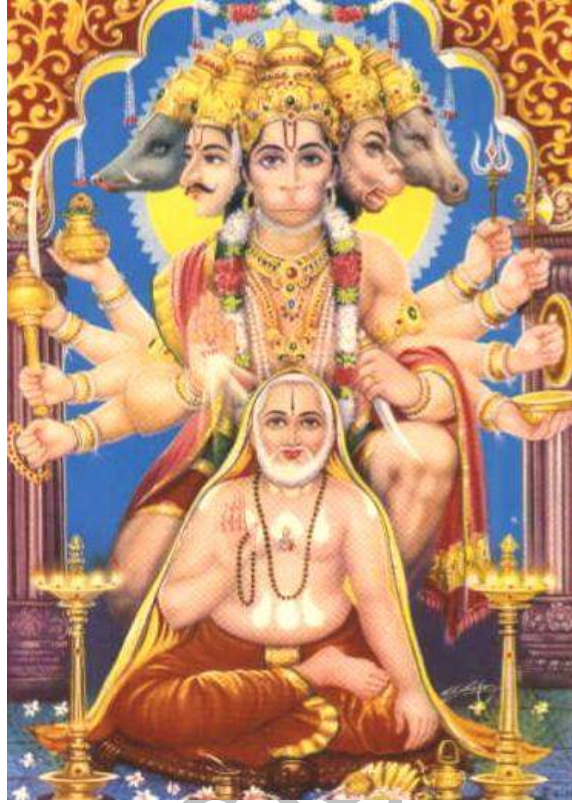


Life of Sri Raghavendra Swamy



Different Manifestations of Sri Raghavendra Swamy:

Prahladarajah: pradhano divitiyo vyasarajakah

Raghavendras thrithiyastu Bhagavat Karyasadhakah

In the Devaloka, there is a great devotee named Sankukarna, who has conquered his self and is perennially engaged in meditation of God and in procuring, for Lord Brahma, the articles of worship like flowers and fruit. Intending to employ him for the dissemination of right philosophy and devotion in the mundane world, Lord Narayana ordained him to take three incarnations on earth.

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The First Incarnation of Sri Prahalada:



Sri Prahlada was the dear son of Lilavati and Hiranyakasipu. Even while in his mother's womb, he was initiated into worship of Lord Narayana by the sage Narada. Ever since birth, he had been absorbed in the repetition of Lord Hari's name. He had no thought of this world.

Hiranyakasipu, who considered Lord Narayana as his sworn enemy, did not like his son's behavior. He sent his son, Prahlada, to the teacher of the demon race, Chanda and Marka, in the hope of reforming him and educating him to be good and virtuous. Prahlada had no taste for the kind of instruction imparted by his teachers. He paid no heed to anything other than the meditation on the Lord. He began to teach his fellow-demon pupils the greatness of praying to Lord Narayana and led them to join him in singing the praise of the Lord. Hiranyakasipu sent for the boy and asked him to recite a verse which he had learnt from his teachers. Thereupon, the prodigy repeated a verse extolling the divine qualities of the Lord and the efficacy of praying to Him, in these words.

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Those hands deserve the name that worship the Lord,

That tongue which praises the Lord deserves to be called so,

The sight that beholds the Lord, deserve its name,

The head that bows to Seshasayi, (one who reclines on the serpent-king Lord Adishesha) is fit to be called so.

He then affirmed fearlessly that his mind, which was drunk with the nectar of the meditation on the Lotus-feet of the Lord (Narayana), could not rest on anything else.

The father then angrily demanded of him to say where Lord Hari is present. The boy instantly replied, "Do not doubt the presence of the Lord in one place or another. Chakri (The bearer of the wheel - Vishnu) is present wherever you seek him in the world

In the end, Hiranyakasipu subjected Prahlada to many cruel tortures in the hope of making him give up his devotion to Lord Vishnu. He caused the boy to be trampled over by elephants. He had the boy thrown down the slopes of mountains, immersed in the ocean, cast into a blazing fire, bitten by venomous serpents and even made him partake a cup of the vilest poison. Prahlada came out unscathed and undeterred, because of his abiding and unflinching faith in Lord Vishnu.

In utter disgust, Hiranyakasipu called his Son and demanded of him to show his God, whom he had described omnipresent, in an adjacent pillar. Prahlada humbly but firmly agreed to do so. In his inveterate anger and arrogance, Hiranyakasipu struck the pillar with his mace. Instantaneously Lord Hari emerged from the pillar, in the manifestation of the Man-lion:

"Satyam vidhatum nijabhritya bhashitam."

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To prove the veracity of his devotee, Prahlada, the Lord emerged from the pillar to destroy the tormentor of the world and hater of God. None of the Gods or even goddess Lakshmi could be calm the enraged and ferocious Man-Lion. Thereupon, Lord Brahma requested Prahalada to be calm and please the Lord, as they thought he alone was capable of doing it.

So, Prahlada prayed to the Lord in deep devotion and begged him to protect the mankind and the universe, to redeem him from the ocean of rebirth and to grant his father a place in Heaven. Lord Narasimha, who is always merciful to his devotees, appreciated the sincere devotion of Prahlada, becalmed Himself and granted him many boons, besides bringing cheer to the Gods by the resumption of his pleasing looks. He anointed Prahalada as king and ordained that the latter should merge in Him after discharging his duties and enjoying worldly pleasures as king. Thereupon, the Lord disappeared.

In obedience to the Lord's ordainment, Prahlada ruled over his kingdom for long years and ultimately merged himself in Lord Vishnu.

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The Second Incarnation of Sri Vyasaraya:



Sri Vyasaraya is one of the most reputed among the propagators of the Dwaita (Dualism) philosophy. He was born of pious parents, called Seethamma and Ramacharya. He had his early education from Sri Sripadaraya. Later, he adorned the pontific seat of the Dwaita School of Philosophy, a repository of the teachings of knowledge, devotion and detachment. In appreciation of his deep devotion, Lord Krishna would converse with him and even dance before him. As his teacher, Sri Sripadaraya, had seen this with his own eyes, his affection for Sri Vyasaraya swelled all the more. Sri Vyasaraya wrote celebrated works such as "Tatparyachandrika", "Tarkatandavam" and "Nyayamrutamu."

Once, while Sri Vyasaraya was at the shrine of Tirumala, the Worship of Sri Venkateswara was hampered. He was asked by King Salva Narasimha Raja to offer worship on his behalf (to Sri Venkateswara). In pursuance of this expressed desire, Sri Vyasaraya conducted worship of Sri Venkateswara for twelve years according to the traditions and rites sanctioned by the Vedas and the Sastras and earned the grace of the Lord.

During the reign of Sri Krishna Deva Raya, once, the ruler was afflicted with a disease named "Kuhu" and he was restless with suffering. He consulted some astrologers who examined his horoscope and suggested that he would be rid of it if he forsook his throne.

Sri Krishna Deva Raya decided to relinquish his throne and was in search of a proper person to take his place as ruler. He sent out his state elephant with a

Life of Sri Raghavendra Swamy

garland in his trunk and offered to appoint as king whomsoever the elephant garlanded. The elephant left the city, reached a forest and trumpeted before a cave. When Sri Vyasaraaya, who was performing penance, came out of the cave, the elephant garlanded Sri Vyasaraaya.

The royal Servants who accompanied the elephant informed Sri Vyasaraaya of the king's order. Considering the elephant's action as a divine command,

Sri Vyasaraaya agreed to ascend the throne. With great exultation, Sri Krishna Deva Raya offered the throne as a gift to Vyasaraaya Swami.

Some time after Sri Vyasaraaya had commenced his reign; there were impending signs of the dreaded "Kuhu" disease. He descended from the throne, and, leaving his upper garment on it, stood at a distance. At once, the cloth caught fire and was soon reduced to ashes. The courtiers were astonished. They praised the greatness of the Swami. The danger of the 'Kuhu" disease was averted and Sri Krishna Deva Raya's life was saved. Sri Vyasaraaya told the king that he was freed from the dangerous effects of the disease and asked him to re-ascend the throne and rule the people according to the dictates of Dharma.

Sri Krishna Deva Raya obeyed the Swami's command and began to rule over his empire.

Sri Vyasaraaya, who had performed great penance, won the grace of the Lord and written various works of philosophy, founded many shrines of Sri Anjaneya in the country.

Devotees well know that the Yanthroddhara Pranadeva's image was consecrated by Sri Vyasaraaya, at Hampi, which shrine is called the "giver of all boons to devotees."

Sri Vyasaraaya preached to the world for many years that "Lord Hari is the greatest God" and "Vayu is the greatest Jiva" and, after winning universal fame, being worshipped by his devotees and adorning the supreme seat of the Dwaita philosophy for ninety years attained the Brindavan on the banks of the

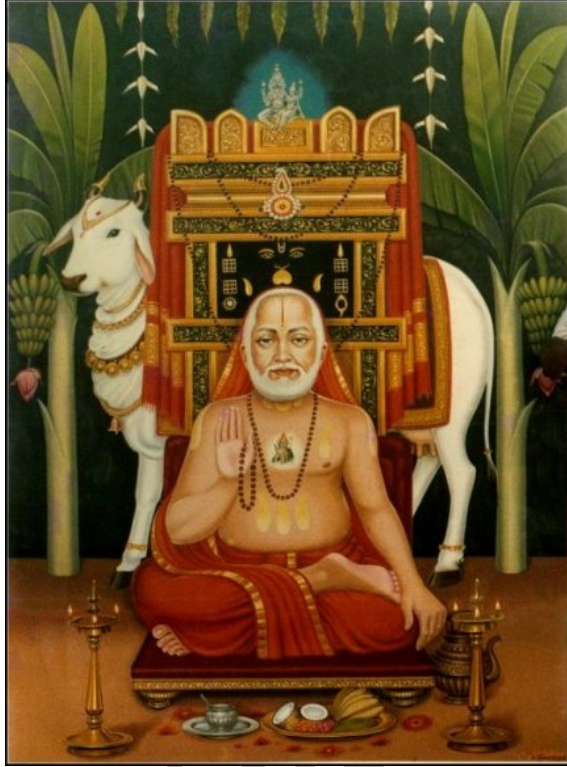
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Tungabhadra river near Anegondhi, on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Phalguna of the year Hevilambi. At this place, besides him, eight pontifis head of the Dwaita School have entered Samadhi. So, this place is called "Nava Brindavana."

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The Third Incarnation of Sri Raghavendra Swami:



In the court of Sri Krishna Deva Raya, the Vijayanagar Emperor, patron of arts, poets and scholars, was a scholar named "Krishna Bhattu". He had son, named "Kanakachala Bhattu", whose son was "Thimmanna Bhattu."

Thimmanna Bhattu was not only famous as a scholar proficient in the Vedas and Sastras but also as an accomplished player on the Veena. His wife was a pious Lady named "Gopamba." The devout couple had a son and a daughter. According to the popular proverb that "one eye is not an eye and one son is not a son", they desired to have another son. So, they went on a pilgrimage to Tirupathi. They worshipped Sri Venkateswara with intense devotion and prayed for a Son. Being gratified by the sincere devotion of the pious couple Sri Srinivasa appeared to them in a dream and told them that He was pleased to grant them a son who would serve as a shining example of the virtues of divine knowledge, devotion and detachment and would raise the world to heights of nobility. Thimmanna Bhattu and Gopamba praised the Lord for his infinite kindness and returned to their native village of Bhuvanagiri. After the lapse of

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nine months, Gopamba gave birth to a son on an auspicious day. He was named "Venkatanatha" as he was born out of Venkateswara's grace. The child grew up into a graceful boy, endowed with intelligence and smartness.

He was put to school on attaining the age of five. A few days later, Thimmanna took ill and breathed his last.

The responsibility of educating Venkatanatha fell on Gururaja, the elder son of Thimmanna. He found much difficulty in maintaining his family. At the age of eight, he performed Venkatanatha's upanayanam (sacred thread ceremony) with the help of donations received from rich people. Then he sent Venkatanatha to his brother-in-law, Sri Lakshiminarashimhacharya, for further education.

Sn Lakshiminarashimhacharya felt it not only easy but a pleasure to teach his new ward as the latter was quick to learn in a very short time. The boy acquired mastery over the Vedas, the six Sastras and the eighteen Puranas and became unrivalled in scholarship.

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Venkatanatha was married to a young, beautiful and virtuous girl, named Saraswati at the proper age. Generally, education ends with marriage. But it was not so in the case of Venkatanatha. At that time, the pontific seat at Kumbakonam was adorned by Sri Sudhindra Thirtha, who was trained by the famous Sri Vijayendra Thirtha Swami. Sri Sudhindra was proficient in the traditional sixty-four arts and he taught many pupils, besides propagating the Dwaita ideals. Venkatanatha desired to go to him and receive lessons in philosophy. Accordingly, taking his elder brother's permission, he went to Sri Sudhindra, prostrated before him and stood at a distance in great humility. The Swami asked him who he was. Venkatanatha replied that he was Venkanna, son of the Veena scholar, Thimanna, and expressed a desire to receive instruction from the Swami in "Sri Sudha". Sri Sudhindra was pleased with him and he not only agreed to teach him but also permitted him to reside in the mutt and receive "Thirtha" and "Prasadams."

Venkanna studied the 'lessons on "the Sudha" with earnestness and learnt them by heart every day, He would get difficult portions explained by his teacher. The teacher was deeply impressed by the pupil's devotion and faith and began, to look upon him with affection. This roused the jealousy of other pupils who planned to bring forth the teacher's wrath on 'Venkatanatha.

One day, the jealous class-mates went to Sri Sudhindra without the knowledge of Venkanna. They said, "O preceptor! The new-comer, Venkanna, is no studying his lessons well. He, is always sleepy and indulging in unbecoming actions. It is a waste to feed and teach such a pupil. He is unfit to reside in the Mutt. So, we request you to drive him out." They uttered many lies to strengthen their argument. The Swami heard them and replied, "Do not worry, I shall enquire about him and set him right. You had better go away." After a while, all the pupils came to learn their lessons. Sri Sudhindra commenced teaching. But, having some doubt in explaining a portion, he told the pupils to come next day and said he would explain it then.

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Venkanna was in the habit of listening to the lessons on "Sri Sudha" with concentration, and noting the Explanations in a note-book, at night, before going to sleep. As usual, he noted down correctly what he had learnt that day and went to sleep. After a short while, Sri Sudhindra came to see him. Venkanna was in deep sleep. There were some palmyrah leaves with writings on them. The teacher, took them up and

observed them. Venkanna was writing a regular annotation for "Sri Sudha," entitled, "Parimalam." He referred to the explanation for the statement about the meaning of which he had some doubt. Venkanna had explained it clearly and beyond any doubt. The teacher read it and his doubt was cleared fully. He felt happy to realize that Venkatanatha's scholarship and ability were unrivalled. Just then, Venkanna was shivering with cold as he had no blanket to cover himself with. Seeing this, Sri Sudhindra, wrapped his own upper garment on the sleeping pupil, took the palmyrah leaves and went away.

Venkanna got up from steep early in the morning. He was grieved at the disappearance of the manuscripts he had 'by his bed-side. He was afraid of his teachers wrath. He feared what punishment might befall him. He was at a loss to know how to convince his teacher of his innocence. Hoping, for divine grace to get out of the trouble, he finished his bath and other activities, approached the Swami, prostrated himself before him and said "O Guru! Someone covered my body, with his cloth while I was asleep last night. My manuscripts are missing. I do not know who took them; I am not to blame, forgive me. Sri Sudhindra replied, "Do not worry. It is time to begin that lesson. Let us go"

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On seeing the other pupils, the Swami said, "Venkanna is not an ordinary person. He is a genius and a man of virtue. He is writing an annotation every night, on what he has learnt, during the day. Yesterday, I had to dismiss the class as I could not find the correct explanation for a sentence. But last night, Venkanna wrote the correct explanation for it in his book. You also had better listen to it." So saying, he read out the explanation given by Venkanna in his book. All the pupils were astonished. Sri Sudhindra paid an encomium to the proficiency and skill of Venkanna and awarded him the title of " Parimala-charya ", as he had written the commentary of "Parimala" on the teachings of "Sri Sudha." Ever since, the other pupils showed Venkanna great respect and regard. The Swami's affection for him increased more than before.

After some days, Sri Sudhindra started on a pilgrimage, followed by his pupils. He visited various cities and villages and accepted the gifts and offerings given by the devotees and blessed them. In this manner, they reached Mathurai in the south. In that city was a Tamil Sannyasi, who was well versed in grammar and was called a "Vaiyakarani", He was proud that no one could equal him in the knowledge of grammar. He wished to enter into a disputation on grammar with Sri Sudhindra. But the Swami said to him, "First, you had better engage yourself in a dispute with my student, Venkatanatha. If you defeat him, you can contest with me." The Sannyasi agreed and commenced a disputation with Venkatanatha on "Mahabhashya", Venkatanatha was an adept in argumentation on all Sastras. So he easily countered every one of the Sannyasi's arguments by his prowess and won over him finally. The Tamil Sannyasi accepted defeat gracefully. Everyone was struck with wonder on seeing the dexterity with which Venkatanatha had demolished every one of the arguments proffered by the, Tamil Sannyasi. Sri Sudhindra Swami was all admiration for his pupil's excellence at argumentation. He, at once, blessed Venkatanatha by conferring on him the title of "Mahabhashyacharya".

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At that time, Raghunatha Rao was the ruler of Tanjore. He was highly proficient in music and literature. He could appreciate and enjoy the nuances of poetry. He sent an invitation to Sri Sudhindra to visit his city. The Swami accepted the invitation and paid a visit to Tanjore. The ruler showed the Swami great respect and requested him to spend a few days in Tanjore. The Swami agreed to do so.

Raghunatha Rao had a minister, by name Govinda Dikshita. The latter had a son, named Yegnanarayana Dikshita, who was well-versed in the Advaita philosophy and who had acquired much fame. He expressed to Sri Sudhindra his desire to engage in a disputation with Sri Sudhindra and his pupil, Venkatanatha on the comparative merits of Dwaita and Advaita. Sri Sudhindra agreed gladly and asked him first to contest with Venkatanatha.

Venkatanath and Yegnarayana Dikshita made arguments and counter-arguments to prove their respective view points. Very many distinguished scholars watched them carefully. Both interpreted "Tatvamasī" and "Aham Brahmasmi" as propounded by the Sastras. Both, being great scholars, advanced arguments in a distinguished manner so as to amaze the listeners. The disputation between the two stalwarts went on for 18 days. On the nineteenth day, Venkatanatha established beyond doubt that Dwatism was the correct one. He vanquished his rival thoroughly and the latter also conceded the victory.

In appreciation of Venkatanatha's supremacy in argumentation, Sri Sudhindra conferred on him the title of "Bhattacharya". Ever since, he addressed Venkatanatha as "Venkatabhatta" out of boundless affection. He appointed Venkatanatha as a poet laureate in the Mutt.

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After completing his studies and training in "Tarka" and "Vedanta" under the tutelage of Sri Sudhindra, Venkatanatha returned to his native village of Bhuvanagiri. He enjoyed the pleasures of family life in the pleasing company of his wife, Saraswati. The pious couple had a son. As Venkanna had suffered from poverty ever since his boyhood, he named the child "Laksminarayana" in the hope that he may not have to suffer from the same.

It was universally known that Venkatanatha was a great scholar. Disciples from various parts of the land came to receive education at his hands.

In those days, the prevailing custom was for the teacher to feed his pupils free of charge. Venkatanatha had to bear the burden of feeding his pupil in addition to maintaining his family. He was, from birth, poor. How could he shoulder the burdens! It was beyond his power to meet the expenses day after day.

At this time, Venkatanatha came to 'know that a rich man in a neighboring village was celebrating a happy event. His wife, Saraswati said to him, Please attend the auspicious function in the rich man's house. He will honour you as a great scholar and give you some money." Venkanna accepted the advice and started for the village. Hundreds of Brahmins had come to the rich man's house to partake of the feast. Venkatabhattu sat in a corner of the rich man's house and was reciting some verses of prayer. The family priest of the rich man was a greedy and thoughtless person. It was his duty to prepare the sandal paste and distribute it among the Brahmins. But, as he was busy, he ordered Venkatabhattu, who was reciting the verses in a corner, to grind the sandal paste and went away. Taking it as a divine ordainment, Venkatanatha prepared the sandal paste and gave it to the priest. The Priest distributed it among the Brahmins who had come for the feast. They applied the sandal paste to their bodies. No sooner had they done so, they began to feel a burning sensation all over their body. The rich man enquired of the priest how he had made the paste and why it was creating the burning sensation. The Priest pleaded ignorance and showed Venkatanatha the person responsible for grinding the paste.

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The rich man enquired of Venkatanatha the reason for the curious occurrence. Venkatanatha calmly replied, "I was reciting 'Agnisukta' while grinding the paste. Perhaps that made the sandal paste give out a burning effect." He later recited "Karuna Sukta" and ground a fresh paste which was distributed to the Brahmins. When the Brahmins used it over the bodies, they got over their burning sensation and felt the paste very cool and pleasing. The rich man realized the divine power and greatness of Venkatanatha. He treated Venkatanatha to a rich feast and gave him a reward of a hundred rupees.

Venkatabhattu returned to his village and the amount of a hundred was spent away in a few days.

It was miserable for Venkatabhattu to meet the demands of his family. To make matter worse, some thieves broke into his house, one night, and got away with the few things he had. According to the saying, "Yasyanugraha michchami tasya vittam haramyaham", perhaps God divested Venkatanatha of the remnants of his belongings to make him fit to earn His grace and acquire greatness in life at a future date.

Venkatanatha became disconsolate with grief, and unable to find a way out of his misery, started for his Guru's abode with the members of his family. He prostrated before Sri Sudhindra and poured out his tale of woe. He wept in grief and sought his Guru's protection. The Swami had great regard for Venkatanatha's scholarly attainments and affection for his qualities of virtue. So, he assured Venkatanatha of help, desired him to live with his family in the Mutt itself and spoke to him words of comfort. Ever since, Venkatanatha had lived in the Mutt along with his wife and children.

Venkatabhattu earned the esteem and affection of all people by teaching pupils who came to him for learning and by taking part in Scholarly conferences. After a few days, the health of Sri Sudhindra received a set-back. So, he said to Venkatanatha "You are a great Scholar endowed with much ability, give up the lure of family pleasures, take up Sannyasa and serve the world at large".

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On hearing these words, Venkatabhattu said, 'O Guru! I bow to your decision. But I cannot leave my young wife and son to their fate. I am not yet ready to take up Sannyasa. Kindly forgive me." Sri Sudhindra considered his pupil's words as wise. As his health was declining, he made another disciple accept Sannyasa and gave him the name of "Yadavindra Tirtha."

Some days later, Sri Sudhindra regained normal health. He attended to his daily duties of offerings and worship to Sri Mula Ramachandra and teaching his pupils religious doctrines. He retained with him the images of Sri Mula Ramachandra and certain others and sent Yadavindra Tirtha to tour the country.

Still later, once, Sri Sudhindra once again fall ill. The worship of Sri Mula Ramachandra, the presiding deity of the Mutt, was hampered. As he was pondering over this, one night. Lord Sri Ramachandra appeared to him in a vision and said, "Venkatabhattu is fit to carry on the worship. He is ready to take up Sanyasa now. Send for him and make the necessary arrangements. Do not feel sad." He instantly disappeared. Sri Sudhindra repeated these words many times and felt happy. He decided to send for Venkatabhattu.

Strangely enough, Venkatabhattu had a dream the same night when Sri Sudhindra had the vision of God. Sri Sharadadevi (Goddess of learning) appeared before him and said, "You are a great scholar of much competence. The world needs to be uplifted by you. The Madhwa philosophy has to be propagated still wider. Give up your family ties and take Sannyasa. Sri Mula Ramachandra is waiting to be worshipped by you. Wake up!" So saying, she disappeared.

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Venkatabhatta awoke from sleep and was happy and surprised to think of what, had happened. He immediately proceeded to the place of Sri Sudhindra and fell prostrate before him. The Swami was overjoyed to see him. They related to each Other the events relating to their respective dreams. Venkatabhattu told his Guru that he wished to perform the Upanayanam of his son, Lakashminarayana and proceeded home after receiving monetary assistance for the purpose. Reaching his village, Bhuvanagiri, and collecting his relations and friends, returned to the Swamiji's place. He performed his son's "Upanayanam" in the presence of Sri Sudhindra and with his blessings. Later, he returned to Bhuvanagari.

A few days later, he called his wife, Saraswathi, and said to her, "You are managing the family as an obedient wife and making me happy. You are an honest woman. But worldly life is like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. It is not everlasting. Do not love me any more. I intend to take up Sanyasa in obedience to my Gurus command. Do not feel grieved. Carry on your life with calmness of mind. She was pained to hear her husband's words. But Venkatabhattu consoled and comforted her by his sweet words.

Having determined to take up Sannyasa, Venkatabhattu went to Sri Sudhindra. He accompanied his Guru on his tour, from Kumbakonam to Thanjavur. The ruler, Raghunath Rao, had arranged a grand reception for the Swami there.

Sri Sudhindra told Raghunatha Rao about his decision to initiate Venkatabhattu into Sannyasa. The ruler made Suitable arrangements for the occasion. In the year Rudhirodgari of Salivahana Era 1845. Sri Sudhindra gave Sannyasa to Venkatabhattu according to the Sastraic rites. He gave Venkatabhattu the appellation of "Sri Raghavendra Thirtha." many Scholars, poets, devotees and common people were present on the great occasion. The programme was gone through with great pomp and glory. Raghunatha Rao showed his esteem for both the Swamis, and received their blessings.

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The news of Sri Venkatnatha's initiation into Sannyasa reached Saraswati's ears through hearsay. She was filled with agony. What a pity that she could not look upon her husband's face any longer. She hated to live further without the support of her husband. With these feelings gnawing at her heart and abandoning wisdom, she ended her life by falling into a well. As a result of committing suicide, she became a ghost. In that form she went to Sri Raghavendra Thirtha and wept bitterly. Taking pity on her, he repeated some sacred mantra and showered on her some drops of water. She was relieved of her ghost-form and gained redemption from life. Ever since, it became a family custom for the descendants of Venkatabhattu to perform "Sarawati Puja" at the commencement of auspicious functions in their houses.

Sri Raghavendra Thirtha started on his religious tours. Wherever he went, large numbers of devotees received him with great respect, offered "Pada Puja" to him and received his blessings in great joy. During his travels, he once visited a village, called "Kande nati", went to the house of a poor boy, named "Venkanna" and asked him to do "Bhiksha" for him (feed him). The boy believed that the Swami had come to his house for "Bhiksha" in preference to the rich people's houses only to bless him. So, he went to the rich people, took their assistance and also invited them to worship the Swami. He gave a grand reception to the Swami in this manner and earned his grace and blessings. While taking leave of the boy and starting for another village, the Swami asked the boy to remember him in times of difficulties.

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At that time, Siddi Masud Khan was Nawab of Adoni. Though illiterate he became a ruler through good fortune. One day, when he rested under a tree, after taking part in a vigorous hunt, a servant gave him a letter, saluted to him and stood at a distance. The Nawab opened the letter but, being illiterate could not understand its content. He looked about in the forest for anyone who could read it. Just then he saw the poor boy, Venkanna, gathering wood for fuel. Immediately, he ordered the servant to bring the boy. In fact, Venkanna also could not read it. He confessed to the Nawab, "I am a poor Brahmin boy; I have not received any education and hence, cannot read the letter. The Nawab retorted, "Being a Brahmin, can't you read? I cannot believe your words. Will you read it or shall I sever your head?" He threatened the boy in these words. Recalling Sri Raghavendra's advice, he said to himself, "O Sri. Raghavendra ! Protect me from danger." By Raghavendra's grace, he was able to make out what was written in the letter. He said to the Nawab boldly, "O King, your army has won in the battle. This is a message of your victory "Thereupon the Nawab took kindly to him, took him to the palace, gave him money and said, "Get better education, still I shall give you a job in my administration." The poor Venkanna agreed to do so.

In two or three years, Venkanna reached good education. He became an official in the Nawab's administration discharged his duties well and soon won the good will and appreciation of the Nawab. In course of time the Nawab recognizing his intelligence and administrative ability made him "Dewan" of his State. In this way, the poor boy Venkanna rose to a high position in life by the grace of Sri Raghavendra Swami.

Life of Sri Raghavendra Swamy

Once Sri Raghavendra. Swami was touring in the Maharashtra region. One of the servants of the Mutt came to him and said, "O Swami! I wish to get married. Kindly give me a month's salary in advance. The Swami was then washing his hand and feet with earth. He said, "Where is money with me? I have only this loose earth in my hands. If you want, take it." The servant, who knew of the great powers of the Swami, said in great confidence, "O Swami ! Even the dust that comes from your hands, will be ten thousand rupees for me. So, give me the dust alone." The Swami gave him a handful of the earth, blessed him, and sent him away.

As the servant went past some villages, it fell dark. He went to one hamlet and laid himself down on a mat for the night's rest. The owner of the house was suffering from some agony. Ever time his wife gave birth to a child; a ghost would appear and destroy the child. The ghost had come then ready to kill the child to be born. But, the earth in the servant's palm was shining with brilliance and did not allow the ghost to enter the house. The ghost awoke the servant, and said to him, "Cast the shining stuff away. It does not allow me to enter the house. I shall give you whatever you wish for." The servant was surprised at his words. He understood that the mysterious power of the earth his hand did not allow the ghost to enter the house. At once, he said to the ghost. "If you get me a vessel, full of rupees, I, shall keep the earth at a distance and let you in." In a few seconds, the ghost brought to the Swami's servant a vessel full of rupees. He took the vessel and out of pity for the ghost, thought of the Guru and spilled a portion of the earth on the ghost. At once, the ghost was relieved of its ghost's form. The master of the house and the members of his family, who observed all this from inside were filled with astonishment. They felt happy that the danger of the ghost which afflicted them was no more there. In the meanwhile, the master's wife was delivered of a male child and the child was safe and sound. Then the house owner had a desire to give his brother's daughter in marriage to the guru's servant. He called the servant in, treated him with much respect and expressed his heart's desire to him. The servant gave his consent and the girl's marriage with him was celebrated immediately.

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The guru's servant returned happily with his wife to the presence of the Guru. He prostrated himself and told his master the entire story. He placed at his Guru's feet the treasure he had secured and begged him to take it. But, the Swami, without taking it, said to him, "Why do I need this money? You yourself take it and be happy." He blessed the servant and sent him away.

Some time later on one occasion, the Swami visited the Gadag region. A gentleman devoted to the guru named Desai Raghunath, wished to play him the host and took him to his house to the accompaniment of various forms of music. Being very rich, he had rich dishes of food prepared for the Swami. He collected a huge vessel full of mango juice.

The Swami finished his bath and other rites and got ready to worship his deity, Sri Mula Ramachandra. Many high-caste Brahmins came to receive the thirtha and prasadam. They witnessed the puja of Sri Mula Ramachandra. The Swami got ready to distribute the thirtha (Sacred water used for bathing the deity). All the devotees were receiving the sacred Water. Suddenly an insect fell in the water and denoted some impurity in the house. He called the house owner and said, "There is some impurity in your house. Try to find it out." As the search was made, it was realized that the house owner's infant had fallen into the vessel of mango juice and died. The rich Desai and his wife were filled with grief. They informed the Swami, with sad hearts, of what had happened. He asked them to bring the child to him. Unwilling to disobey the words of the Guru, they brought the child's dead body and placed it at the Guru's feet. Sri Raghavendra uttered some mantras and spilt some water from his Kamandala on the child's body. Sri Hari's power is indescribable! The boy woke as if from sleep and sat up. The devotees, who witnessed this wonderful event, were amazed. The Desai couple was happy beyond words. Desai praised the Swami for his greatness and gave him much money. He received the blessings of the Swami. The Brahmins, who came for the feast, ate merrily. The Swami went forward on his tour from Kiritagiri. On his way to Tirupati, the Swami rested in a temple of Anjaneya. A Harijan came to the temple and bowed to the Swami from a distance. On seeing him, the Swami recollected his own previous birth as well as that of the Harijan.

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The Harijan was known as "Kanakadas" in his former life. The Swami asked of him, "Are you not yet rid of your Karma?" The man replied, "No, Swami, I wish to end this life of mine. Be gracious enough to help me." The Swami said, "Bring any article of food for being offered to Sri Mula Rama today. You will be freed from the bond of this life." The Harijan went home and brought some mustard seed, as he had nothing else at home. He offered it to the Swami in utter devotion. The Swami ordered the cooks to use the mustard in the food to be prepared for the deity. But it was the period of "Chaturmasya" and according to the rules of custom, mustard seed should not be used in food. So, some scholars reminded the Swami of this ban. The Swami then replied, 'O Scholar! This Harijan was Kanakadasa in his previous birth. When I was Vyasara in my former birth, it was he that helped me to have 'Dharsan' of Sri Hari. In remembrance of this man, mustard seed should be used in our Mutt. There will be no blame for disobeying the "Chaturmasya custom." Ever since mustard is being used in Sri Raghavendra Mutt even in "Chaturmasya." days.

The Harijan observed the worship of Sri Mula Rama with his own eyes, received the sacred water and food, praised Sri Hari, with all his heart and ended his life. He was redeemed from the cycle of birth, old age and death.

In another 'Chaturmasya' period a scholar, named 'Birudahalli Srinivasacharya', came to the Swami, prostrated himself, and placed at his feet, his works on philosophy and said, "I beg of you, Swami, to read them and give your opinion about them." Sri Raghavendra Thirtha examined the writings thoroughly. He observed that the books were written in good style and with great skill and intelligence. He felt much happy and awarded the scholar the title of "Thirtha." That day, the Swami asked Sri Srinivasacharyulu to sit by his side at the time of dinner. The servant served him the pepper-water, prepared with mustard seed. Srinivasacharyulu declined to be served with it as it was against the rule to partake of it in the "Chaturmasya period." He was a disciple of the Uttaradi Mutt. He felt that it was wrong to use mustard seed, in cooking during the "Chaturmasya" period. That was why he declined to take it in the meal. The Swami was observing all this. The meal was over. Srinivasacharyulu received

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fruits and sacred rice grains and went away. He went to "Yadavendra Tirtha", his Guru, and related to him what had happened in Sri Raghavendra Mutt. When he untied the packet of the sacred grain he found that they had all turned black. In the mean time, he began to feel pain in his stomach. His face became pale. On seeing all this, Sri Yadavendra said to Srinivasacharyulu, "You have done some act derogatory to Sri Raghavendra Swami. That is why you are suffering from the stomach ache. Your face is lacking luster and the sacred grain has turned black. Go at once to Sri Raghavendra and obtain his forgiveness." Srinivasacharyulu immediately proceeded to Sri Raghavendra Thirtha prostrated himself and begged the Swami's forgiveness for his misconduct. Being of a kindly nature towards his disciples, Sri Raghavendra Thirtha forgave him and gave him his blessings. He seated Srinivasacharyulu by his side at the time of dinner Srinivasacharyulu partook, unhesitatingly of the pepper-water prepared with mustard seed. After the meal was over, he was relieved of the pain in the stomach. His face shone brightly as before. Srinivasacharyulu was filled with joy. He prostrated himself before the Swami and stood quietly and with humility. The Swami once again blessed him with the sacred grain. Srinivasacharyulu received them with great devotion and returned to Sri Yadavendra Thirtha. He told the Swami how Sri Raghavendra Thirtha had blessed him with kindness. The sacred grain he showed were shining red in color.

No one should act disparagingly towards great sages, who are reservoirs of spiritual power. It is always beneficial for men to walk in their footsteps.

On another occasion, three astrologers from Kerala came to see Sri Raghavendra Thirtha. They bowed to the Swami and spoke of their proficiency in Astrology. The Swami gave them each a copy of his horoscope and asked them to examine it separately by sitting in three different rooms. As ordered, they sat in three rooms, examined the horoscope and began to note down their findings. The three learned astrologers gave almost the same interpretation, except in reading the duration of the Swami's life on earth. They placed their readings before the Swami. He asked three scholars of his Mutt to examine the writings of the astrologers. The scholars said to the Swami. O Swami! The three scholars

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have given their predictions precisely. But in the matter of longevity of life, they have erred. One has predicted a hundred years, another three hundred and the third seven hundred. The hundred years predicted by one astrologer, is credible but the verdicts of the other two are not. It is against the custom of the world. Thereupon Sri Raghavendra, who was omniscient in his powers, said to the scholars, "Gentlemen, the writings of all the three astrologers are true. Do you wish to know how? The three versions are to be coordinated in this manner. The longevity of the physical body is a hundred years. The books of my authorship will live for three hundred years. I shall live in the Brindavan in Samadhi state, for seven hundred years. That means, I shall live for a hundred years. My works will have potency for three hundred years and will fulfill the desires of all those who read them daily, with faith and reverence. I shall abide in the Brindavan in 'Yoganishta' for seven hundred years and fulfill the desires of the devotees. This is the subtle interpretation for the divergent statements of the astrologers." The astrologers had calculated his life span as 300 and 700 years but they could not reconcile them with facts. But the Swami explained the relationship with facts and all the scholars were extremely happy.

At another time, three Brahmins from North India came to Kumbakonam to test his wisdom and powers. They did not tell anyone what kind of food should be cooked for them, thinking that the Swami would know their minds. One wished for Tamarind-rice, another milk rice and the third liked to eat "Modakas" (favorite offering to Ganesha). They went to the river to take their bath. In the meantime, one of the Swami's disciples came to wash the Swami's clothes. Squeezing the clothes, he saw the Brahmins and said to them, "The dishes you wished for have been prepared in the Mutt. Finish your bath early and come for the feast."

The Brahmins were astonished at these words. In a few minutes, the Swami's disciple kept one of the clothes on a stone and went to bathe. The Brahmins asked him, "How did you know our desires?" Hearing their words, he replied, "Who are you? What are your desires? How could I know them? I did not speak to you, to know them." The Brahmins were puzzled. After finishing his bath, he took the Swami's clothes and said to them, "O Brahmins! Finish your

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bath quickly and come it is time for meal. The dishes you wished for, are ready". So saying the disciple went away. The astonishment of the Brahmins was boundless. They began to think among themselves, "When the disciples carried the Swami's clothes, he invited us to dinner. When he kept them down, he denied any knowledge of us or of our desires, again, when he took them and started to go, he invited us to come and said he knew our desires. This shows that gained knowledge when he was in possession of Swami's clothes by their mysterious power. If the Swami's clothes have such miraculous powers, what will be the powers of the Swamiji himself? We have blundered in aiming at testing his powers. It is better we go away, after the bath; without seeing the Swamiji." But one of them suggested. "It is not wise to go away without seeing the Swami and receiving 'Thirtha' and 'prasadam' from him. The other two agreed and the three Brahmins went to the Swami, prostrated themselves before him received the 'Thirtha' and proceeded to the dining hall. The three dishes desired by them were served to them sumptuously and the servants asked them to have their fill. After a hearty meal, they went to the Swami and begged for the sacred grain and blessings. Smiling, the Swami asked them, "Have you partaken of your favorite dishes to your heart's content? Choose the kind of reward that people who wish to test me should have? I shall give it." On hearing these words the Brahmins hung their heads and begged the Swami to pardon them for their folly. The Swami pardoned them and said, "You have tested my powers. So, in future, be born as Brahmins, perform worship at my shrine of Brindavan and eat in the Mutt what you like most." He blessed the Brahmins in these words. The descendants of those Brahmins alone are performing worship at the shrine of the Brindavan in Mantralaya, even to this day.

The greatness of Raghavendra Thirtha is indescribable. On one occasion, The ruler of Thanjavur sent the Swami an offering of a diamond necklace. The Swami was at that time busy performing "Vysvadevam" (a kind of Homa with cooked rice.) So, the Swami gave it as 'Naivedya' to Yegneswara. The people at the place were astonished at this. Learning of this through hearsay the king was angry and grieved that a necklace, worth thousands of rupees, was consigned to

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the fire. Two or three days later, the ruler visited the Swami and said, "O Swami ! I sent to you a diamond necklace. I think you would have used it as an ornament to God. I want it now for some purpose; I wish to make another necklace of the same fashion. Please give it to me. I shall return it again." The swami at once prayed to Yegnarayana, the Lord of Sacrifices. The God of fire appeared before him and gave him the necklace. The Swami received it and gave it to the King. The King, who was witness to the greatness of the Swami, was filled with wonder. Thinking that he had sinned against the Swami, the King prostrated himself before him and begged his pardon. The Swami was manifestation of mercy. He readily pardoned the King and blessed him.

Sri Raghavendra Thirtha carried on his work at Kumbakonam, according to the Mutt traditions, worshipping the deity, 'Sri Mula Ramachandra' and instructing his pupils. At that time, Sri Vijayaraghava, son of Raghunatha Rao, came to the gaddi. During his reign, there was a terrible famine. Vijayaraghava made many efforts to put an end to the famine, conditions. But he could not succeed. At last he came to Sri Raghavendra Thirtha at Kumbakonam, prostrated himself before him and said, "A famine has come over my kingdom. The people are suffering much. Be kind enough and put an end to the famine Be merciful." The Swami remembered the great devotion and regard which his father, Raghunatha Rao, had shown towards him. He took pity on Vijayaraghava and said, "Yes I shall come to Thanjavur."

The Swami visited Thanjavur. He converted the King's palace into a hall of worship, worshipped Sri Mula Ramachandra and prayed. "God, protect the kingdom from the evils of famine." Sri Mula Ramachandra had great grace for the Swami. It looked as if the deity had answered the Swami's prayer. The same day, there was a heavy down pour of rain throughout the kingdom. All the tanks and wells were full to the brim with water. The land became once again green with fresh crops. Vijayaraghava praised the greatness of the Swami in many ways. He gave many rewards to the Swami and gave him a respectful send-off. That year, the produce was plentiful and the country became prosperous. The Swami's greatness was unrivalled.

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Some days later, once, the Swami was teaching his pupils. He suddenly rose up, looked up, asked something and sat down again. The disciples were perplexed. They said to the Swami, "What is it? Kindly explain to us" The swami said to them, "The great sages Krishna Dwaipayana, was riding in a chariot and proceeding, to Vaikuntha. On the way, he appeared before my vision. I bowed to him and asked him, "How long yet am I to endure in this physical frame? By way of answer he showed two figures and waved them thrice. I understood his purport and bowed and sat down. I shall live from now only for two years, two months and two days. Then I shall enter the Brindavan. "The disciples had great devotion for and faith in their Guru. They were grieved to think that their Guru would depart from them soon. They were pained beyond words.

After some days, the Swami came to Adoni on his tours. The Dewan, Venkanna, who was blessed by the Swami, prostrated himself before the Swami and took him home to the accompaniment of auspicious music. He prepared himself to entertain the Swami in a grand manner. He narrated to the Nawab Siddi Masud Khan the mysterious powers of the Swami. He appealed to the Nawab to see the Swami without fail.

Siddhi Masud Khan thought to himself, "I shall see what powers this Brahmin priest has." As the Swami completed the worship of Sri Mula Ramachandra and was about to offer 'Naivedya', the Nawab had a salver covered with a cloth brought by a servant and placed it before the Swami. He did so in order to test the supernatural powers of the Swami. Dewan Venkanna was not aware of the Nawab's intention. The Swami scented the Nawab's wicked plan. Immediately, he spelt out a prayer to Sri Mula Ramachandra and spilt some drops of water, from his Kamandala (drinking vessel) on the salver covered with a cloth. He asked the Nawab to order the cloth, to be removed. When the Nawab had the cloth removed from the salver, it was full of Fruits and Rose flowers. The Nawab was amazed. He realized how great were the powers of the Swami. He regretted his own conduct towards the Swami. He wished to make recompense for the sin he had committed. He called Dewan Venkanna and said to him, "Venkanna ! Your Guru is a great man of rare powers. I wish to grant him some

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jagirs (groups of villages free of rent). I am ready to carry out any bidding of his. Go to your Guru and inform him of my intention." Dewan Venkanna went to the Swami and conveyed to him the Nawab's intention. To this, the Swami replied, "Why do we, who have renounced all worldly ties, need any jagirs? But as you say that the Nawab is insistent, let him give me only one village, named Manchala, on the banks of the Tungabhadra River." The village of Manchala, which the Swami had asked for, had already been given to a Fakir as a gift. But the Nawab exchanged it for another village and gifted it to the Swami. It was the place sanctified by the performance of a 'Yagna' by Bhakta Prahlada. That was why the Swami had asked for the village. The Nawab gave the Swami many presents, bowed to him and took his leave.

The time of Sri Raghavendra's entering the Samadhi at the Brindavan, approached. The devotees became aware of it. Hundreds of people came to see the swami and were blessed by him. The Swami sent for Dewan Venkanna and asked him to build a beautiful Brindavan. He laid out the beautiful Brindavan. The devotees were filled with grief because the Swami's end was nearing. Venkanna informed the Swami of the completion of the Brindavan. At once the Swami said to him, "Venkanna ! this Brindavan will be useful to another great Saint. There is a big rock in the village of Madhavaram. Make a Brindavan with its help." Venkanna could not understand the reason for such an order. So, he said to the Swami, "Swami ! You have asked me to make a Brindavan by using the rock in the Village of Madhavaram. Kindly tell me if there is any special reason for it." The Swami replied "Venkanna! Sri Ramachandra, while traversing the forest, sat on that stone for seven 'ghadiyas'. The stone is sanctified by the contact of his holy feet and has to be worshipped for seven hundred years. That is why I asked you to use it for making, the Brindavan." So saying he cleared the doubts that had troubled Venkanna's mind. Venkanna made the Brindavan as ordered by the Swami. Various scholars, poets and musicians came to see the sight of the Swami entering the Brindavan alive. On Thursday, the second day of the bright fortnight, in the month of 'Sraavan', in the year of 'Virodhikritu', the great Saint, Sri Raghavendra Tirtha, entered the Samadhi in the Brindavan alive. The event was

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marked by great festivity. As ordered by the Swami, they kept 700 Saligrams (natural manifestations of Gods) in the Brindavan, and covered it with a large stone. An image of Sri Anjaneya was made out of the remaining stone and consecrated at a place in front of the Brindavan. Even to this day, worship is offered, with Vedic rites, to the Brindavan as well as to the image of Sri Anjaneya.

Among the disciples of Sri Raghavendra Swami, Appanacharya was the most notable. The Swami had sent him to another village on some business. He was therefore, not present at the event of the Swami's entry into the Brindavan. On his return journey, he heard the news of Sri Raghavendra's entry into the, Brindavan. Regretting that he could not have the last glimpse of his Guru, he ran to the place, praising Sri Raghavendra Swami. As he neared the Brindavan, the sloka in praise of the Swami was incomplete with the words, "Vibhutihirahula" ,Instantly, Sri Raghavendra Swami, who is well known for his affection for his disciples, completed the verse with the words "Sakshihayasyotrahi." Even to this day, this panegyric of Sri Raghavendra Swami, written by Appanacharya, is recited by Scholars and lay men. This verse, beginning with the words, "Sripurnabodha Guruthirtha payobdhipara." If recited 108 times, will help a person to get his desires fulfilled. All baneful conditions will disappear. All sins will be recompensed. This need not be mentioned separately. These effects of worshipping at the Brindavan, are known to devotees by their own experience. It is mentioned that Sri Raghavendra had himself announced to the devotees, from the Brindavan, that Lord Hanuman will himself be witness to the efficacy of this sloka in his praise. Sri Appanacharya has written the "Sri Raghavendra Mangalashatakam" in addition to the "Sri Raghavendra Stotram" for which people are much indebted to him.

Among the successor to the Sri Raghavendra Guru Peetham, Sri Vadindra Thirtha is one. He was a great and poet. He knew quite intimately the miraculous powers and spiritual excellence of Sri Raghavendra Thirtha. He composed the "Guru Guna Stuti," delineating the greatness and versatility of Sri Raghavendra Swami. Sri Vadindra stood before the Sri Raghavendra Brindavan

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and recited melodiously the verses of “Guru Guna Stuti.” The Brindavan, it seems, shook to signify Sri Raghavendra Guru Sarvabhauma’s appreciation of those verses. Oh! How fortunate Sri Vadindra Thirtha was.

“Om Mula Rama Vijayate”

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