

Srīpāda Srīvallabha

“I will constantly take care of the welfare of those who adore Me with pure devotion, who cast all their burdens on Me and seek total surrender from Me.”

From time to time, Lord Dattatreya, the Cosmic Principle of the Teacher, incarnates in a human body to enable the humans to relate to him and get uplifted. In a previous Age, a group of sages under the guidance of Sage Bharadwaja conducted a great ritual to the Sun and prayed for an incarnation of the Lord. In fulfilment of the promise given by Lord Dattatreya to the group of sages, he decided to incarnate in the present Dark Age as Srīpāda Srīvallabha. (His name is also sometimes written Shripad Shrivallabh, Shripad Shri Vallabha or Sreepada Sreevallabha.) Srīpāda repeatedly declared his identity with Lord Dattatreya:



“I am Srīpāda. I am Srīvallabha. Today’s Srīpāda Srīvallabha is none other than the son of Anasuya and Atri of the most ancient Yuga. I incarnated in Pīthikapuram in accordance with the promise made to Sage Bharadwaja.”

And he explained to a sceptical neighbour:

“Undoubtedly I am Datta. As you are having a body, I also came with a body to enable you to recognise Me. In fact, I am formless and attributeless.”

In spite of innumerable supernatural events expressed by Srīpāda, many contemporary eye-witnesses were sceptical and could not realise the greatness of this divine incarnation. Srī Siddha Yogindra, a great yogi, stated:

“Now He has taken birth on this earth as Srīpāda Srīvallabha. The residents of Pīthikapuram did not recognize Him properly. They failed to understand the philosophy of Guru. In Kuruvapuram even ignorant persons like fishermen obtained knowledge of the Brahman, the highest reality. To get the grace of Srīpāda Srīvallabha the ahamkāra (identification with the ego, arrogance) within us has to be destroyed. All types of pride have to be extinct. Then only we can understand His power, His mercy and His real nature.”

Birthplace

“I have to incarnate in Pīthikapuram in accordance with the promise made to Sage Bharadwaja.”

On the eastern side of India, in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, there is a town near Rajahmundry called Pithapuram. In olden times it was called Srī Pīthikapuram. Pura means the village, the town or habitat. Srī means the Mother of Wisdom, of Splendour,

and of Power. Srī Pīthika means the place related to the Mother. In this place Lord Dattatreya took birth in the year 1320. It is him whom we call Srīpāda Srīvallabha.

Name

“He is an incarnation of Srī Datta, and as his feet were marked with all auspicious features, he bears a worthy name as Srīpāda Srīvallabha.”

He was given the name Srīpāda because he carried the most sublime symbols of a conch and a wheel under his feet. Normally when a child is born the knowers see the form and also look under the feet for any symbols. In the case of this child it was observed by his grandfather that in the lines under the right foot there was the symbol of the wheel and under the left foot the symbol of the conch. These are symbols of the divine presence in that form. They are not found except in the case of most high beings. Because of these symbols these feet were considered very sacred. Therefore, he is called Srīpāda, the most auspicious feet. Srīvallabha is a name that was added later.



Srīpāda was born in a Brahmin family. When he was of sixteen years, his parents asked him to get married. He then said, “The Divine Nature is already my partner. I have no other partner.” His nature was full of splendour, wisdom and power, and his life was one of sacrifice for the humanity at large. Therefore, he smilingly said, “I am already the man to the lady Srī.” That is why he is called Srīvallabha, meaning the husband of Srī, the male dimension of Srī.

That is how his name has come to be: Srīpāda because of the presence of the most auspicious signs under the feet; Srīvallabha because he is the male counterpart of the female nature, the Will, the Knowledge and the intelligent Activity.

Father and Mother

“Yogic lights emerged from the eyes of Appalarāja Sarma and mother Sumatī who were in deep meditation. These lights combined and stayed in the womb of mother Sumatī.”

Srīpāda Srīvallabha took birth in a very auspicious place called Srī Pīthikapuram; there is already a seat of the Mother in that place since most ancient times. The name of the mother of Srīpāda is Sumatī. “Matī” means the mind; “Sumatī” means the good mind. She was a good-natured lady, simple, austere in her discipline, ever related to the Divine. She never entertained any opinions of others.

Her husband was Appalarāja Sarma. He was a great devotee of Datta and he offered himself to the divine completely. He was a priest; he went from house to house and performed rituals.

If someone exploited him, he did not complain. “What I should receive, let the Lord decide. I keep worshipping him and he receives my worship.” He was a deep worshipper offering himself to the Lord who gave him the presence as Kalagni Shamana Dattatreya. It is a dimension of Lord Dattatreya who puts off the fury of time. This means, what he wills that happens through time, through the fire of time, Kalagni.

Sumatī came from a high family and offered herself to the husband who was very humble – his life, his house. Sumatī saw in her husband the kind of righteousness one normally does not see. Everything he thought, spoke and acted was in accordance with the natural law. Her father saw a great yogi in him. The knowers go by the vibrational energies the other carries and not by the objective accomplishments. What is apparent need not be real.

When the couple conceived their first child, they had a blind son. They accepted and continued. Then they had a second son – a lame one. The couple accepted without any complaints and without abandoning their practices in spite of the calamities that happened. Appalarāja Sarma did his daily worships and conducted his duties in the society. Sumatī took care of him and the two children and also took care of the relatives and friends who came home. In ancient India the mother was seen as divine, as the World Mother; the father was seen as the Lord Absolute. They were daily worshipped as the Lord and the Mother. The teacher was seen as another form of the divinity. In ancient India there were no hotels and there was no sale of food. Food was never sold; this was considered a very low act. The lady was taking care of the family and the unexpected visitors coming from other places.

Announcement of Birth

“To satisfy your desire I am giving you the vision of Srīvallabha. You can ask Me for anything in this Srīvallabha form of Mine.”

One day there was a ritual in the house of Appalarāja Sarma and Sumatī relating to the pitris. Pitris are the ones responsible for giving us healthy bodies with all limbs well formed. The worship of the pitris is always for three hours from noon to 3 o’clock. Appalarāja Sarma was doing the worship. Great preparation of food was done as an offering at the time of this ritual. It is offered to the Brahmins who attend the ritual, to the cow and the crow who, according to the scriptures, is seen as the messenger of the pitris.

When this ritual was on, even before the ritual was complete, there was a call from a beggar from the outside. The lady went outside. She saw an avadhuta standing there and he was transmitting great light to her. Then the beggar asked, “Would you mind giving some food to me? I am hungry.” She was in a predicament; she was in a ritual and no food should be given until the ritual was over. But having seen the beggar she felt that it was good to offer food to the person who came with a hungry stomach. She went inside, took some food of the preparations and offered it to him.

The person was very happy and said, “Do you have any wish? I will fulfil it.” The lady very unconsciously said, “I would feel extremely blessed if I had a son like the light you gave to me, of your radiance. That would be a great blessing.” Suddenly a sixteen-year-old good-looking boy dressed like a sage appeared before her and said, “Mother! I am Srīpāda Srīvallabha. I myself will be born to you.”

He gave the date of his birth. The lady was deeply touched and happy. Then Srīpāda disappeared.

Later, Sumatī came back to her normal consciousness. She thought how she could give the food before the end of the ritual for the pitris; it was contrary to the tradition. She went to her husband and explained what had happened. The husband said, “A very good thing has happened.” He did not mind and the priests who were conducting the ritual also did not feel any objection. All was very harmonious and the ritual was completed.

Birth and Early Years

“Mother! You are very privileged for giving birth to a child who is attributeless and formless, the supreme phenomenon.”

Appalarāja Sarma and Sumatī had worshipped Lord Dattatreya very ardently and so he came to them. During the birth of Srīpāda a great light appeared and musical instruments were heard. Sumatī had fainted. Many great beings appeared in forms of light and celebrated the birth of Srīpāda. And for eighteen days, a cobra with three hoods came and held its hoods as an umbrella over the newborn.



Already after a few months Srīpāda went around and gave discourses on sacred wisdom. From the time of his birth, he appeared to different people in forms with different ages, often as a boy of sixteen years of age. Srīpāda was very humorous and playful, and he conducted many extraordinary supernatural acts even from the age of one year on, which are described in his biography. He did many miracles, changed outdated rituals and transformed numerous people in the village of Pīthikapuram.

It is a beauty in the life of Srīpāda that when a person had deficiencies and he healed them, he always gave the karmic reasons for the deficiencies and suggested rectifications. He could see the past lives of the beings and he even saw humans incarnating in the form of a bull or a cow. He also gave many prophecies and spoke about his future incarnations and of others. You are much drawn into the story when you read it.

At the age of sixteen, when his parents asked him to marry, he replied: “I have greater purposes to fulfil and therefore I seek your permission to leave the house.” His mother Sumatī said, “You are the only able son we have. Your elder brothers, one blind, the other lame, they cannot be offered a lady. If you don’t marry and leave the house, we don’t see a continuity of our lineage. You are the only one.” Then he touched both his two brothers and made them normal. He gave eyesight to the eldest brother and took away the lameness from the other one. Then Srīpāda said, “Now your two sons are eligible for marriage. Please give me permission to leave.” And thus, he left Pīthikapuram and became an ascetic, a wandering mendicant.

The Mission

“The time has come for Me to hide this gross body. I will disappear in river Krishna. I will be moving in disguise in this Kuruvapuram. After that, I will come with the name of Narasimha Saraswati to restore the order of asceticism.”

Srīpāda started wandering and went to various places; his visit would be of consequence to those places. He went mostly from Southeast Andhra Pradesh to Northeast India, through Karnataka and Maharashtra. He went to Varanasi (Benares, Kashi), to another centre on the west coast called Gokarna and to Srīsailam.

Srīpāda then settled at a place called Kuruvapuram (today Kurugaddi, Kuruvapur). It is located on an island in the Krishna River, at the border between Andhra Pradesh (today Telangana) and Karnataka. Many people came to him seeking help and were enlightened. He was teaching and healing and many super-mundane revelations happened around him.

Srīpāda gave the assurance that he will incarnate whenever dharma, the Law, touches bottom most level. In consonance with that assurance he took birth in three successive incarnations to restore the law and to protect his followers from a downfall. He achieved this main purpose of his incarnations by teaching, by giving examples and, most of all, by creating situations where people had to pass through to adjust and become elevated.

In his thirtieth year Srīpāda declared in Kuruvapuram that he would disappear but he also announced that he lives forever: “My form will be concealed but this Srīpāda Srīvallabha form will stand as an eternal reality.”

Twenty-eight years after his disappearance in 1350, he reincarnated as Narasimha Saraswati (1378-1459) in Karanjapur (Karanja Lad in Karnataka) to restore the order of asceticism. At the end of this incarnation he disappeared again and withdrew into a banana forest, in Kadali Vanam near Srīsailam, where he stayed doing penance for 300 years. In 1856 he reappeared with an old body as Swamī Samartha and lived for twenty-two years in Prajnapur (City of Akkalkot, Maharashtra) until 1878.

Text from the website <https://sripada-srivallabha.org/> on the basis of the biography “Sripada Srivallabha Charitamrutam” and of a transcription of a seminar of Dr. K. Parvathi Kumar on Lord Dattatreya / Sripada.

