



Transformation through literature: A study of vachana literature and its impact on society

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Abstract—The popular adage that Pen is mightier than a Gun holds good when it comes to literature. Many social maladies like dowry, child marriage, gender discrimination, fascism and other problems spanning a human being's life culturally, economically, sociologically and politically have been set right due to such mighty writings springing from a humble pen and a mighty mind. This author has focused on Basavanna's Vachana Literature, to examine the social construction prevailing during Basavanna's times and the enormous impact it created in his times that continues to hold good even today present times. English translation of his works have been used in this paper for research purposes. Basavanna became the pivotal force behind the 12th century bhakti movement and the vachana literature written during his times attempted to simplify life and religion. It goaded and nudged people to follow dharma, righteousness and not to believe superstitions. Although millions of vachanas were penned, many have been lost with still hundreds of thousands having seen the day.

Keywords—Literature, Transformation, Basavanna, Vachana Literature, Bhakthi Movement, 12th Century.

I. INTRODUCTION

Basavanna was a great human being, social reformer, and founder of Veerashivism., lingayat religion. He spearheaded the Veerashiva bhakti movement where he preached a new way of life wherein the divine experience is the center of life regardless of gender, belief, tradition, religion, caste or social status. The main philosophy of Veerashivism is based on the principle of kayaka ve kailasa, which means karma or work is the way to kailasa , the abode of shiva.

Basavanna and other saints, who were also called as shiva sharanas (devotees of lord shiva) of veerashaivism propagated their vachanas which means speech or 'said' , poems of devotional nature that propagated the ideals of veerashivism . They communicated their beliefs and ideals in Kannada, the common man's language, instead of Sanskrit which was the language understood only by the elite class and Brahmins.

The movement opened a new chapter in the chronicles of Kannada literature and gave a literature of considerable value in the vernacular language of the country – the literature which attained the dignity of a classical tongue.

II. BASAVANNA AND VACHANAS

Vachanas criticized the rigid society which had placed importance on mere rituals and caste system than human values and love of mankind. It was comprised of the day to day experiences and events of a common man speaking in a common language that everyone can understand. Vachanas dissented from the majoritarian views in accordance with hindu view of relationship between god and devotee and the caste division.

Basavanna's vachanas had concept of devotion and reformation making them very much relevant in the contemporary society. In the 12th century the practice of worshipping many gods and goddesses in the form of idols

was much common. Basava and other Shiva sharanas condemned this practice and advocated monotheism (Belief in one supreme god).

Basava says –
 “God is but one many his names,
 The faithful wife knows but one lord,
 Should she fall for another man?
 He chops her nose and ears!
 Should i, O Kudalasangama Lord;
 Regard them as sort that eat
 The crumbs of several gods? And
 “Do not say swollen with pride.
 The gods are two or three:
 Mark, you, He is but one,
 That there are two is just a lie.
 The veda says, there is none,
 But Kudala sangama”.

Thus, there is only one god. He is all pervading he is absolute Parabrahman (“highest brahman”) absolute reality and he is parasiva (lord shiva). His another name is soorya (absolute void or bayalu) . The one from which everything is evolved and again merges in is shoonya. It is infinity. it is linga . The shoonya conceals in it countless billions of universes and all that could exist beyond that. It is Sat chit ananada (truth-consciousness bliss). It is beyond space and time as conceived by science, Linga represents boundless space and whatever exists beyondthat, as aptly explained by Basavanna

Basavanna had declared that compassion is the root of religion. Without compassion no religion can function meaningfully. Therefore all its activities should be based on compassion. He says:

“What sort of a religion can it be
 Without compassion?
 Compassion needs must be
 Towards all living beings.
 Compassion is the root of
 All religious faiths:
 Lord Kudalasangama does not care,
 For what is not like this”.

Basavanna himself was compassion incarnate. His heart melted for poor, down trodden and all living beings. He was guided by this principle in all his actions throughout his life

He was against caste system and promoted equality among all people irrespective of their caste and creed. In one of his vachanas he says:

“The man who slays is pariah,
 The man who eats carrion is low caste person .
 Where is the caste here- where?
 Our kudala sanga’s sharana ,
 Who loves all living beings.
 He is the well born one!”

Based on above vacahanas, Basavanna tried to establish equality among all human beings by igniting divinity hidden in them. He regarded divinity as an equalising factor. He tried to eradicate untouchability by giving freedom of worship to low caste people. In those days untouchables were not allowed to enter the temples. Even now the situation has not changed much. He admitted them to Lingayath religion, gave them Ishtalinga, the symbol of parashiva for worship, without any mediation of priests and without entering the temples and preached them to live a life of austerity. He disagreed with the priestly mediation between god and devotee, rather he said that an individual can develop direct connection with the god through antha ranga shuddhi (inner purity) and bahiranga shuddi (external purity)

Don’t say that day, this day, another day
 To one who bows to shiva , today,
 Must ever be the day!
 To one who bows to hara
 Today is ever be the day!
 To one remembering ceaselessly
 Our Kudala sangama today
 Must ever be the day!

There are no good or bad days. There are no good or bad dates, auspicious or inauspicious time in the eyes of god. Every fraction of time is auspicious in the lords’s creation. the devotee who remembers god always is under the grace and protection . Basavanna tried to eradicate these kinds of superstitions from the society completely. And he also opposed astrology and marriages based on horoscopic considerations. He never wanted people to be superstitious, rather he wanted people to be rational and question the practises and traditions instead of following them blindly without any reason.

The Vachana literature which was propagated by Basavanna and his disciples had a revolutionary impact on the grief ridden Hindu society. The vachanas spoke for the people and their sufferings under the orthodox Vedic

traditions. Before the raise of Veerashaivism the society was characterised by idol worship of many deities, superstitions, sacrificing of animals for deities. The society had clear caste segregation and practised the inhumane untouchability.

The untouchables were not allowed to worship nor enter the temples by upper classes. People blindly believed in the traditions and rituals which were imposed by the elite classes without going against them or questioning them. The vachanas were composed and used by the shiva sharanas to build an egalitarian society. Basavanna wrote his vachanas under the ankita nama (pen name) called 'kudala sangama'. Similarly the following shiva sharanas used their respective pen names drawing inspirations from their divine connections. Vachanas cover philosophical, scientific, logical, cosmological, rational and other abstract and mystic concepts leading to the divinity and experience of truth.

III. CONCLUSION

Literature is the most powerful weapon which has the ability to transform the society and influence the opinions and beliefs of people over masses. Through literature man has found the purpose to live and explore the meaning of life. Vachanas, which was written and propagated by Basavanna and other shiva sharanas, had transformed the society in the 12th century and lit the spark of revolution. The contemporary society which is dominated by the materialism and ignorance has lost the moral and human values. Even today the society faces the same problems and obstacles which had challenged the social equality, centuries ago. So, Vachanas are applicable even today and can help us to transform our life making it more meaningful and purposeful.

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