

With a strong anchoring in the Vedas, Sri Vedanta Desika brought different voices together without excluding texts and ideas coming from different backgrounds. Next only to Sri Ramanuja's Sri Bhashya, Sri Vedanta Desika's Tatwa-mukta-kalaapa and Satadhoosani are philosophical classics of the Visishtaadvaita school of philosophy.

The sheetanchor of Sri Vedanta Desika's versatile endeavours in poetry, logic and philosophical disquisition was his devotion to God as Sriman Naarayana. The worship of God through icons was part of his regular devotions. His attachment to God was neither a sentimental feeling nor an

emotional upsurge. It was intense love welling up from the depths of his soul, because of the hard austerity and deep meditation that he had practised.

It is said that Sri Desika was blessed by Garuda Bhagavan with an icon of Lakshmi Hayagreeva, which he worshipped throughout his life. This moorthi is cherished in the shrine of the Parakaala Matha of Mysore even today.

As Sri Hayagreeva is a moorthi reflected in the Vedas and represents knowledge in all its forms, Sri Vedanta Desika became a master of all arts, crafts and sciences. A Sarva Tantra Swatantra, one who has command over all the arts and sciences.

Born as Venkatanathan, Swami Desikan was honoured with various titles that speak volumes about his greatness.

- **“Kavi Tharkika Simham”** one who was a lion among poets and logicians
- **“Vedanta-acharyan”** – greatest Acharya of Vedanta’s.
- **“Ramanuja Daya Pathram”** - an unparalleled preceptor of Vishistadvaita Philosophy in the lineage of Bhagavad Ramanujacharya

Swami Desikan was a multi-lingual genius who wrote in **eight different languages** including Sanskrit, Tamil, Prakrutham, Manipravalam, saurashini etc.

Desika composed his poems in various poetic metres. The following are some of the compositions of Vedanta Desika that provide a glimpse of his mastery over poetry, logic, grammar and philosophy:

Hayagriva Stotram: a hymn on Lord Hayagriva, the Lord of Learning, who bestows real knowledge to the reciter, banishing the darkness of ignorance from within him.

Achyutha Satakam: hundred verses in praise of the Lord of Lords Devanatha, in which Desika expresses his passionate love in the form of a bride.

Bhagavat Dhyana Sopanam: twelve stanzas that describe the steps for meditating upon the Lord of Srirangam, Ranganathaswami.

Dasavatara Stotram: describes the ten important incarnations of Lord Vishnu to protect the world and uphold the principles of dharma or righteousness

Daya Satakam: hundred verses eulogising the mercy or daya of the Lord of Tirumala.

Sri Suti: a prayer to 'Sridevi' the Goddess of Fortune that is said to have been composed when a bachelor was sent to Desika, seeking financial help for his marriage. Since Desika himself lived a life of voluntary poverty, he took him to the temple of the Goddess and sang Sri Stuti. This culminated in a shower of gold coins, solving the financial problems of the young bachelor.

Vairagyapanchakam: five verses that describe the importance of renunciation or vairagya.

Hamsa-sandesha: is a lyric poem of 110 verses, reminiscent of Kalidasa's Meghadhuta. It describes Lord Rama sending a message via a swan to his wife Sita, when she was in the Asokavana.

Paduka Sahasram: composed of a thousand and eight verses on the holy sandals of the Lord Ranganatha.

Tamil works: Swami Desikan's Works in Tamil are numerous, of which special mention should be made of Paramathabhangam, where he describes 15 different schools of philosophy and repudiates their validity and Aharaniyamam where he describes the correct types of food to be consumed.

Scholars of Sri Vedanta Desikan's works opine that a special feature of his devotional hymns is that the 'Bija' or seed of the mantras which pertain to the respective gods and goddesses are interwoven in the hymns. The hymns are therefore a boon to those who neither have the equipment nor the time to chant the mantras and earn the grace of the deities. The mere reading and repeating of Sri Desika's hymns will make one the recipient of the fruits that accrue from the meditation or chanting of the mantras. Such in the blessing that Sri Vedanta Desikan has left posterity.

Several anecdotes and stories of Desika's life illustrate various aspects of his character. I wish to mention a few of them here.

When a fever raged in epidemic form in Tiruputkuzhi near Kanchipuram, Sri Desika is said to have composed two hymns, the Shodasha Aayudha Stotra and the Sudarshana Ashtakam. His prayers through these

hymns were answered and the place was rid of the epidemic and people who had fled the place, returned. The event also shows Sri Desika's concern for the sufferings of the common people.

In the year 1327, Srirangam city was invaded by Malik Kafur, the General of Allauddin Khilji, who wanted to loot the temple and destroy its Deities. Desika hid the main Deity of the temple behind a newly built wall, and placed a duplicate Deity in the front. The smaller festival Deity was smuggled out and carried to Tirupati, where it was worshipped secretly for many years.

Twelve years later, General Gopanna of the Vijaya Nagara empire, defeated the invaders and restored the city of Sri Rangam to its previous glory. Swami Desikan came back to Sri Rangam, and established the rituals and ceremonies for worship in the temple, which are still in vogue today. In particular, he established the chanting of the Tamil compositions called the divya-prabandhams and installed Deities of the twelve Alwar saints for worship in the temple.

I congratulate all those who have associated themselves in disseminating the message of Vishistadvaita contained in the poetic and divine works of Swami Vedanta Desikan.

I also congratulate **Padmashri Professor Shri Rajagopalan Vasudevan** for his pioneering research on plastic roads and **Shri Kaveri Ranganathan** for his efforts towards working for the Kaveri Melanmai Variyam.

My special appreciation is reserved for the office bearers and members of SARAN and the Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha who have made this function possible. May the noble life and words and deeds of the unparalleled Swami Desikan inspire us to serve his divine cause as well as the cause of our nation.

Nandri Vanakkam

Jai Hind