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5. Contribution of Vachana Sahitya to Enrich the Kannada Literature

Dr. Nalini Avinash Waghmare

Introduction: The 12th century was a turning point in the cultural history of Karnataka. In the southern Karnataka Vaishnavism was gaining ground at the influence of the great philosopher Ramanuja. In northern Karnataka Virasaivism came to prominence under the dynamic leadership of Basaveshwara, Allama Prabhu, Channabasavanna, Siddharama and many others. They were progressive in their approach to social and religious problems. In short they brought about a socio-religious revolution. This movement enriched Kannada literature as it gave rise to a new pattern of writing, thus completing the evolution of old Kannada into medieval Kannada.¹

As stated Vachanas importance "Vachanas contain age long tested in the light of their own spiritual and practical experience in everyday life. Approach to all problems was based on realism, rationalism and scientific problems. Vachanas provide solutions to intricate problems in all walks of life. They rank very high and it is a unique contribution to the literature of the world". Nowhere and in no language such a literature exists. With the creation of Vachana literature new 'free age' began in Kannada literature. Hereafter literature became reflection of common man's life in its true sense. One advantage about the Vachanas was the ease with which they could be composed. The language was simple; there were no rules. Though Vachanas are not verse, it is possible to arrange each Vachana in lines of varying lengths. A Vachana could run from three to thirty-five lines; there were no restrictions as regards the number. Each Vachana end in an Ankita, the name of his personal Lord.²

Devara Dasimayya or 'Gods Dasimayya', who lived during the middle of the eleventh century or even earlier, has composed Vachanas of high literary value and he known as the first Vachanakara.³

Basaveshwara: Basaveshwara stands out as one of the most

1. K.R.Basavaraja, *Basaveshwara, His Life, Vision and Work*, Someshwara Publications, Dharwar, 2001, pp.564-565.

2. See for detail *Siddayya Purnanik -Basava Journal Silver Splendor*, Basava Samiti Bangalore, 2003, pp-337-347.

3. A.K.Ramanujan, *Speaking of Shiva*, Penguin Books India, 1973, p. 148.

outstanding personalities in the history of India. He was not only a socio-religious and economic philosopher but also a great literary scholar. His period is also called Vachana Yuga, because along with him, other Shivasaranas also wrote Vachanas. Instead of Sanskrit Kannada become a popular mass language of the people. His life and teachings have been a source of inspiration to millions of people in South India for the last nearly nine hundred years, and influenced and moulded their lives and continues to do so even to this day.

Basaveshwara and other Sharanas were to educate the masses about their new revolutionary ideas. People belonging to the lower section of society were illiterate and were forbidden to learn and hear anything from ancient scriptures like the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita and other texts, which were in Sanskrit. Therefore, Basaveshwara rightly chose the people's language, Kannada, to communicate his ideas. He and his associates expressed their ideas in the unique prose poetry style known as Vachanas (sayings). Literature of this lucid does not exist anywhere else, or in any other language. The devotees expressed their own spiritual and political experiences, to provide solutions to intricate problems in all walks of life.⁴ They became the literary medium of the medieval Virasaiva saints.

Basaveshwara established Anubhava Mantapa at Kalyana.⁵ Many Shivasaranas participated there. Almost all saints have sung their realization in different strains and expressed their views and opinions on men and society in varied sayings. The collection of these sayings is known as the Vachana Sahitya, the scripture of the Virasaiva faith.

Basaveshwara was a keen observer of life and nature. Many images, which he has employed, are fresh and original. He has employed innumerable images from the world of animal, plants, birds and insects. Basaveshwara like a good teacher, repeats his utterances, uses similar structures, and employs Sanskritic and Kannada phrases in the same construction. Sometimes, he uses rustic proverbs, idioms, and folk-beliefs to communicate his ideas to the people.

The number of Vachanas composed by Basava is 1426, and more Vachanas are discovered each year with the discovery of new

4. Virupakshappa, Basava and his teachings, Basava Samiti, Bangalore, 2002, p.26.

5. S.S.Wodeyar, Sri Basaveshwara, Eighth Centenary Commemoration Volume, Govt of Mysore, 1965, p.18.

manuscripts. His Vachanas may roughly be classified under a few headings: a few are purely didactic in nature; some are devoted exclusively to social criticism; a few contain self-criticism and express his inner conflict; some of them narrate the principles of Virasaivism; quite a few express his mystic experience.

Basava was a keen observer of life and nature. Many images which he has employed are fresh and original. He has employed innumerable images from the world of animal, plants, birds and insects. Basava like a good teacher, repeats his utterances, uses similar structures, employs Sanskritic and Kannada phrases in the same construction. Sometimes, he uses rustic proverbs, idioms, and folk-beliefs to communicate his ideas to the people.

His Vachanas: Basavanna's Vachanas have been arranged according to six phase (Satsthal) system into six large groups: Bhakta 'affective', Maheshwara 'Conative', Prasadi 'Cognitive', Pranalingi 'Intuitive', Sarana 'Executive', Aikya 'unitive'. Most of his Vachanas related to Bhakta Sthala and other six phase which are very valuable religion as well as literature point of view.

The Anubhava Mantapa which he established threw the doors of divinity open to all irrespective to their birth or worth, and the miracles happened; the lowest in society reached the highest place in the spiritual experiences in inimitable Vachanas or prose lyrics. The number of the Vachanakaras of the age of Basava is more than three hundred, including scores of women. Such a rich harvest was never reaped in any other country in any age that too from such neglected though virgin fields.⁶

Vachanas may be divided into two categories viz, traditional and general. If traditional vachanas are applicable to those who are initiated into Virasaivism the general Vachanas are applicable to the entire universe and making. The Basaveshwara's Vachanas included in the second category. Till today also his many of Vachanas influence the people and they changed their physical, mental and souly set up after learnt his Vachanas. These Vachanas works as nectar in this nuclear age.

Allama Prabhu: Allama Prabhu was foremost among Basaveshwara's colleagues, one of the prime ministers of the Virasaiva religious movement. He was also one of the 'jewels of Kannada culture'.

6. Siddayya Puranik, Epoch Makers of Kannada Literature, Basava Journal, Basava Samiti, Bangalore, 2003, pp 337-347.

"In the spiritual history of the Karnataka, Allama Prabhu's is a very great name. A man of surpassing intellect, his impact was epoch-making. Few mystics have attained greater heights. Although his fame and influence have been mostly restricted to the Karnataka, his message has an appeal and a dimension, which are universal"⁷

Allama Prabhu's Vachanas are at once so incisive and so comprehensive that, if known, it can enlighten all ages and all climes. "In Prabhu's Vachanas we find an original and independent thinking power that should not only amaze, but also endear him to the rational man of our day."

There is abundant material about Allama Prabhu's life.⁸ Prabhu is the author of the Satsthala Vachanas, which form an authoritative treatise on the Satsthala Siddhanta Lingasutra Nirnava Vachanas; Mantrogopya, Kalajnana Vachanas and other miscellaneous Vachanas and songs, all crammed with mystic experience and Shiva yogic practices.

He not only advocated that all ways lead to Atmajnana are the best, but also gave currency to the principles that embrace all religions. His was the religion of man, irrespective of caste, creed, colour and faith.

His Vachanas:

His Vachanas are beautiful but not simple. A section of his Vachanas is named as Bedagina Vachanas; Bedagu literally means grace, novel or even uncommon. The Vachanas are paradoxical in nature meaning one thing to a lay reader, but another to the initiated. The language of these Vachanas is comparable to the sadha bhasha of tantric texts.

About 1645 Vachanas of Allama are available now, though he is said to have composed 2 crore 77 lakh Vachanas. They examine the important philosophical tenets in the light of personal spiritual experience. His Vachanas may be called the sutras of Virasaiva Siddhanta. Guhesvara was the name by which Allama referred to God.⁹

Allama's Vachanas are short and packed with thought. Many of them are almost riddles. It has been possible to understand them only

7. S.C.Nandimath, L.M.A.Menezes and R.C.Hiremath, Sunyasampadane Vol. I, Karnataka University, Dharwar, 1965, p.1.

8. Harihara's Life of Prabhu or Camarasa's Prabhu Linga Life are too meager to make up an authentic life-account. His Vachanas, and Sunyasampadane gives us various thoughts of Allama Prabhu's life.

9. H.T.Sasnur, Elventh and Twelfth Century Kannada Literature, Ram Krishna Academy of Education and Culture, Bijapur, 1991, pp 79-81.

because of the commentaries on them. Allama's virakti, his jnana, his anubhava and his self-confidence are finely revealed in his Vachanas.¹⁰ He preached Shivatatwa through Kannada. Thus, Kannada literature and language have been enriched by the thoughts and words of Allama.

Chennabasavanna: "Chennabasavanna held a unique position among saranas. It was he who paying greater attention to exposition of Virasaiva Siddhanta in his Vachanas, gave it a complete shape and order and expounded it in a systematic manner". So during his day and even to this day, Chennabasavanna is considered an authority in matters relating to the philosophy and practices of Virasaivism.

While Basaveshwara was the embodiment of Bhakti, Chennabasavanna seemed to be Jnana incarnate.¹¹ In the discussions of the Anubhava Mantapa, on subjects ranging of Sunya or the Absolute Reality, he was an easy leader. He was the first perhaps, to systematize the Shatsthala doctrine. They called him by such titles as Mahajnani,¹² Svayambhjnani, Sadusthabrahmi¹³ and Sadusthalacakravarti.

Chennabasavanna had, in his brief life, time to make voluminous contribution to Kannada literature. He is the author of the following works: Satsthala Vachana,¹⁴ Karana Hasuge, Misrarpana, Hiriya Mantragopya, Pada Mantragopya, Sakilada Vachanagalu and works are also attributed to him Rajayogada Vachana and Rudra Bharatada Srsti.

His Vachanas:

Thus Chennabasavanna went about educating and alerting the emerging populist Virasaiva through his comments on the Marga as well as on the Desi traditions in a language characterized by bluntness, satire and challenge.¹⁵ In his Vachanas we find the search for truth, knowledge and experience, fearlessness and independence of judgment to challenge.

10. Ibid., p.80.

11. K.R.Basavaraja, Basaveshwara, His Life, Vision and Work, op, cit, p.565.

12. Menezes M.A. and Bhoosnurmath S.S, Sunyasampadane, Vol. III, Karnataka University Dharwar, 1969, V.62.

13. Menezes M.A. and Bhoosnurmath S.S, Sunyasampadane, Vol. II, Karnataka University Dharwar, 1968, V.35, P.274.

14. A Collection of all of Chennabasavanna's Vachanas, including these, has been published by Karnataka University, Dharwar, under the title 'Chennabasavannavara Vachanagalu'.

15. K.Ishwaran, Religion and Society among the Lingayats of South India, Vikas Publishing house, New Delhi, 1983., pp.55-56

Chennabasavanna's wrote above 2000 Vachanas, which are available now. In his every Vachana he said when outward action and inward consciousness are united all pollutions of body and mind cease. Chennabasavanna's doctrine that "work is knowledge and knowledge is work" was a truth that seekers cherished as the breath of their being.

Siddharama : Siddharama was one of the well-known personalities of the twelfth century. He was a devotee of god and belonged probably to the Lakulisa-Pasupatha Saiva sect. He was a social worker with the zeal of a missionary. He was certainly an historical person, since references to him are found as Siddharama of Sonnalige, the present Sholapur, and Maharashtra. Here can be seen to this day the Lingas he installed, the temples and tanks he built and other relics of his activity. Mention of his name can also be found in Virasaiva literature. Not only Literary,¹⁶ but also some inscriptions give us information about Siddharama of Sholapur.¹⁷

His Vachanas: He believed that mere birth, reading, preaching, or puja (worship) did not make a man great, for greatness could be achieved only by realizing the light within oneself. He wrote about 1378 Vachanas, mainly on these themes. His Vachanas are in very simple language, and explained his belief in Ishwara (God), Jiva (life), and Prakruti (nature).

In his Vachanas we find the experience of life, meaningful message, Shatsthala's importance and Ashtavarana. Siddharama was a spiritual force who played an important role in the Virasaiva movement. Prabhudeva and Akkamahadevi belong to one type; Basवेश्वरा and Siddharama belong to another type. They are Bhakti Oriented.

It would not be an exaggeration if it is said that Siddharama excels many Vachana writers in the art of expressing difficult subjects in

16. Palkurike Samantha's Someshwara Purana, Virakta Tontadarya's work Siddheshwara Purana, Shantalingeshwara Bhalraveswara Kavyakatha Sutra Ratnakara, Lakkanna Dandesa's Sivatatva-Chintamani, Raghavanka's Siddharama Charitra, Harihara's Prabhudevara Ragale, Bhlmakaviya Basavapurana, Jayadevi Lingade, Siddharameshwara Purana etc. In all these Virasaiva prose, Kavya and Puranas we find the mentioned the name of Siddharameshwara. And also his name mentioned in Sunyasampadane.

17. Sangamesh Savadattimatha, Bayala Karanika, memorial volume of Silver Jubilee celebration of P.Shivayogishwara Maharswamiji, Bhatambra Bhalki 2000, p.207 (Kannada).

a most perspicuous way. His Vachanas do not abound in technical terms common to the Virasaiva philosophy. So, we find simplicity not symbolism in his Vachanas.

Akkamahadevi : Akkamahadevi is perhaps one of the greatest saints of Karnataka and is comparable to Mirabai of Rajasthan and Andal of Tamil Nadu. Akkamahadevi has composed some of the finest Vachanas, which are lyrical in nature. They tell us of all the turmoil and conflict she experienced in her spiritual journey. As far as literary quality is concerned, her compositions are next only to those of Basवेश्वरा.

Mahadevi's Vachanas that were once important only to a certain sect have now universal appeal because of their cosmic vision and lofty ideals. These Vachanas are poetry of the highest order, which reveal the towering personality of Mahadevi. Some other literary sources also give us information about the Akkamahadevi.¹⁸ Her sayings in different periods of her life contain eternal truths. These may be taken to be her teachings.

Her Vachanas: Mahadevi took active interest in the deliberations of the Anubhava Mantapa and her discussions testify to her profound knowledge and wisdom. Mahadevi work in the shape of literary output is very meager in quantity. Instead of spending time in writing poetry, she lived poetry. For we know of only about 360 Vachanas. She was the author of a few other works: Yoganga Trividhi, Srstiya Vachana, Padagalu and Akkagala Pithike.¹⁹

Her sayings in different periods of her life contain eternal truths. These may be taken to be her teachings. The striking features of Mahadevi's Vachanas are:²⁰

1. The ultimateness of spiritual values to be obtained by inward honestly and cultivation of the inner life.
2. The need for a holy or whole development of life.
3. A positive attitude of sympathy for all. Even the lowly and the lost.

Akkamahadevi was a great poetess of nature, who had realized the mystery of beauty, truth and goodness. Like other Bhaktas, her struggle

18. To know history of Akkamahadevi, we have to refer the Harihara's work Mahadeviyakkana Ragale, Camarasa's Prabhulingalingalle and Sunyasampadane.

19. S.S.Bhoosnurmath and Armando Menezes, Sunyasampadane, Vol.IV, University of Dharwar, 1970, p.267.

20. H.T.Sasnur, Eleventh and Twelfth Century Kannada Literature, op.cit., pp 87-97.

was with her condition, as body, as woman, as a social being tyrannized by social roles, as a human confined to a place and a time.²¹

Akkamahadevi occupies a unique place in the annals of women all over the world. Her uniqueness springs from the fact that she was a combination of the spirit of independence, will power, courage, renunciation, mystic, insights and poetic fervor. Her Vachanas are among some of the earliest literary compositions by women in the country. Akkamahadevi's contribution in terms of mystic vision and poetic imagery has enriched Vachana literature immensely.

It should be kept in mind that Akkamahadevi did not assume the garb of a preceptor to expound truth and the mystery of the universe. The be-all and end-all of her life was to see God face to face and become a part and parcel of that infinite power. For this she dedicated her life. It may be said that her life is an unbroken period of austere meditation on the highest. With this meditation she made her life attuned to the infinite.

The other Vachanakaras:²² The lives of various Virasaiva women writers and their Vachanas are a proof of the fact that the spirit of equality pervaded the atmosphere that prevailed in the twelfth century Karnataka. The 33 Sivasaraneyu's rose, like the phonetic, out of their own ashes and breathed the fresh air of freedom; became conscious of their rights to seek their salvation, to work and worship along with their made counterparts, to share God experience with fellow devotees. They shed the vestiges of caste, creed and gender, and stood out as 'liberated souls'. Their Vachanas are an expression of their souls yearning for union with the absolute void. In the unprecedented harvest of Vachanas the Virasaiva women's share was in no way small. Both in quality and in quantity the women's Vachanas were rated high.²³

In their Vachanas Madivala Machayya and Ambigara Chaudayya expressed themselves against social injustices and evils. The Vachanas of Urilingadeva and Gajesa Masanayya are some of the best utterances of the mystic. Further the Vachanas of Moligeaya Marayya, Dohara, Madivala Madara Dhulayya, Ghattivalayya are of great social, religious

21. A.K.Ramanujan, Speaking of Siva, op.cit., p.114.

22. For detail Samagra Vacanas Samputa, 15 Volumes, Government of Karnataka, Kannada and Sanskrit Department, Bangalore, 1993

23. See for detail C.R.Yaravintelimath, Translated, Vacanas of Women saints, Basava Samithi, Sri Basaveshwara Circle, Bangalore, 2006, pp 17-18.

and poetic value.²⁴ Thus the emergence of Virasaivism opened not only a new avenue in Kannada literature but also made it clear that Kannada was equally, if not more, a convenient medium for communicating religious, philosophic and mystic thoughts.

Conclusion: Vachana writing has become a literary style in Kannada throughout the centuries since the 12th century which was then pioneered by Basava and other 770 Shivasaranas. The Vachanas represent a continuous tradition of original writing, spanning eight centuries from the time of Basavanna to the present day. Poet Harihara in the 13th century and Bhimakavi make copious and contextual use of the Vacanas in their poetic biographies of the Saranas. Under the auspices of Lingayat institutions, in the next three centuries, 15th to 17th the Vachana literature was consolidated through painstaking compilation of the Vachanas of Saranas and creative commentaries on them. The magnum opus of this period is the Sunyasamapadane compiled during the 15th and 16th centuries. It is a collection of the religious debated in the Hall of Siva experience and a selectively edited collection of the Vachanas of dynamic tradition of Lingayat religious thought.

Today this tradition is continued under the auspices of modern Universities and traditional Mathas, each complementing the other. It is because of this living and continuous tradition that the original flame of the Vachanas has not been dimmed by the passage of time. Their inspiration continues to be an important resource in the preservation and progress of the community. The influence of the Vachanas is extensive over the whole of Karnataka, and has been instrumental in the effective propagation of the non-Bhakti tradition of the Saranas, their religion, their ethics and values, because of this tradition the Basava's thoughts still follower the many Virasaivas as well as other lover of literature went through his Vachanas and find their own path to get the salvation.

The liberty, equality, brotherhood and humanity the message Vachanakaras are not confined to any particular region or person but all men and women of nations of the world. The need of the hour is to practice and profess the ideas of Vachanakaras in these days of burning issues like poverty, unemployment, inequality etc. On the whole

24. For detail Samagra Vacanas Samputa, 15 Volumes, Government of Karnataka, Kannada and Sanskrit Department, Bangalore, 1993.

Vachana literature has enriched the Kannada language. Simple, chaste, sincere words coming from the innermost heart certainly captured the hearts of the people of those days and today also.

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