Bibliographic Guides

Publications of the Suddha Dharma Mandala

Eastern Tradition Research Institute
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INTRODUCTION

The existence of the Suddha Dharma Mandala (Śuddha Dharma Maṇḍalam) was announced by Sir S. Subramania Iyer in the article, “An Esoteric Organisation in India,” published in 1915 in The Theosophist. He there writes that his object is to draw attention to an ancient Indian organization that has long served a purpose similar to that aimed at by the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society. The heads of this ancient organization, the Suddha Dharma Mandala, belong to what Theosophists call the White Brotherhood, “whose sole concern is the welfare of humanity.” As such, they now wished “that the existence of their Organisation should be more widely known.” A major aspect of their work pertains to India. “It is the Vaidika form and gives yogic training according to certain immemorial methods.” An outer organization of the same name was allowed to be formed, which published a few of the many Sanskrit books preserved by the inner organization that had long been inaccessible. Unlike those brought out by the Theosophical Society, these hitherto secret books were brought out in the original Sanskrit.

The first of these is the previously unknown Praṇava-vāda of Gārgyāyaṇa. There is a fascinating story connected with this book, but we will defer this for the moment. Among the books published by the Suddha Dharma Mandala, what aroused by far the most interest is their controversial edition of the alleged original Bhagavad-gītā. This is the most beloved book in India, so feelings about it run high. In content, the Suddha Dharma Mandala version does not vary substantially from the standard known version. It is more a matter of the book’s arrangement. The S.D.M. version has 745 verses in 26 chapters, compared to 700 verses in 18 chapters in the standard version. They share a total of 659 verses. The other 86 verses of the S.D.M. version are all found in the Mahā-bhārata. There are no new or previously unknown ones among them. The S.D.M. version omits 41 verses found in the standard version. The above numbers are deduced from the index in the 1917 S.D.M. edition, which correlates its verses to the current version and to the Mahā-bhārata.
Warrant for the Bhagavad-gītā having 745 verses is found in three lines of some editions of the Mahā-bhārata, occurring just after the end of the Bhagavad-gītā, saying that Keśava (Krṣṇa) spoke 620 verses, Arjuna 57, Saṅjaya 67, and Dhṛtarāṣṭra 1 verse (Bombay and Kumbakonam eds., Bhiṣma-parvan, adhyāya 43, verses 4-5ab). Critics soon pointed out that while the Suddha Dharma Mandala edition does allot 67 verses to Saṅjaya, and 1 to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, it allots 608 rather than 620 to Krṣṇa, and 69 rather than 57 to Arjuna.¹ In the view of the Suddha Dharma Mandala, however, the 12 verses of the hymn to Durgā that Krishna asked Arjuna to recite in chapter 1 are not Arjuna’s words, but must be regarded as Krishna’s.² So the numbers do match. Moreover, ancient commentaries on this version, such as the one by Hāṁsa-yogī, are said to be in the possession of the Suddha Dharma Mandala; and the outer organization of that name founded by Sir S. Subramania Iyer started publishing it. The introduction and first chapter came out in Sanskrit before opposition and lack of support put a halt to this.

The well-respected Sir S. Subramania Iyer wrote in his foreword to the 1917 Suddha Dharma Mandala edition of the Bhagavad-gītā (p. xxxviii):

It should be added that the wish of those at whose instance the present edition is issued will be carried out in the sense in which they want it to be done, only when the Geetā, as here arranged, is translated into English, according to the acceptance of Hamsa-yogi and placed within the reach of all through the medium of that modern lingua franca.

This did not occur until 1939, fifteen years after his death in 1924. To our knowledge, neither the 1917 Sanskrit edition nor the 1939 Sanskrit-English edition has been reprinted. They are extremely hard to find, as are the other books published by the Suddha Dharma Mandala. In twenty-five years of searching the major academic libraries of North America, we have been able to locate and make archival quality copies of twelve of these, plus one from India, as listed here. Others still elude us.
Returning now to the fascinating story of the *Prañava-vāda*, we see that this and several other hitherto secret books came out years before the formation of the outer organization called Suddha Dharma Mandala in 1915. In 1894 a wandering blind pandit named Dhanarāja showed up at the house of Pandit Parmeshrī Dās in the town of Bārābaṅkī near Lucknow. This blind pandit could recite from memory many now unknown Sanskrit books, which answered the questions that had been perplexing Parmeshrī Dās. So Parmeshrī Dās and others wrote down a large number of verses from the dictation of Pandit Dhanarāja, sometimes completing a book and sometimes not. One of the books so received was the *Prañava-vāda*. This book was of particular interest to Bhagavān Dās, who eventually made a summarized English translation of it and published it as *The Science of the Sacred Word: The Pranava-vada of Gargyayana*, 3 vols., 1910-1913. An account of all this was published in the preface to vol. 1, as “The Strange Story of a Hidden Book.” It includes a full listing of the now lost Sanskrit books.

The Sanskrit original of vol. 1 of this book was published as the first volume of the Suddha Dharma Mandala Series in 1915, and vol. 2 of this book was published as the fifth volume of this series in 1919. These were prepared from manuscripts of the *Prañava-vāda* in the possession of the Suddha Dharma Mandala. The third and last volume apparently never came out. But the handwritten copy taken down from the dictation of the blind Pandit Dhanarāja by Bhagavān Dās and others is preserved in the Adyar Library. We have a microfilm of it here. So the last volume could still be published if there was sufficient interest. We have not yet been able to trace the whereabouts of the many other Sanskrit texts that were dictated by Pandit Dhanarāja. These may still remain with the families of Parmeshrī Dās and others. The Suddha Dharma Mandala does not seem to exist any more as an outer organization, but the ancient inner one as described by Sir Subramania Iyer could never cease to exist. Judging from the fate of the outer one, the secret manuscripts in the possession of the inner one are likely to remain secret until favorable circumstances allow their release.
About the fate of the outer organization, Sri Janardana writes in a book published “more than four decades since the adverse reactions against Suddha Dharma”:

The last straw to break the camel’s back was the publication of the Suddha Dharma Mandalam edition of the Gita. A great furore was made against it by the bigoted few of the Pandit-class without their even seeing or studying this Great Text and its commentaries. . . . It seemed also, as though there was no scholar in the whole of this land who was free from prejudice and orthodox leanings to assess the legitimate worthiness of this text and its teachings, except, perhaps, a few here and there and their voice was drowned.

In this state further release of these publications and the conferring of Deekshas were abruptly stopped by the Adhikarapurushas of the Mandalam.3

Adverse reaction from orthodox scholars thus seems to have been the major factor in stopping the further release of secret books. But this is not all. Another factor apparently came from within. Esoteric groups attract the devotional, those who want to believe, whether or not this belief is warranted by reason. They often make unverifiable claims, which turn away the very people who could and should soberly evaluate the secret books thus brought out.

In the early 1900s the Theosophical Society announced the coming world teacher in the form of a young man, Jiddu Krishnamurti. Of course, we know that such teachers do come, since they have come before, e.g., the Buddha, the Christ, etc. Alice Bailey gives the Tibetan Master’s view that this announced coming was real, but had to be aborted due to the reaction of the devotional types that largely make up such organizations as the Theosophical Society.

The power used by him was distorted and misapplied by the devotee type of which the Theosophical Society is largely composed, and the experiment was brought to an end.4
The Suddha Dharma Mandala, too, announced a coming *avatāra*. It was over this that Sir Subramania Iyer left the Suddha Dharma Mandala, according to Annie Besant’s report. Those in charge of the Suddha Dharma Mandala after his death denied that he left it. Besant writes:

He left the Shuddha Dharma Mandala when, during his long illness, it deserted the lines on which he had guided it, and announced the birth of the World-Teacher as a child born in January, 1919. Sir Subramania himself informed me of this, saying that he had nothing more to do with it.5

This was shortly before his death. At that time he asked the seven senior members of his organization to join Alice Bailey’s newly formed Arcane School, which they did.6

In a pamphlet issued by the Suddha Dharma Mandala in 1923, *The Avatara of Bhagavan Mitra Deva*, some statements are made that sound incredible. The *avatāra*, born on January 16, 1919, is said to have delivered his first discourse on October 22, 1920, to an assembly of about a hundred Mahatmas (p. 11). He would have then been just one year and nine months old. His second discourse, on the future work of the Hierarchs, was given on January 23, 1921 (p. 11), just after his second birthday. After the account of his early doings, one is invited to join his order. This requires the purchase, for the then considerable sum of 100 rupees, of a gold medallion that “not only provides immunity from accident, mishap and perilous bodily ailment, but also secures protection and prosperity, beside conferring spiritual progress and peace” (p. 17).

This pamphlet has a foreword by Subramania Iyer, along with his photo, thus apparently endorsing it. We must wonder, however, whether he really did endorse it. Annie Besant was known for her utter honesty, and her report that he left the Suddha Dharma Mandala over this *avatāra* should not lightly be dismissed. The *avatāra* was expected to emerge publicly before the world in 1941, which admittedly did not happen.7 This led to the demise of the organization some years later.
But none of us are free from personality shortcomings. The real need is to evaluate the secret texts that the Suddha Dharma Mandala brought out. To do this, one must get past the devotional overtones that characterize the introductory matter written by the modern Suddha Dharma Mandala exponents, and that even intrude into their English translations. Are there distinctive doctrinal positions that can help us determine their authenticity as texts of the hitherto hidden Wisdom Tradition, claimed to have once been universal?

It is well known that in *The Secret Doctrine*, the primary Theosophical sourcebook, the number seven is featured as the basic number of our cosmos. While this number is frequent in Sanskrit writings, so are other numbers, as critics of Theosophy have pointed out. Turning to the *Praṇava-vāda*, two volumes of which were brought out by the Suddha Dharma Mandala in Sanskrit, but which was translated into English by Bhagavan Das earlier, so that this translation is free of devotionalism, we find the following (vol. 3, p. 89):

> We no doubt speak ordinarily of nine substances and twenty-four attributes, etc., . . . yet in reality there are only seven substances proper, and seven attributes, and seven movements. It is true that all other numbers also, one, two, three, four, five, hundred, thousand, etc., have all an equal value and importance, and there is no peculiarity about seven, in the absolute sense. But the septenary number predominates in our particular brahmāñḍa [world-system], as other numbers do in other systems, as a mere fact.

Another characteristic and distinctive feature of *The Secret Doctrine* is its teaching that life evolves through the forms of the mineral kingdom, then the plant kingdom, then the animal kingdom, then the human kingdom, and so on up the scale. Even though extant Sanskrit books may imply this, there is no explicit statement of it. So neither scholars nor Hindus regard their religion as teaching evolution. The *Praṇava-vāda* does so clearly (vol. 2, pp. 35-36; Sanskrit ed. vol. 2, p. 22):
As said before, the method of treatment of all subjects in the Upa-Veda is the summational or all-comprehensive. . . . All the various kinds of minerals . . . are described therein. . . . So with the vegetable kingdom, vṛkṣha: how plants are evolved out of minerals, what their order of development of the various species is, . . . and so forth. The evolution of animals, pashu, out of plants, and of humans, mānava, out of animals, and the gradual birth and growth in men, of intelligence and discrimination, are all similarly dealt with.

The secret Stanzas of Dzyan given out in The Secret Doctrine depict cosmogony, utilizing the term svabhavat, i.e., svabhāva, seven times. The great sage Gauḍapāda near the beginning of his Māṇḍūkya-kārikā reviews the various theories of “creation,” or more accurately, manifestation. He concludes by giving his own view that the svabhāva of the deva, i.e., brahman/ātman, is the cause of manifestation, in full agreement with the Wisdom Tradition.8 Yet this is not the doctrine of the Advaita Vedānta school known today, which was established by Śaṅkarācārya, his disciple’s disciple. The Śaṅkarācārya known today teaches that the cause of the world is omniscient, omnipotent brahman as God (iśvara). He then goes on to specifically reject svabhāva, “inherent nature,” as the cause of the world.9 So virtually all Vedāntins today accept God, iśvara, rather than svabhāva as the cause of the world. But the Praṇava-vāda, in agreement with Gauḍapāda, says that manifestation is the svabhāva or inherent nature of brahman, and that svabhāva is declared everywhere to be the cause of the world (vol. 3, pp. 75, 77):

. . . this prapañcha [manifestation] is verily Self-established by Its own nature, the Sva-bhāva, the Self-being, of Absolute Brahman.

. . .

Because of this all-comprehensiveness of Brahman is the Nyāya-declaration true that the past and the future are equally interdependent. Both are simultaneously parts of the same svabhāva which is declared everywhere to be the cause of the world, having no cause of its own.
These few examples are sufficient, I think, to show that the *Prañava-vāda*, and presumably other texts brought out by the Suddha Dharma Mandala, are in agreement with the hitherto secret teachings brought out in *The Secret Doctrine*. Moreover, the last example indicates that they represent a more ancient tradition than the one currently found in India, as verified by a still extant source, Gauḍapāda. This lends credence to the claim that all these teachings represent an ancient Wisdom Tradition. It indicates that this tradition is not a new invention, but rather only provides truer or more original understandings of familiar teachings, teachings that perhaps became distorted through human weakness and predilection.

Indeed, there is a striking feature that no reader of the *Prañava-vāda* can fail to notice: its freedom from sectarianism. Texts of all the now known philosophical systems, *darśanas*, are quoted at will to support any particular point. Thus, Vedānta texts are quoted to support statements from Sāṃkhya texts and vice versa, and so with Mīmāṃsā, etc. As we find them today, Vedānta and Mīmāṃsā are at opposite ends of the spectrum, wholly opposed to each other; while the commentaries on the extant *Brahma-sūtra*, the basic Vedānta text, explain it as taking Sāṃkhya as its primary opponent. In the *Prañava-vāda*, these are all just differing but mutually supportive approaches to the same reality. The problem of the cause of the world is a case in point. For Gārgyāṇa, author of the *Prañava-vāda*, it is not an either/or question. While he says it is the *svabhāva* of brahman, he also says that a world-system is the ideation of its particular īśvara, God, or *mahā-viśnu*, as he usually calls this.

Moreover the texts of these *darśanas* that are quoted are often different from the ones now known. It is as if the texts we have are abridgements. For example, the text of the *Yoga-sūtra* that Pandit Dhanarāja dictated to Bhagavan Das has 501 verses, compared with 195 in the extant *Yoga-sūtra* (vol. 2, p. 187). In the brief time Bhagavan Das had available, he also wrote down from Pandit Dhanarāja’s dictation the “original” commentary of Vyāsa on two of these *sūtras*, which are found in the extant *Yoga-sūtra*. None of these texts have been published.
In brief, there is good reason to believe that the books of the Suddha Dharma Mandala warrant further study. But as long as the books they released long ago, such as the “real, original” version of the **Bhagavad-gîtā**, have practically no circulation and remain virtually unheard of, there is little reason to expect any more secret books to be released.

**NOTES**

7. *Sanatana Dharma Sootras*, Janardana, p. 61: “if the incarnated Lord Sri Mitra Deva would be gracious enough to come out from his retreat in the Himalayas by appearing publicly in our midst. . . .”
8. *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā* 1.9 (*deva* = *turya* in 1.10; *deva* = *ātma* in 2.12, 2.19).
Publications of the Suddha Dharma Mandala

Suddha Dharma Mandala Publications
(held in our archives)

The Avatara of Bhagavan Mitra Deva, [no author stated].


Sanatana Dharma Sootras of Bhagavan Sri Narayana, trans. by Sri Janardana. Mylapore, Madras: The Suddha Dharma Office,
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[no date, “These Sootras now published form part of the book Sanatana Dharma Deepika or the Light on Sanatana Dharma Vol. 1 which was released by Suddha Dharma Mandalam in the year 1917 . . .”]. Suddha Dharma Mandalam Series no. 11; viii + 78 pp.


Publications of the Suddha Dharma Mandala

Suddha Dharma Mañḍala Series
(as far as could be determined)

1. Pranava-Vada, vol. 1, 1915 (Skt.) [no series statement]
2. Yoga Deepika of Bhagavan Narayana, 1916 (Skt.-Eng.) [series no. 2]
5. Pranava-Vada, vol. 2, 1919 (Skt.) [series no. 5 (a-1)]
5.? Articles on an Esoteric Organisation in India, by Sir S. Subrahmanya Iyer, 9 articles, rev. 2nd ed.
6. Sanatana-Dharma-Deepika, or Anushthana Chandrika, by Hamsa-Yogi, vol. 2, 1921 (Skt.)
7. Sri Bhagavat-Gita-Bhashya, by Hamsa Yogi, vol. 1, Upodghata (Introduction, Skt., with summary in English), 1922
8. Sri Bhagavat-Gita-Bhashya, by Hamsa Yogi, vol. 2, chapter 1, (Skt.), 1924

Journal Articles
(listed by date)


“The Iså Upanishad in the Light of the Unpublished Commentary of Gobhila,” by S. Subramaniem, The Theosophist,
vol. 40, May 1919, pp. 165-180 (includes Gobhila-kārikāḥ in Sanskrit, 45 verses).


see also, earlier materials on Sanskrit Grammar:

see also, earlier materials on the Bhagavad Gītā:
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Miscellaneous Related Materials


*see also:* *The Theosophist*, vol. 64, no. 6, March 1943 (much of this issue consists of tributes to Sir Subramania Iyer).


Materials Including Information on the Suddha Dharma Mandala edition of the *Bhagavad-gītā*


Materials on the Question of a 745-verse Bhagavad-gītā

*Allahabad University Studies*, vol. 12, 1936, pp. 67-82.

