



Makers of Indian Literature

BASAVESHWARA

H. Thipperudraswamy



Basaveshwara, also known as Basavanna, is one of the greatest spiritual leaders of India. A revolutionary saint, a great poet in Kannada, a noted mystic and an ardent social reformer, he is hailed as the prophet of a new era in Karnataka.

Born in a well-to-do Brahmin family around A.D. 1131, Saint Basaveshwara studied the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and the like. But his life-long struggle was to eradicate caste distinctions. He raised the common man and the outcaste to divine heights of spiritual realization.

Vachana, literally meaning prose, acquired a new vigour at the hands of Basaveshwara. He caused revolution in Kannada literature both in form and in content. His is the poetry of life. The Akademi has already published in Kannada the select *Vachanas* of Basaveshwara.

H. Thipperudraswamy (1928-1994) was a scholar who made a pioneering effort to look at the culture of Karnataka in its entirety. He was born in Honnali, a small town in Davanagere district, and obtained early education in his native town and Teerthahalli. His work *Sbaranara Anubhaava Saahitya* fetched him a Ph. D. degree from the Karnatak University. He joined his alma mater as a lecturer in 1964. He was appointed as the Director of the Post Graduate Centre of the University at Bhadra Project in Shivamogga district and also served as the Director of 'Sri Kuvempu Kannada Adhyayana Samsthe' till he sought voluntary retirement in 1987.

He was a creative writer and contributed a few works to various genres of literature such as poetry, drama and fiction. Novels such as *Paripurnadedege*, *Kadali Karpura*, *Kart Arana Kammata*, *Jyoti Belagutide* and *Vacana Virupaksba* are based on the lives of historical personalities i.e. Allamaprabhu, Akkamahadevi, Basavanna, Nijaguna Shivayogi and Raghavanka respectively. He has written a few biographies meant for children on the lives of Kannada poets and Veerashaiva saints. He was honoured with the Sahitya Akademi award for his *Karnataka Samskriti Sameeksha* in 1969 and the life time award of the Karnataka Sahitya Academy in 1985. In the present monograph he has depicted the many faceted personality of Basaveshwara.



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Basaveshwara

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodhana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A. D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi

Makers of Indian Literature

Basaveshwara

by
H. Tipperudraswamy



SAHITYA AKADEMI

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Life Story

Human problems are more complicated today than ever before. No doubt man has acquired unprecedented knowledge and power; but these have caused unparalleled changes and, as a result, life has become confusion worse confounded. Everything about us is in a state of flux. In this predicament, the need for spiritual ministrations is more keenly felt today than ever before in our history. The great saints and poets of the world can teach us how to acquire the spiritual strength we need to pull ourselves out of the rut of daily humdrum circumstances. Basaveshwara or Basavanna, of Karnataka, was a saint, a poet and an ardent social reformer, and is among the great spiritual teachers of India.

In the context of the social changes and religious awakening in modern India, the message of Basaveshwara acquires a special significance. Today Indian society, with its ideas of democracy and nationalism, and its emphasis on the spread of education and on a scientific outlook, is reshaping itself. It is influenced by the main current of world thought. Our thought-patterns are changing so radically that it seems impossible for some of our old values, institutions and customs, like castes and

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creeds and rituals, and for our blind beliefs to survive. Basavanna lived eight hundred years ago but he strikes us as thoroughly modern and practical, and so his teaching has relevance today. The picture of Indian society would have been quite different if only that teaching had been followed. In the core of his religion, Basavanna anticipated many a modern prophet like Swami Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda and Gandhiji. He may rightly be called the prophet of a New Era in Karnataka—nay, in India.

Before taking up the study of the story of his life it would be helpful to have an idea of the religious and social conditions of the land in his time and of the contemporary political situation.

Since the beginning of history, Karnataka has kept her mind open to all religions of the world. From epigraphical evidence it is clear that long before the Christian era the Aryan religion had made an impact throughout the country. It received Royal patronage. Along with this Hindu religion, indigenous forms of worship like that of the cobra, or a particular tree or several female deities also seem to have prevailed in ancient Karnataka.

Then came Jainism and Buddhism. But Buddhism never gained ground and popularity here as in North India; compared with Jainism it soon became decadent. Jainism was able to secure patronage from almost all the major dynasties that ruled Karnataka. Hence its contribution to Karnataka culture is rich and significant.

From the twelfth century onwards Jainism began to decline. Somewhere about the eighth century a towering personalty rose on the South Indian horizon. It was Shankaracharya. Born in Kerala, he travelled throughout India; he preached the doctrine of Advaita and rejuvenated Vedic religion. He chose to establish the first of his Maths at Shringeri in Karnataka.

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The earliest and most widely predominant religion in Karnataka was Shaivism, with various sects like Pashupata, Kalamukha, and Kapalika. Kashmir Shaivism and Tamil Shaivism also entered Karnataka and influenced the Shaiva sects to a very great extent. Some of the Kalamukha teachers and heads of religious monasteries were great scholars and they were very popular in Karnataka.

At the beginning of the twelfth century came Ramanuja, who propagated Vishishtadwaita. He left Tamil Nadu, because of the persecution of Vaisnavas there by the Chola King. True to its tradition of freedom, Karnataka welcomed him as it had welcomed Shankara earlier. The Hoysala King Vishnuvardhana became his disciple. From then the influence of Jainism began to wane. Vedic religion asserted itself once again.

But by this time, in spite of the teachings of the Acaryas like Shankara and Ramanuja, Vedic religion had deteriorated into dogmatic rigidities. Even the splendid vision of the Upanishads was dimmed by sectarian customs. Blind beliefs and meaningless and superstitious rituals had become parasitic growths on society. The cult of sacrifice was widely prevalent.

The system of Caturvarna, the fourfold division of society into the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas and the Sudras might have done good in the beginning, when its spirit was properly understood. But in course of time it led to a fragmentation of society. In the original form it might have been a doctrine of social solidarity. But ultimately it ended in the decadent caste-system, the essential principle of which is division based on birth—the abhorred system that has destroyed all ideas of unity.

A sharp distinction was made between the higher classes and the Sudras and even these groups were divided into innumerable sub-castes and sub-sects. Religion became the

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monopoly of the privileged few. Vedic knowledge was denied to women and the Sudras. All the dharmasastras were written or interpreted in support of this view and thus social injustice received the stamp of religious sanction. Added to this was the ignominy of untouchability. The plight of the untouchables was miserable. They were treated worse than animals. Hindu society, in spite of all its high cultural traditions and spiritual splendours, had failed miserably to meet the needs and aspirations of the common people. It was at this hour of need that Basaveshwara appeared on the scene.

An authentic biography of the saint based on historical material has yet to be worked out. The important sources for reconstructing his biography include contemporary epigraphs, religious literature such as the puranas by Veerashaiva writers, and Basavanna's own sayings and those of his contemporaries like Channabasavanna, Allama Prabhu, Siddarama, Akkamahadevi and other members of the Anubhava Mantapa.

Fortunately a couple of inscriptions relating to Basavanna have been brought to light. Their value as authentic evidence of some details of his life is immense. Of all the Veerashaiva works, *Basavarajadevara Ragale* in Kannada and *Basavapurana* in Telugu are very important as their authors, Harihara and Palkurike Somanatha respectively, were near contemporaries to Basavanna. *Basavapurana* of Bhima Kavi, *Sivatattva Chintamani* of Lakkanna Dandesa and *Amalabasava Charitra* popularly known as *Singirajapurana* of Singiraja may also be considered here. Their intention was not to write history but to sing the glories of Basavanna with devotional fervour leading to deification. But still a careful study of these Kannada works will help us to determine some historical facts. An attempt has been

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made here to present a short biographical sketch, without going into controversial details, on the basis of all the sources that are available.

Basavanna was born in a high-placed Brahmin family in Ingaleswara-Bagevadi (now in Bijapur District of Karnataka) around the year A.D. 1131. His father Madiraja or Madarasa was the chief of Bagevadi *agrahara*, and was called Gramanimani. His wife Madalambe or Madambe was a pious woman and a great devotee of Nandiswara, the principal deity of Bagevadi.

Basavanna was their third child. He had an elder brother called Devaraja and an elder sister Nagamma; who actively participated in the later religious and social activities of Basavanna.

As soon as he was born a great Saiva saint called Jata-vedamuni, also known as Ishanya Guru, came from Kudala Sangama to bless the child with a symbolic Linga and to initiate him into the new path.

Even as a child Basava displayed signs of greatness and individuality. He was a precocious child with an independent spirit. Born in a traditional Brahmin family, he had occasions at home and in his locality to reflect on the rituals and rigid conventions that were being observed meticulously by the orthodox. He found that in the name of religion, superstitions and dogmas held men and their minds in a firm grip. Even the temples had become the centres of exploitation. Young Basava pondered over these things.

When he was eight years old he had to face the first crisis in his life. He saw his parents making preparations for his Upanayana, i.e., initiation or thread ceremony and he firmly opposed it. His argument was that he had already been initiated with the Linga at the time of his birth. When his father insisted

that he must undergo the ceremony he left his parents' house and turned towards Kudala Sangama.

The incident is presented in a slightly different version by Harihara. He says that the ceremony was performed and when Basava was sixteen years of age he discarded the sacred thread and left home for Kudala Sangama. But the other writers are unanimous that the ceremony was not performed at all. But this much is certain that he could not compromise on the issue of his Upanayana and the subsequent observance connected with it, because it had become only a symbol of caste hierarchy. The wearing of the Linga, according to him was not a sign of caste, but only a means of worship. Anybody, without any distinction of caste, creed or sex, could wear it.

Thus even at that early age he found that the significant symbol of Shiva could become a powerful means to propagate social and religious equality, and so he was attracted towards Veerasaivism, which regarded Lingadharana or wearing of Linga on the body as initiation, or Deeksha. His stay at Sangama gave his thoughts a new vitality and brought him a new vision.

Kudala Sangama, a place situated at the confluence of the rivers Krishna and its tributary Malaprabha, was one of the great centres of learning in those days. As a boy Basavanna had heard much about the glory of Sangama and probably he had visited that holy place earlier. It must also be remembered that Ishanya Guru, the Sthanapati or the chancellor of that centre of learning, was the Guru, who had initiated the infant Basavanna into Veerasaivism with a linga. So when he broke all social bonds and left his home in search of light, naturally he turned towards Kudala Sangama. Nagamma, his elder sister who was attached to him very much, also accompanied him to Sangama. By this time she had been married; and, according to Singiraja, her

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husband Shiva Swamy was from Kudala Sangama and this was itself a very happy coincidence.

Sangama was an ideal place where Basavanna could pursue his studies and realize his cherished objective. Ishanya Guru, probably of Kalamukha school of Saiva faith, who preferred Lingadharana (the wearing of the Linga on the body) to Vedic sacrifices and rituals, was a great scholar of catholic views. He found in Basava the promise of an extraordinary career. Under his able guidance Basavanna spent some years in rigorous study and spiritual meditation. This period of his life was extremely significant for it was here that his future plans were shaped and paths were determined.

He studied extensively, the Vedas, the Upanishads the Agamas, the Puranas and the Kavyas as well as expositions of various religious faiths and philosophies. He studied them critically and his revolutionary mind sought to translate the ideas and ideals which appealed to him into deeds. Being a great Bhakta himself he learnt with great avidity the devotional songs of Saiva saints. The poet in him grew as he sought to give expression to his devotional fervour in the form of Vachanas.

He might have spent about twelve years at Sangama. Then came a turning point in his life. Baladeva, his maternal uncle, was a minister of finance (Bhandari) under Bijjala of Kalachurya Dynasty. He offered his daughter in marriage to Basavanna. But Basava, dedicated to the lofty ideal of spiritual pursuit, was not quite prepared to accept the offer. But Ishanya Guru convinced him that he should participate in worldly life with his new message to mankind.

Basavanna left Sangama for Mangalavada (modern Mangalvedhe, near Pandarapur in Maharashtra) the capital of Tardavadi of which Bijjala was the ruler. Nagamma, Shiva

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Swamy and their son Channabasavanna who was eight or ten years old, accompanied him. Basavanna married Gangambike, the daughter of Baladeva and also Neelambike the adopted sister of Bijjala. We do not know exactly in what circumstances he had to marry Neelambike. But there seems to be no difference of opinion about the fact that Basavanna had two wives, though Harihara gives their names as Gangambike and Mayidevi.

He stayed at Mangalavada for a couple of years and rose to power and prominence by his ability. He was found to be the most appropriate choice to succeed Baladeva as Bhandari.

By that time the political situation in Karnataka was changing. The Chalukyas of Kalyana (which is now called Basava Kalyana in Bidar District in Karnataka) were becoming weaker after Tailapa III became emperor. Bijjala who was only a feudatory of the Chalukyan empire took advantage of the situation and usurped the Chalukyan throne and became the Emperor of Kalyana. He persuaded Basavanna to go over to Kalyana with him and to accept the ministership of the empire.

Basavanna was not interested in the political upheaval; nor did he wish to acquire power. But he agreed to go to Kalyana and take charge as Bhandari only because it would provide him with ample opportunity to pursue his mission effectively.

He went to Kalyana probably in the year A.D. 1154 and he was there up to 1167 when, according to inscriptional evidence, Bijjala's rule came to an end. His achievements in the short span of twelve or thirteen years of his stay at Kalyana are striking.

He plunged into religious and social activities. He worked with burning zeal to realize what he had visualised at Kudala Sangama. The Gates of Dharma were thrown open to all without any barriers of caste, creed or sex. He established a socio-religious academy called Anubhava-Mantapa which attracted

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hundreds of saints and spiritual aspirants from all over the country. To mention only a few: Allama Prabhu, Siddarama, Madivala Macayya, Ambigara Cowdaiah and others from different parts of Karnataka; Urilingadeva from Maharashtra; Bahurupi Cowdaiah, Sakalesa Madarasa from Andhra; Adaiyah, Soddala Bacarasa from Saurashtra (Gujarat), Moligeya Marayya and his wife Mahadevamma from Kashmir.

Dharma became a living force in the vital cause of mass awakening. At no other time in history of religion had Dharma acquired such splendour and such miraculous power. It is said that Basaveshwara performed many miracles: but the greatest miracle is this that he raised the common man and the outcast to the divine heights of spiritual realisation.

His revolutionary message and mission created a sensation among the orthodox. They organised themselves to oppose him. They framed many allegations, concocted tales about Basaveshwara and tried to lower him in Bijjala's eyes. Basaveshwara was accused of misappropriation of the State funds for the maintenance of his followers. But when Basaveshwara placed the entire accounts of the State before the King, the accusation was proved to be false and baseless slander.

His magnetic personality could overcome even Himalayan obstacles, and his mission continued with even greater zeal. It reached its culmination in the marriage between the daughter of Madhuvarasa who had formerly been a Brahmin, and the son of Haralayya, who had formerly been an untouchable. It was, according to the orthodox, Varna-sankara, i.e., the admixture of Varnas, which was against Dharma. So, fretting and fuming, they raised a hue and cry. They complained against Basavanna

and his followers to the king who was expected to be the custodian of Varna-Dharma.

But Basavanna never cared for the so-called Varnas. His life-long struggle was to eradicate this Varna division. According to him the marriage was quite in order. His argument was that once Madhuvarasa came to the Sarana fold, he was not a Brahmin; nor was Haralayya, an untouchable. When they became Bhaktas wearing Linga they transcended Varnas. We of the post-Gandhian era can understand the reasonableness of this argument. But the society of the twelfth century could not assimilate such a radical view. It may be said that Basavanna was eight hundred years ahead of his times.

Basavanna's opponents grew stronger. Bijjala had to yield to the pressure of the vested interests. The innocent Haralayya and Madhuvarasa were mercilessly persecuted. They were chained to the legs of an elephant which dragged them to their death.

This atrocity shocked the Sharanas. Some of them got enraged and vehemently pleaded for revenge and retaliation. The political undercurrent that was developing since the usurpation of the Chalukya throne by Bijjalas, now grew stronger and Bijjala's enemies took advantage of the situation. Mallugi or Mallikarjuna, the younger brother of Bijjala, joined Kasapaiah, the governor of Banavasi, trying to arrogate to himself the Chalukyan throne by overthrowing Bijjala. Even the sons of Bijjala, Rayamurari Sovideva, Sankama and Singhana were rivals for the crown. All these forces were waiting for an opportunity. When there was a religious upheaval, a conspiracy was hatched and Bijjala was murdered, probably by his political opponents. But the blame was thrown upon the Saranas.

What was Basavanna doing when such atrocities were taking place in Kalyana? Such things could not have happened had he been in Kalyana at that time. He would have taken upon himself

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the death sentence that was inflicted on Haralayya and Madhuvarasa. He did not know that things would move so quickly. There is every reason to believe that he had gone to Kudala Sangama, probably to be away from the pandemonium, and to spend some quiet days. But things developed too quickly for him to do anything and he became a helpless victim of the conspiracy of circumstances.

The Sharanas left Kalyana and scattered in different directions. One prominent section, including Gangambike, Nagamma, Shiva Swamy and others headed by Channabasavanna, proceeded to Ulavi, a place near Gokarna in North Kanara. Neelambike came to Kudala Sangama with Appanna, a devout disciple of Basavanna, to be with him in his last days.

As Basaveshwara was not merely a social reformer but a prophet and a great mystic, he could perceive the divine dispensation that was working through these happenings. He thought his mission was over, and he could return to Lord Sangameswara from whom he had received the mandate to be the instrument of the Divine Will. He attained Linganga Samarasya, i.e., consubstantial union, with Lord Sangama probably in the year 1167, when he was only 36 years old.

This brief history of Basavanna's life is only a formal account. The true biography of prophets and saints is the history of the evolution of their world within, their spiritual life, their vision, realization and mission. We shall make an attempt to understand it in the subsequent chapters.

2

Bhakti-Bhandari

Basavanna made a name as the most efficient Bhandari—the chancellor of the State Exchequer—and won the admiration of King Bijjala of Kalyana. But in the realm of spiritual pursuit he was Bhakti-Bhandari, the custodian of the precious treasure of devotion.

Among the Sharanas we find persons of different nature. Allama Prabhu whose adventurous spirit was dominated by knowledge, held radical views and lived a life of asceticism and renunciation. In Channabasavanna were found a sharp intellect and profound scholarship. Siddarama was mainly devoted to work and selfless service, Karma-marga. So also Akkamahadevi, Madivala Machayya and others had each his or her own marked individuality. Among them Basaveshwara was considered as a living embodiment of devotion.

"Basava is the rich harvest of Bhakti," says Channabasavanna, "Basava is Bhakti-incarnate, and joy-incarnate," declares Siddarama. Madivala Machayya in one of his vacanas suggestively said :

Bhakti-Bhandari

Whichever way you look
Behold the creeper: Basavanna;
You pick it up and lo
A cluster, the Linga;
Pick up the cluster, and lo,
The juice of Bhakti brims up in it.

Wherever you squeeze the utterances of Basavanna the juice of Bhakti brims over.

Fortunately, about a thousand of his Vacanas, have come down to us. They are the store-house of the recorded experience of the spiritual journey of one of the most exceptional minds of all times. All the stages of his spiritual pursuit, from the troubled anguish of the mind to the serene tranquility of Realization of the Divine have found authentic and powerful expression in his Vacanas; they serve as the living manual of the path of devotion for the seekers.

"Bhakti is of the nature of the highest Love," says *Narada Bhakti Sutra*. It is firm love focussed on God without any selfish desire. But so long as we find pleasure and great satisfaction in the visible worldly objects, we cannot turn towards the invisible Divine Power. We always hanker after the fleeting pleasures of the mundane life. We can get nothing but what our hearts pine for. But only those who realize the eternal interests of the soul crave for something more than earthly pleasure. This divine dissatisfaction is the first step towards Bhakti.

We find in the sayings of Basaveshwara a dominant note of this divine discontent at the beginning of his spiritual pursuit.

Lord this world
Has caught me in its snare;
Save me, O, save me Lord;
All worth is gone, is gone;

Basaveshwara

You mercy, Lord, you mercy
Kudala Sangama.¹

He continues in the same tone: "The Rahu of this world has swallowed me and I am in a total eclipse. I am like a frog under the hood of snake. The serpent of the world has bit me with the venomous fang of the five-fold senses. My own mind obeys me not. It leaps about like a monkey on a bough."

I have a thought, it has another,
This way I pull, it pulls that way;
It grates and frets me too,
To toil and moil;
And when I long to meet
Lord Kudala Sangama
It casts a darkness on my path
This Maya.

"In a fit of pleasure I am exposing myself to distress without measure. Do not look into my heart. It is like a country fig. My life is like a dog licking the sharp edge of a sword for ghee. I have now become like a beast fallen into a bog. Lord, O Lord, I cry, could you not answer me ?"

Alas; alas; O Siva, there is
No pity in you;
Alas; alas; O Siva there is
No mercy in you.
Why did you give me birth.
To travail on this earth,
A stranger unto Heaven?
Why did you give me birth?

1. Translations of Vacanas quoted here are from *Vacanas of Basavanna* translated by L.M.A. Menezes and S.M. Angadi.

Bhakti-Bhandari

Hear me, Kudala Sangama
Could you not well have made
A tree or bush instead?.

"Aren't the trees better than I? At least they provide a shade to the travellers."—In such words as these Basavanna pours out the troubled anguish of a seeker.

He is aware of the need to establish contact with the Divine, but at the same time he is painfully aware of his limitations. But he does not despair. It is only an initial stage which appears early during the spiritual pilgrimage. He triumphantly goes through this ordeal which is called 'The Dark Night of the Soul' by some of the western students of Mysticism, and advances to a stage of declaring :

This mortal world is but the Marker's mint;
Those who earn merit here, earn also there,
And those who earn not here, earn neither there;
O Kudala Sangama Lord.

Now his faith is purified and shines with the crystalline brilliance of spiritual fulfilment. He realizes, by his Guru's grace, the ultimate aim of life and also the path which he has to tread. With total dedication to the Lord he seeks shelter in him:

My father Thou, my mother too;
Thou also all my kith and kin,
Save Thou no kindred is to me
O Kudala Sangama Lord,
Do with me as thou please.

This unparalleled love and absolute surrender known as *prapatti* and *sharanagati*, in the Vaishnava school of Bhakti make him an instrument of the Divine will. Nothing remains that he can call his own.

Basaveshwara

Thine are my weal and woe;
My loss and gain are Thine;
Thine too my honour and shame;
O Lord Kudala Sangama
How can the creeper feel the weight
of its own fruit?

Thus by submitting to his Lord, he overcomes the initial agony of the soul. Now with quiet confidence he can sing the efficacy of God's grace :

If it's Thy will, O Lord,
A log may sprout;
If it's Thy will, O Lord,
A barren cow gives milk;
If it's Thy will, O Lord,
Poison is turned to nectar;
If it's Thy will, O Lord,
All things obey one's call
O, Kudala Sangama Lord.

He is able to discern the power of God in every object of the world. He dispels the 'ego' in him and keeps open his heart to receive that divine grace.

Annihilation of the ego is an essential step in the path of Bhakti. At every step we build the barriers of 'I' and 'mine'. It is only when the limited 'I' perishes that the limitless or universal 'I' descends. The ego is a thousand-headed hydra which raises its head in the form of self, of poverty, of power, of caste superiority, and even of knowledge. The seeker must cautiously pluck its head and prune his ego whenever and in whatever form it crops up.

We find in Basavanna conscientious alertness at every stage. He had all the circumstances favourable to feed the ego and fan his pride. But he rose above those things :

Bhakti-Bhandari

'Mid mangoes, I am a manure-fruit:
How can I, without shame.
Reckon myself a devotee
Before Thy Saranas?
Before Kudala Sanga's Saranas
How can I be a devotee?

He unpretentiously admits that his love for God has been the result of the Saranas' grace. In one of his vacanas he says: "A lesser man than I, no, there is none; Greater than Siva's devotee, no, there is none."

The pride of caste and class was most difficult to break in those days when the social status of a person was judged on the basis of caste alone. But Basaveshwara rejected the pride of his own caste. He says:

Make me not bear the brunt, O Lord
Of being born in a superior caste.

He identified himself with Cannaiyah, Kakkayya and such others who were customarily looked down upon as untouchables. Thus Basavanna rooted out even the most subtle ego or insidious *ahankara*.

Bhakti also demands a determined resolve to proceed on the path, come what may:

Let fire come, or wealth come, I don't say
I want or do not want.

This is what is called Naisthika Bhakti or Bhakti of unflinching zeal and pointed faith, of Maheshwara Sthala, the second of the six steps called Sat-Sthala, leading to spiritual realization, as laid down by Veerasaivism, and followed by all the Sharanas including Basavanna. Bhakta, Mahesa, Prasadi, Pranalingi, Sarana and Aikya are the six stages of spiritual

sadhana (or attainment). We find in them all the states of mind that a Bhakta passes through from the initial agony to the final bliss and peace resulting from the realization of the universal Self.

In Sat-Sthala system, Bhakti keeps on evolving and assumes a cosmic dimension. In Bhakta-sthala we find Shraddha-Bhakti, i.e., faith without reservations. It evolves into stead-fastness—Naisthika-Bhakti in Mahesha-sthala; Avadhana (vigilance) Bhakti in Prasadi; Anubhava (Experience of the Supreme) Bhakti in Pranalingi; Ananda (bliss) Bhakti in Sarana, and finally Samarasa (Union of God and soul) Bhakti in Aikya (Union of soul with God). This conception of evolution of the Bhakta (devotee) and Bhakti (devotion) has been very significantly brought out in the Sat-Sthala system, which is not within the scope of this survey.

Basavanna in Maheshwara-sthala attains 'steadfastness in faith'. His Bhakti, being freed from all impurities, now reflects the cosmic will of the Divine and encompasses the entire universe. He welcomes both pain and pleasure with equal poise as facets of Shiva's grace. He knows that Siva subjects his devotees to several trials and searching tests:

Should I say I believed in Thee,
Should I say that I loved
And sold myself to Thee,
Thou shak'st my body for a test
Thou shak'st my mind and wealth
To put me to Thy test,
And when I do not shrink
From all these tests,
Our Lord Kudala Sangama
Quivers to piety.

It is said that the path of devotion is the easiest to reach God. But in another sense it is extremely difficult. "You cannot

do what goes for piety; it cuts through like a saw going and coming," says Basaveshwara because it is an unflinching and unyielding faith. Basava had that faith, and so he proceeded successfully in the path, dedicating his undivided love unto Him.

This love is fundamentally unearthly and knows no limitations of 'I' and 'mine'. But while giving expression to this love, the Bhakta conceives of it in the form of several worldly relations with God. From this point of view Bhakti has been classified into five modes as Dasya (spirit of service), Sakhya (spirit of friendship), Vatsalya (spirit of filial affection), Madhurya (spirit of bridal love) and Shanta (spirit of serene relationship).

Basavanna has exquisitely expressed some of these modes. But like other Sharanas he too gives greater prominence to the impersonal nature of God than to his personal form. Worshipping Linga, the symbol, i.e., *kuruhu* as it is called, Sharanas yearned to realize *aruhu* or the Divine Consciousness which transcends *kuruhu*. So they did not stretch these modes too far. But they have been elaborately depicted in Dasa Sahitya composed by Purandara Dasa and others. However certain Sharanas like Akkamahadevi, Siddarama, Urilingadeva and even Basavanna have experienced some of these modes.

Basava surrenders to Kudala Sanga as a dutiful servant and a devoted wife. He expresses himself as a perfect servant in the following Vacana:

If the warrior runs away
His master bears the shame;
You make me fight and win,
O Kudala Sangama Lord
Without fraud in body and mind and self,

'If a warrior falls back from the battle-field it is a loss to the master. Even so you are Master and I am a servant. If I run away

Basaveshwara

having been defeated in the battle of life it is an insult to you. So make me fight and win," he prays.

Sati-pathi Bhava—the spirit of bridal love—is another mode expressing the intense mystic surrender to Kudala Sanga.

I am like a woman bathed in turmeric,
Arrayed all over in gold.
Who lost her husband's love.
I am like one who has
Besmeared himself with ash
And wound his neck with beads
And lost your love, O God;
Within our clan there's none
Who, falling into sin, yet lives!
Protect me as you will
O, Kudala Sangama Lord.

Being Sharana—the wife, he prays to the Lord, the Linga. This 'Sharana sati, Linga pati' attitude plays an important role in the mystic path of the Sharanas.

Apart from these five modes of Bhakti explained above, nine other features such as Shravana (hearing), Keertana(singing), Smarana (recollection), etc. have also been referred to. To hear the glory of the Divine, to sing hymns in His praise through all those, the Bhakta evolves his spiritual abilities. These have been effectively expressed in some of the vacanas of Basavanna.

Besides, the path of Satsthala, followed by Basavanna, has eight aids called Astavarnas—Guru, Linga, Jangama, Prasada, Padudaka, Vibhuti, Rudrakshi and Mantra—which help the Bhakta to ascend the six steps.

He adopted these Ashtavarnas in such a way that they became significant symbols of inward purity and an invulnerable armour, to protect him in his onward march towards the Divine.

He surrendered his body, mind and self to Guru, Linga and Jangama respectively. This is called 'Trividha-dasoha', Triple worship.

In hundreds of Vacanas he suggestively expresses his cosmic conception of Guru, Linga, Jangama wherein it acquires a new dimension going beyond all the limitations of a particular religion. This great aspect of his Bhakti requires special study. Suffice it to say that his Divine Love is profound and flows full-flooded, taking him through Prasadi and Pranalingi stages to Sharana-sthala.

Here at this stage the initial agony of the Bhakta is completely wiped out. Now he joyously sings:

My tongue is filled with the nectar of Thy name
My eyes are filled with Thy image
My mind is filled with thoughts of Thee
My ears are filled with Thy fame
My Lord, Kudala Sangama,
I am a bee at your lotus feet
Fused in Thyself.

In his beatific vision of 'Unitive Love' he is completely transformed into a Universal Man. He has now become a lute in His hands to be played upon. Yet he is not satisfied and goes a step further:

My legs tire not with dancing,
My eyes tire not with gazing,
My tongue tires not with singing;
What else, what else?
My heart tires not with worshipping
Thee with full hands;
What else? What else?
Hark unto me, Kudala Sangama Lord,

Basaveshwara

What I'd love most to do
Is burst Thy belly and enter it.

The last line is significant. He wistfully longs to enter into the depth of the Divine and to become Kudala Sangama Himself. The mystic union of the Bhakta and the Lord is when there is no duality but unity of the two—the Bhakta and the Lord being one.

This is the last stage, 'Aikya Sthala'. Here he experiences the direct and intuitive apprehension of God; the consubstantial union of Anga and Linga which is called Linganga Samarasya, the highest achievement of spiritual pursuit. He is completely merged in the Universal Self and becomes co-extensive with the entire Universe. Absorbed in Bhakti, He becomes a veritable embodiment of Bhakti itself. "The devotion chased me and swallowed me up," he says. The following Vacana exquisitely brings out the height of his accomplishment:

Upon the soil of piety
Sprouted Guru, the seed,
And Linga, the leaf, was born.
Then Thought came for the flower,
And Deed for tender fruit.
And knowledge for the ripened one,
And when the fruit of knowledge broke
Loose from the stalk and fell.
Look, Kudala Sangama, Wanting it Himself
Gathered it up.

Basavanna, now ripened into a perfect fruit, offers himself to Kudala Sangama who picks up the fruit on his own part and tenderly lodges it in his heart.

Thus beginning with Dvaita (duality) he finds his fulfilment in Advaita (non-duality) in accordance with the Veerashaiva

path. This marks the essential difference between the Dasa tradition of Bhakti followed by Purandara Dasa, Kanaka Dasa and other followers of dualism and the Sat-sthala system of the Sharanas following Advaita. Purandara Dasa enjoys bliss different from Hari even in the end. But in Basavanna, though duality is found in the beginning, ultimately there is neither Bhakta nor Bhakti, neither the worshipper nor the worshipped. He becomes the Bliss Itself or God Himself. Worship, the Worshipper and the Worshipped (Bhakti, Bhakta and God) merge into one!

It is a perfect example of the synthesis of not only duality and non-duality but also of Bhakti, Jnana and Karma. In Basavanna there is an emotional exuberance combined with philosophical insight and deep compassion that melts for the good of mankind. His Bhakti is animated by the vision of the mystic experience which knows no limits. It runs with restraint and dignity towards a determined goal, having matured and having purified the emotions in the light of sparkling intellect. Like the river merging in the sea to become the sea itself, his Bhakti merges with and becomes Lord Kudala Sangama Himself.

He describes this as the state of ultimate silence. As the Upanishads say, speech cannot reach and the mind cannot comprehend that state of ultimate communication with the Universal Self. Nevertheless Basaveshwara makes a daring attempt to compress into words the sublimity of that state :

Look at the being that remains
When all the murky darkness is dispelled;
While light on light has been enthroned,
Lord Kudala Sangama alone knows
The Union that ensues.

Light mingles with light and what remains in the end is nothing but light.

3

A Revolutionary Saint

The Vacanas uttered during the spiritual pursuit of Basaveshwara are the living record of intuitive experience and a course of conduct to aid spiritual realization of the most exalted type. It is not an intellectually spun out system of thought; nor is it dry as the philosophy of scholastics. It has a distinct aim and an admirable feature of the gospel of Divine Love which embraces both thought and action.

His Bhakti strikes a balance between *pravrtti* or the participation in worldly activity, and *nivrtti* or the withdrawal from all activity. It is a perfect balance between the outer life and the inner life of man. It is a rare confluence and a happy synthesis of all the three aspects of human personality — thought, feeling and action.

He was a man of action; his actions were deep-rooted in a sound philosophy and a noble attitude to life; and this attitude was inspired by incomparable compassion for humanity and selfless love for the Universal Being. He lived in all these dimensions and his achievements in each one of them is singular.

Basaveshwara attained the highest state of ecstatic experience that any spiritual aspirant can realize. He was able to attain it

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not by renouncing the world, nor by following the path of asceticism. He accepted the world; and even respected it. He never turned his back upon the normal activities of life. The Buddha renounced the world in his quest after perfection, but Basava accepted the world and attained perfection.

He held a high position in the political life of the country. He had a happy family life. To him, renunciation did not mean rejection of life. He did not subscribe to the view that woman, gold and land were the lures of Maya. He says in one of his vacanas:

Bridling your senses, all you do
Is startling maladies;
For the five senses come and stand
And laugh into your face;
Did Siriyala and Cangale
Give up their nights of love
As wedded man and wife?
Did Sindhu Ballala give up
His amorous pleasures and his dalliance?
Before Thee I avow:
Should I but covet another's wealth or wife,
Let me be banished from Thy feet
Oh Kudala Sangama Lord.

One should enjoy the delights of the senses in legitimate ways. There is nothing wrong in it. But at the same time one must realize that there are limits to one's enjoyment and control the senses. The restraint on the senses should be automatic and effortless. Artificial suppression of the senses and self-mortification are of no use. The senses should be one's servant to provide comforts in the journey of the Spirit and they can not

be allowed to become obstructive tyrants holding back the Spirit from progress.

One has to realize the insufficiencies of worldly pleasures. But one need not feel dispirited. It is possible in this human life, and quite within this life itself to search for an abiding core of truth. Therefore, this mortal life is holy and worthwhile. "This mortal world is but the Maker's Mint," says Basavanna. We are all coins coming out of the mint. If any coin proves to be fake here, it will be fake there also. Those who cannot live well here, what can they attain hereafter, he asks. To live like a walking corpse with despair and disgust is not the spiritual way of life, nor can it be considered as true asceticism or Sanyasa. One must live here and live well, and at the same time attain the life of the spirit which is beyond the bounds of mortal life.

Life here gains insignificance when it ceases to be a hurdle in the pursuit of eternal life. One should have the resoluteness of a warrior to ride the mad horse of Samsara or worldliness. Instead of being at the mercy of the horse, one must be his master. Basavanna laid down the ethical and spiritual principles by which one can get complete mastery over the horse of Samsara.

He did not believe in tall talk and hair-splitting speculation. He did not say anything which he could not put into practice. In his life practice preceded preaching. He saw in the Hindu religion, a mockery of the Upanishadic philosophy which proclaimed the essential Oneness of all humanity, for, in practice, there are hundreds of castes and creeds, apart from the four-fold division, each claiming superiority over the other. Again there was the shocking practice of untouchability which Basava considered a disgrace to man and a blot on society.

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He vehemently deprecated the whole system and protested against the selfish practices and exploitations that were prevalent in the guise of Caturvarnya or the four-fold division. He rationally illumined the true nature of religion. The following Vacana is an illustration of his rationality :

The man who slays is a pariah
The man who eats the carrion is a low-caste person
Where is the caste here-where?
Our Kudala Sanga's sharana
Who loves all living things
He is the well-born one.

Thus he declares that man's worth should be judged not by his birth but by his thoughts and deeds, by his conduct and character.

He was disgusted to see hundreds of castes, sub-castes and the degrading wrangles among them. He conceded only two classes among human beings: Bhakta and Bhavis, i.e., the good and the bad. He illustrated his affirmation with a score of examples of sages and seers and showed that caste by birth could never be the criterion for the worth of a man:

Vyasa is a fisherman's son,
Markandeya of an outcaste born,
Mandodari, the daughter of a frog;
O, look not for caste; in caste,
What were you in the past?
Indeed, Agastya was fowler,
Durvasa, a maker of shoes,
Kasyapa, a blacksmith,
The sage, Kaundinya by name
Was, as the three worlds know,

Basaveshwara

A barber—Mark ye all, the words
Of our Kudala Sanga run;
What matters one is lowly born?
Only a Sivabhakta is well born.

Thus he condemned the caste-ridden society and raised his voice of protest stoutly against the fourfold division of the Hindu Society.

He did not accept caste discriminations in social relations like sharing food, in the matter of marriages and in other affairs of daily life. Such discriminations, he considered, were based on an uncalled for artificial division and created a wide gulf between man and man:

They say their vows are not affected
In eating and in wearing cloth;
They look for caste
Whenever they arrange a match
How can you call them devotees?
How can you call them adepts too?
Hearken to me, Kudala Sangama Lord,
It is like a woman in her monthly course
Bathing in water that is pure.

This was revolutionary indeed. Especially eight hundred years ago its impact upon the caste-ridden society can well be imagined. Had Basava merely proclaimed it, may be the reactionary forces would have ignored him. But he put into practice what he said. The very untouchables whom the high-born had kept at a distance and a look at whom had to be followed by a purificatory bath, were enlisted as members in 'Anubhava Mantapa', the Socio-religious Academy set up by Basavanna. He gave them equal status both in religion and in society. He says :

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Shall I call siriya a man of trade,
And Macayya, a washerman?
Call Kakkayya, a tanner, and
Cennayya a cobbler?
And if I call myself
A Brahmin, will not
Kudala Sangama just laugh at me?

This proclaims perfect religious equality to all who deserved not by virtue of their birth but by their worth.

Consequent upon this social reformation Basava had to face terrible opposition from reactionary forces. In spite of it he was able to produce momentous results because he was not a preacher of any localised social reform. His social reformation was based on love and love alone. His love for humanity, especially for the lowly and the lost, for the downtrodden and the degraded, knew no limits.

He identifies himself with the common man, and even goes to the extent of saying :

When Kakkayya the tanner my father is,
And Cennayya grandfather
Am I not saved?

It is this inexhaustible love and compassion that made him the saviour of humanity.

Love and compassion are the watch-words of his philosophy and religion. One of his famous Vacanas says:

What sort of religion can it be
Without compassion?
Compassion needs must be
Towards all living things;
Compassion is the root

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Of religious faith;
Lord Kudala Sanga does not care
For what is not like this.

All his social and religious reforms were based on this compassion and all-embracing love for humanity.

In fact Basava did not believe in what is ordinarily called reformation, he believed in growth. He made a whole generation grow more and more towards the Vedantic ideal of the Unity of man and his inborn divine nature. He saw life steadily and saw it whole. His was an integrated vision and so he could not tolerate any 'artificial division' of society in the name of religion. Resenting the artificial barriers that prevented the progress of individuals, he radically protested against such disharmony and disparity. He tried to establish perfect equality for he did not seek to level down all but to level up, giving opportunities to all without any discrimination of caste, creed or sex.

His great object was to build up an ideal society where all individuals must have equal opportunities for religious pursuit or spiritual development, irrespective of their vocation in life. He had to change the prevailing social attitude of estimating the worth of a man by his profession. He proclaimed that there was nothing high or low in occupations, it was honesty and sincerity that decided the merits of the means of livelihood, which is called 'Kayaka'.

So Haralayya of lowly birth, a cobbler by profession, was recognised as the equal of Basava who was a minister of the State, because his spiritual progress was equal to Basavanna's. Basava firmly believed in such social equality; and so he provided equal opportunities to all in his new religion.

But it must be remembered that all cobblers were not Haralayyas. Only those who could make use of the opportunities

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and rose above the circumstances, with a spiritual bent of mind, were accepted into the fold of devotees. They led a clean life by being pure in thought, word and deed.

It was a remarkable achievement that Basava boldly threw open the same social and religious opportunities to all without any distinction of caste, creed or sex.

There is a mistaken notion that Basavashwara converted all sorts of people into Veerashaivism. But he knew that only those individuals who could follow firmly the spiritual pursuit based on individual and social ethics would become Bhaktas. He was very fastidious about the moral aspect of religion, and did not take anybody in just because he wanted converts.

He mercilessly condemns deceit and theft, greed and violence, wickedness and bad conduct and gives the highest priority to unimpeachable character, an upright conduct, politeness and pleasing manners and clean habits in society. Some of his Vacanas in this regard have set the universal moral code, and read like the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. To quote only one :

Thou shalt not steal nor kill;
Nor speak a lie;
Be angry with no one;
Nor scorn another man;
Nor glory in thyself
Nor others hold to blame.
This is your inward purity,
This is your outward purity,
This is the way to win our Lord
Kudala Sangama.

He gives importance to purity within and without. Only when the seeker is pure in body and mind, heart and soul, will and consciousness, can his devotion to God find fulfilment.

Basaveshwara

Thus those who could follow the path of Virtue were considered to be Bhaktas and were taken into the new faith after initiation called Deeksha. Once they entered the Veerashaiva order, Basaveshwara declared, their old Varnas and castes were automatically burnt, and a new life began. Untouchable converts like Haralayya, Nagamayya, Dhulayya were equal in all respects to Bacarasa, Shantarasa, Madhuvarasa who were converted from Brahminism. At one stroke he achieved social and religious equality and spiritual regeneration of the masses. Never before, we may believe, had religion assumed so deep an outlook and so vast an appeal. It is startling to find that even common people like Madara Dhulayya, an untouchable, Turugahi Ramanna, a herdsman, Jodhara Mayanna, a warrior and a host of others could attain the noblest heights in the spiritual realm and express their mystic experience in the Vacana form.

Another achievement of equal importance was the emancipation of women. The age of Maitreyi and Gargi had ended long long before. Women and Sudras had no right of access to the Vedas or any other scripture. In such circumstances, Basava boldly declared that there was no distinction in religion between man and woman. He threw open the doors of spiritual pursuit to every one, man or woman, who would enter with a pure heart and earnest desire. Hence we come across several women saints like Akkamahadevi, Akkanagamma, Neelambike, Gangambike, Lakkamma, Lingamma, and Mahadevamma and others whose very names are associated with elevated spiritual attainments.

Basaveshwara, simultaneously with the announcement that all have equal opportunities in religion, had to fight to make religion free from scriptural and sacerdotal clutches. He asks: "What if you read the Vedas, what if you listen to the Sastras? What if you tell your beads or make your penance" and affirms:

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"Unless the deed obeys the word, Lord Kudala Sangama love not." This identity of word and deed is an essential qualification of the seeker Basavanna reiterates:

I call not the apostles
Of Veda and Shastra great,
Nor those who are shrouded
In errors of illusion.

Only those who have dispelled Maya or illusion are great
This greatness can be achieved by one and all who are pure in
body, mind and deed.

He vehemently protested against the rituals prescribed in the Vedas, but accepted the truth revealed in the Upanishads. Basava, the compassionate, who asked, "What sort of religion can it be without compassion?", could not accept any compromise on the issue of sacrificial rites tending to animal slaughter. In one of his vacanas he strikes the note of piety and compassion. He here addresses the goat which is being taken to the sacrificial fire :

Cry, cry, o goat
That you are slain
In accordance with the Vedas,
Cry, cry before them
That read the Vedas,
Cry, cry before them
That hear the sastras;
Lord Kudala Sangama
Will take a fit toll
For what you have wept.

The Buddha was also moved in the same way, with compassion and he too protested against such sacrifices and other rites. Basavanna rebelled against these rituals and the priestcraft that was responsible for this.

Basaveshwara

Basavanna advocated supreme love and pointed faith towards one ultimate Divinity. He did not approve of polytheism or worship of several gods. His strict monotheism has been expressed in several Vacanas. He says :

God is but one, many His names,
The faithful wife knows but one Lord.

He criticises the worship of hundreds of Gods and Goddesses like Mari and Masani, for trivial ends. He sarcastically remarks that a single stroke of “O Kudala Sangama Lord be my refuge” is enough to shatter hundred of earthen pots like Beerayya, Ketayya and other deities that seize or beg a milching cow, a crying infant, a pregnant woman etc., Here Basavanna clearly distinguishes the religion of fear and superstitions from the religion of love and selfless devotion.

He advocated the worship of one God in the form of Ishtalinga, as propounded by the Veerashaiva faith. In conformity with it, his conception of God is so lofty and convincing that it a; once fascinates even the rational thinkers:

Whichever way I look
Thou only art, O Lord;
The form of all circumbient space
Thou art the Universal eye,
O Lord, and Thou the Universal face;
Thou art the arms of All, O Lord,
And Thou the feet, O Kudala Sangama Lord.

He transcends the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra. It is the supreme Almighty which has assumed the form of Ishtalinga and by the grace of Guru it has come to be worshipped.

In the Veerashaiva faith, the Ishtalinga, worn on the body by every individual, forms the central theme which need not be

discussed in detail here. It is a conception of God as formless. Making an image of Sunya or perfection, the Guru gives it to the seeker as Ishtalinga, and breathes the six-lettered mantra, Shadakshari, into his ears. This Ishtalinga which is daily worshipped on the palm, seizes the entire spirit of the seeker and helps him to evolve further into Pranalinga and Bhavalinga, as we have seen in the development of the Bhakti of Basaveshwara in the previous chapter. Basavanna stressed that the seeker should concentrate all his powers of meditation and worship only in the Ishtalinga with a single-minded faith.

Thus Basava was able to do away with temple-cult and priest-craft which had become the centres and means of exploitation. Worship is a personal communion between the devotee and the God. That is achieved directly in Ishtalinga as there is no mediator between the Linga and the Bhakta. To arrange to get worship done by others in temples has no virtue in it. Basaveshwara says:

Indulging in love, eating one's food—
Is that ever done by deputy;
Oneself one ought to do
All Linga's rites and ceremonies:
Its never done by deputy
O Kudala Sangama,
How can they know Thee Lord
Doing it for mere formality.

Thus worship of God by agents is strongly condemned.

This religious rationalism gave people a new outlook towards life. It threw new light upon the Karma theory which had led men to fatalistic inertia that everything is the fruit of the past Karma, that man is a helpless puppet at the mercy of a perfidious

destiny. Basavanna strongly rebelled against this defeatist outlook and infused new vigour and vitality to wipe out the past Karma and to mould his future with self-confidence by his present and future actions.

Rationalist as he was, Basava upheld only the faith which assisted spiritual pursuits but not blind beliefs and superstitious customs. There were many blind beliefs, firmly rooted in the minds of the large multitude, relating to astrology, omens—good or bad, and the influence of days, weeks, or stars. People at every step, for every petty cause, were habituated to look helplessly towards some supernatural power. They were too simpleminded to know the guiles and frauds of those who paraded in ostentatious garbs as priests and ascetics. Basava strongly reproved and tried to put an end to this religious exploitation. He firmly declares :

Whenever our own say so
Deem that to be the auspicious time,
Think the compatible signs are there,
And that the Union is predestinate;
That favourable are the moon and stars;
And that: Today is better than tomorrow,
The purchase that accrues
To Lord Kudala Sanga's worshippers is Thine.

In another Vacana he has said : “All days are alike to him who says Shiva is his refuge and who invokes him without fail.” A seeker must not be a Bhakta of days; he should be a Bhakta of God, having unflinching faith in one supreme omnipotent Divine Power.

Basavanna exemplified in his way of life the truth of the Vacana:

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I know not
What is day or week.
Whether a sign of the zodiac
Is auspicious or otherwise;
To me night is one division,
Day is another division,
Bhakta is of one caste,
The non-bhakta of another.

For him all omens are auspicious, all days are holy. It is like "Seeking his own shadow, though dwelling in shelter of the great mountain Meru." For those who have taken shelter of the Great Meru, i.e., Shiva, where is the difference between the auspicious and the inauspicious?

So he rebelled against everything which was repugnant to reason and tried to change the conditions of mental stupor and physical weariness that prevailed as a burden of the past. He could not approach the Dharmasastras, or any scripture for that matter, as Holy Writ which must be accepted without challenge or demur. He could not tolerate the vices of the privileged classes and raised a stout protest against all the distinctions of class and caste, a protest which appeared very revolutionary in the conditions of the society in his age.

He gave the utmost importance to purity of thought and purity of action. To him the means was as important as the end. He called this spiritual discipline endowed with purity of thought and action 'Kayaka' which acquired a special significance in the context of the achievement of the Sharanas of his time.

4

The Message of Kayaka

The term 'Kayaka' means honest manual labour, but it is much more than labour for one's living. The concept of 'Kayaka' may be said to be a signal contribution of Basavanna to Practical Philosophy. It acquired a new dimension in the way it was preached and practised by Basavanna and other Sharanas. Basavanna breathed into it a perfect co-ordination of thought and action. And he himself was a man of thought as well as of action. The concept is so comprehensive that it is capable of universal application.

In the first place, it is a vocation or an occupation for subsistence. It is 'bread labour' as Gandhiji calls it. "Nature has intended us to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow," says Gandhiji. Bodily or manual labour for every one whether rich or poor is inevitable in some form or other. Then why should it not take the form of productive labour? Basaveshwara, in the same strain declares that every one should undertake some work which fulfils the needs of society. Be it a Bhakta, a Guru, or a Jangama, one has no right to live an idle life of parasitism exploiting the labour of other people. Its underlying principle is that every man should pursue his material and spiritual progress

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through his 'Kayaka' and that beggary and idleness have no place in society.

Another important aspect of Kayaka that Basava advocated was the democratic principle of freedom of occupation. He revolted against the Karma theory which dictated that each man's occupation was predetermined by birth; Basavanna condemned any discrimination on the basis of birth, sex or occupation.

This was a great revolution in society and brought about spiritual and social awakening in the minds of the people. Primarily, Kayaka changed the habit of deciding the worth of men by their professions. Basaveshwara proclaimed that no occupation was superior or inferior to another and that it was honesty and sincerity which decided the merit of the means of livelihood. This is the keynote of Kayaka. The equality of all professions as proclaimed by Basava leads to the next important aspect of Kayaka.

It forms a new outlook on life. Kayaka is at once the dignity as well as the divinity of labour, it is not merely an occupation to earn one's livelihood. It is work with absolute detachment and it should fulfil the needs of both the individual and society.

The earnings of the individual should promote not only his material and spiritual progress, but it should also be utilized for the welfare of society in the form of triple Dasoha or dedication to Guru, Linga and Jangama. It is only then that one's profession can become Kayaka or holy work or worship.

Basaveshwara did not work as a minister of Bijjala to accumulate wealth for himself. He solemnly explains in the name of God why he accepted service under the king :

If rising at dawn and rubbing my eyes,
I worry for my belly, for my goods,

Basaveshwara

For wife and children, then
My mind be witness to my mind.

He does not worry about himself or about his family; nor is he enamoured of the power and pomp of the ministership:

If going into the lowest pariah's house,
I do the lowest service well,
My one concern is but Thy Majesty;
But if I worry for my belly's sake
Let my head pay for it,
O Kudala Sangama Lord.

He is prepared to go to the lowest pariah's house to do the lowest service, but he will do it well. Thus any work which is undertaken for the good of the world and which is performed well is Kayaka. Such Kayaka is as good as the worship of God.

It is in this sense that Sharanas say 'Kayaka is Kailasa' (the abode of Siva'). Such an ideal prescribed by Basavanna and other Sharanas will perhaps be more intelligible to us who are living in the post Gandhian Era.

In fact there are remarkable similarities between Gandhiji's concept of bread-labour and Basavanna's concept of Kayaka. Gandhiji discovered some of his deepest convictions reflected in the great book of Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, and it so captivated him that it transformed his life. He decided to translate the principles of the book to practice. The following are the main teachings of the book as Gandhiji understood it

- (1) That the good of individual is contained in the good of all.
- (2) That a lawyer's work has the same value as a barber's inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.

- (3) That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

We find that all these principles are the core of the doctrine of Kayaka expounded by Basavanna and other Sharanas.

Basava firmly believed in the first principle that "the good of the individual is contained in the good of all". The triple 'Dasoha', i.e., dedication to the Guru, the Linga and the Jangama, is mainly based on this principle. He says that body, intellect and earnings should be offered to the Guru, the Linga and the Jangama respectively. The Guru, the teacher, reveals the secret of Linga, the object of worship. So these two promote individual good taking him through his spiritual pursuits.

But the 'Jangama' has a different connotation. Basava read the term in its widest sense. To him it was not a particular caste of sect. "Is there harshness in Linga? Is there a caste in Jangama?" he asks. The Jangama is one who has become all pervasive. He is a true Jangama who, having annihilated his ego, embraces the entire universe and yet transcends it. Having entered into cosmic consciousness through intuitive awareness the Jangama ceases to be an individual.

Basaveshwara's conception of the Jangama, in a sense, seems to include the whole universe with all its movable beings. Thus Jangama 'Dasoha' becomes so comprehensive that it includes every kind of service to society. Money earned through one's vocation should be surrendered to the Jangama for the welfare of the society: "My brother, you who gaze into the mirror, look at the Jangama," says Basavanna and continues: "For in Him the Linga dwells. Kudala Sangama's word says : 'The immovable and the movable are one!'"

Unless this is understood what is the use of tall talk about philosophy? What is there in a wreath of words? What is the use of *abhisheka* or pouring water on the Linga at the time of

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worship unless you pour it upon the Jangama for his bath? So Basavanna asks us to find the Divine in the heart of mankind. In one of his vacanas he beautifully puts it in these words.

Seeing a snake of stone, they say:
'Pour milk, do;'
Seeing a real snake, they say:
'Kill it;'
If a Jangama who can eat arrives,
They say: 'Away;'
And serve their dainties to a Linga
That cannot eat;
If you make little of
Our Kudala Sanga's sharanas
You will be as a clod
Knocking against a stone."

Linga worship attains fulfilment only when such a universal awakening is evolved. In the following lines, he suggestively expresses the same :

If knowing the root is the tree's mouth,
You water it below,
Lo, high up the sprouts appear;
If knowing the Jangama to be
The Linga's mouth, you serve him food,
He gives you a banquet in return.

Such a synthesis of devotion to the Linga and the Jangama leads to the synthesis of the individual and society. This is the unique character of Basavanna's spiritual pursuit. The fruits of the worship of the Linga, i.e., the individual good are contained in the worship of the Jangama, i.e., in the good of all. Thus his conception of Kayaka envisaged and achieved the synthesis of

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the good of the individual and the good of society which are interdependent and supplement each other.

The second principle of Ruskin as understood by Gandhiji is that a lawyer's work has the same value as a barber's. This is the foundation of Kayaka. Basaveshwara made it very clear that there was no such thing as high or low among occupations. The dignity of Kayaka lies not in the nature of the work but in the spirit with which it is done. Maralayya's occupation as a cobbler is as important as that of Basaveshwara's occupation as a minister.

Whatever may be the work, when undertaken in a spirit of dedication and utter humility, it becomes worship. In Basavanna's age this concept did not remain merely an ideal; but under the magic spell of Basavanna's guidance it was realized on a grand scale by the Sharanas of the 12th century. He encouraged the Sharanas to follow hundreds of different occupations, not only to enhance the dignity and importance of labour but also to contribute their might to society.

Thus we see hundreds of Sharanas in different occupations: Madivala Macayya (a washerman), Nuliya Candayya (a rope-maker), Ambigara Cowdayya (an oarsman), Medara Ketayya (a basket maker), Hadapada Appanna (a barber), Turugahi Ramanna (a cowherd), Sunkada Benkanna (a toll-keeper), Madara Dhoolayya (a pariah), Talavara Kamideva (a watchman), Ganada Kannappa (an oilman), Vaidhya Sanganna (a physician), Sujikayakada Ramanna (a tailor), Bacikayakada Basavappa (a carpenter), Kottanada Remmavve (a paddy pounder), Molige Marayya (a hewer of wood), and so on. The words prefixed to their names indicate the Kayaka each had undertaken. The Sharanas who were following vocations like taking the cattle to graze, washing clothes, extracting oil from seeds and making shoes could sit in equal rank with Basavanna in the Anubhava

Mantapa, or Socio-religious Academy, and participate in its deliberations. It is a remarkable accomplishment and a reformation which has not been completely effected even today.

There is another aspect of Kayaka: the importance it attaches to bodily labour. The requirements of the body must be earned by the body itself. This is in accordance with the principle that the life of labour is the life worth living, as suggested by Ruskin. Basavanna exalted bodily labour to the highest extent, and he himself actually lived up to this ideal. Though a minister he dedicated himself to the work of a drudge, he says:

A broom in hand, a cloth-ring on my head,
I am a household drudge's son,
O Kudala Sangama Lord
I am the son of a servant-maid
Who come up with the dowered bed.

This is a suggestive vacana where he identifies himself with the menials and joins them in the so-called menial work.

It reminds us of a saying of Gandhiji: "We should, from our childhood, have the idea impressed upon our minds that we are all scavengers, and the easiest way of doing so is for everyone who has realized this to commence bread labour as a scavenger. Scavenging, thus intelligently taken up, will help in a true appreciation of the equality of man." It is the same spirit breathed into Kayaka by Basavanna, that we notice in Gandhiji.

Gandhiji adds the adjective 'intelligent' to bread-labour, and affirms that only intelligent bread-labour can become social service. This is true Kayaka also. All vocations and professions cannot be called Kayakas.

Once a situation arises in Anubhava Mantapa when Ayadakki Marayya whose Kayaka is to gather rice-grains scattered on the ground, raises a question and expresses his doubt about Kayaka.

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"When it is said that Kayaka is Kailasa or work is worship, why the need of Guru, Linga and Jangama at all?" This is his question which is discussed at length in Anubhava Mantapa, and finally Allama Prabhu elucidates the nature of Kayaka and puts it in a nut-shell. He says that work becomes Kayaka only when it is done with absolute detachment and unselfishness. To attain such a state of self-abnegation through work, certain practices and disciplines are essential and hence the triple Dasoha, i.e., dedication of body, mind and money to the Guru, the Linga and the Jangama.

Marayya, reflecting and meditating upon these words of Allama Prabhu, forgets his Kayaka of that day. Then his wife Lakkamma admonishes him for forgetting his duty. So Marayya proceeds to his Kayaka. When he returns, Lakkamma finds to her surprise that Marayya has brought more rice-grains than the usual measure. She reminds him that greed for grains in excess does not become his Kayaka, and insists upon his taking back the excess of rice and scattering it where he had picked it from. This suggests a very significant aspect of Kayaka. If every one takes just as much as he needs, no one in this world would suffer from any want.

One is reminded here of Mahatma Gandhiji's unforgettable words: "Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world, there would be no man dying of starvation." Thus when each takes only what is essential for him and utilises the rest for the good of his fellow beings in a spirit of dedication, perfect harmony and order will be established in society. This connotation is implied in Kayaka which was practised in the age of Basaveshwara even by an ordinary woman like Lakkamma.

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What Basavanna envisaged was a self-sufficient society with no discrimination of caste, creed or sex. Nor was there any distinction of rich and poor. He identified himself with the poor, the degraded, the lowly and the lost, and insisted that all should voluntarily take up the labour that the poor must do, and eradicate poverty and social injustice.

Basavanna gave the utmost importance to non-possession and his conception of Kayaka was based on this very principle. There is an interesting episode which is said to have occurred in the life of Basaveshwara. It so happened that one night a thief entered the house of Basavanna. Having found nothing in the house he tried to snatch away the earrings of Neelambike, the wife of Basavanna. Suddenly she woke up and screamed. Basavanna got up and immediately asking his wife to give up those earrings to the thief, he said: "If a thief has entered the house of a bigger thief, I consider him none other than God Kudala Sanga Himself." He calls himself a bigger thief because he possessed something which a common man could not afford. This corresponds with Gandhiji's view which is expressed thus: "I suggest that we are thieves in a way. If I take anything that I do not need for my immediate use, and keep it, I steal it from somebody else."

Thus there are remarkable similarities between Gandhiji and Basavanna, in social outlook and the message of bread labour. At times we find that Gandhiji is speaking the language and seeking to enforce the doctrines of Basavanna. What Gandhiji tried to expound and establish through 'Sarvodaya', Basavanna did achieve through 'Kayaka'. It can be affirmed that 'Kayaka' of Basavanna is the core of Gandhiji's 'Sarvodaya'.

To sum up Kayaka cuts at the root of traditional Varna or caste hierarchy, embodying in itself the principles of the equality

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of all men and the dignity of men and also the dignity of labour. It is in conformity with democratic principles. Its goal is equitable distribution of work and also wealth. Beggary and idleness have no place in the society that Basavanna visualized.

This may be called, the Kayaka system of society. Here everybody works to satisfy the needs of his body, mind and heart, which means an all-round development of the inner faculties of man. Exploitation in any form, be it economical, social or religious, is not tolerated. Each works according to his capacity and makes out the proceeds of his profession to society. There is no greed and so no artificial scarcity, no social injustice and no social tyranny. There is equality of opportunities for all, including untouchables, in all walks of life. Everybody seeks his or her salvation through a spiritual pursuit by individual efforts without any mediator, and so there are no blind beliefs and rituals centred round the temple and priestcraft. Work and worship are infused inseparably in the form of triple Dasoha, i.e., dedication to Guru, the Linga, and the Jangama, thereby sublimating the mercenary motive into the spiritual motive. This is not the Utopia of a dreamy philosopher, but the vision of a man of action and a prophet of the New Era.

This message of Kayaka emancipated people from age-long social and religious superstitions and restored them to self-reliance, self-confidence and spirit of freedom and free-thinking. If it is understood in the proper perspective it can shed a new light and pave the way to solve the problems of our scientific age.

5

A Great Poet

“Great men are rare, great poets are rarer, but a great man who is a great poet is the rarest of all.” Thus goes a well-known saying. Basaveshwara is the rarest combination of a great man and a great poet. He was a great man combining in himself a mystic, a social reformer, an independent thinker and a prophet of the new era. His main concern was not literary composition, but the attainment of the highest goal of life and paving the way for the highest good of the common man.

His immense venture was to propagate eternal truths and ideals among the people and to take the divine message to every hearth and heart. So every feeling or thought that stimulated his mind, provoked his intellect, and blossomed in his heart, was given an expression in simple but powerful Vacana form.

In fact all the Sharanas of the 12th century who wrote vacanas had only this end in view. They wanted to give expression to their own spiritual ideas and experiences, and the defects and drawbacks of society, in a language easily intelligible to all. So they had to fashion a new form altogether, to realize their objective of the highest social good. The words they spoke in that endeavour became Vacanas which came like the onrush of a

great flood to a stagnant pool of water, and changed the very trend of Kannada literature.

"Literature is fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language," says W.H. Hudson in *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*. This can be applied to Vacana literature in general and to the Vacanas of Basavanna in particular. He looked at life thoroughly and from, various angles beginning with the common struggle on the material plane and reaching the highest level of metaphysical experience. He could enter deep into things for he was a keen observer endowed with great poetic insight. His soaring genius, enriched through all observations and varied experiences, has found utterance in the form of Vacanas.

Vacana literally means prose, but here as a medium of expression it acquires a new dimension and has started a new genre unique in Kannada literature. The Vacanas composed by Sharanas are in prose, but theirs is the inspired voice of poetry. They may be called brief prose-lyrics, possessing the lyrical grace of poetry and the rhythmic articulation of prose. Though there are no regular rules of metre and rhythm in vacanas they have their own rhythm which is linear, sometimes non-metrical but intense according to the thought content and the emotional fervour of the particular vacana.

Vacanas, except those which expound metaphysics or lengthy descriptions, are generally brief with a seal of the Sharanas dedication to their personal deity at the close of each Vacana, like Kudala Sangamadeva of Basavanna, Guheshwara of Allama Prabhu and Channamallikarjuna of Akkamahadevi.

Basavanna is not the originator of the vacana form. Devara Dasimayya who has composed a number of Vacanas of mature form and strength preceded Basavanna, or at least he may be considered an elder contemporary of Basavanna. At present it is

generally accepted that Dasimayya may be considered as the first Vacanakara, or composer of Vacanas, though there is every possibility of its origin being traced to a still earlier period. This Vacana form acquired a new vigour and vitality when innumerable Veerashaiva Saints, both men and women who took part in the social and religious revolution initiated by Basavanna, chose it as their medium of expression.

But the supremacy of Basavanna in the field of Vacana literature cannot be questioned. He cultivated and enriched this literary form and raised it to the height of universal literature. His Vacanas are a powerful and spontaneous outpourings of the intensity of heart-moving devotion, the lustre of rare mystical experience, and the insight of exquisite metaphysical meditation, in short the rich and invigorating experiences of life 'here' and 'hereafter'.

Basavanna has a remarkable power of communicating his wide experience directly to the heart of the readers. The figures and images, the similes and metaphors, imagery and word-pictures, illustrations and examples, proverbial utterances, countless excerpts from the language of the masses—all these are living witness not only to his vast experience and human compassion but also to his artistic achievement.

He succeeded in eliminating the artificial distance that had grown between the literary language of old Kannada poetry and the spoken language of the common man. He enshrined his rich experience, deep insight and lofty spiritual realizations in a very simple but profoundly moving language. This caused a great revolution in Kannada literature both in form and in content.

His Vacanas spring from the heart spontaneously and their language flows with effortless ease and grace. Even figures of speech appear in his Vacanas not because of any deliberate effort but with felicity and ease; they are spontaneous and

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inevitable as an indispensable means for the expression of his experience. Here the word is brother to the thought, as Pindar would say. Even among the Sharanas, in this respect, very few like Allamaprabhu and Akkamahadevi and occasionally Channabasavanna, Siddharama and some others can rise to his heights.

The following is a good illustration of the different levels at which his vacanas work :

If you should speak, your words should be
Pearls that are strung upon a thread.
If you should speak, your words should be
Like lustre by the ruby shed.
If you should speak, your words should be
A crystal's flash that cleaves the blue.
If you should speak, great God must say
Ay Ay, that's very true;
But if your deed betrays your word,
Can Kudala Sangama care for you?

In a way he himself has suggested here the essence of his Vacanas. It is also interesting that the simile goes on evolving from the quality of the pearl to the spiritual quality of self-realization. In the last line he says that the word and deed should unite and only then descends the grace of God. In Basavanna we find the perfect fusion of word and deed. He has dedicated his power of action as well as the power of speech to the delight of the Divine and has revealed His glory in his sayings. Such integration is rare indeed!

Basavanna is not a poet set on writing poetry. Nor is he interested in describing the beauties of nature. His is the poetry of life. The beauty of life itself has become poetry in his words. What he has described is the beauty of the inner self. We find

in his vacanas all the different stations of the journey that a seeker undertakes. Limitations of worldly life and its futility, the frailty of the mind and its meanness, pretentious devotion, the deceit and the double-dealing of the so-called religious people on the one side, and, on the other, purity of heart, Bhakti of the highest order and the glory of Sharanas—all these have been given serious thought and artistic expression in the background of the ideal of human life.

The words he has uttered about the futility and the limitations of mundane life are so powerful as to direct the mind of the reader towards introspection. Making himself the centre, he has displayed self-awareness and self-exploration in his Vacanas to a remarkable degree. He says in one of the Vacanas :

My life is like a mouse
Ensnared in piles of bags:
No peace from it until it dies.

The simile he uses is that of a mouse which has settled in the midst of piles of bags. It goes straight to our hearts and makes us realize that we are in no way better than a mouse. In another Vacana he says :

My plight is like frog's
In the shadow of a snake.
This many coloured word is like
The amity between
A snake-charmer and a snake.
When the serpent of this world
Instilled its venom into me—
They call its objects of the fivefold sense—
There was no stepping further.

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Thus hundreds of similes, one more powerful than the other, can be cited. To indicate the topsy-turvy life of indiscrimination he uses the simile: "Like the life of bat," to indicate the vain attempt of mortals to enjoy worldly life, he says: "The frog caught in serpent's mouth hungrily yearns for the passing fly"; and also, "The sheep brought for sacrifice eats the branches brought for the decoration." He effectively compares the mind to a country fig, to a monkey on a bough, to a dog riding in a palanquin and to a dog licking the sword's sharp edge for ghee. Such examples can be seen in every one of his Vacanas.

Some of his Vacanas echo the deepest cry of his soul splendidly. For example:

O Lord, it's you who spread this green
Sense-pasture before my eyes;
What does a feast know? It is drawn
To all that's green and grass.
Rid me of sense, and feed me, Lord,
With holiness till I have my fill;
Serve me true wisdom for my drink;
Look after me, O Lord
Kudala Sangama.

The following Vacana gives a suggestive and significant picture of infirmity and fickleness of mind:

Like a lizard about
A hedge, so is my mind, O Lord;
Like a chameleon who appears
One thing each several time,
So is my mind;
Like the condition of a flying-fox.
So is my mind;

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Even as dawn breaking at the gate
For the blind man who wakes
At dead of night
Is their, for the mere wish
A disinterested piety,
O Kudala Sangama Lord?

What we find in his Vacanas is that his language is equal on every occasion and can capture it in all its splendid strength and form. The spiritual longings of his soul have found expression in some of the finest images in Kannada. The following Vacana may be quoted here :

Melt my mind and purge its stains,
Test it and in fire refine;
Hammer, so the hammer pains,
To pure gold this heart of mine;
Beat from me, great craftsman, beat
Anklets for Thy devotee's feet:
Save me Lord Kudala Sangama.

Thus he often attains great poetic heights by using appropriate poetic images and symbols or vivid word-pictures. The felicity and ease of his utterances are marvellous.

While making it clear that weak and mean minds cannot accomplish Bhakti, he asks: "What boots it, if you smear holy ash on a jar of wine, unless it is pure within?" and also: "How long so ever a stone may lie in water, can it by soaking turn soft?" He stresses the need of inward purity and the futility of ostentatious Bhakti.

If you strike the ant hill
Will the snake die?
What if you perform

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The severest penance
Will Lord Kudala Sangama
Have trust in those
Whose heart is not pure?

There is no use of beating the bush without tracing the snake in it. What is the use of a lamp that cannot dispel the darkness of the house? So also what is the use of worship unless it dispels the darkness of the heart?

The elephant fears the goad;
The mountain, the thunderbolt;
Darkness is afraid of light
The forest fears the fire;
The five great sins fear, Lord
The name of Kudala Sangama.

Ignorance is compared to a mighty elephant, to a mountain, and to the darkness of gross inertia. But invoking the name of God with deep love and pure heart is as a goad to the elephant, a thunderbolt to the mountain, and a light to the darkness. These repeated images effectively convey the glory of God's name.

Basavanna has amply succeeded in making every subject he dealt with reach the heart of the reader. It is from his profound experience of life, from his penetrating insight, from his manifold knowledge and versatile genius that his imagination blossomed and figures and images emerged. His poetic fervour has not only revealed itself in his effective expression and thought but also set forth the various stages in the progress of his spiritual awareness. His genius has covered every shade of expression beginning from the utterance of seekers who have struggled with social inequalities and differences, to the joyous exclamation of the experience of Divine Bliss. This can be considered roughly

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in three stages: empirical consciousness, detached consciousness and transcendental consciousness.

The basic subject of poetry is the external world. But the greatness of poetry is decided by the spirit in which the poet reacts to it, and the inspiration he draws from it. Basavanna's poetic wisdom in the midst of all divisions and diversities of the world has flown in heavenly heights but always come down with compassion to lift up the earth. He says:

The body is the basket, mind the snake
See, how they live together,
The snake and the basket;
You have no notion when
It may kill you,
No notion when he bites;
O Kudala Sangama Lord,
If I can worship Thee
Day after day
That the charm.

The beautiful image of the basket and the snake express the empirical awareness of the seeker and also his inner urge to transcend it. In a large number of such Vacanas which are superb as artistic expressions, Basavanna has insisted on developing the empirical consciousness and on ascending higher and higher to transcend it.

The next step in the path of evolution may be called the 'detached consciousness.' It is also manifested vividly and effectively through poetic intuition in various Vacanas:

The body of an active devotee
Must be even as the trunk
Of a plantain-tree:

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When peel by peel, you strip
Its outer tegument,
There must not be a core behind.
Our own have swallowed
The excellent fruit
Along with the seed itself.
Mark you, Kudala Sangama Lord,
No more birth for me.

Here he suggests that work must be done in the spirit of absolute detachment.

He says that we should live in the midst of Samsara (worldly life) and be at seekers the same time. We need not run away from this world. Whatever walks of life we may be in, we have to attain a spirit of complete detachment which is possible only through intelligent work, i.e., Kayaka. He puts it effectively in this image: “Even a kite flying in the sky must have a leading-string; even a hero must exert himself; can a cart move without the ground?” Like a kite we have to fly; but we must not lose contact with the leading string of the world and the right discipline. Only then is it possible to say, as Basavanna has said:

This mortal world is but the Maker’s mint;
Those who earn merit here, earn also there
And those who earn not here, earn neither there
O Kudala Sangama Lord.
It is a beautiful symbol pregnant with suggestion.

The seeker who has achieved such absolute detachment will assuredly transcend all lower levels of consciousness and attain the ultimate height of ‘Samarasa prajna’ or ‘transcendental consciousness’ which is experienced as a result of the consubstantial union of the Anga and the Linga. We have

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already noted some of his Vacanas on the sublimity of the union. We may remember here how the fruit of his life grown in the soil of Bhakti was dedicated to Kudala Sanga. Annihilating the triple modes of impurities he sank into silence as light in the Great Light. Here is another Vacana :

After the eyes are filled, there's nought to see
After the ears are filled, there's nought to hear
After the hands are filled, there's nought to adore.
After the heart is filled, there's nought to think,
Of our great Lord Kudala Sangama.

Seeing, hearing, and worshipping—all these may be considered from the point of view of the physical expression of a common man, an intuitive expression of a poet, and the divine expression of a mystic. When the touch of the Divine is felt all around, eyes, ears, body, mind—all are filled to the brim with that experience.

In another Vacana he has expressed this Divine communion thus :

I was great than the greatest that there is
In the grand Absolute, sublimely great
How can I tell the way the word
That I am within the lofty light
Of Lord Kudala Sangama
Was turned to silentness?

And as he suggests in another Vacana light becomes a throne to light. Light mingles with light. Thus Basavanna can express even such deep and subtle thoughts and experiences, in plain and simple but powerful and suggestive words which are able to embody and communicate the vision of life.

As we read his vacanas we realize the truth of Aurobindo's statement on poetry; he says: "Poetry translates the truth of the higher plane of consciousness in the language of the lower one." Basavanna has translated the truth of all planes of consciousness in the language of the common people. His Vacanas incorporate all the feelings and all the levels that elevate and ennoble our life. The high spiritual ideals that he attained, his vision of life, the path he trod, the heights he scaled—all these have found expression in the form of Vacanas.

His closeness to the common man has given a new tinge of folk vigour to his language. He uses proverbs extensively and some of his sayings themselves have become proverbs. Besides being a social and religious revolutionary he has also caused revolution in Kannada literature, by restoring the living language of the people to its central place.

His mastery over the subtleties and possibilities of the language is unique and remarkable. He is a master in his word-pictures, achieving the maximum visual impact with the fewest words. His figures of speech, the nuances of his words and images, and his choice of chiselled words are an integration of painting and music. The special musical quality of his Vacanas cannot be translated into English. To that extent the Vacanas that are quoted here have lost their original artistic music-function, and have tried to retain only the meaning-function as far as possible. Even with this limitation it is possible to experience and realize to some extent, the beauty of expression, imagination, and emotional content of the Vacanas which are quoted in the body of the text.

In conclusion it may be said that Basaveshwara touched the very life-pulse of the people; enriched the literary and mystic traditions of the land, directed the aims and aspirations of the people towards an integrated vision of a whole life; and so

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achieved all that a spiritual movement can achieve. If some of the unavoidable elements incidental to the age are excluded, the ideal realized by Basaveshwara is for all times and climes.

We, of the modern age, it may be said, are better equipped to understand the significance of his revolution, the nature of society and religion he visualised, and the boldness he exhibited in carrying out in action what he preached (in words). His life and teachings, in which he anticipated the greatest of modern thinkers—Karl Marx and Mahatma Gandhi, shine as powerful beacons guiding mankind in its quest for perfection, and cast their brightest rays illuminating the lives of all who come near them.

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