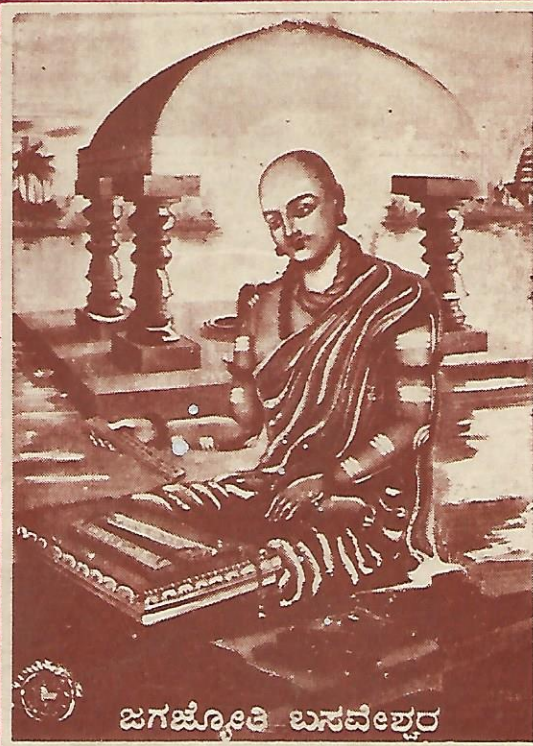


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Upon the soil of Piety, Sprouted Guru, the seed,
And Linga, the leaf, was born; Then Thought came for the flower,
And Deed for tender fruit, And Knowledge for the ripened one
And when the fruit of Knowledge broke, Loose from the stalk and fell
Look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

BASAVA SAMITI, BANGALORE-1
SILVER JUBILEE SPECIAL ISSUE



The Ambresia of Akkamahadevi's Musings*

— Dr. SIDDAYYA PURANIK

Translated by: G. B. SAJJAN

The intellect coruscates as much as does the fullness of heart impress itself upon us in Akka's works. The two meet in an electric embrace there as it were. We see the confluence of thought, feeling and knowledge in the speech of one who had been fed on the milk of sentiment, the ghee of right knowledge and the sugar of metaphysical thought. In a sense, the origin of all three seems to be the heart. Haven't all great truths emanated from the heart? There is a saying that the heart holds within itself, in seed-form, the while of the animate and inanimate universe. Perhaps this is true in the case of Akka whose outpourings but echoed what her intellect cogitated and her inner eye saw as intuition. Therefore is a rare harmony to be discerned between her reason, sentiment and intuition. Her mystical experience has come out in her Vacanas, dipped in all the sweetness of the heart's holy affections. Her heart and intuitive knowledge of the Life Divine siezed upon as truth what reason unaided by the inner eye, the letter-mined study of theology and the scriptures, or the vacuous debates in the councils of the world, or yet the preachings in congregations could not have gleaned for her as nuggets of ever-lasting and intergral wisdom. We may quote in this context the relevant part of Harihara's

poetic account of Akka's life: She lived in bliss, being the support of the proliferating congregation, having planted the songs of the Patriarchs in the soil of her mind and watering them with her tears of joy, manuring them with the thrills of devotional fervour, training the sun and moon of her piety and wisdom on them, decking them with the flowers of discussion and singing new hymns picked from the fruit-of-bliss-bearing trees of music as accompaniment to her mystical communion with God, bathing in the waters of devotion, and emerging into the knowledge of the Absolute, renouncing everything, chasing away all attachment and allure.

Did Akka have a pre-sentiment of her early end? May be yes, may be not. At any rate, she held life to be a brief candle snuffed out in no time. Before your life-span, measured by Morn and Eve, is spent, fasten your thoughts on Him, she exhorts the laity. For, you will have no opportunity afterwards. Life is *vanitatem vanitares*. It is Void. Before Void fades out into Void, do live in the company of Cenna Mallikarjuna's devotees, with a will and determination. Before you are far gone with this world, do embrace Shiva, and don't trust this body and its breath. Before the body's five elements are

* Reproduced from 'Mahadevi' the Book written by Dr. Siddayya Puranik and Published by Karnataka University Dharwad.

dispersed, do surrender to Cenna Mallikarjuna.

Such percipience does not down upon us, however advanced, in years we may be. But Akka had it given to her as a gift of God early in her life. She cries in anguish :

My body is dust,
My breath belongs to the Void :
How do I grasp them ?
And how shall I meditate on Thee?

She knew, in spite of her apparent inexperience and youth the true nature of life in this world, even better than many a philosopher does :

Existence was begotten
Where I was born ;
Where Existence began
There was born stupefaction ;
Where stupefaction arose
There went Desire with it ;
Where there was Desire
There was Anger, too.
The smoke of that fire of Anger
Beclouded my understanding ;
Thus did I forget thee
And opened the doors to Grief in me.

That, for you is a prognostication of the malady which is life in this world. Death alone may seem to be the final curtain run, down upon this tragic drama of human life. But is there no remedy to this suffering and woe, between the cradle and the grave, that goes by the name of human life? is the question which has confronted the intellectuals of the world, from Buddha's time to this day. It is an ever-teasing question, to which (if you please) there is an answer in Akka's vacana, quoted above. Where stupefaction prevails, about the true nature of life, there suffering

is. The passage to bliss lies backwards through Anger to Desire to Ignorance to a state where Existence is not a trammel but an ornamental archway. When besotted Man has awakened into the dawn of true knowledge and become a Sharana (literally, 'Surrendered Soul', but, in technical parlance, seer, saint, Devotee. all rolled into one) suffering has ceased for him.

And where does this knowledge come from and how? This is not the 'Advancement of Learning' that modern times have witnessed, the progress of science and technology. All the knowledge of 20th century man heaped together will amount to a zero without a number preceding it. Knowledge, which is all of the spirit, and which alone can guide our steps to our destiny, should come as His grace, as these lines of Akka do testify :

Thou, Cenna Mallikarjuna,
Shouldst lift me up with Thy tender grace

Do away with my oblivion
And vouchsafe a glimpse of Thy feet :

Knowledge that leaves Him out is no knowledge at all, declares Akka.

What use is riches without generosity?
What use is a cow, if it be dry?
What use is beauty without virtue?
So is my being no use
As long as I have not known you,
O Cenna Mallikarjuna.

That is why she is thankful to Him for having guided her steps to the understanding of Him. It was His tender mercy, His grace. He is at once nearer than the nearest and farther than the farthest corner of the earth from her. But all the while He was seated at her heart. How near! She needed only

to look within herself. She celebrated her delighted awakening in these lines:

Thou, the light that dwells within the
lotus of my heart, O God!

Do Thou implode into the dawn that
circles the edge of my mind!

Do Thou come into me, O Master,
O Boon, O the Ultimate!

Do Thou come, O God, the quitesence
of Good, the Serpent-garlanded one,

Veerabhadra, Rudra, Sin-Remover,
the Universal Self!

Come Thou the fruit, the juice of the
fruit, the sweet joy of the savour
of the fruit,

Come Thou the Perfect one, the
Redeemer from the slough of Despond,
the celebrated Mallinatha¹

Such lines can overflow from a heart that is given up entirely to the other Being, has felt the pangs of separation and been electrified by the envisioned glimpse of Him and the anticipation of her mergence with the Divine Lover. Love that is Bhakti (Devotion) and Bhakti that is Love overflow in a confluence here. The vacanas are the stream that bear the tide of her love and Bhakti towards the sea of the Divine. Such divine madness as is hers finds its aptest expression through metaphor and symbol. Witness, for example, these verses:

Lord and Master, I trust thee
Thou, husband of Ambika² my
Boatman!
See how swift the gleaming current
flows!
How turbulent are the waters!

I am fallen into the whirlpool!

Thou alone must pull me out of the
vortex.

³The six-fold wave is bearing down,
see Thou Boatman,

It speeds like the wave of the Deluge
Kick it aside and row me safe ashore.
Put me not away, Thou Boatman,
Thou Lodestar that art Bhakti,
Carry me to Cenna Mallikarjuna's
Haven of Bliss

The river of universal life bears upon its bosom the ark of the individual life. Shiva himself must be the earman for the ark. Truth is the ear, and devotion the path. If such be the conduct of life, it will not be a tragedy that we often, in our ignorance, make of it. Devotion is not a thing to be undertaken for fear of hell or for the favour of attaining heaven. It should be the passage-way for our life's bark. Rab'ia the woman-saint of Arabia, was once seen walking the street with fire in one hand and water in the other. When someone questioned her as to the import of her act, she is said to have replied: "With the water in this hand, I'm out to quench the flames of Hell. With the fire in the other, I want to burn down Heaven. It is only then that the mortals of this world, rid of the fear of Hell and the lure of Heaven, will know true devotion."

Today even Bhakti has become merchandise. The priest charges so much for this and so much for the other form of worship, promising varying kinds of rewards appropriate to the form of worship.

1 Harihara: Life of Mahadeviakka (In blank verse), cant. V

2 Ambika = Parvati

3 The six deadly lusts, the six enemies, as they are usually spoken of: Lust, Anger, covetousness, Infatuation, Pride & Envy.

Forms of worship carrying different price-tags have been elaborated by the religious middlemen—the priest, the person, the paster, the deacon the Bishop. Akka is critical about this ‘middle-man’-ry between man and God.

What need of the present of food to
One who has no hunger?

What need of ablution for One who is
at once the deeps and the Vault
of Heaven?

What need of lamp-worship to One who
is Himself the source of Light?

What need of flowers to One who,
comphor-white of complexion,
exudes a subt'e fragrance?

Work that is devoid of faith

And devotion that is prey to pride—

What use are they?

Akka divides the Shaivas-worshippers of Shiva—into two kinds. Those who are Shaiva by caste hanker after the pleasures of paradise. Those who are Shaiva by inclination surrender their all to the Absolute, to his symbol the Linga, and to the spiritual Guide, the Jangama (the Enlightened itinerant Preacher, who is the living embodiment of God). The worship offered by the Shaivaborn is like the loyalty of a prostitute! The devotion of those who cannot resist the lure of Woman, Gold and Land is the worship of the small. “Show me such as offer themselves up to God and find fulfilment in it.” Akka belongs to that other category who are the salt of the earth. She is one who goes into ecstasies over her self-surrender. “Thou art my mind, my motion, my breath. Before high heaven I swear, I shall not think of aught else” declares she. When true knowledge has

dawned on one, one finds that the self and the Other self are not different but one. One's preceptor can only be understanding of this truth.

Of course, the pilgrim soul's journey does not end here. The inner quest has to be squared with conduct in the outside world. Where Word and Deed are dichotomous, there is no spiritual attainment. Right knowledge, Right (moral) thinking and Right conduct go hand in hand. The three Rights are the triple path of enlightened soul. Such a one walks in the light that comes from within.

This, surely, is the glorious path that Akka has shown to us. That is the ambrosial cream of her cogitations, her spiritual, inner debate, the ‘obstinate questionings’ of her mind, and the answers she found in her own soul. There is knowledge of one kind and another, similarly, there is Action (or conduct) of the right kind and wrong kind. And so is there a difference between true morality and the false kind.

This raises, incidentally, the question of Ends and Means. For men like Gandhiji, ends and means must be in accord with each other. For those like Marx, if the end was good, it could justify the means, whatever they be. For Akka, Thought, word and Deed should be integrated into a holy trinity. It is because we have gone ‘whoring after false gods’ that we have missed our true destination. We have acquired piles and piles of knowledge but in the process missed wisdom altogether. Didn't Eliot, the greatest of 20th century poets, lament:

Where is the knowledge that we have
lost in information?
Where is the wisdom that we have lost
in knowledge?

Akka's own prognostication is that Maya (Illusion, Infatuation with the Unreal) is the real stumbling-block. Even the greatest of them have fallen prey to Maya—not even Hari (Vishnu—one of the Trinity of Gods) and Brahma (another of the Trinity) excepted. But will falling prey to it be the inevitable destiny for such a one as me? asks Akka of herself. 'No, never a chance with one who has taken refuge with Cenna Mallikarjuna!' She is cock-sure, it will never deflect her, never befog her.

The world and the Maya which envelops it were created by the Lord Almighty for his sport. And we must accept life, its trials and tribulations, and the Maya that wraps us into the fold of worldly Attachment—all must be accepted as part of the Game that God plays. It is to Him that we must resort for protection and deliverance from the trammels of Attachment. He alone can redeem us from the strangulating knot of Nescience and Worldly Lure. If we, in our agony, call out to God for help, He will see us through the miasma. But if we, in our ignorance, revile against God, our Creator, we will be like the owl that abuses the sun; like the crow which, not being able to see by night, belittles the moon. We will be like the blind man who, not being able to look in the Mirror, sets it at naught. Yes, if wrapped up in the miasma of Attachment, we deny the existence of God, negate all order, and a Supreme Being behind that order, Cenna Mallikarjuna will send us to hell!

The same Akka, who has wedded Cenna Mallikarjuna in her heart, sees no contra-

diction in sometimes addressing Him as 'O Father', and pleading that, barring Him, she has no one to turn to, no deliverer—'Thou art my sole resort, Thou art my mind. There is none but Thee to listen to my pleading. Do Thou, therefore, listen, O father, heed my request and extend Thy Protection to me.'

The consciousness of Previous births, the cycle of a thousand thousand existences of heretofore, plagues her. Whatever might have been my ups and downs in those lives, let the cycle stop here and may I attain Kaivalya (Nirvana) through Your grace, says one of her vacanas.

She knows that there is no way to find a place in the bosom of God but that of self-surrender:

Too much reading of the Vedas can
lead to Argumentation:

Too much of the knower's ego could
reduce the Agamas¹ importance to half,

In their vanity of supplying the answers
to abiding questions,

The Puranas² have gone to Jeriche?

All of this book-lore is one that is doomed to death. We must therefore, seek knowledge that is deathless. Faith in Him alone can show you the right path. When you are with Light, where is the fear of being benighted? Akka, therefore, rhapsodizes that she knew happiness of every kind by attaining true knowledge and putting away Nescience.

Does this knowledge that passeth all worldly lore, and faith that can move more than the mountains, come of its own accord,

1 Agamas = Scriptures

2 Puranas = Legendary history

like peace dropping from the veils of the morning to where a devout soul exists or does it come through any external stimuli? Is it something that can be attained by anyone, provided he or she has the aspiration and sedulously strives after it or is it the destined goal where only the elect of God, the blessed ones, the 'chosen few' arrive?

It is possible that such knowledge and faith can come from within, as an impulse divinely caused, but it can also be aroused and fostered by the open temple of God which is the universe the infinite variety, the mind-boggling vastnesses, the ever-changing colours and wondrous beauty of this universe can so touch a devout heart as to enthrall it quite to a conception of the Lord God, The Maker. The unheard voices that come from every quarter of this planet, and the firmament above, can touch only those that have their ears open.

Akka's greatness lies in the fact that the child's sense of wonder in her was never dimmed. She kept open her eyes and ears as windows through which the Divine Presence, writ in every little object, in the littlest atom, could flow in and suffuse her whole being. Her intellect endorsed what the heart silently felt. The wonder that she felt as a child is now shot with an adult's understanding wonder at the mysteries of creation.

Who poured the acid water into the lime, the mango and the 'madala'?

And who gave the sugar-cane and the cocoa-nut their sweet water?

Who, by the way, put the rice-pith into paddy?

Who, again injected into the jasmine and the rose their fragrance?

Though water, soil and sun were one and the same,
They bred in these their several forms and essences.
The lord immanent has many forms and attributes,
But, transcendent, Me is but Himself and none of these.

It isn't as if none had observed the phenomena of the mango, the lemon, the sugar-cane springing from the soil, drinking in the same sun and water, but growing in to their different essences. But and Akka alone could drive home the point by phrasing the Creator's mighty magic in those terms.

The child's wonder has yielded to the adult's mystic insight, which wonder pierces home through the illusion of to Truth itself.

There may be an apparent contradiction between the vision that perceives the Far as Near at hand, in the form of the symbol, and the vision that sees the symbol as only a symbol which cannot per se be the Absolute. When the Absolute Principle itself is paradoxical, this double vision is inevitable, but it need not puzzle or perplex the reader.

The young mind, awash with divine grace, and yearning towards Light, will, if in due season planted with the seed of True Knowledge, grow up into the human-made-divine. The company of like minds of enlightened souls is nonetheless necessary as the proper clime or habitat for its flowering. The importance of the 'go(o) dly fellowship' is brought out by Akka in one of her vacanas :

Tree brushing against tree begets
a spark
That burns the clump and the
brushwood.
When soul brushes with insightful
soul
There is born the fire of True
Knowledge
That burns up all the ills of Body.
Gain me the goodly fellowship
of saints,
O Lord, Cenna Mallikarjuna ;
And thus make me worthy of Thy
grace.

Akka, however, cautions us that there is company of the right sort and of the wrong sort. Association with one who knows not the Truth is like striking flint and inviting fire, while keeping company with the learned and the wise is like churning up butter from the curds. Best of all is the company of your devotees, O Cenna Mallikarjuna, declares Akka, for it is like setting a burning match to the camphor-hill.

Fire is begotten of association :
It's not without union that a seed
doth sprout,
It's in saintly fellowship that bliss
doth abide,
It was in the company of your mystic
devotees,
O Cenna Mallikarjuna,
That I attained that bliss of Paradise.

Glorying in the purification which she has thus undergone Akka exclaims :

My wordly being is at an end
As the reward of associating
with Thy elect,
Even as the hillocks suffer dissolution
From the Holy Ganga's turbulent
flood.

Even as Darkness is put to flight
When it meant to play with Light.

There is rejoicing in her qualifying for the grace of God, as also thanks giving towards the enlightened souls of Kalyana, who made it their endeavour to groom her spiritually for the acceptance of her Lord :

Purged was I in body,
Purged was I in mind and soul
By the divine company of Thy elect,
O Lord Cenna Mallikarjuna !
They it was who tried and tested me
on their touchstone,
Therefore am I made fit ornament
to Thee.

The ascent upward to the summit of mystical thought is not impossible. But 'staying put' there and not suffering oneself to climb down is an even more difficult task. The greatest impediment to the attainment of Perfection is the monkey fickle Mind of Man. 'The Enemy is us' as they say.

Just as the silkworm weaves a cocoon
out of its own slime,
And makes a noose of the same,
The Mind is enslaved by its own
impulses.

Thou alone, Cenna Mallikarjuna, canst
cut the strings of maya binding me,
And lead me towards Thee.

Annihilating the mind is easier said than done. The mind is a phoenix which 'dies' only to rise out of its ashes. But if one knows how to slash off the hood of 'Mind', there is no need to read the Vedas and Agamas (the Scriptures)

Akka did not have to go through a long period of preparation, marked by penance and poring over scriptural tomes. One

wonders where and how she gathered the lore that she distils into her verses. She had not only mastered the vedic lore, maybe through oral tradition, but had even gone beyond them. Hers was wisdom that surpasses knowledge. Experience and observation of the working of the Universe had crystallized into pearls of wisdom, which the mere study of the Vedas could not have given her. With her, experience, observation, and knowledge had all passed into an understanding and a wisdom that were a divine gift of insight.

The vedas are so much booklore which is no more than chaff, if you can go straight to the heart of the matter-and that is to steady, to stabilize, to fix the mind in the contemplation of God. That surely is to rise to the plateau of True knowledge. And that was Akka's transcendental attainment-a feat impossible for spirits of softer stuff. These latter do not turn into proper bricks in the kiln of the spirit's making. They remain a clump, a clod, soon dissolved by the rain. Akka's transformation, on the contrary, was, to use her own imagery, like the water that turns into a pearl.

The pearl forms out of water
So does the hailstone.
The salt crystal dissolves
Even as the hailstone melts into water.
But there's none who has witnessed
The pearl dissolving into water.
Mere mortals remain what they are-
Thy radiance, O Cenna Mallikarjuna,
Will not touch their inner being.
But I became charred in Thy fiery
essence.

Into that Heavenly Radiance had
Akka's being entwined itself. She loved

Him, with all her heart, with all her mind,
with all her strength, with all her spirit.

The Master is my body,
God Himself my Mind,
The Jangama my spiritual Face.

Sang Akka. Her hymn of thanks
giving is worded like this :

Thou didst uplift me
From the unease of the Body,
From the Temptation felt by Mind.
I fumble for words to image forth
Thy matchless grace
Which tore the trammels of existence
for me.

Having taken refuge in Thy feet,
O Cenna Mallikarjuna.

Like the Chakora that sets its heart
upon the Moonrise,
I splash about in the tide of Bliss.

The right knowledge is the first step in
spiritual life. Rightness of conduct cannot
come where right knowledge is wanting.
That was why Akka said,

What use is dousing the husk with
holy water ?

Will it ever make it sprout ?
If conduct will not go with True
Knowledge

How will it bring the happiness of
perfection ?

Will the perfume sprinkled on from
outside

Ever stay with one ?

Those that know not

Cenna Mallikarjuna

Have no Right Conduct, mind you !

Conduct that is of the surface is blind :
if it does not originate from insight it is no
use. Right knowledge must issue in Action.

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because not only did he live the life of the spirit, in thought, word and deed, but also lived a life of chastity, not lusting after another's wife, another's wealth, not maligning another soul, never telling an untruth, never inflicting violence, never mixing with 'infidels' or those of diabolical propensities, and lived a life of complete dedication to the service of others. Basavanna thus excelled in fiftytwo righteous ways, extols Akka.

Lest the expression 'He will not mix with the non-devotee' ('infidel') be construed as religious bigotry, Akka offers an explanation:

Let those who prattle about (righteous) conduct tell me if they know what forms its sheet-anchor. And if they know not, let them heed: Lust is the first infidel, the second is Anger, the third is Greed; Infatuation the fourth; pride the fifth; Envy the sixth and Lure the Seventh. So do not call him that is without Linga a Bhavi (x "infidel"). It is those who harbour the seven Deadly sins within and yet, to all appearances, wear a Linga on their person, who are Bhavis. Will Cenna Mallikarjuna be pleased with those fakes who cheat the world by carrying out the ritual of worship at specified hours of the day?

This, truly, was a revolutionary concept. The world goes by appearances; words are mere counters to the generality. Who reflects on the true meaning of a word? An infidel is one who does not follow in *our* path of worship. But aren't there other forms, other ways of reaching God? After all, it is inward purity that counts. If you put a shine on the outside of a vessel, but fail to wash the inside, of what use is that kind of cleanliness?

Akka's penetrating intellect, her discernment, have revealed truths which the world in its mad rush does not heed nor divine. Did she not revealingly comment upon the world's practice of non-violence by giving the analogy of the fisherman, who feels for his child when it is in pain but never a jot does his conscience prick when he kills fish in hundreds and thousands? The ethics of her definition are higher in conception than we have ever had from other saints and social reformers.

Some of the ethical gems that have come out of the mine of her thinking, the steel with which she reinforced herself while she walked the testing ground of this world, are:

Wherever the brave may turn, he hath
no fear.

The coward is never at ease, listen O
my brethren!

He that gives can never be faulted,—

He that melts with pity never sins.

O Cenna Mallikarjuna,

He that, having touched Thee, will
not

Touch others money and others wives
Hath nothing to fear.

• • • • •
"He who knoweth Truth from Untruth
alone is a Sharana
Untruth is the 'untouchable'".

• • • • •
"Chastity of heart, of mind, of word,
of deed, of taste—
These are the Five 'holy waters' (not
those collected from 'holy'-reputed
springs)"

* * * *

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"Show me those that are chaste of
body,
Chaste of mind and chaste of heart,
Those that are right of conduct,
Whose speech is gospel
And who are ever-pure in this wise"

* * * *

"He is a sharana who hies for his day-
labour
Who thinks not of yesterday nor
tomorrow"

* * * *

"I am too busy today, for
We have a festival at home;
So ye passions, we have no time
Even for a word of courtesy to you.
Go ye your way"

* * * *

I am without pride of caste
Without pride of resolute will am I.
I have cast away the arrogance of
riches,
Of the pride of learning also I have
none.
No manner of pride dare come
near me,
For Thou hast blest me with
Thy Grace.

Such ethics as Akka set for herself
were cavaire to the general. Not many in
society would pass muster by this most
exacting of standards. She saw through
the parade of vanity, imposition, hypocrisy,
self-will, pride, selfishness and what have
you. Men who had too much to do with
the world could not easily be won over
to the ways of enlightened souls or highly
evolved beings. She therefore, in no
uncertain terms, castigates those worldings
and pseudo-enlightened ones whom those
evils rode rough-shod:

Ye, who are ridden by original pride,
The pride, besides, of race and clan.
The pride of will, or caste,
Of nomenclature, of colour, of status
The vanity of faith and scripture,
The fallacy of logic, the lure of
Kingship

The illusory solace of money, of
grain-store,
Of son and friend,
The false pride of riches, of sacrifice,
Of enjoyment and of living the
'Life Divine',

The pride of flesh, of the senses
And the lure of sensual pleasures,
The attachment to breath, to mind,
And feeling and life as ever-lasting,
The conceit of self-effacement,
Of self-doubt and of self-as-Absolute
Such and such-like
Fallacies and conceits, numbering
two and thirty

Have possessed many a mortal
Parading in false attire.
I turn away from these to Thee
O Cenna Mallikarjuna.

Being ashamed to call them 'sharanas'
and 'Jangamas' Akka was out and out a
revolutionary. At one blow, she makes
mincemeat of all that stood between man
and man, and man and God. The false
and the deceitful must have found shelter
even under the garb of the new religion.
Akka was not one to be taken in by false
appearances. Basavanna might have been
too much of a Mahatma to see anything
but gold in all men. Only a woman such
as Mahadevi, preternaturally beautiful, and
alone and defenceless, could have seen the
lascivious leer and the cloven hooves of
the satyrs in Sharanas clothing.

If she appears to be only politely expressing her indignation at the hypocrites here, elsewhere she is seen to be using somewhat harsh language. She calls them 'barking pups' in other words 'canting dilettantes' who, not knowing what the terms 'Chidanga' 'Bhakta', 'Prasadi' 'Mahesha' stand for or mean, give themselves those attributes and prattle about the Master (Guru), the peripatetic one (Jangama) and the Other (the Absolute) 'Their cunning astonishes me'. She points to the authentic gold of Basavanna's profession and practice, and of the early Shaivites, in contrast to whom these sundry followers of the cult are pynchbeck. 'Stupid Knaves,' she calls them.

This *the* is way to reach God for any body, whatever his religion. Only the technical terms used by Akka or the other enlightened souls of the period may need to be changed so as to fit the most universal concepts forming the common grist of all religions. The way that Akka has shown

to us in simple terms is the right path wherein Right Knowledge, Right Morality, and Right Action are harmonized.

Akka defined romance in these unconventional terms:

The sight of elders is beautiful to
one's eyes:

The songs of the Sharanas of old are
romance to the ear;

Truth is the ornament of speech;

The language that the devotees do use
Adorns dialogue and discourse.

The hand is beautiful that beautiful
does

By giving to the deserved.

The goodly fellowship of these
sharanas

Is the consummation of corporate
living.

What is life, if devoid of these raptures?

Could we ever make these words the
motto of our lives, we would be paying
Akkamahadevi an appropriate tribute.

Like the fire immanent in the deeps,

Like the sweetness in the nectar of the moon,

Like the fragrance in the bud,

And, O Kudala Sangama,

Like a maiden's love was it,—

the Unnameable in man.

—Basavanna*

Courtesy t—

* Selected 'Sayings of Basava'

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Glorious Daughters of a Great Revolution

— Dr. SIDDAYYA PURANIK

"Women have known harship in all societies, in all civilisations. But surely nowhere else could the inequality of the treatment of women surpass that in India."

—Ashok Rudra.

It is a painful fact that in the very country which proclaimed, "angels roam where woman are worshipped", the position of women deteriorated gradually as a result of the selfish interpretation by men of the following maxim of the Vedas :

"A women must do whatever her husband asks her to do, whether that be in accordance with Dharma or opposed to it".

To what an amazing absurdity this led the protagonists of male superiority is illustrated by the much cited puranic story of the wife of a leper who lovingly carried her husband in her arms to a brothel at his command. In the Mahabharata, a reluctant queen is persuaded by her husband to submit herself to the sexual services of an appointed man following the Niyoga custom.

Different functions and duties have been laid down for different castes under the caste-system ; but for woman, her husband is her god her one duty is unquestioning obedience and unlimited service to him however low he may be morally or however unfair his demands.

How ironical it is that even Devi Bhagawati which extols the Mother Goddess, contains the following derogatory passages about women ;

"Women are neither friends nor foes. They perpetually crave forever new men, They desire any well-dressed male they see; but in order to obtain what they want, they make a show of chastity ; In public women are very modest. But when they get their beloved in private they make as if to devour him. They bestow more affection on men who satisfy them sexually than on their own children".

"Oh King ! Do you not know that women's love, like that of wolves, is never genuine ? That is why men of the world ought never to trust women and robbers" (Urvasi to Pururava)

"Women constantly suck the blood of men like leaches ... That very woman, whom man considers his beloved, robs him of his manhood through sexual indulgences and of his mind, his wealth and all his possessions. Hence is there a greater robber than a woman ?"

Let us revert to the Mahabharata and see what more it has to say about women ;

"Women, even when they are of good family, beautiful and married, do not hesitate to transgress morals.....At the first opportunity they leave wealth and good looking husbands to share adulterous bed with other men. Men desirous of adulterous sex have only to approach them with just a few words of flattery and they immediately get infatuated by them." (Anusasana Parva) (ಅನುಶಾಸನ ಪರ್ವ)

It is stated in the Shanti Parva of this great epic that the categories of persons to be excluded from the place where a king holds any consultations are ; dwarfts ; hump-backed persons, lean men, lame and blind men, idiots, eunuchs and women ; women ; are thus lumped together with the retarded and deformed.

This when treated at all as human. Most often women were treated as mere objects and lumped together with other items of property—villages, gold and cows ; Manu, Sukra and Chanakya confirm this barring of women from any responsibilities let alone their being considered worthy of any position of power in Society. Women were not even considered fit to be witnesses. Manu ruled them out because 'their understanding is apt to waver'. Yajnavalkya and Vasishtha considered women as 'lies incarnate'. That they were considered as part of man's property is best symbolised in the statement that a woman could be given as a pledge, the interest being one-seventieth of her value, though how that value was to be computed is nowhere clearly stated. (Agni Purana)

All prophets and law-givers, poets and philosophers, artists and rulers were born in the wombs of their mothers only ; but still most of them considered woman as the root of all evil. Even the Great Buddha gave the following reasons why woman ought not to be entrusted with responsibilities.

'Women are soon angered, Ananda ; women are full of passion, Ananda ; women are envious, Ananda ; women are stupid. That is the reason, Ananda, that is the cause, why women have no place in public assemblies, do not carry on business and

do not earn their living by any profession (Sullavaga x-1.6). In one of the Jataka stories, the Bodhi Sattva is made to say, 'In famous is the land which owns a woman's sway and rule, and infamous are the men who yield themselves to women's domination'.

Plato thanked God that he was created man, not woman ; according to Tartullian and Sankara women is the door to hell ; according to St. Paul, women should not raise religious questions like men, they should always be subservient to their spouses ; according to the Christian Convention of 578, woman has no soul ; according to Martin Luther, it is a vice for a woman to try to become an intellectual ; according to St. Bernard, even his mother was evil incarnate ; and according to Tulsidas drums, fools, sudras and women are fit only for thrashing.

Woman is the worst sufferer in all societies. She is the oldest bonded labourer in the history of humanity. Even today, her condition in many countries is that of a second grade citizen, a serf and a servant. In the 12th century, this might have been more harrassing and more humiliating. The emancipation of womanhood brought about by Basava as an essential plank of his comprehensive and all-inclusive revolution is to be evaluated against this background. It was an epoch-making revolution and the man who spearheaded it was a great prophet, a great revolutionary, a great mystic, a great administrator and a great literary luminary—Basava.

'The soul is a sexless entity', proclaimed Jedara Dasimayya—a senior contemporary of Basava. His wife, Duggavve, was herself a liberated lady. Hence Dasimayya

could see in his own case the sacred unity of the souls of husband and wife in holy wedlock transcending the physiological differences confined to externals in both. His saying that where the two are united in devotion to the god within both, there is nothing like it in all this world, is the sanest summing up of the ideal of married life.

Basava went a step further and said that every woman in the world, other than his own, was Mahadevi to him. His reverence for womanhood was more than matched by that of Siddharama Sivayogi who considered woman as his own Lord Kapila Siddha Mallikarjuna.

Allama Prabhu viewed this relationship from a different angle ; when both husband and wife become consorts to Linga according to the concept of 'Sharana Sati and Linga Pati', does the wife remain wife and the husband, husband? This concept virtually revolutionised the relationship between husband and wife by holding that both were the wives of the Linga on a spiritual plane. Allama Prabhu further elucidated the equality of sexes by comparing the husband and wife to two eyes with a single sight. This sameness of the sexes should obliterate all distinctions and discriminations based on sex.

This unprecedented revolution gave birth to a galaxy of gifted women—glorious daughters of a great revolution. They not only meaningfully participated in the discussions at Anubhava Mantapa, covering spiritual, social, moral and vital subjects and topics, but also blossomed into great writers of vachanas, throwing new light on the hidden aspects of these subjects and topics. For the first time in Karnataka, nay in the world as a whole, a host of

women writers drawn from the highest to the lowest strata of society, cast off the shackles of enturies and got full unfettered freedom of expression resulting in a rich harvest of vachanas of rare wit, wisdom and beauty.

The Karnataka University has published the vachanas of the following 32 Shiva Sharaneyaru—a number never equalled prior to this or subsequent to this period in the literatures of the world.

1. Akka Mahadevi
2. Neelambike
3. Gangambike
4. Lingamma
5. Moligeya Mahadeviamma
6. Aydakki Lakkamma
7. Muktayakka
8. Satyakka
9. Akka Nagamma
10. Bonta Devi.
11. Goggavve
12. Kadira Rammavve
13. Wife of Gajesh Masanayya
14. Kalavve W/o Urilingapeddi
15. Masanamma W/o Yedemathada
Nagidevayya
16. Gangamma W/o Marayya
17. Laxmamma W/o Kondeya
Manchanna
18. Kalakanniya Kamamma
19. Rechavve W/o Kati Kootayya
20. Ketala Devi W/o Gundayya
21. Kottanada Somamma
22. Kalavve W/o Bachi Kayakada
Basavayya
23. Veeramma W/o Dasarayya
24. Guddavve W/o Battaleshwar
25. Akkamma
26. Kadira Kayakada Kalavve
27. Kannadi Kayakada Ramamma

28. Soole Sankavve
29. Kalavve W/o Sidha Budnayya
30. Amuge Rayamma
31. Akkamma
32. Rekavve W/o Revana Siddayya.

This number is likely to increase if hitherto unnoticed palm-leaf manuscripts come to light. Besides, the exact number of these glorious daughters of a great revolution who actually participated in the discussions in the Anubhava Mantapa without articulating their experiences—both spiritual and temporal—in the form of vachanas can never be known. Hence the range of this age of enlightenment for women is to be surmised relying on circumstantial evidence.

Suffice it to say that there is no parallel in history which can even remotely resemble this women's liberation movement under the banner of Basava. Prof. D. Javare Gowda, retired Vice Chancellor of the Mysore University, has rightly stated in his erudite book 'Basava Samithi' that among all the greatmen of India, Basava was the first to recognise the futility of inequality based on sex and to grant equal rights and equal status for women.

The women, on their part, justified this reformation by rising equal to the expectations of Basava and by demonstrating by their inspired utterances and noble actions that given equality of opportunity they can equal, even excel, men in all fields of thought and action.