



Pandit Ghulam Dastagir Birajdar

A Sanskrit Scholar

Madhavi Narsalay

Department of Sanskrit, University of Mumbai
madhavinarsalay@yahoo.com

The Sanskrit world mourned the loss of one of its scholars, Pandit Ghulam Dastagir Birajdar, who passed away on 21st April, 2021 at Solapur. Panditji, as he was fondly known in the Sanskrit world, was a great scholar of Sanskrit. He was born in Akkalkot, Solapur, where in his childhood days, he would listen to the lessons taught by a teacher in Sanskrit. One fine day, he mustered courage to ask the teacher, whether he can sit for Sanskrit classes, inspite of being a Muslim. The Sanskrit teacher was so open-minded that he permitted Panditji to sit for his lessons. One good action from a teacher changed the entire perspective of the life of Ghulam Dastagir Birajdar. Panditji mastered the Vedas, classical Sanskrit Literature and also the art of conversing in Sanskrit.

After coming to Mumbai to make the best of what he had learnt, he started teaching in a Madrassa. His Sufi background did not permit him to sit idle. He undertook the crusade of popularising Sanskrit as a language for all and not restricted in the clutches of the Brahmanical priestly tradition. His efforts found due respect with the State Government, which appointed him as an Honorary Sanskrit Pracharak. With this designation, he visited schools and urged their managements to start teaching Sanskrit; he visited colleges and urged the students to take up Sanskrit at degree level; he visited Universities and urged them to undertake activities for general public to popularize the language. He has given insights and perspectives

for the curriculum of Sanskrit even to the State Board.

'Sanskrit Language without barriers'; this was his mission of life. Sanskrit should be taught and learnt irrespective of caste, religion or gender. Being a follower of Islam did not deter him to move freely in the world of Sanskrit. He published a book noting the contribution of Muslim scholars to the field of Sanskrit language and literature. He emphasized the need to translate important Sanskrit texts into Urdu, Arabic or Persian. In the same way, texts significant for Islam should be translated into Sanskrit. In this way, there would be a dialogue with Sanskrit and Islamic scholars. They will be able to understand the similarities and differences of thought and action, and this will lead to tolerating and appreciating conflicting ideas for universal peace and harmony. This led to the organization of interfaith and inter-religious dialogues between scholars practising Hinduism and Islam. He encouraged expression in Sanskrit and created a platform for Sanskrit, he started a periodical called 'Vishvabhasha'. This periodical was funded by the king of Kashi. In his deeds, we observe is that in every course of action, he had overcome

the notion of fragmentation based on religion.

Panditji practiced what he preached. He urged for translations of different texts pertaining to Islam and Hinduism. Before leaving for the heavenly abode, he completed the translation of the Quran in Sanskrit. This translation will ease the barriers and encourage give and take between Sanskrit and Islam.

Panditiji was decorated with many awards and accolades. He received the highest award for Sanskrit, which is the President's Certificate of Honour at the hands of the then President of India, K. R. Narayanan. The State Government of Maharashtra honoured him with Kalidasa Sanman. Panditji's life is a path-breaking journey, adhering to the principles of peace and universal solidarity. Encouraging translations of Sanskrit texts to other languages and inter-religious interfaith dialogue with diverse group of people will be a true and meaningful homage to the departed soul.

