

Value of devotion (Bhakti) in the vachanas of women vachanakartas

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In medieval India, devotion was not only a value of poetry but also a value of life. There are many reasons for it, we can note the Mohammedan invasions in the tenth to twelfth centuries, the inter-imperial attitudes of the Indian kings and the shifts in religious life. By the 12th century, the entire continent of India had reached a state of discovery of a new literary trend. Moving on from the epics, literature shifts its focus to a devotional value proposition. At the beginning of the history of medieval India, the decline of Buddhism, deviation from Jainism, and some superstitions in Vedic religion started to disturb the religious life of a person. As a result, Bhakti movements started. In the Middle Ages, devotion was the supreme value of literature and life. The Bhakti tradition asserted that devotion to overcome human suffering is ultimately the only way for believers to believe in God. Bhakti Sahitya was the literature that made devotees to devote. This is why geniuses like Kabir, Chaitanya, Ramdas, Meerabai, Tulsidas etc. became famous in this regard. Vachana movement in Kannada land without these sublimations of Veerashaiva values a huge number of vachanas were narrated and recited. This is how devotional literature grew.

The 12th century is a period where Shivasharans are seen everywhere in Kannada history. Kayak(work) and Dasoha is the time when these values are fully functional. This was the era when the dream of an equal society was realized. It is a century where there is no dichotomy between the educated class and the Dalit class. Maudya nailed and cornered. It was the golden moment when a new commentary was written and it was the time to merge with the transcendental God through devotion. All these changes and the feeling of working and sharing food had sprouted. There are no upper and lower class here and all are equal. Witnessing the very exciting event of Kannada and during this time women became poets for the very first time. Among them, hundreds of vachanakaras like Akkamahadevi, Muktayakka, Akkamma, Satyakka,

Lakkamma etc. have given their own contribution to vachana literature and especially to the devotional tradition. In it we find some devotional verses spoken by Akkamahadevi.

When some devotees asked about husband in Anubhava Mantapa, Akka replied by saying that 'Chennamallikarjuna is her husband and the rest of the world is not related to her.'

Everything is seen as Chennamallikarjuna's maya for Akka, who has entered Shri Giri. By singing Vanavella nīve, vanadoḷagaṇa dēvataruvella nīve, taruvinoḷagāḍuva khagamṛgagaḷella nīve Chennamallikārjuna sarvabharitanāgi enagēke mukha dore?' she entered the forest of Kadali.

For Parama Pativrata, husband is the only one, for Sarana, everything is the deity of her choice. Every bhakti she does is dedicated to her favorite deity. The aim of surrendering was to join her master. Akka is no exception. She has expressed in this verse that no matter where the flow of her life revolves, Chennamallikarjuna is her husband, the love of God, everything. So her mind was not attracted to the men of the world.

Ihakkobba gaṇḍanē? Parakobba gaṇḍanē?
Laukikakobba gaṇḍanē? Pāramārthakobba gaṇḍanē?
Nanna gaṇḍa chennamallikārjuna dēvarallade
mikkina gaṇḍarella mugilamareya baṇṇada gombeyante(3)

In this vachana, Akkamahadevi bemoaned Chennamallikarjuna in the fireless fire of his absence.

Kiḍi kiḍi kedaridare
enage hasivu tṛṣe aḍagittembenu!
Mugilu haridu biddare
enage majjana keredare antēnu
giri mēle biddare enage puṣpavembenu!
Chennamallikārjunayya śira haridu biddare
prāṇa nimagarpitavembenu (4)

In this one verse, we know how Akka's morale, determination and courage are. Chennamallikarjuna's unwavering devotion to Akka's longing for Pranavallabhan without the need of life moves God himself. She marries her husband Chennamallikarjuna, who has swallowed and digested spirituality. She gives eternal life that never leaves. Thus Mahadeviakka's devotion was devoted to Chennamallikarjuna.

Similarly, we see the devotion of Vachankarti Neelambike in her Vachanas.

Hṛdayada madhyadallondu jyōtiya mane hutṭittu
ā jyōtiya madhyadalli spaṭikada tanu beḷagittu
ā beḷagida tanu madhyadalli marujēvaṇiya kuḍi
hesarillada rūpāyittu basavaṅge saṅgayyā (5)

In this whole verse Neelambike had great devotion to her worldly husband Basavanna in the form of God. Basavanna's personality is vivid in her verses. It seems to highlight her ingenuity. Then Nagalambike continued like this and expressed her devotion in verses. At a time when girls were seen as Shudras, she emerged as a good vachanakarti with the help of Basavanna and became spiritually successful. As Nagalambike had great devotion to Basavanna, this is the vachana she uttered as she was saddened by his passing away.

Bhaktiya tavanidhiye basavā
Muktiya mārutīya basavā
Līṅga jaṅgamada chaitan'yavē basavā nimma nagaliyāṇentu sairisuvenu ele ayyā basava?
Ele parama guruve basavā
āhā! Ennataragada jyōtiye basavā?(6)

She lamented in this way. Although she praised Basavanna, she worshiped him as her guru. Another Vachanakarthi who came later, Moligeya Mahadevi, though she was the wife of the King of Kashmir, gave up all pleasures and came to Kalyan and showed her loyalty in Kayaka and Linga Bhakti. We can see it in her words.

Kāyavulḷannakka liṅgapūje ātmavulḷannakka arivina bhēda
puruṣa nī sati nānembali ubhayada bīja, nā nīnembannakka
agada liṅgadalliye niranvāgabēku
ennaya priya immaḍi niḥkaḷaṅka mallikārjunā (7)

Thus, should find eternal happiness in Linga Puja. Mahadevi informs her husband about Bhakti that it is not good for a devotee to go to Kailasa with a heart of stone.

Kalavva, another Vachanakarthi, was well versed in Kannada as well as Sanskrit. She wrote the ankitha of her verses as Urilinga Peddigalarasa. This is a testimony to her husband's devotion. This is how the Vachana of Kalavve was created by giving the example of the wood used in making the dishes in the kitchen.

Tobara kolliyante urivāta bhaktane?
Husidu tandu māḍuvāta bhaktane?
Bhaktara kulavanetti nindisuvāta bhaktane?
Nindayā śivabhaktanām kōṭi janmavi sūkaraḥ |
sūpta janmavi kuṣṭhi san dāsīgarbhēṣu jāyatē |
embudāgi tanna prāṇada mēle bandaru barali ivara biḍabēku.
Biḍadiralu urilinga peddigalarasanollaravvā (8)

From this vachana, the greatness of Kalavva's Lokanubhava Shivanubhava can be seen. A devotee should be calm, a devotee should not be like burning wood that does not burn in oil. A devotee is one who does truth and purity. No one can become a devotee by birth. Kalavve has asserted the image of her devotion and loyalty in the verse that those who speak and act well are devotees.

Another vachanakarti Hadapada Lingamma has brought out all the feelings of her mind in the form of vachana. She says this in one of her verses on spirituality. 'Chandralōkakke hōgibarabahudu huliyannu kaṭṭihākabahudu. Ādare hariva manavannu ēkāragoḷisuvudu kaṭṭiṇa,

manas'su ēkāragoḷḷade daiva sānidhya paḍeyuvudu kaṭhiṇa(9). ('You can go to Chandralok and tie a tiger. But it is difficult to concentrate the flowing mind, it is difficult to get closeness to God without concentrating the mind.) She has described that difficult path convincingly with the examples of water, sunshine, birds and mirrors. Lingamma is not ordinary, she has reached unity. She has reached the pinnacle of spirituality by achieving Shivayoga with the strength of devotion, loyalty and dispassion.

Kadire Remmavva was a spinner of shiva sharana wheel, Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra are Ishtalinga Pranalinga Bhavlingas respectively. She has said that by adjusting both action and knowledge and moving with abhinnabhava knowingly attains Paramasukha. Thus, the Vachanas have compared the beautiful Vachanas to the Kayakas and have found the meaning of their devotion in the Kayaka itself.

In a selection, Lakkamma says that 'garvadinda māḍuva bhakti dravyada kēḍu, naḍeyillada nuḍi ariviṅge hāni(10). (Bhakti done with pride is bad for material, speech without action is bad for knowledge.) Any bhakti should be done with calmness of mind. It should not be done out of arrogance as it is futile, just as ill-mannered speech causes unwitting harm. 'Dṛḍhavallada bhakti aḍi oḍeda kumbhadali sujala tumbidante mārayya priya amarēśvara liṅgava muṭṭada bhakti.'(11) In this verse devotion without any unwavering mind is like filling a broken vessel with water. She has informed about Bhakti that it does not remain in our heart.

Another Vachankarti is Amuge Rayamma. She is a famous orator. She wouldn't be able to see the scumbags. Why love without devotion, knowledge and dispassion? She asks. In the revelation, she showed disdain for those who live hypocritical lives in the guise of devotees.

Mūgilladavaṅge kannaḍiya tōralēke? Kaiyilladavaṅge kudureyanēralēke? Kālillavaṅge niccaṇikeyanēralēke?

Bhakti, jñāna, vairāgyavilladavaṅge iṣṭaliṅgavēke?

Amugēśvarā? (12)

In this verse, Ammuge Rayamma has harshly questioned those who are not in the position of Bhakti. In this way, the vachanakartis using Bhakti as a springboard and a platform to discuss the areas they choose and their views on them are not only interesting. Looking back over a period of almost 800 years, his positions deserve serious discussion. We find in many vachanas the positions of the vachanakarti which can not only widen the seed of Bhakti Panth but also give it a definite socio-political dimension to it and give it a face on that identity.

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