

**Veerashaiva Concept and Folk Tradition
in Basaveshwar's Vachanas
Roopa Shrinivas**

Associate Professor, Dept of English, Government First Grade College,
Dharwad.

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ABSTRACT:

Basavanna was a philosopher and a social reformer in 12th century Karnataka, the paper represents on folk tradition in Basavanna Vachanas, the paper explores the important vachanas which are related folk language and folk communication. Basavanna accepted that men and women of all castes and creeds as social equals and his encouragement of inter-caste marriages infuriated the King and some of his hide-bound followers. The paper deliberate the laying down the path of spiritual advancement and social reconstruction based on free thinking. This unique institution has few parallels in the religious history of the world.

KEYWORDS:

folk tradition, philosophy, God, salvation, vachanas, religious, oneness, equality.

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Shri Basaveshwara stands out as one of the most outstanding personalities in the religious history of India. He dominates the scene across the centuries liken colossus. His life and teachings have been a source of inspiration to millions of people in South India for the last eight hundred years and more and have influenced their way of living. His folk tradition and teachings are very relevant even today to the strife-torn world and to our countrymen in particular when the common men under the stress of poverty and want in a society bereft of moral values is perplexed and frustrated and is showing symptoms of gathering anger and indignation. It is good for us to recapitulate the ideals and folk tradition of great and noble saints like Basaveshwara and try to find solutions to our problems and solace to our disturbed minds, in the light of those ideals.

Basaveshwara was a Universal Man who believed in One God. One World and One Humanity. He believed that compassion for all living beings is the very foundation of any great religion. His love embraced all living beings. The message of Basava like that of Buddha is a message of

love and compassion. His vachanas bristle with examples of his boundless compassion. Numerous are the stories about his acts of kindness, not only to fellow human beings, but on to animals and other living beings. The story is to of how when once his cows were stolen by thieves, and when it was reported to him by the servants, he ordered them to take the calves and hand them over to the thieves, so that the calves would be with their mother cows. His mind could think of nothing else at that time but of the suffering of the young calves. All life was sacred to him. In one of his oft-quoted vachanas he has said. "That man is really devout, that man is really religious, that man is Godly who wishes well of all living beings, of life wherever it throbs." Such was the magnanimity and nobility of his soul. Dr. Schweitzer, the great humanitarian doctor of the twentieth century, in a flash of mystic illumination called this all-embracing love "Reverence for life" and he elaborated this by saying, "I am life which wills to live in the midst of life which wills to live. I must therefore revere my own life and the life around me. A man is ethical only when life as such is sacred to him, that of plants and animals, as that of his fellowmen, and that when he devotes himself helpfully to all life that is in need of help." (S. S. Basavanal and K. R. Srinivas Iyengar 1941)

Basaveshwara spoke these very words nearly eight hundred years ago. One is reminded of Christ when one reads the outpouring of his heart as he saw an innocent lamb being brought to the sacrificial altar to be slaughtered. The following lines speak eloquently of the anguish of his marrow at the pitiable sight:

**"O dear lamb,
 Cry unto the Lord and lay.
 Thy cause before Him.
 In vain are you being slain
 Cry, cry before them
 That have read the Vedas.
 Cry, cry before them that have read the shastras
 Thou shalt surely be avenged"!**

(Sadashiva Wadeyar 1975)

Basaveshwara was not a saint interested in his own salvation, but a godly man who wanted to see all human beings happy and contented. He did not believe in running away from life. For him 'life is real and life is earnest,' and one can attain salvation only through leading a good life on this very earth on which we are born. He said, "The world is the

Lord's mint. The coin that is good here will be good in heaven. One who is accepted as good in this world is acceptable in heaven as well." (Hardekar Manjappa 1966) At the time when Shri Basaveshwara came on the scene the old Varnashrama dharma was showing signs of decay. The old order had created in the society a feeling of high and low between the different sections. The accident of birth decided man's caste. A man born in a lower caste was condemned to an inferior status and to do menial jobs in the service of the people belonging to higher castes. Basaveshwara revived the Veerashaiva dharma which he adopted and placed on a broad base founded on the principles of justice and equality for all mankind and restored the status of man in all his human dignity. As Prof. Gokak very tersely puts it. "To a society petrified into castes and creeds, he came as the great deliverer, preaching oneness and equality, equating the pariah with the Brahmin, and the bearer with the prince. All were equal in the eyes of God and comparative greatness was one of proximity to God. Greatness did not depend on the accident of birth or caste. He thought of human society as a democracy of souls with inherent respect and affection for all." (Hardekar Manjappa 1966)

Social equality was the very breath of Basaveshwara's folk tradition and philosophy. He advocated equal status to all human beings and gave promise of salvation to everyone who led a virtuous life. He provided in Veerashaivism a firm social base on which the society of mankind could be organized, free from all man-made distinctions of any kind and the resultant bickering. He headed the movement which was revolutionary and a democratic movement for the emancipation of the down-trodden. It is interesting to note that each one of these is the author of vachanas and other writings. He preached to them in their own language and through them brought about a revolutionary change in the contemporary society with remarkable success. A mass of newly awakened people surged towards him to form a community enthused by high ideals and a zeal for better life, which in a brief span of time attained a level of culture of which any country could be proud.

The impact of the new movement on the society was so great that seekers from different, sometimes very distant parts of the country, flocked to Kalyan, where, during the reign of Bijjala, the Kalchurya King, the 'Anubhava Mantapa' had been established. To this 'Mantapa' came Jommayya from Andhra, Adayya from Saurashtra, and from far off Kash-

mir came a prince called Moligeaya Marayya. So revolutionary was the nucleus of the Utopian ginger group that with the blessings of Basaveshwara they brought about a marriage between the daughter of Madarasa, a Brahmin, with the son of Haralayya, a Harijan. The orthodox society was shocked and dazed. It evoked the wrath of the tradition-minded people. In fact, Basaveshwara was the first to speak of the eradication of untouchability in this country, and the first to think of an egalitarian society, thereby anticipating nearly eight hundred years ago, the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi regarding Harijan uplift and Sarvodaya. He strongly deprecated the idea of treating a fellow human being as an untouchable. Arthur Miles in his book *The Land of the Lingam*, paying glowing tributes to Basaveshwara has said. "Whatever legend may say about Basava, the fact is pretty clear that he was the first Indian free thinker. He can be called the Luther of India. Basava mounted the rostrum for the abolition of caste and ceremonies and proclaimed that all men are by birth equal." (S. S. Basavanal and K. R. Srinivas Iyengar 1941)

The principle of Kayaka enunciated another great message for humanity for all time; that is, as long as man is prepared to work, there can be no poverty. A man who is prepared to put in honest labour need not be afraid of poverty my time. He is rich in mind and spirit. Even the ghost of poverty will shudder to come near him because he is ready to put in honest labour and such a man can never be in want or need. Kayaka is the highest form of worship. It is heaven itself. While enunciating the moral and religious value of Kayaka, Basaveshwara goes to the extent of saying that there can be nothing more pleasing to God than s devotee who is engrossed in work. In a beautiful vachana it is said that is a man is engrossed in work, it is no sin to forget his daily worship or his Guru or Jangama, for work itself is heaven.

Work has its own pleasure. They can be no greater pleasure than being engrossed in one's work. The pleasure that a man derives out of work is something unique. A man engrossed in work enjoys a bliss which is likened to that of a bee which is encompassed by fragrant nectar. A life of honest labour is the life of one who is really dedicated to God. It is much better to earn one's living with the sweat of one's brow than carry on a parasitical existence. In a beautiful vachana Basaveshwara says:

**"He who works on the soil, toils hard with his body
Consecrates to the Lord**

**The food that is thus earned
 And shares it with others
 Show me, Oh Lord, the feet of such a devotee as this.
 His body is pure
 His mind is pure, his conduct is pure;
 The words that he speaks are holy
 That Teacher is great who has such one as his disciple
 His home is a veritable Kailasa
 Enter Ye into this Kailasa and worship the Lord
 I bow to such devotee.”**

(Sadashiva Wadeyar 1975)

In whatever he did, Basaveshwara always had the common man in view. He wanted that his folk communication and teachings should reach the minds and hearts of the common man. Till then, most works in philosophy and theology were in Sanskrit, which was the language of the elite. Basaveshwara wanted to bring philosophy out of the musty shelves of the mathas and monasteries to the common man. Therefore, he discarded the idea of writing in Sanskrit, the language of the elite and wrote in simple Kannada. He couched his teachings in simple prose lyrics of rare felicity in Kannada, known as vachanas. They are the spontaneous outpourings of the deep-felt feelings of his rich and sensitive mind. They are in the language of the common man, simple and unsophisticated but at the same time, elegant and embodying noble ideas and the highest truths of religion.

The greatness of vachanas is that they can touch the hearts and minds of even the humblest of men. Their verbal suppleness, and their simplicity and felicity of language, have endowed them with a cadence and an appeal rarely achieved by poetry in any language. This form of literature was adopted by many Sharanas and saints belonging to other faiths in later times. Thus, it was Basaveshwara who started the movement to bring philosophy out of the closets of pundits, from the heights of inaccessible Sanskrit scholarship down to the knowledge of the common man. He was thus a pioneer of a great democratic movement in literature.

Look at this picture of the beloved waiting for her lover in tremulous expectancy:

**“I hang the cage; I pour the oil
 Into the lamp; I trim the wick;
 When will he come my Lord?”**

As a leaf crackles. I prick
My ears, My heart is cold and sick
When will he come, my Lord?"

Look at the lovely image to describe the plight of the man whose senses are uncontrolled and going astray:

"Is the master of the house gone out?
Or is he in?
Upon the threshold, grasses sprout;
The house is just
A bowl of dust
Is the master of the house gone out
Or is he in?
When falsehood does infect your flesh
And your heart is a sensual mesh
The master of the house
Cannot be in, cannot be in."

(Sadashiva Wadeyar1975)

In all his teachings, the emphasis was always on ethical and moral values. He viewed with contempt falsehood and hypocrisy. Through homely similes and dicta, he tried to teach the common people to lead a pure, simple and virtuous life. He has left in the vachanas a treasure-house of ethical and moral teachings which can give solace, peace, contentment and happiness to human beings at all times if only they would read and try to understand them. In a single Vachana he gives simple dicta of good life which remind one of the Ten Commandments in the Bible.

"These Commandments engrave in thy heart;
Thou shalt not steal.
Nor kill.
Let no falsehood foul thy tongue.
Be angry with no one.
Bear with one another.
Do not scorn other men.
Do not blame others.
This is your inward purity.
This is your outward purity.
This is the way to find favour with God."

(Sadashiva Wadeyar 1975)

The influence of this great man's teachings has not been in vain. In the bedrock of the society having faith in his folk tradition, these values are still alive and they still influence the conduct and behaviour of the

people and exercise a holy and benign influence on their way of life. It may well be asked whether Basava succeeded in his mission.

Conclusion: The Kayaka doctrine underlines another basic faith of Veerashaiva concept that the world is real and not Maya. It is opposed to a man going to the forest for meditation. It is against Sanyasa or renunciation. It is rooted in life, and believes that any human being can attain salvation by leading a good life and the best and the surest way of leading a good life is dedicating one's life to work. Basaveshwera condemned laziness and parasitism in the name of asceticism. According to him, everyone must be an earning member of society. By ensuring this he wanted to build up a self-sufficient and self-reliant society.

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