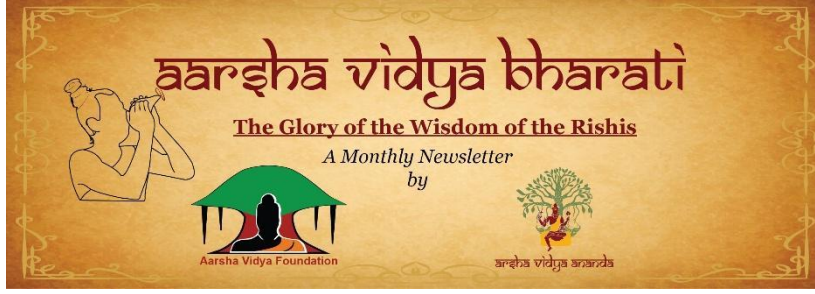

Aarsha Vidya Bharati - May 2024

Vaisakha - Jyeshtha 2081

A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



This is one of many articles from our monthly newsletter. Access the [may 2024 issue](#) or read any of [the articles](#).

Jaya Jaya Shankara



Ādi Śankarācārya at Kedarnath

As we bow our heads in deep reverence to *Jagadguru Ādi Śankarācārya* (especially in his birthday month) we are reminded of his innumerable contributions to *Sanātana Dharma*. Besides re-establishing Vedanta and the traditional method of teaching through his *bhāṣya*-s, discourses across this sacred geography, debates with all systems, establishment of *Ṣaṇmata* worship (of 6 deities) he also assigned his disciples to set up *maṭha*-s across different regions of India.

Ādi Śankarācārya recognized that establishing centers of learning and *sādhana* would serve to teach, guide and bless Hindus also playing a pivotal role in the preservation and propagation of *Sanātana Dharma* and Vedanta.

A centre of learning or an institution is always greater than the individual and outlasts the individual for generations. Unlike Abrahamic religions which are based on one book and a centralised institution, Hinduism has a library of books of its oral tradition and is transmitted through its many *sampradāya*-s, lineages of learning.

The *maṭha*-s (not mutts) founded by *Ādi Śankarācārya* and his disciples or even any other *sampradāya* encompass several key aspects:

1. **Preservation of the Vedas** - Vedas are also known as *Śruti* as these were transmitted through the oral tradition. Hence *Veda-pāṭhaśālā*-s ensure that these are learnt, chanted, committed to memory and transmitted to the next generation.
2. **Gurukula System:** *Maṭha*-s follow the traditional *Gurukula* system of education, where students lived in close proximity to the Guru (teacher) and learn the Vedas including Vedanta. This system of the *guru-śiṣya* relationship facilitated the *sampradāya* (*samyak pradānam*) i.e. complete and thorough giving of knowledge from teacher to student. The curriculum at *maṭha*-s focuses extensively on the study of Veda including Vedanta, particularly the *Upaniṣad*-s, *Bhagavad Gītā*, *Brahma Sūtra*-s, and other Vedanta texts. Students engage in *Mīmāṃsā*, (traditional rigorous textual analysis), inquiry, and debate to deepen their understanding of the scriptures through the oral tradition.
3. **Cultural Identity and Preservation:** *Maṭha*-s contribute to the preservation and promotion of Hindu cultural heritage through the celebration of festivals and cultural events. Traditional music, dance, art, and literature are preserved, practiced, offered in temples and shared with the wider community. A *sampradāya* provides a sense of cultural identity and belongingness to its followers. Even our self-esteem as a group is closely linked to our cultural identity.
4. **Blessings by Rituals and Religious Practices:** Within a *sampradāya*, religious practices and rituals performed by the custodians of the *maṭha*-s (*maṭhādhipati*-s) bless their followers with all pursuits of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa*. Ranging from *trikāla pūjā* to elaborate ceremonies and festivals, these increase the *śraddhā* of the followers and ensure the continuity of our rituals.
5. **Sevā and Outreach:** *Maṭha*-s play an active role in serving the community through *annadānam*, establishing educational institutions, scholarships, restoration of temples, medical assistance to the needy, fostering a spirit of compassion and *sevā* among disciples.
6. **Life Guidance:** Our ancestors always had guides, mentors, counsellors and therapists in the form of their gurus and elders. Even to this day, innumerable Hindus flock to their *Ācārya*-s and gurus who offer appropriate and timely guidance and blessings forging the way ahead.

The establishment of *maṭha*-s was not the sole endeavor of *Ādi Śankarācārya* himself; rather, it was a collective effort involving his devoted disciples - *Sureśvarācārya*, *Padmapāda*, *Hastāmalaka*, and *Totakācārya* and our ancestors.

Just like a tree is sustained by the ecosystem of the forest, so too the forest is also sustained by the tree.

Just as the *guru-śiṣya sampradāya* is sustained by the collective involvement of its contributors so too the contributors and followers gain blessings and strength to live a glorious life of *Sanātana Dharma*.

सदाशिव समारम्भाम् शंकराचार्य मध्यमाम् ।

अस्मद् आचार्य पर्यन्ताम् वंदे गुरु परम्पराम् ॥

sadāśiva samārambhām śankarācārya madhyamām |

asmad ācārya paryantām vande guru paramparām ||

Beginning with *Sadāśiva*, through *Ādi Śankarācārya* in between and upto my own *Ācārya*, I bow with reverence to the entire lineage of Gurus.

And yes, please ensure that your priceless vote is put to good use as India continues to have its polls for all of May.

With love and prayers,

Brahmavidananda

Brahmaprajnananda