

AUTHOR'S SUBMISSION:

Why does an author keep the core message of his writing hidden deep inside his heart?

He does so with the hope that the teaching would shine with double the vigor when a reader finally finds it. Because of that reason, he doesn't seal it securely in an iron vault; he only tucks it behind the tender petals of a colorful flower. His wish is that his heart should be accessible— but only to those readers who make a little effort to unravel it. Thus goes the thinking of great writers and poets; and in there lies the inner meaning of their poetic works.

The Celebrated Poet Kalidasa described the Sage Valmiki as the greatest of the spiritual guides. These words are very apt with respect to Yogavasishta. The poetic skills of any author may sparkle all by themselves when telling the story of a noble warrior and Kinglike Shri Rama, or in narrating the end of the demon, Ravana. But writing a tome on the theme of a bone dry and abstruse subject like Vedanta with lyrical beauty, extending the text to 32,000 verses without losing the gravity in the discussions or the detail in narration in a gripping manner till the very end bespeaks of the immense capability of the Sage Valmiki. No other writer has attained such levels of excellence to date.

I consider myself blessed. Thanks to the benevolence and grace showered on me by my Gurus, Swami Janardanananda Saraswati and Swami Sri Ganapati Sachchidananda, I could fathom without much of an effort on my part, the depths of Sage Valmiki's heart and his teaching contained in Yogavasishta. With the purpose of sharing my understanding with all my fellow-seekers, I began a Series of discourses on Yogavasishta on the Gemini TV.

Inspired by the words of my teachers, I was tempted to investigate the inner meaning of Sage Valmiki's teaching. I was aided in my search by the redoubtable Saint Shri Ananda BhodendraSaraswati Swami. His voluminous commentary on Yogavasishta under the title "tAtparyaprakAshavyAkhya" repeatedly helped me in capturing the heights of knowledge disseminated in the text. This gave me the courage to gain the fruits of studying Yogavasishta.

Let me first introduce the venerable text Yogavasishta.

About Yogavasishta:

1. Author: Sage Valmiki
2. Period of writing: Some time after the completion of his earlier book, Ramayana.
3. Alternate names by which this book is known: jnAnavAshiShTha, vAshiShTharAmAyaNa, Uttara rAmAyaNa, mahArAmAyaNa, vAshiShTha etc. etc.
4. Size of the text: 32,000 verses

5. Subject matter: Inquiry into the Supreme Self. It comprises the teaching given to the 12 year old prince Rama by the Sages Vishwamitra and Vasishtha. The book establishes that the man enlightened by the wisdom of knowing the highest truth will be able to function with excellence in this world.
6. The style of Narration and other specialties:
 - a. The gist of the each topic to be discussed is summarized upfront.
 - b. The subject is illustrated through a captivating story.
 - c. The symbolical significance of the characters used in the stories is explained by the author himself.
 - d. The object of the text is not about the denying or contradicting any other theories.
 - e. There are no polemic debates.
 - f. The author raises a number of questions from various angles and answers them himself.
 - g. Though the subject matter is that of tough Vedanta, one can see the poetic skills of the author at innumerable instances.
 - h. The text is full of unimaginable metaphors that capture the reader's heart.
7. Abridged Versions: As the text is quite voluminous, many condensed versions of the book have been prepared both in the Northern and Southern parts of India. Some of the more popular versions are:
 - a. The text by the Kashmiri Pundit Abhinandana comprising 6,000 verses.
 - b. The text by Shri Swami VidyanandaPrakasagiri, Head of the KalahastiShukabrahma Ashram, having 8,000 verses.
8. Translations: Translations of the text are available almost in all languages. There are six translations in Telugu language itself -- five in prose form and one as verses. I consulted all these books in my work and I am indebted to those authors. Out of these, the translation by Shri M. Subbaraya Sharma was particularly helpful to me.
9. Expert views: Yogavasishta is highly revered not only during the old historical times, but also in modern days by the spiritual teachers. For example:
 - a. Swami Ramatirtha described Yogavasishta as the "most wonderful" text.
 - b. The book is highly revered by the Malayala Swami, The Head of the Erpedu Vyasa Ashram.
 - c. Yogavasishta is acclaimed as the foremost amongst the books on Advaita by the Head of GayatriPeetha.
10. Structure of Yogavasishta:

There are six chapters in the text.

 - i) *vairAgyaprakaraNa* -- On Detachment -- 1,500 verses

This chapter describes in detail the feelings of detachment experienced by Shri Rama.

ii) *mumukshuvyavahAraprakaraNa* – On the Conduct and Behavior of a Spiritual Aspirant -- 1,000 verses

The second chapter gives the details of the basic qualities to be attained by a spiritual aspirant. The importance of human effort in achieving the liberation is discussed and it has been established that it is necessary that an effort should be made to obtain liberation.

iii) *utpattiprakaraNa* – On Origination -- 7,000 verses

The third chapter examines the reality of the visible world and if it has been created at all.

iv) *sthitiprakaraNa* – On Sustenance -- 3,000 verses

The fourth chapter investigates how the apparent world is sustained.

v) *upashamaparakaraNa* – On the Calm Down -- 5,000 verses

The fifth chapter talks of the method of obtaining a tranquil mind through True Knowledge.

vi) *nirvANaparakaraNa* – On Liberation -- 14,500 verses

The sixth and the final chapter is the largest wherein the achievement of Liberation is discussed thoroughly. It is divided into two parts.

11. Commentaries: It is said that there are many commentaries in Sanskrit on Yogavasishtha. However, only “tAtparyaparakAshika” by Swami Ananda Bhodendra Saraswati is available in print. It was published by the NirnayaSagar Press in 1937. This commentary has received accolades from many learned pundits.

About Author Valmiki: It is opined by some experts that the author Valmiki of Yogavasishtha was different from the author Valmiki of Ramayana. One group of such people belong to those that are opposed to Non-dualist philosophy. Their main concern is only to deprecate the importance of Yogavasishtha as it is an unrivalled text on Non-duality. The other group contends that an evaluation on the authorship is called for using modern techniques rather than going by the word of tradition. Let us examine critically the various arguments advanced by this group.

1. The writing style of both Ramayana and Yogavasishtha is about the same. In fact, no critic has been able to point out any major differences. However, some of these critics ask why there is not even a hint made about Yogavasishtha in Ramayana. The answer to this question is available right in the first chapter of Yogavasishtha. One needs to just take a look at it.
2. The second argument is that because we find reference to Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna, Arjuna, Sage Suka and others in Yogavasishtha, it should belong to a period later than that of Bhagavad-Gita. But if we keep in mind the caliber and

skill of a writer who could handle a complex and intricate subject as AdvaitaVednata with such a dexterity as found in the book, it is unlikely that we will be persuaded to conclude that such an enlightened and exceptionally competent author belonging to a later period would have tried to create a false impression about the date of his work. Hence, it is untenable to argue that it belongs to post-Bhagavad-Gita period.

A question may, however, arise about the reference to the events of a later eons (*yuga*) in the text. But inclusion of a reference to the events that are likely to take place at a future date is quite typical of the Sage Valmiki. He did so in his other and more popular work, Ramayana too. In fact, in the Balakanda of Ramayana, his narration cuts across past, present and future times in the description of different events. Sage Valmiki resorts to this type of narrating the future in uttarakanda of Ramayana also. Thus the narration of future events as seen by him through clairvoyance is a characteristic of the Sage Valmiki. It is no wonder that we find examples of such descriptions of future events in Yogavasishta also. In fact, whenever a future event is described, the author raises a question through one of the characters in the book about the chronological inconsistency and a suitable reply is given right there. Readers familiar with the works of other great Seers and Sages do not find this style of writing odd at all. For example, we find future events being narrated at a current time in Agastya Samhita. Sage Vyasa authored an entire purana which describes the future events only. Thus when viewed with an unbiased eye, it is inevitable to conclude that the author of Yogavasishta and Ramayana was one and the same poet.

Further, we have to note that the Sage Valmiki was not only a writer *par excellence*, but also a great Maharishi. The word 'Rishi' in Sanskrit means the one who realized the ultimate Truth (*tatva*). A true writer is one who can speak accurately. Because he has both these qualities, he could write with such a depth of understanding and beauty. We notice several instances of this signature style of the Sage in both Ramayana and Yogavasishta.

I studied and tried to decipher the core message of Yogavasishta and the commentaries on it with the same spirit. I took help of elders, prayed to my teachers, and also consulted the teachings of Shri Janardanananda Swami who was not only a noble saint but also happened to be my father before his renunciation of the world. What I could understand is presented by me in my discourses that were telecast by the Gemini TV and the same is now offered in the form of a text. That is the reason it is called as the 'heart' of Yogavasishta.

We find a variation in spelling the name of the Sage Vasishta. It is written in the Devanagari script both as vashiShTha and vasiShTha. Both ways are correct as the former spelling is derived to mean as the one who conquered his senses and

the latter one means the one who excelled as a householder. Sage Vasishtha himself clarified that writing his name either way was acceptable as quoted in a verse in Mahabharata (Canto 13, Chapter 63, verse 96). I adopted 'vashiShTha' in my writings as it would emphasize the importance of control, over the senses which is an important requisite in the study of Vedanta.

Acknowledgements:

This work would not have reached the seekers and intellectuals of the non-Telugu speaking people around the world but for the able and powerful translation of the entire work by Dr. Vemuri Ramesam, a reputed retired Scientist from the Department of Science and Technology, Govt. of India. He sat with me for several days to ensure that the translation maintained the integrity and stayed loyal to the original. I am deeply indebted to him for his commitment and devoted involvement in rendering this work into English.

All words are inadequate to express my indebtedness to my Teacher, Swami Ganapati Sachchidananda. Therefore, I dedicate this work to him. I am also grateful to the Gemini TV for telecasting my discourses. I tried to present the teaching contained in Yogavasishtha in a logical manner and with a modern idiom. Please do condone any omissions or commissions. However, my request to the readers is that this presentation should not be treated to be a condensation or abridgement of the original text. It is an effort to capture the "core" message and do please study it in that spirit.

I am only nominally there in delivering this message. The inner sentient principle that motivates, acts and speaks is different. I pray to my Gurus to channel the Grace of that inexplicable principle to all in experientially realizing It.

Salutations to the Gurus.

Kuppa Venkata Krishna Murthy