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Editor

Dr. C. Naganna

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and practice and to
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and Literature

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The Suttur Swamiji Speaks

In the vast sub-continent of India, Kannadigas are not only popular for their gallantry but are also well-known for their gentleness. “A sadhu for a sadhu; tender to the soft-spoken a warrior to a warrior with equivalent vigour; this is none else than Madhava himself.” These words extracted from *Kappe Arabhatta's* edict aptly symbolize the state of mind of Kannadigas. When we consider religion as the basis, Kuvempu's aphorism “A peaceful garden of people of different ethnicity” is not merely poetic imagination but a true reflection of the social reality and richness of Karnataka culture.

The religion of Jainism spread from North India to all over the nation including Karnataka in the era before Christ. The contribution of this religion to the field of literature, sculpture, art, astrology and other such important subjects is immeasurable. Even local people were greatly influenced by this religion. The local kings and chieftains were also responsible for nurturing and encouraging religious tolerance here. Ranadheera Kantheerava Narsaraja Wodeyar, agreeing to the wishes of a Christian Father, provided land in Ganjam near Srirangapatna for the Father to reside and spread the teachings of Christianity. Even Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar granted a site in Mysore district for the construction of a church and extended a helping hand for any assistance needed.

Even today, in some parts of North Karnataka, there are Muslims who are ardent followers of the Veerashaiva sect. In many religious centres, both Hindus and Muslims, offer their prayers with reverence towards both work and worship. Clearly

evident here is the pure dedication to 'Dharma' irrespective of one's religious background.

If religious practices become mere social and traditional acts without any dedication and if they fall a prey to a routinized state of mind it leads to various predicaments. In reality, practising a religion, simply put, is purity in code of conduct and deliberations. Anything contrary becomes a callous act. Most of our problems today are created because of our apathetic acts, which underscore the absence of responsibility.

In recent times, the above topic has been discussed in detail by the mass media. Participants involved in these discussions are not only the common people from different backgrounds but also scholars, cultural researchers, scientists and religious leaders. Each support their arguments with their specific instances, proof and respective viewpoints. In most of the writings, instead of extracting the essence or core principles of a religion, only social aspects of the religion are being displayed. While historic religions vie for the top spot, relatively new religions - in spite of adopting superior principles and codes of conduct - stumble upon obstacles for their survival. The rationale for this belief is the influence of a religion is dependent on certain factors relating to the followers of that particular religion. These factors are economic status, muscle power, artillery power and their influence on the world economy. Embracing a religion based on its principles and values is more appropriate than a momentary decision to convert to another religion for monetary gains. Basavanna was deeply inspired by Devara Dasimayya and the like for their philosophy on life and also their vachanas. He became a follower of the Veerashaiva philosophy because he strongly believed that the principles involved would facilitate his personality development and also bring about a social revolution which was necessary at the time. By becoming an ardent

devotee of Veerashaiva philosophy, Basavanna elevated Veerashaivism to a grand stature. Selfishness becomes the basis of a mere bodily conversion whereas a complete spiritual transformation benefits the self and others too.

*This corporeal crowd has gathered for food
How do they know the ways of Linga
Beings of the body, swayed by excitement
How do they know the stance of Guheshwara*

When Basavanna announced Allamaprabhu as the President of 'Shoonya Simhasana' ('The Throne of Void'), the latter's aforesaid vachana addressed to the intolerant people gathered in the Anubhava Mantapa (Hall of experience), applies well to the current trend of religious conversions. Present-day intellectuals of our society should seriously consider these religious conversions which are delusionary and involve temporary gains. The innocent and helpless people should be steered in the right direction by instilling self-pride within them in bringing them to the forefront of life's mainstream. Any effort contrary to intellectual guidance becomes a pointless debate resulting in mud-slinging which only tarnishes the image of the participants. Further, this unhinges the equanimity of the people. We need to reflect in unison upon this subject which has managed to cause so much antagonism within our society.

Notes From The Editor

"Sharana Patha" is completing its tenth year now, and, together with "Prasada" in Kannada, it has been catering to the spiritual needs of the readers. Vachanna Literature is an inexhaustible mine of knowledge and wisdom; and, therefore, it continues to yield rich rewards to all those who explore it with sincerity and dedication. Spiritually charged utterances of the Sharanas have not lost their lustre in spite of the passage of time; in fact, they shine with fresh luminosity to brighten the path of the contemporary world.

In order to view the vachanas from myriad angles we have requested the scholars well-versed in the field to contribute regularly to this unique journal. Some have readily responded; the others will surely join us in our venture soon.

The eleventh day of November 2008 was a memorable day in my life; for that was the day on which Jagadguru Sri Shivarathri Deshikendra Mahaswamiji blessed me with the Editorship of this holy journal in the presence of the stalwarts of the Editorial Committee, Sri B.N. Betkerur, Dr. Prabhushankara, Sri H. Gangadharan, Vidwan H.V. Nagaraja Rao, Prof. Chandrashekharaiyah, Sri Ma.Gu. Sadanandaiah and Sri R.S. Purnananda. When I bowed before the Swamiji on the occasion, he smiled gently and said "Your responsibility has increased." I could summon only two words at the moment, "Your Grace.....". I later thanked all the elders present and remembered with gratitude the service rendered by the former editors, Prof. Chandrashekharaiyah and Prof. D.A. Shankar. I have taken the baton from my respected teacher, Prof. D.A. Shankar in all humility, for he is a redoubtable scholar, critic and translator. He

felt immensely happy on learning that I have shouldered the responsibility of editing the Journal.

We are placing in your hands the composite issue of Jan. 2008 and July 2008, assuring you that the future issues would reach you as scheduled. However, we regret the inconvenience caused in the interregnum.

In tune with the suggestions obtained in the Editorial Committee meeting we have included an article by Dr. M. Chidanandmurthy on Basaveshwara under the heading: "Pages from the Past." Vidwan H.V. Nagaraja Rao has reviewed Dr. M.R. Srinivasa Murthy's *Vachanna Dharamasara*, a work of unageing beauty. Smt. L.V. Shanthakumari has written on Aaydakki Lakkamma, the eternal guide who epitomized the life of integrity, and Dr. Vijaya Guttal has contemplated on Akka Mahadevi who continues to be the source of inspiration in today's world. A related article by yours truly sketches Akka Mahadevi's life in her Udutadi-phase, taking into account the comparable points in the spiritual careers of other female mystics like Lal Ded, St. Teresa of Avila and others. The Rev. Swamiji, through his "Guruvani", has gently cautioned the society to take a fresh look at the phenomenon of conversion as it is more often designed to allure the hapless masses than to provide enduring succour to the have-nots.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge with gratitude the co-operation extended by Sri Sadandaiah. The editorial assistance of Sri R.S. Purnananda, Deputy Director of Publication Division, Ms. Nirupama Sagar has made my job very smooth-sailing; I thank them for that.

The Editorial Team wishes you a happy and prosperous New Year.

Dr. C. Naganna

The Relevance of the Vachanas of Aaydakki Lakkamma

Smt. L.V. Shanthakumari

The vachanas of Aaydakki Lakkamma have a particular prominence in the Vachana Movement of the 12th century. Influenced by the socio-religious reformation, Veerashaiva Siddhantha, expounded by Basavanna and other Sharanas, women from all strata of society came out of their shells to participate in spiritual seminars and compose vachanas. The episode of Aaydakki Marayya and Aaydakki Lakkamma (Marayya's wife) during the spiritual discourse in the Anubhava Mantapa, under the headship of the great Allamaprabhu, is unique and most relevant to our contemporary society. Some of the concepts that are of relevance even today are the purity of 'Kayaka' and 'Dasoha', not hoarding goods and non-acceptance from unjust sources. Aaydakki Lakkamma drives home the truth about the purity and true value of 'Kayaka' and 'Dasoha' to her husband in the Anubhava Mantapa itself, before the assembled guild of Sharanas. Thus she proves herself a paragon of virtues such as courage, wisdom and devotion emanating from mature spiritual experience and knowledge of philosophical dogmas. Lakkamma, by establishing her identity, has become an example, a model and a guide to women of all ages.

'Kayaka' and 'Dasoha' are two mutually complementing

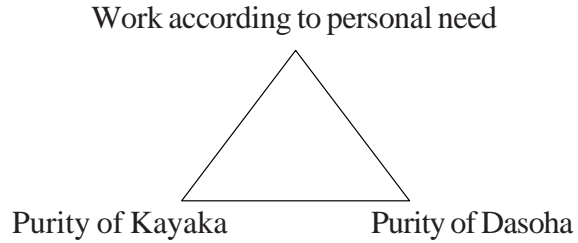
* (The vachanas used in this article are taken from "Shivasharaneyara Vachana Samputa," published by Karnataka Government, Directorate of Kannada and Culture, Bangalore. Editor Dr. Veeranna Rajura. Translation of Vachanas by L.V. Shanthakumari.)

principles which have evolved to the highest summit in the Veerashaiva Siddhantha.

By earning according to our need in a just manner, we achieve physical and mental wholesomeness, and the sanctity of Kayaka and Dasoha will be preserved. With an intention of performing more and more Dasoha, more is earned in an unjust manner and thus the value of Kayaka and Dasoha would be denigrated. Unless the mode of 'Kayaka' is pure, the devotee cannot achieve perfection in his 'Kayaka' and 'Dasoha'. Only what has been earned by pure means, must be used for 'Dasoha', and whatever is left after offering to the Jangama (guest) should be eaten as 'Prasada'. If so, what are the features of pure 'Kayaka' and 'Dasoha'?

This reminds me of the episode of the golden mongoose in the Mahabharata when Dharmaraya performed the Rajsuyayaga and thousands of people were fed. The water used for washing their hands flowed like a river. A mongoose with half its body turned into gold, was wallowing in that water and muttering to itself, "Oh, the other part of my body did not turn into gold." Krishna standing there with Dharmaraya asked the mongoose, "Where and how did you get your body to turn into gold?" The mongoose told the story of an extremely poor Brahman family living in the forest, making a livelihood by picking corn in the fields and searching for roots and leaves in the forest. Yet, they had adopted a 'Vratha' of feeding a guest before they ate. Once they did not get anything to eat for three days. The fourth day the wife prepared four rotis with whatever they did get. They were about to start their meal, when a guest came and said he was very hungry. He was not satisfied until the members of the family gave him their share of rotis. When he washed his hands after this 'great meal', a few drops of water fell on the mongoose and half of its body turned into gold. However, in Dharmaraya's yaga, though the water was flowing like a river, nothing did happen.

The guest was Indra himself who had come in disguise to test the Brahman is irrelevant to us. And that it was an episode to chasten the pride of Dharmaraya is also irrelevant to us. In this story we get the concept of purity of 'Kayaka' and 'Dasoha'. Donating what is not needed to us, cannot be considered donation or 'Dasoha', when more than our need is earned it cannot be considered pure 'Kayaka'. As such, a triangle of working according to our personal need, purity of Kayaka and purity of Dasoha is formed:



When one begins to hoard money, grains and other commodities of life it paves way for black marketing and corruption in the society and thus a vicious circle is formed. This profound doctrine has been propounded and analysed in the vachanas of Aaydakki Lakkamma.

Marayya and Lakkamma hail from Amareshwara village, Lingasugur taluk of Raichur District. Hearing about the fame of Basavanna, the couple came to Kalyana and took the vow of performing the Kayaka of picking rice grains from the courtyard of Basavanna's Mahamane and doing Dasoha. Through this mode of daily duty performed by this couple, the relation between the sanctity of Kayaka and Dasoha is beautifully explored in the episode of 'Aaydakki Marayyagala Sampadane' from 'Shoonya Sampadane' composed by Siddaveerannodeya. Once Marayya forgets his Kayaka during a spiritual discourse conducted in the Anubhava Mantapa, under the Presidentship of Allamaprabhu. Lakkamma enters the assembly of Sharanas to remind her

husband about his duty and says, "Kayaka has been brought to a halt and you have to attend to it, my lord." This courage, a sense of time and duty astounds us. Being a housewife she is worried about the delay in Dasoha because of the delay in Kayaka. The details of the Kayaka of her husband also are described in her vachana. Marayya has to pick out rice grains from the yards of great devotees. With a steadfast mind and pure feeling, Lakkamma has to prepare the offering for the deity and perform Dasoha. So she implores her husband to get back to his work. Listening to his wife, Marayya moves hastily to Mahamane of Basavanna and brings larger quantity of rice than he used to bring daily. But Lakkamma was not a common woman to hoard on extra rice so that she can perform 'Dasoha' to more devotees. As if a bullet is shot, she takes her husband to task and retorts:

ಆಸೆಯೆಂಬುದು ಅರಸಿಂಗಲ್ಲದೆ
ಶಿವಭಕ್ತರಿಗುಂಟೆ ಅಯ್ಯಾ
ರೋಷವೆಂಬುದು ಯಮದೂತರಿಗಲ್ಲದೆ
ಅಜಾತರಿಗುಂಟೆ ಅಯ್ಯಾ?
ಈಸಕ್ಕಿಯಾಸೆ ನಿಮಗೇಕೆ? ಈಶ್ವರನೊಪ್ಪ
ಮಾರಯ್ಯಪ್ರಿಯ ಅಮರೇಶ್ವರ ಲಿಂಗಕ್ಕೆ ದೂರ ಮಾರಯ್ಯ

(No. 6, 628, Page 200)

*Desire is meant for the king
Does it suit the devotees of Shiva?
Anger is meant for the servants of death
Does it befit the emancipated?
Why do you desire for so much of rice?
Shiva does not approve.
And Marayya would be distanced from Marayyapriya
Amareshwara Linga.*

Commenting upon the act of bringing larger quantity of rice, Lakkamma explores the nature of basic human instincts like desire, anger etc. Along with it she analyses how these instincts

affect a king, a common man and a devotee of Shiva. It is quite natural for a king to desire for wealth, power, and to hoard grains in the granary as he wants to expand the boundaries of his kingdom and protect his subjects during war and famine. But for a devotee of Shiva, who has renounced these material desires, the desire to get more is unjust and sinful. Desire for wealth, power and material comforts intoxicate us as stimulants to secure more and haunt us according to our status. But a devotee of Shiva who is an emancipated soul should be free from these haunting pressures of having more and hoarding more. In the same manner anger suits the yamadutas and not the emancipated devotee. Anger and enmity are the qualities which supplement each other. Anger, when it is purely negative, paves way to enmity and enmity pushes a man on the path of cruelty, cunningness, treachery and cheating. As such anger is natural to them who are instinctively cruel and not for the emancipated soul - Ajatha. After differentiating between the two paths, Lakkamma asks her husband, "Why do you desire for so much of rice? God does not approve of this", and mildly warns him that, by this act, he would be distanced from Marayyapriya Amareshwaralinga.

Lakkamma even suspects whether Basavanna with an intention of testing the loyalty of Kayaka of Marayya, had spilled much rice in the courtyard:

ಒಮ್ಮೆ ನವ ಮೀರಿ ಇಮ್ಮೆ ನದಲ್ಲಿ ತಂದಿರಿ,
ಇದು ನಿಮ್ಮ ಮನವೊ, ಬಸವಣ್ಣನ ಅನುಮಾನ ಚಿತ್ತವೊ?
ಈ ಮಾತು, ಮಾರಯ್ಯಪ್ರಿಯ ಅಮರೇಶ್ವರ ಲಿಂಗಕ್ಕೆ ಸಲ್ಲದ ಬೋನ
ಅಲ್ಲಿಯೇ ಸುರಿದು ಬನ್ನಿ ಮಾರಯ್ಯ

*Transgressing the steadfast mind, you have brought this
With duality in your mind;
Is this your mind or Basavanna's suspicious mind?
This is not suitable for offering to the deity,
Marayyapriya Amareshwaralinga.
Go, Pour this there and come Marayya.*

Lakkamma wonders whether Basavanna wanted to test the staunchness of Kayaka in Marayya. She is not the woman to keep her suspicion a secret. She expresses her mind by asking her husband if the bringing of larger quantity of rice was the result of Basavanna's way of testing them and if there was large quantity of rice spilt in the courtyard on that particular day. But this rice, brought with greed, was not fit for offering to God and Dasoha. So she commands her husband to go back and pour the rice in the same place from where he had brought it:

*'It is enough for us, what we used to have everyday,
You take this rice, go back there again and pour it,
Whatever Kayaka, Marayyapriya Amareshwaralinga
has given us,
It is enough for us Marayya.'*

She advises her husband not to choose a different method of Kayaka. In one vachana, Lakkamma insists not to desire even for 'Kailasa' leaving 'Kayaka' and 'Dasoha', which are sacred vows for them. Thus Lakkamma becomes the functional force and guiding light on the spiritual path of her husband. She confidently states that a virtuous devotee who performs 'Kayaka' with a pure mind would be blessed with the Goddess of wealth. As if to prove this, she asks her husband to invite to their tiny hamlet, Basavanna and his one lakh and ninety six thousand Jangamas for 'Dasoha'. By her unwavering willpower, profound devotion and loyalty towards 'Kayaka' and 'Dasoha', she serves the huge group with delicious dishes and satisfies them. Allammaprabhu himself exclaims, "I knew the greatness of Kayaka" and Basavanna seconds Allamaprabhu's opinion. "If you look at the house it seems like a poor household, but if you look at their minds they are truly wealthy".

Lakkamma analyses in her vachanas with many established doctrines of her contemporary society with a rational thought pattern and a philosophical stance. This vachana of three lines,

explores the concept of poor and rich with a philosophical stance in a rather novel way:

ಐದು ಇಲ್ಲವಾದಂದಿಗಲ್ಲದೆ, ಜಗದೊಳಗಾಗಿಗೂ ಬಡತನವಲ್ಲದಿಲ್ಲ,
ಐದು ಉಳ್ಳನ್ನಕ್ಕೆ ಸಕಲ ಜೀವಕ್ಕೆ ಚೇತನ
ಮಾರಯ್ಯಪ್ರಿಯ ಅಮರೇಶ್ವರ ಲಿಂಗುಳ್ಳನ್ನಕ್ಕೆ ಧನಮನ ಸಂಪನ್ನರು

(No. 7, 629)

*'Unless the five have become nothing, there is none
who does not have poverty.
Until there are five, there is life in all beings.
As long as Marayyapriya Amareshwaralinga is there,
All are blessed with material and mental wealth?'*

The five here are the five senses. The five becoming nothing means, to be rid of sensual passions born out of these five senses. Whoever is not free of these senses, they are suffering from poverty. Lakkamma paradoxically says, while one is full of sensual passions he is poor and while one is empty of these passions one is wealthy. Lakkamma, by this concept, totally changes the general concept of poverty. She is speaking not about material poverty but spiritual poverty and spiritual wealth. In the second line of the vachana, the 'five' is used to denote the five elements, the five principles of the world, the sky, air, fire, water and earth, necessary for sustaining power of all life in the world. Whether a man is rich or poor, these are the five internal principles or the forces that keep him alive. While this is the reality, to distinguish between the rich and the poor by means of external wealth seems ridiculous. When the first five are haunting everyone, and the second five are the cause of existence and extinction, who is rich according to Lakkamma? Whoever has achieved realisation, oneness with Amareshwaralinga, he alone is blessed with material and spiritual wealth.

In another vachana, by using the images of a mountain and a chisel, Lakkamma interprets the meaning and power of poverty. Reading this vachana we realise that poverty has its

own dignity, ability and poignancy:

*There may be penury of the body, is there penury to the
mind?*

*If the mountain is strong and the edge of the chisel is
thin does it not break a mountain?*

*There is no poverty to the sublime devotees of Shiva
and there are no evil deeds by the true and virtuous
And I do not have obligations to any as long as I have
Marayyapriya Amareshwara Linga with me.*

In the beginning of this vachana Lakkamma distinguishes between the matter and the spirit or the static and the dynamic. When the body or the organs of the body are compared with the mind – spirit – the mind happens to be subtle, small, invisible and abstract. Yet plasticity and the elasticity, vastness, velocity and the power of perception are not possible for the body. Moreover, the mind does not have the constraints and limitations of the body. As such, the smallness itself - poverty - becomes a great merit of the mind. After this, Lakkamma compares the strength of a mountain, with that of the thin edge of a chisel. A mountain is big, inorganic and an image from nature whereas the chisel's edge is small, thin, and an image from man-made world of tools. A small chisel is after all quite powerful enough to break a mountain. Through this comparison, Lakkamma emphasises on the immense power latent in the small things. When this line is examined or analysed with a social dimension, it suggests the explosive power concealed in the poor that can trigger a revolution. Even a small streak of light can drive away the dense darkness. Lakkamma asserts that the devotees of Shiva who are spiritual are never poor. The true and virtuous never commit evil - deeds. As she is blessed by Marayyapriya Amaleshwaralinga, she does not feel obligation to any other. This exploration of poverty, in a different manner, brings to light Lakkamma's

courage, confidence, originality and a thought pattern with social concern. Thus, these vachanas acquire relevancy.

Can we differentiate between guests as rich, poor or on the basis of caste and creed while performing Dasoha? Lakamma raises this question and states that it is not right to discriminate among guests or rebuff anyone. If you are sensitive and can empathize with the feelings of others with purity, you may have the blessed feeling of being with Amareshwara. In a tradition, where the 'guest' is compared to God, how can the guests be classified by caste or creed?

In one vachana, Lakkamma expands the psychological truth that a person's basic nature cannot be completely changed with external assistance or any instrument:

ಕೈದ ಕೊಡುವರಲ್ಲದೆ ಕಲಿತನವ ಕೊಡುವರುಂಟೆ ಮಾರಯ್ಯಾ ?
ಹೆಣ್ಣು ಕೊಡುವರಲ್ಲದೆ ಕೂಟಕ್ಕೊಳಗಾದವರುಂಟೆ ಮಾರಯ್ಯಾ ?
ಕಳುವ ಚೋರರಿಗೆ ಬಡವರೆಂದು ದಯವುಂಟೆ ಮಾರಯ್ಯಾ ?
ಮನವನೊರೆದು ಭಕ್ತಿಯ ನೋಡಿಹೆವೆಂಬವಗೆ
ಎಮ್ಮಲ್ಲಿ ಗುಣವ ಸಂಪಾದಿಸಲಿಲ್ಲ ಮಾರಯ್ಯಾ
ಶೂಲವನೇರಿ ಸಂದಲ್ಲಿ ಮತ್ತಿನ್ನು ಸಾವಿಗೆ ಹಂಗು ಪಡಲೇಕೆ?
ಯಾರಯ್ಯಪ್ರಿಯ ಅಮರೇಶ್ವರಲಿಂಗ ನೀನೇ ಬಲ್ಲೆ "

*Weapons could be given, can valour be given Marayya ?
Bride can be given, can they participate in
union of a couple Marayya?
Does the thief feel pity for the poor and stay away from
stealing them?
He who says, has seen devotion by scraping, testing the mind,
Has not earned merit by us Marayya.
Once you have climbed the trident and met with death,
why should you be afraid of death?
You yourself know Marayyapriya Amareshwaralinga.*

Valour and courage are positive qualities that are essential in helping a man to face the hardships of life, either in wartime or in daily life – Lakkamma argues that by giving weapons we may help a person to use his innate power more effectively. But when

one lacks that innate power, we cannot infuse valour and courage in him; weapons are only passive tools in a coward's hands. As such, Lakkamma rightly says that weapons could be given but not valour and courage. In the field of spirituality, prayer, meditation, counting rosary and other modes of worshipping may be important, but they cannot produce pure devotion until it rises from deep within. You may marry off a bride to a worthy bridegroom, but you cannot be a part of their union. In the same way, by scraping and testing the mind the devotion inside is invisible. Lastly Lakkamma says there is no need for a person to be obliged to death while as a devotee he has already climbed the trident and met death. The trident suggests the weapon of Shiva. The "Shoola" that Lakkamma cites here may be the plight of life or the trident of Shiva which is the spiritual symbol as well as the tool of destruction. By climbing on this trident – the spiritual symbol, a person will be rid of the material life and gain a spiritual life. This desire for the spiritual must sprout from within and cannot be flowered using any external manure.

Lakkamma defines devotion, nature of sacrifice, co-ordination of thought and action like this:

*Devotion observed with pride is waste of money;
Words without right conduct is damaging to wisdom;
To be called a donor without donating is
like being adorned without hair in the head;
And devotion sans firmness is like filling holy water
In the pot with a broken bottom.*

As in Kayaka and Dasoha, there is no place for ego and boasting in devotion. An increase in wealth leads to external pomp and show of devotion turning a simple concept of "Patram, pushpam, phalam, toyam", to a ritual involving varieties of sweets, gold, silver etc. Lakkamma feels this is devotion with pride and a waste of money. When there is no harmony between thought and action, words and action, it is self-deception and

damages one's wisdom. Lakkamma ridicules the idea of being called a donor without giving anything by comparing it to a head without hair being adorned. Finally through the homely image of filling water in a pot with a broken bottom, she drives home the truth that infirm devotion will not stay in the mind which is broken with holes of sensual pleasures and desires. The mind and devotion should be firm to attain spiritual perfection.

After elucidating the firmness in devotion, Lakkamma raises another important question, "Can the devotees perform Kayaka and Dasoha in partnership, as it is done in the business field?". "May devotees, in the name of Kayaka earn in a partnership and perform Dasoha?"

Lakkamma's question becomes highly relevant in our contemporary society where through partnerships, forced contributions in the name of many gods, people are fed in large scales in the name of Dasoha. Are these Kayaka and Dasoha in the real sense? Kayaka should be done with one steadfast mind and earnings should be brought in one proportion only. Before the duality of hoarding or any mode of greed sets in, Dasoha should be performed. Lakkamma makes light of the belief that by giving one can achieve Kailasa and asks "Is Kailasa the place to go by giving wages?" She states that without any expectations, without looking for any gain, if the work is performed, that itself would be Kailasa; Lakkamma very simply puts forward the doctrine of 'Bhagavadgita', '*Karmanyevadhikarasthe ma phaleshu kadachana*'.

Another vachana of Lakkamma reveals her wisdom, experience, calmness and positive acceptance of life. The vachana expounds the doctrine that a person obtains only what has been assigned to him, when he comes to this earth:

ಬಾಹಾಗ ಕೊಂಡು ಬಂದ ಪ್ರಾಪ್ತಿಯಿಲ್ಲದೆ,
ಬೇರೊಂದ ಗಳಿಸಲಿಲ್ಲ, ಬೇರೊಂದ ಕೆಡಿಸಲಿಲ್ಲ,

ಬಂದುದು ನಿಂದುದು,
ಮಾರಯ್ಯಪ್ರಿಯ ಅಮರೇಶ್ವರಲಿಂಗ ಕೊಟ್ಟಿಲ್ಲದಿಲ್ಲ

*Nothing would be acquired, except what we have brought with us, while coming to this earth.
Did not earn anything else; did not spoil anything else
Whatever came, did stay.
Unless Marayyapriya Amareshwaralinga gives,
nothing would be there.*

We desire to mould our life, enhance our wealth, control our lives and think we have the power, but nothing happens as per our wish. Though this vachana seems to favour determinism or fatalism or an exposition of Karma theory, it is not so. It proclaims the truth that we live as 'God has ordained'. This vachana reminds us of the doctrine expounded in one of the *keerthanas* by Purandaradasa: 'It is better to keep quiet until there is God's grace. By writhing constantly and grieving, can we get the fortune which we have not obtained by our birth?' Lakkamma also says, except what we have brought with us, while coming to this earth, whether it is good fortune or bad fortune, we cannot earn anything. What has come with us would stay with us. They may be good deeds or bad deeds of our past. Unless Amareshwara with his grace offers us, there would be nothing.

Lakkamma opines that spirituality and detachment should be nurtured while they are at the stage of germination. After the root is dried up, what is the use of watering it? As such Lakkamma advises to water the sapling of detachment, before it dries up;

ಸಸಿಗೆ ನೀರದರೆ ಎಳೆಕುವುದಲ್ಲದೆ
ನಷ್ಟಮೂಲಕ್ಕೆ ಹೊತ್ತು ನೀರ ಹೊಯಿದೆಡೆ ಎಳೆಕುವುದೆ ಮಾರಯ್ಯ
ನಿನ್ನ ವಿರಕ್ತಿ ನಷ್ಟವಾಗುವ ಮುನ್ನವೆ
ಮಾರಯ್ಯ ಪ್ರಿಯ ಅಮರೇಶ್ವರ ಲಿಂಗವನರಿಯಿರಯ್ಯಾ

*If you water the sapling it would sprout
But, will the dried up root sprout, Marayya,
even by carrying water and pouring on it?
Try to know Marayyapriya Amareshwaralinga
before your attitude of detachment is lost.*

Lakkamma warns the seekers of salvation, to try and understand Amareshwaralinga, before the mind is caught in the whirlwind of sensual pleasures and the roots of spiritual sapling dry up.

For the time being, only twenty five vachanas of Lakkamma are available and they express her originality of thought pattern, spiritual stance, courage, purity of mind, steadfast loyalty in Kayaka and Dasoha. These vachanas are direct expression of her experience and her thoughts rather than poetic outpourings. Marayyapriya Amareshwaralinga is the “ankitha” in all her vachanas.

The episode of Aaydakki Lakkamma is important for the following reasons:

1. The analysis of wealth and poverty from a spiritual and philosophical stance.
2. The elucidation of the real value and meaning of ‘Kayaka’ and ‘Dasoha’.
3. Stress on the essential greatness, and importance of saving food.
4. Throwing light on a woman’s courage, innate strength and her position in the contemporary society.
5. Propounding principles of not hoarding and non- acceptance from unjust sources.

Lakkamma becomes an inspiration and guide to women by her wisdom and spiritual knowledge. By realizing her innate freedom and power, by courageously warning her husband about his duty in the assembly of sharanas like Allamaprabhu and

Basavanna. This episode throws light on the value of a single grain of rice and makes us think about the social responsibility of saving food grains. If the rice spilt in the courtyard of Basavanna’s Mahamane was more than enough to perform Dasoha in Marayya’s house, saving food grains really seems a matter of concern, especially at this juncture where the whole world is experiencing food crisis. This episode suggests that a tendency towards hoarding leads to blackmarketing and corruption which, in turn, destroys the wholesomeness of the society. Like Lakkamma, until the principle of *Tena tyaktena bhunjeetha*, *Ma grudhah kasyaswiddhanam* is realized, social welfare remains a distant dream.



The children of the rich do not automatically become eligible to inherit their wealth. Those who are economically sound must make their children stand on their own feet by providing them good education. The tragedy is they seldom follow this method. Most of the children hanker after their parents’ properties and they feel no embarrassment in possessing them as a matter of right. Those of us who invite poverty voluntarily do not envy the wealth of the rich people. We must lead life in such a way that they get inspired to follow austere living. It is sad that not many derive pleasure out of austerity.

This is my advice to the rich: whatever you do, try to live without violating your inner purity. There is no evidence to show that those who earn gold would follow the patterns of virtue easily. Though I have arrived at this inference drawing from my observation, it is equally true that there are people who remain detached from their wealth and power like King Janaka. If they can lead such a life, it should be possible for others to make their living exemplary.

Mahatma Gandhi

Akka Mahadevi : The Saint-Poet

Dr. Vijaya Guttal

The Veerashaiva Movement during the 12th century in Karnataka was essentially a bhakti movement, of which we may see different expressions at different stages in the spiritual history of India. Bhakti is central to the heritage of India and is its essential ethos. The unique phenomenon of the bhakti tradition appears to have begun in South India, in Tamil Nadu before the 7th century with the Alvars and the Nayanmars and spreading to other parts of the country later. The bhakti cult found one of its strongest expressions in the Veerashaiva Movement of the Shivasharanas, spearheaded by Basavanna during the 12th century in Karnataka. The Shivasharanas were followed by the Haridasas in the 15th century. The bhakti tradition continues with Tukaram, Namadev in Maharashtra and Vallabhacharya and Narasimha Mehta in Gujarat. While Tulsidas, Kabirdas and Mirabai are the great mystics of the north, Chaitanya belongs to Bengal and Lalleshvari to Kashmir. The bhakti tradition has continued with other saints of later times.

Irrespective of the religious and philosophical systems from which they came, all the mystics of the bhakti tradition spoke the same language of loving devotion offered to God. In bhakti, rituals are replaced by devotion and there is an accent on purity in personal character. The mystic's bhakti involves a total dedication of the will. These mystics have made the supreme transition from life of the senses to the life of intuition. The 'Real' lying at the root of the visible world and sustaining its life, impels them to hanker for the communion with the Supreme Self. The quest for God constitutes the whole meaning of life for a mystic soul.

When one's mind flows into God and harbours there, one has the experience of bhakti. Total self-surrender and self-conquest is the mark of a lover of God.

True mystics are never self-seeking. On the contrary, they are god-centered men and women who have made the utmost sacrifice of the will. In the 'Mystic -Way', the self passes through different stages of development which are identified broadly as, 'Purgation, Illumination, and Ecstasy'. At the beginning of this path, the individual soul is drawn to the spiritual life, undergoes a process of purification and practices annihilation of the self. By directing the vital powers of the will towards the 'Higher Reality', the seeker is able to reach the illumination of the inner self and attain inward light. Through a constant practice of renunciation and purification, one is able to reach the experience of ecstasy in which the human soul enters consciously into the presence of God.

The characteristics of the 'Mystic-Way' commonly coincide and are seen in almost all the mystics of the world. Even though the order and degree of these spiritual states may not always be the same in all of them, they are all seekers of God who have removed themselves from the entanglements of the sensual world and are rooted in God. The Shivasharanas of the Veerashaiva Movement belong to the band of god-seekers who exhibit a total dedication of the will to the service of God. The movement initiated by these Sharanas is distinct in a number of ways. A whole host of mystics converged in Kalyan under the banner of Veerashaivism in the stewardship of Basavanna, one of the greatest among the Veerashaiva Sharanas. It is necessary to recognise that the Veerashaiva movement led by Basavanna is essentially a spiritual movement which protested against an unjust religious system which prevailed at the time. The Vedic religious system of the time had been reduced to a set of mechanical rituals and religious aberrations which paved the way

for social injustices against the poor and the ignorant. The common people had been deliberately kept away from true knowledge. As a result, they indulged in superstitions and worshipped all kinds of gods and spirits. Sanskrit being the language of the learned, the ordinary man had no access to traditional religious texts or to the knowledge of the true path to God. Women were denied both equality and independent thinking. The Veerashaiva movement launched spiritual and social revolution against these injustices and strove for a radical change in the religious life of man. As religious life is closely bound to social life, the spiritual revolution initiated radical changes in social life as well. The Sharanas of the Veerashaiva Movement on one hand opposed the exploitation of the lower caste and on the other hand fought against the superstitions and the blind beliefs of the lower caste people and tried to bring them on to the path of true experience of God. The Sharanas responded to an urgent need to envisage a new concept of religious faith, a necessity to re-define the relation between man and God, man and man and man's relation to life.

Among the Veerashaiva Sharanas, the great names that stand out are those of Basavanna, Allama Prabhu, Channabasavanna, Akka Mahadevi, Siddharama and each of them had reached a unique spiritual height. But the saga of the spiritual attainment of Akka Mahadevi is one of the most fascinating. Akka has been acclaimed as a realised soul by many Sharanas of her time and is admired for her spiritual daring. She is a spiritual rebel who broke all conventions that had kept a woman from achieving liberation of the spirit. At a time when a woman's stature was no more than that of an instrument of physical satisfaction, she refused to conform. She was the daughter of god-fearing parents who belonged to a small village called Udutadi in Karnataka and she had taken to a life of devotion under the guidance of her guru at an early age. Forced into a marriage with

a Jain King Kaushika against her will, she would not submit to a worldly life and allow him to interrupt her devotional life. When he overstepped the restrictions she had set, she threw conventions to the winds, and broke out of the family ties. She chose a life of austerity and embarked on a pathway to God. She left her home and wandered in search of her God-lover whom she names 'Channamallikarjuna'. She then journeyed towards Kalyana seeking the spiritual companionship of Basavanna and other saints. It is said that rejecting a worldly life with Kaushika, she also rejected the 'shame' of the body and the 'burden of clothes', which perhaps was part of her protest against the world, which treated woman merely as a 'body'.

Like Lalleshvari, the mystic of Kashmir, Akka Mahadevi discarded the 'burden of clothes' in an ultimate defiance against the patriarchal social structure which stood in her way preventing her from a total surrender to God. Another woman saint, Mira, had danced with anklets on her feet, god-intoxicated, unmindful of worldly censure or family shame. These women saints broke out of the traditional role model of womanhood but at the same time, as great mystics transcended the boundaries of gender. From one point of view, they are within the fold of *feminism* as they rebelled against the existing social system of time. But from another point of view, there, apparently, is a clash between the subversion of patriarchy and the urge of the women saints to seek ultimate union with God. But in true spirituality, gender boundaries collapse and in the presence of God, the saint is an asexual being.

At a time when women were thought of as snares to male asceticism, these women saints walked out of their homes and attained communion with the Divine and thereby breaking the patriarchal construct. The identification of woman as body-centered and the close association of sexuality with the feminine is another patriarchal construct that gets splintered by women saints

like Akka Mahadevi, Mira and Lalleshvari. The case of the women saints perhaps projects a paradoxical situation where although they appear to reject the patriarchal structure, at the physical level, they seem to operate within the same framework at the spiritual level. They move away from their roles as women in the patriarchal framework and stand as spiritual rebels on one hand, and on the other, they call themselves the 'brides of God' returning to the role they have rejected. But it is also clear that they become 'brides of God' in the mystical sense of the term where it does not signify the limited sense of female submission and surrender. On the contrary, it foregrounds the sense of giving oneself completely with loving devotion to the Divine.

The *Shoonya Sampadane*, one of the most significant Veerashaiva texts, which gives a poetically dramatic account of the spiritual deliberations held in the *Anubhava Mantapa* by the Sharanas, provides a moving description of how Akka Mahadevi was put to an acid test by the Sharanas before accepting her into their fold. She was a soul born with an instinct for the 'Absolute' and hence even before she arrived in Kalyana, she had been able to transcend the entanglements of the sensual world and root herself in the Divine. She had made the transition from the life of the senses to the life of the spirit. Among the Sharanas, Akka Mahadevi is one of the finest examples of the intimate and effective type of contemplation which expresses itself in an intense form of mystic love where the mystic sees herself as the beloved of God. She identifies the Divine by the name 'Channamallikarjuna' and He is her bridegroom, her eternal husband and her Supreme Lord. She has lost herself in Him, having reached the summit of illumination. Foreseeing her arrival in Kalyana, Allama Prabhu who presides over the spiritual discourses at the Anubhava Mantapa, sends Kinnari Bommayya, another Sharana, to test Akka's dedication. But Akka Mahadevi is one who has achieved victory over Kama, the god of love

himself. Kinnari Bommayya's encounter with Akka reveals the truth that she has 'lost the darkness of the body' and 'is arrayed in the eternal light of Channamallikarjuna'. Although Allama is aware of her evolved state of spirit, he questions her severely to make sure her rapturous immersion in the Divine is genuine, for the benefit of others. Her uncommon life which involved rejection of the commonly held patriarchal attitudes puzzled many. As Dr. Chidananda Murthy points out, the queries, which come from him, are not really his but they were raised for the sake of others [Kinnari Bommayya]. He deliberately begins by questioning her harshly, "Who is your husband? You may sit giving the identity of your husband or quit." The questions are loaded with patriarchal preconceptions denying her an identity of her own. Akka Mahadevi who has transcended the gender boundaries as true mystic, replies with feeling that she is married to her Lord Channamallikarjuna and that she has nothing to do with the husbands of this world. Considering her hair-cover as her attachment to the world of senses, Allama is not convinced by her claim to renunciation. He questions her further, in a vachana:

*Is it true that
You laid the blame and left him?
Casting away cloths and body bare
Illusion of mind's pride not lost;
Hair still screens the form
How then is shame shed?
This attire befits not
Our Guheshwaralinga.*

A rebel woman mystic is not easily accepted even by the Veerashaiva Sharanas who themselves rejected the implication of body-consciousness and opposed gender discrimination. Akka replies with the power of detachment and introversion:

*What if body darkens black?
What if body shines bright?*

*Once inward purity gained
Body that Channamallikarjuna loves
What matters how it is.*

When Allama still persists, she says unhesitatingly,

*Lest it pain you
To see the stamp of Kama
I covered myself.*

Akka entreats the Sharanas not to pester her, as she is one who is immersed in her God Channamallikarjuna and reveals her unique communion with the Infinite in the following vachana:

*I love the Handsome One
The deathless, decayless, formless One.
Mother, I love the Beautiful One
Matchless, infinite, markless and complete.*

*I love Him
Who has no bond or fear
No clan or land
Lord Channamallikarjuna
Is my handsome husband.*

*Take away these
Dying, decaying husbands
And throw them into the kitchen fire.*

Allama and the other Sharanas are finally convinced that Akka is a deeply contemplative soul that dwells in God and that hers is an extreme form of the personal and intimate communion of the going forth of the beloved to the lover. Although the concept of 'Sharana Sati-Linga Pati' in which Sharana, the spiritual seeker, whatever is the gender, is seen as the wife and god as the *Pati* or the eternal husband a typical feature of Veerashaivism; similar concept may be found in Western mysticism too. St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila considered themselves as the beloveds of God.

The long debate between Akka and Allama in the *Shoonya Sampadane* highlights the extreme austerity of Akka's personality and also her total dedication. In the act of contemplation, the mystic's whole personality, directed by love and devotion, transcends the worldly distractions. Casting off its attachments, it then rises to the freedom of the spirit. The mystic constantly practises self-surrender and discovers that "there is death in fruition, and a melting and dying into the nudity of Pure Being" [*Mysticism*, p. 345]. It is this 'nudity of Pure Being' which belongs to Akka Mahadevi in her state of union with her Lord Channamallikarjuna.

The purgation of the senses and selfhood are placed first in the order in the Mystic Way. Purification of the soul of imperfections to make it a worthy dwelling for the Divine is seen as a perpetual process. The mystics of all ages and all faiths agree that the three virtues which are the essential virtues of the mystical quest are poverty [of possessions], chastity [poverty of senses], and obedience [poverty of will]. The well-known western mystic Meister Eckhart says, "God is Pure Good in Himself, therefore He will dwell nowhere but in a pure soul. What is Purity? It is that a man should have turned himself away from all creatures and have set his heart so entirely on the Pure Good that no creature is to him a comfort, that he has no desire for anything mundane so far as he may apprehend therein the Pure Good, which is God." The Sharanas also put forth that detachment which keeps the soul away from the distractions of the sense world which dissipates precious energy and has contempt for all things which are not God.

Although Akka Mahadevi agrees with the Sharanas on the importance of detachment, yet she lays a greater emphasis on chastity of the body and the chastity of the senses. She sees chastity of the body as paving the way for the chastity of the mind. Her vachanas underline the fact that spiritual freedom is

achieved by the victory over the physical desires. The transition from the world of the senses to the world of the spirit is seen as a formidable task. When Akka emphasizes the purity of the body, she seems to speak as a woman saint for the world that had forced a woman to think that the body was the province of her power. Akka subtly rejects this patriarchal proposition in a spiritual sense and highlights the need to achieve loss of the 'shame' of the body and stand before the Divine Reality in the 'nudity of Pure Being'. Basavanna, praising Akka in one of his vachanas, testifies to the fact that her spiritual enlightenment had reached this very level:

*Illusion of body's shame lost
Love of life's shame lost
Memory of mind's shame burnt
Knowing that mind's merging
Is to stand nude before God
Shedding eagerness,
Affection and commerce
Lord Kudalasangamadeva
This is mother Mahadevi's stance*

If Akka Mahadevi's losing the awareness of the body by losing herself in the Divine Reality is one form of subversion of patriarchy, she also approaches the traditional belief that the female is a snare to the male ascetic in her own unique way. In one of her vachanas, she speaks of it lucidly:

*Maya plagues man
As the pride of woman
Maya plagues woman
As the pride of man
To the maya of this world
The way of the Sharanas seems insane
The Sharana Channamallikarjuna loves
Has no maya, nor forgetfulness,
Nor pride.*

Akka Mahadevi sees 'maya' or illusion as universal phenomenon which bogs all seekers on the pathway to God and she visualises the path of bhakti as the only means to reach the truth. Here she not only rejects the patriarchal construct that woman is a snare to the spiritual aspirations of man but subverts it by saying that man is as much a snare to the woman. She extends the meaning of the idea when she points out the universality of the concept.

Akka Mahadevi is a mystic who rises above the worldly notions of the body and the feminine qualities and having lost body-consciousness, she attained a spiritual state in which she was one with the Divine. Allama Prabhu, the most austere of Veerashaiiva saints, recognises the spiritual splendour of Akka and pays homage to her:

*She became
Companion of Linga
Body-consciousness lost;
Companion of awareness
Mind-consciousness lost;
Dazzling light
Self-consciousness lost;
Division of self and other lost;
One with our Guheshwaralinga,
To the stance of Mahadeviyakka
I bow.*

The unique feature of Akka's spiritual attainment is her supreme self-abandonment and an extreme purity of soul. She had shed the 'burden of the body' and its pride, and her soul stood 'nude' before the Divine. There is a deep inwardness of the soul which she cultivates and her vachanas give a powerful expression to the inseparable bond she forges with the Divine.

At the heart of Akka Mahadevi's mystical vision, as she renounces all desires and attachments on the physical plane and resorts to them on the spiritual plane, one has to admit that it is a

paradox which is part of the mystical life itself. She regards herself as the bride of God Channamallikarjuna in whom her Self is merged in a spiritual marriage and she employs the whole gamut of feelings that surround the image of conjugal love and describes her feelings of longing, the pain of separation and the rapture of the union with her spiritual husband most poetically with the intensity of the actual. When an evolved spirit like Akka Mahadevi who is said to have shed her very quality of femaleness and detached herself from the world of the senses, takes recourse to descriptions from conjugal life like the beloved, wife, husband and marriage, it is not in any conventional sense. She uses them as metaphors to express her powerful spiritual vision of the union with the Divine. For even a mystic has to give expression to the highest experience of the Divine in terms of the worldly life and its experiences in order to be understood. The uniqueness of these metaphors is that they at once convey the sense of the personal and the spiritual extending the meaning beyond the particular symbols and metaphors.

Like all great mystics, Akka Mahadevi borrows symbols and metaphors from the material plane to articulate her transcendental perceptions. For the transcendental experience to be grasped by surface consciousness there is a need to employ symbolic devices. Akka Mahadevi embodies her spiritual perceptions in the vachanas, a form the Sharanas discovered and her vachanas are expressed with great poetic beauty. Like all other Sharanas poets, she too chose to write in Kannada, the language of the common people unlike the writers of the time who composed in Sanskrit. For the aim of the Sharanas was to reach out to the commonman. Although, the Sharanas are not poets primarily, some of them like Basavanna, Allama Prabhu and Akka Mahadevi excel in the use of the poetic idiom and also the manner in which they couch the metaphysical thoughts in the colloquial language. Akka Mahadevi is one of the most poetic of the

Sharanas and her vachanas are especially known for their nature imagery. Her writings carry a rare sense of immediacy and involvement and abound in poetic similes and metaphors. Her language is supple, rhythmical and lucid. Akka Mahadevi's vachanas are among some of the earliest compositions by women in our country. Her contribution in terms of mystic vision and poetic imagery has enriched vachana literature.



It is pertinent to note how the poets of the twentieth century have responded to Akka Mahadevi. As it is evident from their creative output, they look up to Akka as a very Significant Being among the saints of the twelfth century. Some have expressed their helplessness that they are unable to follow her example as they are caught in the web of domesticity. There are references to Akka's mysticism and the poets show their determination to achieve redemption by following her way of life. Devotion, self-respect, self-confidence, courage and tenacity to achieve the goals are some of the other factors that goad the present-day poets to meditate upon Akka.

What is interesting is that Akka has not been portrayed as a devotee of Lord Channamallikarjuna by the twentieth-century poets; she is recognised, first and foremost, as a poet. They have described with respect and affection Akka's life and career as a poet. With the full consciousness of the social context of the past and present, they admire Akka's rebellion, her way of questioning the existing order and so on. They search for Akka in their own existential condition; some describe their experience as springing from successful revelation of Akka's personality, some only place abiding questions about her life.

-Ed.

Impediments into Incandescence : Akka Mahadevi's Udutadi -Phase

Dr. C. Naganna

“When a woman rebels, revolution happens”, says Chandrashekhara Talya, a well-known Kannada poet, in one of his poems. Placing Akka Mahadevi in the revolutionary context, he makes the following observation:

Many modern revolutions have been unsuccessful because they lacked alternatives. But the Sharanas created alternative gods and this became a foundation of the new religion, a new community and a new philosophical approach. Their intention was not merely to break the old social order but to establish a new and vibrant arrangement in its place. One of the important programmes of their revolution was to uphold the dignity of labour and to recognise the grandeur and centrality of womanhood. Akka Mahadevi emerged as the supreme example in the Sharana Movement.

Akka accomplished all that she could because of a unique mental make-up. It was special and unconventional. Even the women of today are daunted by Akka's whirlwind-like life. She pulsated for that madness and marched towards a goal she had set for herself.

Why does a mind rebel against the established convention? The conventions do represent a rigid framework within which the free spirits are confined. The rebellious spirits defy all forms

of constriction, because they outgrow the norms of the world very quickly. After all, these so-called norms are developed over the years to keep individuals under control. Humanity, by and large, proceeds without raising its voice against such an imposition of restrictions. But some visionaries are born at regular intervals in the human world to take stock of the situation and to apply the correctives. They detect the aberrations prevalent in the world and at once try to remedy the situation as well. Akka Mahadevi belongs to such a rare breed of seers who got the meaning of the world relatively quickly.

The Udutadi-phase of Akka's life has registered her protest on many counts. But if we depict her as a mere rebel we will be doing great injustice to her mystical qualities; and, in fact, she is first and foremost, a mystic of the first order. But the mystics are rebels by the very nature of the path they choose to traverse. Their walk, their talk, their dress, their association – are all different from the run-of-the-mill methods adopted by the rest of the humanity. Since the mystics also have an added responsibility to the enduring values of life, their emphasis on following straight and narrow path ought to be understood in its proper sense.

Therefore, Akka's vachanas must be studied under broad categories such as her understanding of Maya, the place she has assigned to the body, her attitude towards *Samsara* (the world), her encounter with Kaushika and her transition from Udutadi, the first threshold called Kalyana. There are geographical thresholds existing in the heart of the mystic vibrating all the time to gain access to the next threshold. It is equally true that a mystic's life cannot be studied as if it is a neatly divided compartment. Even as Akka is coming to terms with her life in the first phase at Uduadi as a young woman exposed to the conflicts of the adult world, she might have already forged her inner stamina for the journey she is to undertake shortly. She might even contemplate

on the final union with her Lord in Udutadi itself. To lend meaning to a mystic's career the intermediary stage is as important as the primary stage and the last stage. The intermediary stage is where she comes in contact with the gurus who have progressed already on the path of spirituality.

As Roland Barthes said, "True knowledge depends on unmasking of the 'I'." This is precisely what seems to be happening in Akka's career in the Udutadi-phase. Her addressing Maya and all other elements enlisted above, point in the same direction of achieving 'Purgation' in the sense in which the term is used in the context of the Christian mystics. Simply put, "Purgation" is a state of pain and effort, though it also carries the sense of "cleansing". This phase of Akka Mahadevi's life can also be described as "unsequestered quest".

A 'sequestered condition' means a condition where an individual is hidden away from other people and the aspect of 'quiet' is also emphasized. But Akka's life tells us that she refused to be 'sequestered' and be 'silent'. Her moving away from the small little domestic orbit did make the vision of a larger horizon possible. She would have been an 'ornamental possession' as far as Kaushika was concerned. Akka could understand all this instantaneously and therefore she chalked out a different programme for her career.

Though young and very attractive in physical terms – the two ingredients conspiring to assure pseudo self-sufficiency – Akka decides to move and mix with people of her ilk. Moving away from the domestic orbit is very important. Even Mira Bai who had all the provisions of a "queenly life" shunned the claustrophobic constriction of a palace, preferring the wide vistas of an open journey with fellow-seekers.

It is important to deal with the three significant aspects, *Maya* (manifestation of the world or illusion), *Kaya* (the physical or carnal body) and *Samsara* (the world and orientation to the

divine) – which play a great role in Akka's life at this stage of intense suffering and pain necessary for the spirit to strengthen itself to undertake a more exacting movement ahead.

Manifestation of the world (*Maya*):

The aspect of *Maya* is variously described by the aspirants. *Maya* could be ignorance; it could represent the going on of the manifest world; it is even described more commonly as an "illusion". The power of this "illusion" is immense and beyond any comparison as can be seen in the vachanas of Allamaprabhu:

*When illusion trampled down Brahma and Vishnu,
When illusion made mad and persecuted
The Rudraganas and the Pramathaganas
When those who had three eyes
And five faces and ten arms
Became wedded to illusion,
When eight thousand sages
Were lost to illusion
In the arrogance of their penance,
It was then O Guheshwara, that
I was Nirmaya, a Ganeshwara*

(Translated by Dr. D.A. Shankar)

As it is evident in the vachana of Allamaprabhu, it is difficult to overcome 'illusion.' According to Allama, even the gods failed, the demi-gods failed (Rudraganas and Pramathaganas) and the "eighty eight thousand sages were also claimed by illusion". Luckily, Akka is aware of the tether of *Maya*. Once the end of the tether is reached the highest deity will cut the connection.

Creating the world is a sport for the God; once he finishes this sport, he will end the grip of *Maya* on the world. What is important for the seeker is to realise that his world has been created by Him for His mirth and he further envelopes it with worldly circumstances. It is also true at the micro-level or at the level of the individual human being. The phase 'enveloping worldly

circumstance' is very effective in describing Akka's situation. It stands for her parents, the chieftain Kaushika and all other arrangements that lie in wait to put her within a familiar mould. She also realises that this trap will not be operative once Channamallikarjuna stops His sport. Then the life-taking 'noose' will have no effect at all.

Maya assumes myriad forms and hence there is no way of winning against it:

*Before a man, Maya tantalizes
With woman-consciousness;
Before a woman, she tantalizes
With consciousness of being man
The way of Shivasharanas stands outside
The Maya of this world
For the Sharana who's dear
To Channamallikarjuna, there is neither Maya
Nor forgetfulness
Nor yet self-consciousness*

(Menezes and Angadi, 1973:79)

Being extremely circumscribed, the seeker needs the reassurance of the fact that a Sharana will experience no "forgetfulness". This is an important concept among the Shivasharanas. *Arivu* is awareness and *Marevu* is forgetfulness. The self will not be detached from the divinity under any circumstances; it will always remember the source of its substance. That constant awareness is the opposite of "forgetfulness". Forgetfulness is the result of ignorance as well.

The individual self exhibits an urgency to succumb to the pulls and pressures of the manifest world. Even the great gods have proved to be vulnerable to the attraction of *Maya* as this vachana states:

*Maya has swallowed Hari and the Unborn,
Indra and Chandra as well.
Maya has swallowed the strong-armed ones*

*Who claim to know, and also those
Disclaiming knowledge; and has taken
The fourteen mansions
O Channamallikarjuna
Rid me of Maya, Compassionate One!*

(Menezes and Angadi, 1973:80)

The achieving of the 'alchemical' transformation of the human personality into the state of divinity is a long way off. At the starting point of the journey the self makes an attempt to understand the power and capacity of *Maya*. In another vachana Allamaprabhu says:

*Through fire and brimstone I have
Passed through in this world,
And, I have crushed the head of illusion
And, I swear, O, Guheshwara
I shall not be back there again.*

(Translated by D.A. Shankar).

It is interesting to note that there is no reference to the help of the compassionate one here. The finality in the tone of the seeker, 'I have crushed the head of illusion' indicates that he must have passed through those stages of organizing experience. At one stage, Allama himself asks: "I am Shiva, how was it I got caught in *Maya*?" His question is answered by his wisdom (*viveka*) which tells him that because of *Maya* he thought the Unreal world as Real.

The body that is transformed out of the five elements has shadow as the first illusion. Breath is established in the body. The body that contains breath is plagued by the mind because the latter remembers desire, disharmony and other dislocations and these are engendered by *Maya*. Even 'knowledge' is menaced by 'ignorance' and therefore there is no freedom from *Maya* to the kings of the world, who suffer its monkey-grip inescapably.

Akka again talks of the encumbrances of the soul that are caused by the ‘worldly circumstance’. She makes an earnest appeal to her Lord to deliver her from the same:

*Lord, break my Maya's pride
Dispel my body's darkness,
Put to rout the encumbrances of my soul.
O Channamallikarjuna Lord,
Deliver me from worldly circumstance
That wraps me round and round, I pray!*

(Menezes and Angadi, 1973:99)

Akka is pointing the pride that is nothing but ignorance. As pride of illusion grows man becomes rash and insolent. A man of pride is filled with darkness. Only Mahadeva or the Lord can dispel this darkness. Once again there is a reference to ‘worldly circumstances’, a concept that is very close to the common man. It appears as if Akka is pleading to the Lord on behalf of the people in general who are caught in the ‘circumstances of life’. It is the Lord’s obligation to deliver the being from the enveloping world. The circumscribed condition of the seeker is very effectively brought out by the next vachana where Akka is registering a peculiar state of stasis:

*A stream behind, a brook in front:
How can I be with thee, tell me!
Behind a tank: in front, a net:
Where is my happiness, tell me!
This Maya which you have set
Is overwhelming me ...
O Channamallikarjuna*

(Menezes and Angadi, 1973:7)

The stream, brook, tank and the net refer to various pulls and impurities present inside the body and mind of the seeker.

Akka is also aware of the worldly relatives who contribute a great deal in making this life more ‘circumscribed.’

St. Teresa of Avila in her book *The Way of Perfection* makes a particular mention of the relatives and she warns the sisters against them. Her warning should be understood as something coming from a mystic about the worldly arrangement of certain human ties. She says:

“I am astonished by the harm that is caused from dealing with relatives. I don’t think anyone will believe it except the one who has experienced it for himself. The practice of perfection seems to be forgotten in religious orders of today. I don’t know what it is in the world that we renounce when we say that we give up everything for God if we do not give up the main thing, namely, our relatives. The situation has reached the state in which it seems to be a lack of virtue for the religious not to love and talk a great deal with their relatives, and these religious ones are not afraid to say and even advance their reasons.”

St. Teresa is underlining the importance of achieving detachment from one’s relatives to embark oneself on the path of spirituality. Akka Mahadevi realized it at the beginning itself and thus we see her moving towards an understanding of the power and capacity of *Samsara* (the world) and eventually to detach from it as well.

The World (Samsara)

The world and *Maya* are inter-connected and therefore Akka sometimes projects the one to mean the other as well. She had to deal with them simultaneously as they followed her wherever she went:

*What is called world, O Father, is my foe;
In generation after generation, Lord,
It comes unfailingly in search of me!
It seeks me, seizes me, and slays!
I seek thy shelter, save me, Lord!*

(Menezes and Angadi, 1973:85)

In yet another vachana she repeats the topic of the world 'chasing' her. This time it is a stronger word than merely 'following'. It indicates the degree of aversion the mystic feels towards everything she left behind. But the rejected world follows her with a vengeance to torment her so that her progress on the spiritual path is slowed down:

*This world plagues me
By chasing me relentlessly:
What shall I do O Lord, what shall I do
For this vexation of each day?
I have not strength to bear
The burden of this burning flesh!*

(Menezes and Angadi, 1973:85)

'The burden of the burning flesh' refers to the pulls of the body and the desire that is lodged within. Although mystics normally have emphasized the imageless character of 'Reality', here Akka Mahadevi communicates her experience through a language that is not inaccessible to the layman. What the overbearing presence of the world causes is a "vexation of each day". As a seeker she wants to move forward lest she should experience a pull in the opposite direction, such is the "gravitational force" of the world.

Though Akka is far away from achieving the immediate experience of the 'ultimate reality' at this stage, she yearns to go beyond the limits imposed by the world. Because the human soul can never be satisfied with the creature as the creation is essentially limited and the soul needs the unlimited, the infinite,

the mystic is prepared to carry on the "business of this world" in a detached manner after having achieved the single-minded devotion to the Lord. But it is not so easy to achieve mastery over the world. Akka records different stages of man's life in a poetic way and, unlike a pure poet, she does not stop at giving us the physical details about the physiognomic transformation that takes place as man traces the chronological curve. Being a mystic she underlines the object of life - that is to be aware of the existence of God. Once the fact of the Lord is withdrawn, that is the end of the 'Play'. Akka adopts the language of the theatre to describe her idea of the stages of life:

*Alas, alas, it comes and struts:
The gabble of the world!
First comes the turn of Pop or Dad;
Then comes the act of whiskers buttered up;
And last the part of doddering old age
But when thy countenance is withdrawn
O Channamallikarjuna
The curtain drops upon this temporal stage!*

(Menezes and Angadi, 1973:122)

This vachana invites a comparison with Shakespeare's play 'As You Like It', where the bard talks of 'Seven Stages of Man' through the character of Jacques in the Forest of Arden. The long speech of Jacques begins thus:

*All the world's a stage
And all men and women merely players
They have exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His act being the seven stages.*

Shakespeare continues to trace very meticulously all the important stages of man and the ending is very interesting:

*Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,*

*Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste and sans everything.*

Since Shakespeare is more interested in the aesthetic presentation of life, he leans towards colour and elaboration. Setting is important for him. On the other hand, Akka Mahadevi, being a mystic, is not obliged to present an elaborate picture of what stages are involved in a human life. With deft touches she leaps from stage to stage leaving many meanings with unsaid implications. It is very difficult to sum up the brevity of human life on earth with such economy of words. If Shakespeare is capturing one type of reality, Akka's approach is marked by a departure from customary affection, independent from carnal desires.

The Body: A Vessel of Filth

Akka is very clear about the worth of the body. She describes in concrete terms the biological functions of different organs; but she is aware of the fact that the onlookers have a different estimate and therefore they are attracted by it. She gives its description:

*I am a puppet of this world
A Vessel filled with Maya's filth
A worldly mansion by passions tenanted*

(Menezes and Angadi, 1973:74)

But the nature of the body must be properly understood. The external form of a woman might attract men, but they are at least aware of the transformation that has taken place in her. Akka compares the passions of the body to a situation where a mother becomes a monster. It is a terrible prospect. But such a monstrosity must be tamed before converting it into an entity fit to be loved by God.

The seeker must progress to call the body 'dust' and 'void'; at that stage she has no dilemma.

The more one tries to correct the mind the more it clings to the ways of aberration. The mind is like a pot with a hole at the bottom; whatever the quantity of liquid poured in, it simply gets drained through the hole. The mind falls a victim to 'forgetfulness', the body attaches itself to darkness and desires. All these are various nooses engendered in the body. Steadfastness could tackle these bindings. But the vast multitude of people does not tread the path of steadfastness.

When life is full of distractions there will be little time for thought and therefore dissipation results. The starting point of reversing this trend and turn the mind to crave for some infinite good is to recover "steadfastness" that might have slipped into the zone of complacency. Therefore Akka demands the divinity to pose stumbling blocks on her path so that she would test her stamina to understand the nature of endurance:

*Lord, make me walk form door to door
Not missing one, with hand outstretched;
Lord, make sure when I beg
No alms is given, and if it should,
Let it drop to the ground;
And ere I pick up what has dropped
Let a dog pick it up,
O Channamallikarjuna Lord !*

(Menezes and Angadi, 1973:96)

This steadfastness has earned Akka the title the "Heroic Renunciator" (*Vira Viragini*). The mystic prepares herself even to offer her head to the Lord:

*If spark has kindled spark,
I say it quenched my hunger and my thirst
If one cloud comes tearing down,
I say it's water pouring for my bath
Should a mountain fall on me,
I say it's flowers showering down*

*Should my head break and drop
I say my life is offered unto thee,
O Channamallikarjuna Lord !*

(Menezes and Angadi, 1973:118)

The mystic here is involving the objects of nature to come down upon her so that she would accomplish the annihilation of herself, if necessary.

The extraordinary importance of the Udutadi-phase in Akka's life is that she wants to take the silkworm's existence as a metaphor and plead Channamallikarjuna to orient in His direction. The silkworm weaves a cocoon with its own essence. The tragedy of it is, if it were to be in the forest it would have been a beautiful butterfly enjoying the freedom of the wild. But the silkworm is caught in the web of the human world. And therefore it undergoes the torture of being baked by the weavers who weave silk thread to get clothes out of it.

The way Akka grasped the situation and fashioned a method of liberation is a real stroke of good fortune for herself as well as for mankind. What she struck was a path of emancipation. She pleads Channamallikarjuna to protect her by removing the mind's desire. And therefore it possesses a mysticism that brings out elegance to the body releasing the society from the grip of inertia.

Along with evolution of man the wishes or aspirations have turned into 'forms' and these forms have branched as centres and symbols. Akka is precisely attacking these types of forms in her vachanas. Whether it assumes the form of a husband or a wife or some other power principle, it basically tends towards inertia and violence. To confront this cruelty, Akka chooses a space that is beyond all categorisation, or in other words, she achieves transcendence.

Akka's relentless effort was to conserve the primal energy of humanity with a view of channelising it to a higher order.

Foucault, the modern French philosopher, has said somewhere, "At some stage you have to control your desire". The twelfth-century mystic and the modern philosopher are uncannily saying the same thing. But Akka was subverting the existing order through her choice of life in order to empower the women of her time as well. With her subversion and empowerment was a simultaneous operation.

Writing on the topic of "Thinking Beyond Gender In India", Ruth Vanita makes a pertinent point regarding opting out of the conjugal system, especially, as seen in the lives of the mystics. she says:

What is common to the legends of all bhaktas and seers, men and women, is that they refused to be good spouses and good parents; many women refused to marry and those who were married left their husbands. This is a common feature in the lives of medieval mystics in Europe, women who chose to be nuns rather than wives. Frideswide in medieval England is supposed to have performed a miracle which blinded her prospective husband and ended his pursuit of her. Another medieval English saint Wilgefortis miraculously grew a beard to discourage a prospective husband. Women worshipped her under the name of 'Encumber' because they hoped she would encumber them of their husbands.

Great mystics convert impediments into incandescence. Akka faced many impediments in her Udutadi-phase as an emerging woman mystic. The next stage of her journey, namely, Kalyana would further brighten up the incandescence in the company of saints gathered at Anubhavamantapa, or the Hall of Experience.

Vachanadharmasara: **A Seminal Work on Vachana Literature**

H.V. Nagaraja Rao

Yeoman service was rendered by many scholars to Vachana literature in the twentieth century. Rao Bahadur P.G. Halakatti started a new era by publishing the *Vachanas of Sharanas* and opened the doors to researchers and thinkers in this field. Among those who entered the field and made an indelible mark M.R. Sreenivasa Murthy, popularly known as M.R. Sree, deserves to be mentioned first. He was born in a family of orthodox Madhva Brahmins, but it did not deter him from studying the Vachanas of Sharanas with an open mind. He delved deep into this mine of vachanas and brought out fine gems of purest quality.

M.R. Sree was wellknown for his acumen in research, oratorical skills in Kannada and finesse in writing. His work on Sharanas (*Bhakti Bhandari Basavannanavaruru* etc.) and dramas (*Nagarika* etc.) were very popular in the first half of the twentieth century. So it was very apt that the University of Mysore assigned the task of writing a special work on Vachanas to M.R. Sree. The outcome of the assignment was *Vachanadharmasara*. The book which contains less than three hundred pages gives a complete picture of Vachana literature even to a lay reader. It tells about the history and special features of Vachana literature besides explaining the philosophy of Sharanas. It also tells about the importance given to ethics by the Sharanas and highlights their rationality. The author draws the attention of the readers to the poetic beauty of the Vachanas. In eighteen short chapters, the author succeeds in enlightening the readers and in opening up a whole new world.

It is effectively shown in this book that although all Sharanas enunciated the principles of devotion, knowledge, performing social service, disinterest in mundane pleasures, each of them emphasized the practice of one of those principles. Thus, devotion became the hallmark of Basavanna, Chennabasavanna emphasized knowledge and Siddarama underlined service. The author's insight is observable on almost every page. For instance, when he gives a glimpse of Chennabasavanna's 'Karanahasuge', he reveals that a text called 'Vijayabhairavi' was the source book for Chennabasavanna.

The author's intelligence in selecting the right vachanas for the exposition of the main tenets of the Sharanas is remarkable. He chooses the vachanas not only from the greats like Basavanna, Allamprabhu and Akkamahadevi, but also from the not-so-famous vachanakaras when their vachanas drive home the point. See the vachana of Shanmukhaswami quoted on page 179 of the *Vachanadharmasara* (IV edition 1968):

ಮಡದಿ ಮಕ್ಕಳು, ಪಡೆದ ದ್ರವ್ಯವು
ಎನ್ನೊಡವೆ ಎಂದು ನೆಚ್ಚಬೇಡಿರೋ
ಎಲೆ ಹುಚ್ಚು ಮಾನವರಿರಾ,
ಅವು ನಿಮ್ಮೊಡವೆಯಾದೊಡೆ,
ನೀವು ಪಡೆದು ಹೋಗುವಾಗ್ಗೆ
ನಿಮ್ಮೊಡನೆ ಬಿಟ್ಟವೇ ಹೇಳಿರೋ
ಇದನರಿತು ತಡೆಯದೆ ವ್ಯಡನ
ಸೇವೆಯೊಳು ತೊಡಗಿದರೆ
ಕಡೆವೊದಲಿಲ್ಲದ ಪದವು ದೊರೆಕೊಂಬುದು ನೋಡಾ
ನಮ್ಮ ಅಖಂಡೇಶ್ವರ ಲಿಂಗದಲ್ಲಿ

*O mad men, don't be deluded
that wife, children and pelf
are yours. If they are yours,
will they come with you
when you leave this world ?*

*Understand this and serve
Lord Shiva without any delay
If you do so, you will attain the position
Which has no end or beginning
In the divine form of Lord Akhandeswara.*

The simple diction of this vachana at once attracts our attention through its unpretentious elegance and unobtrusive alliteration.

M.R. Sri was conversant with the ancient Sanskrit literature as well as with the Buddhist religious texts. In many places he quotes the parallel statements from them which widen our knowledge. He is of the opinion that Basavanna was not only a reformer and visionary, but also a good poet. He goes to the extent of comparing Basavanna with Kalidasa. He boldly states that vachanas are Upanishads and Sharanas are seers.

At the end of the book, there is a fine collection of selected verses from various Sharanas. This helps the readers very much. Similarly the glossary (Kannada-Kannada) provided at the end is a boon to the students of vachana literature.

This book was first published in 1942 and has been reprinted several times. No serious student of vachana literature can ignore it despite the fact that many books on the same subject have been written by doyens in the field in the subsequent years. Without any hesitation, one can say that *Vacanadharmasara* is a perennial source of information and inspiration to all scholars interested in vachana literature.



Pages from the Past

Dr. M. Chidananda Murthy

SRI BASAVESHWARA AND HIS MODERN OUTLOOK ON LIFE*

Basava, the central figure in the Veerashaiva movement of the twelfth century was a towering and immortal personality. He was an inspiring religious leader, a mystic, a great social reformer, a rebel, a statesman and a literary man of remarkable abilities. It is no exaggeration to say that he stands peerless in the history of Karnataka either in the richness of his many-sided achievements or the lasting and abiding influence on society.

To me, he is essentially a rebel, one who revolted against decadent tradition, which was the cradle of many evils, social, political, economic, religious, and literary. It is important that we have no contemporary biography of Basava. All the biographies of Basava belong to a later period, and hence these cannot be considered as providing authentic material from which one could piece together a faithful account of his life.¹

Basava was a Brahmin by birth, and even as a boy gave evidence of being endowed with an independent mind. He rebelled against blind ritualism which was repugnant to reason and therefore, failed to evoke intellectual assent. It is not

* This article is taken from *Sri Basaveswara*, the Eighth Centenary Commemoration Volume published by the Directorate of Kannada & Culture, 1967 & 2003. We express our indebtedness to the author.

-Ed.

¹ Harihara's *Basavarajadevara Ragale* is the earliest and the best among these biographies. It is a pity that only about half of this work is available. The remaining portion is lost forever.

surprising that he refused to undergo *Upanayana* ceremony (and became a Veerashaiva). (This event demonstrates his natural impulse to rebel against any thing that is reactionary or irrational in the traditional order). He felt that the old order was rotten to the core and the time was ripe for it to yield place to a new social order. He was no idle innovator. He aimed at introducing such reforms which would vitalise society on truly humanistic principles. This was the mission of his life.

It is worth taking a brief look here at the religious conditions prevailing in Karnataka during the twelfth century. No assessment of his life and work would be adequate or proper without this background against which we will have to place Basava and his Veerashaivism, so that both he and the revolution of which he is the symbol become meaningful. There were at that time many minor tantric cults like the *Kaula*, the *Kapalika*, the *Ganapatya* and the *Saura*. The followers of these cults were known to have indulged in gross acts like wine drinking, flesh-eating and sexual laxity. These were practised in the name of religion. There were followers of Lakulisa-Pasupata sect, also known as *Kalamukhas*, and this Shaiva sect was pretty popular. Some of the followers of this sect were no doubt great ascetics. But again, like all religions, this religion in course of time had lost sight of its original ideal and its observance became limited to such activities like temple-building and idol worship. There was Buddhism but it was primarily a religion of the minorities. It was in fact *Vajrayanism*, a modified form of Buddhism that was prevalent here. Jainism was still powerful and there are evidences to show that it was also gradually losing its hold on the masses. Vedic Brahmanism was however a very powerful influence. To the followers of this religion, the doctrine of Karma claimed primacy even over that of *bhakti*. As a consequence, all the evil effects of the Varnasrama Dharma, with the hierarchy of caste, making

one superior to another, merely by accident of one's birth, became inevitable.

Thus we can safely assume that there were few religions in those days which could have appealed to the common man. The question of political unrest, social inequality, exploitation, religious apartheid, all these things taken together make us believe that the times were bad and that the situation warranted a religion which could clean up the current consuming 'I' and re-orientate religion to satisfy the spiritual longings of the common man. Basava came up with such a religion and that was *Veerashaivism*.

The first thing which Basava did was the popularisation of his religion. His religion was no longer a religion of the selected few. Any person of any social status, occupation, or caste could embrace it. The only qualification required for entering it was that one must become a sincere follower of Shiva, the one supreme God, must wear *linga* on the body and smear *bhasma* on the forehead. To modern thinkers, familiar with all the religions as they are, it may possibly appear there was nothing essentially new in the tenets of his religion, but there was definitely a new note in how they were expressed and practised.

The 'vachanas', literally mean spontaneous utterances, which embody the gamut of the experiences of Basava and his followers. They were composed in simple, chaste, and spoken Kannada and were easily understood by the masses. It was natural therefore a large number of people, touched by the sincerity of feelings expressed by the religious leaders, responded to its appeal. They came from all walks of life. They enjoyed perfect freedom of speech and thought in this new religion. Once a person became a Veerashaiva, he was equal in all respects to every other Veerashaiva. No barrier of caste or creed separated them. They had every right to express themselves in their mother-tongue.

Kannada language was enriched by the utterances of hundreds of vachanakaras, who otherwise, left alone, might have chosen to remain silent. This idea of the freedom of thought and the idea of equality were not honoured as mere ideals. They were assiduously followed in practice. Basava was himself a model of all these ideals in his life. He was a highly placed official, a minister under king Bijjala. But, in private life, he considered himself a 'servant of the servants of Shivasharanas'. Though he was the central figure in the Veerashaiva movement, he was happy to consider himself the least among the followers of his religion. A good number of instances can be quoted wherein Basava was strongly criticized for wrong actions and corrected by his followers who were pursuing lesser occupations.

Basava was both a man of this world as well as the other world. Nowhere in his utterances or in the compositions of his followers is renunciation of this world emphasised or even recommended. The goal of man is, of course, salvation ('moksa'). But to attain *moksa* one need not have a cynical and sickly attitude to life here. "Live well here, live to the satisfaction of Shiva. You are like a coin. The coin becomes fit for circulation outside when it gets the stamp of the mint. This world is God's mint. Be accepted here; you will then be accepted there, in the other world." This is the keynote of Veerashaivism. Asceticism as understood by many religions was not encouraged. Nothing came in the way of a Veerashaiva who wanted to lead a happy, pure, and dedicated life.

Thus the life-breath of Basava's social philosophy is 'activism' which preached dedicated hard work to make one's life happy and this world prosperous.

To be happy and self-dedicated, one must profess an occupation which involves physical and mental labour. Religions often encourage laziness and parasitism in the name of

asceticism. Basava strongly resented this. He proclaimed in unmistakable terms that Kayaka was the surest path to salvation ("Kayakave Kailasa"). Kayaka is not mere occupation or mere physical labour. It denotes the profession of a person who consciously identifies his work as a part of his religious life. Kayaka is dedicated work. Dedication is of two kinds, one is dedication to one's own profession; another is dedication of the fruits of one's labour to the society. The instance of Moligeya Marayya, the wood-cutter's story well represents this philosophy of thought. He would go daily to the fields, collect a bundle of sticks and sell it in the market. He would buy daily rations out of the meagre sum earned in this way and share his food with the *Jangamas*. He never grumbled about his profession and his poverty. He was happily married and contented; he fervently believed that his Kayaka would lead him to salvation. Once Basava, out of pity for his poverty and in admiration for his dedicated life, attempted to offer him some money. Marayya rejected it outright on the ground that his accepting the gift would amount to theft as it was not earned by the sweat of his own labour.

Kayaka has a note of dignity about it. A person may have undertaken the meanest of occupations; but if he is sincere and dedicated to his occupation, he is not inferior in any sense to a person who by sheer accident may have a more enviable occupation. This great ideal, again, was put into practice without any reservations. In the religious discussions that took place in Basava's place, the woodcutter, the washerman, the tailor, the shoemaker and the peasant sat side by side with the minister and the scholar to freely participate in the proceedings. All this looks incredible, no doubt, and yet it is so modern in spirit and so true. This principle of equality of man was one of the greatest messages that Basava and his followers gave to Karnataka and to the world.

All religions prior to Basava had royal patronage as well as followers. But Basava did not aspire for such patronage. On the contrary, he had to work for society in the face of bitter opposition from royal circles. The inspiring force behind him was the common man. Basava, in this respect, was unquestionably a great leader. He was dedicated to the cause of the common man. He wanted to release him from binding traditions and give him hope of a better life. He preached to the masses in their own language and inculcated in them a great sense of self-respect, courage, equality, freedom and sacrifice. They understood him and followed him. When Basava revolted against Vedic Brahmanism in his youth, we can safely assume that there were then very few followers of Veerashaivism. Basava's teachings had an unflinching mass appeal and conversion took place on a large scale (It is pertinent to mention here that there is practically no evidence to say that there was religious persecution). Basava was able to give to the masses a new outlook on life. He brought about a thorough change or revolution in their ideas. For example, he declared that men are born equal and social inequality based on caste or creed was an unjust imposition. His followers accepted this noble idea. He was a great champion of the poor, the down-trodden and the untouchable. As one story goes, he was questioned by Bijjala for entering the house of an untouchable by name Kambali Nagimayya and dining with him. He had arranged for a marriage alliance between a high-caste family and a low-caste family. By no means an easy proposition, though not impossible, even for a modern man of the twentieth century, Basava of the twelfth century, must have faced tremendous opposition from the conservative groups of his times. As was suggested earlier, Basava was a born rebel and iconoclast and hence was able to accept the challenge thrown at him. It is very interesting to note that what Gandhiji did for Harijans in our day, Basava tried to do in his own capacity and within his own limitations

eight hundred years ago and was successful to a very great extent during his life time.

Basava shunned publicity. When people around him praised him, he often requested them not to "drop him on the golden spike". He had no fascination for riches. He loved poor people and chose to be poor. What he earned by virtue of his being a minister, he spent to the last coin for the uplift of the poor. "The doors of his house were always kept open for those people. To him 'jangamas' or the wandering poor devotees were the real Gods by proxy. The worship of the jangamas was to him, therefore, the real worship of Shiva. He compared them to the roots of the tree called God. "Water the roots", he says, "and the tree blossoms at the top." Hence, service to the poor was real worship. He has pleaded, in many of his utterances, not to save money for the future by hiding it underground, but to spend it all for the poor and the deserving. In one of his utterances he has given expression to the vanities of the rich. "The rich man is like a man possessed; he is so insolent that he disdains to speak with others. His insolence will melt in a moment, as if by magic, when he is struck by poverty. Then only he will speak with others."

The services rendered by Basava to women in general are remarkable. It is well-known that the orthodox Hindus believed that women were unfit to receive education, unfit to participate in serious discussions, and that no freedom should be allowed to them. As a result, women's field of activities was restricted to their homes and, there too, they had no freedom for the development of personality. Basava felt that this was entirely unjust. He encouraged women to come out of the barriers which tradition had built and participate in the activities of the society. Here again Basava must have faced tremendous opposition from the conservative section of society. But his followers stoutly supported his cause for the emancipation of women. It was mostly

because of him that we have a host of women writers who composed vachanas in their own language. They actively participated in the discussions that took place in Basava's house. There were women living there with perfect freedom and sharing the responsibilities of householders. It was for the first time in the history of Kannada literature, that women took active interest in literary activities. Some of them were great mystics and had risen to a high order of spiritual consciousness. Some like Mukhtayakka and Akkamahadevi were able to meet great mystics like Allama on their own ground. This emancipation of women is something very unique in the history of Karnataka. Basava was a great idealist. At the same time he was a practical man too. He had the rare capacity of being an excellent organiser, otherwise we cannot explain how he was able to organise and build up a well-knit society. It is remarkable how he was able to bring about revolutionary change in the social set-up of the people during the twelfth century. His outlook on life was liberal, democratic and intensely humanitarian. He gave new values to the society and new dimensions to Kannada literature. He taught people not to waste money over building temples, but to look within and find God enshrined within oneself. The *linga* which a Veerashaiva wears on his body is nothing but a symbol of God within oneself. He also preached not to go on pilgrimages, but to feel the presence of God everywhere and that every spot is a holy place. Thus we see that there are many things which the modern man can appreciate and follow in the life and teachings of Basava.



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