

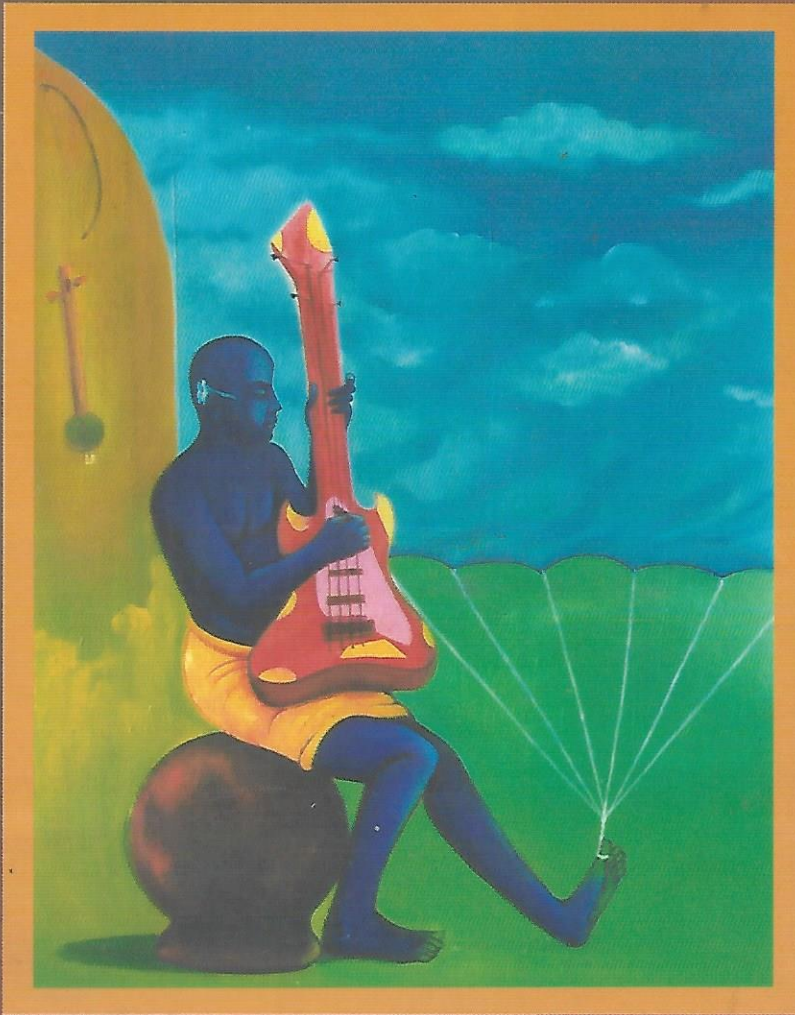


MAY - JULY  
2006



# Aniketana

a quarterly journal of kannada language and Literature



Karnataka Sahitya Academy

May - July - 2006

# ANIKETANA

(a quarterly journal of Kannada language and literature)

## EDITORIAL

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ANIKETANA : a quarterly journal of Kannada language and literature.  
May-July-2006.

This Journal is registered with the Registrar of News Papers in India vide  
registration number : 45647/88

Volume No.XIII - 1

Copies - 500

Pages : xii + 92

*Chief Editor*

**Geeta Nagabhushana**

*Chairman*

Karnataka Sahitya Academy

*Publisher*

**V.N. Mallikarjunaswamy**

*Registrar*

Karnataka Sahitya Academy

Kannada Bhavana, J.C. Road

Bangalore - 560 002

***Subscription Tariff***

Per copy - Rs.30/-

Annual Subscription - Rs. 100/-

Life Subscription - Rs. 300/-

For Subscription and Copies contact the registrar

Cover Page Art : **Shivanand Basavanthappa**



ISO 9001-2000

ಬಾಸವರಾಜಪೇಟೆ, ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು-18

ದೂರವಾಣಿ : 2661 3123, 2661 8752



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## Epoch-Makers of Kannada Literature

-Siddayya Puranik

As we explore the slopes of the history of Kannada literature, the beginnings of which are lost in the mist of time in the early centuries of the Christian era, we come across a few lofty peaks of perfection which have illumined the centuries and still continue to be the lighthouses of our literature. Their genius listened only to the whisperings of the beautiful and the sublime in nature and human nature and their works breathe the value preferences and highest ideals of the Kannadigas thorough the ages.

Among these, Pampa is our Everest....our earliest and best. He is not only the father of Kannada poetry, but its type-phenomenon and chief glory also. In him were blended beautifully the bloodstream of an ancient Brahmin family with the new aspirations of the faith he had embraced, Jainism, the divine gift of poesy with profound scholarship which claimed all knowledge as its province, intense emotional response to beauty in Nature and life with remarkable restraint in its expression, swordsmanship with penmanship, love for the good things of life with renunciation transcending all earthly pleasures and pains, enormous confidence in his own powers with absolute humility of spirit in the presence of old masters, ripeness with richness, and crowning all, the ideal with the real.



He flourished as a poet in the Court of Arikesari II, a prince of the Chalukya family and a feudatory of the Rastrakuta monarch Krishna III. He composed his maiden work *Adipurana* : in 942 A.D. when he was thirty nine years old, and a few years later he produced his magnum opus, *Vikramarjuna Vijaya*, popularly known as *Pampa Bharata*.

The *Adipurana*, depicting the story of Adinatha or Purudeva the first of the twenty four Tirthankaras of Jainism, is the Pilgrim's Progress of Jaina hagiology. It is no doubt an adaptation of the Sanskrit *Adipurana* of Jinasena II; but Pampa has fashioned altogether a new image out of this old gold. In all respect it is a greater work of art than the original. It was the genius of Pampa which preceived a unifying principle behind the unconnected stories of the ten previous births of the Tirthankara and welded them all into a harmonious whole. The desire for enjoyment loses its intensity from birth to birth and ultimately yields place to infinite and everlasting happiness through self-abnegation. It is the victory of Tyaga over Bhoga, of selflessness over selfishness, of desirelessness over desire, and of the tranquillity of the soul over the torments of the mind.

His second work, the *Bharata*, is work of vaster magnitude. Pampa himself states that he wrote *Adipurana* to propound Jinagama and *Bharata* to present the proprieties of the secular life (laukika). How we wish he had not made this differentiation ! Had he produced a work without this distinctions, blending both Jinagama and laukika in the same work, he would have been assured an honoured place in the galaxy of poets. Even now he has his place there.

It is not possible to do full justice to Pampa's *Bharata* in this bird's-eye view of the highest peaks of the Himalayan range of Kannada literature. Suffice it to say that Pampa has achieved remarkable success in the difficult task of condensing the mighty epic in a sizeable compass without omitting anything of significance and without damaging the plan and structure of the story. In the words of Professor D.L. Narasimhachar, he has converted

the jungle of the Mahabarat into a park. In doing so he sometimes compresses a whole episode into a single verse without losing its essence or beauty, expands and elaborates where necessary, takes liberties with the sequence of events in the story and inserts new incidents according to his master-plan, and concentrates on essentials and eliminates non-essentials. As he goes on narrating this intensely human drama, scene after scene unrolls itself before our bewildered gaze in swift and slow marches as the occasion demands, and by the time we come to the close of this panorama of *Pampa Bharata* we exclaim with him "Ee Bharatam loka puujam !"

Pampa is an epoch-maker in the sense that he sets the pattern of poetry in the Champu form and all those who succeeded him in this field have followed in his footsteps. His *Adipurana* became a model for all subsequent Jainapuranas and his *Bharata* for all subsequent Champu Kavyas. Pampa's *Udita Marge* continues to evoke admiration to this day.

The next epoch-maker is Sri Basaveswar (1160) of Kalyana-a prophet pathfinder, prime minister, sadhaka, sharana, social reformer, vachanakara and revolutionary-all in one. He rose like the kindly light from the gloom that encircled India in the beginning of the 12th century, and led millions of men and women, trodden under the tyranny of orthodox religion and tortured by the shackles of society based on inequality, to deeds of imperishable glory. The magic touch of his all embracing love and overflowing sympathy for the fallen, forsaken and forlorn turned the basest metal into purest gold, and out of this raw material of humanity which had been neglected contemptuously for ages he created a new society of sharanas or devotees of God. The divine light which he radiated dispelled the darkness from the innermost recesses of the heart and ennobled and exalted everyone who came in contact with it. Indian womanhood, liberated from the bonds of serfdom of centuries, rose to unequalled heights, and even the so-called untouchables attained sainthood and sharanhood. Every avocation of life became divinised and every moment of life was spiritualised. Even eating was elevated into worship by converting



food into *prasada*. In short, old barriers which had separated man from man, old prejudices which had condemned womanhood to eternal servitude, and old rites and customs which had usurped true religion, were all smashed to pieces the unhealthy and ugly socio-religious excre-scences which had collected around Hindu Dharma and had disfigured it completely were washed away: and old conceptions of high and low, twice-born and low-born, rich and poor, initiated and uninitiated, yielded place to the concept of the brotherhood of man irrespective of caste, colour, sex or avocation of life.

Both the scope of his article and the space at my disposal forbid further elaboration of the life and teachings of Shri Basavana. What most interests students and lovers of Kannada literature is the entirely new direction which he gave it. It is said of Socrates that he brought philosophy down from the high heavens to dwell among men. It may rightly be said of Basavanna that he brought the Bhagirathi of devotion, knowledge and humanism from inaccessible scriptures, unapproachable temples and half-forgotten hermitages, to dwell in hearths and homes, fields and cottages. 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 hierarchy of Sivasharanas and gave expression to their spiritual experiences in inimitable Vachans 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 age-and that too from such neglected through virgin fields !

It is the unanimous verdict of critics that the like of these Vachanas is not found in any other literature, The closest approximations may be found in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine and the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. But no-where else are found the quiet cadence, verbal suppleness, sublime simplicity, perfect fusion of thought and feeling, and common human appeal of these pithy and epigrammatical utterances. They uplifted the Kannada language from the morass of the morbid verbal

gymanastics of earlier poets and made it a living language with moving literature. The floodgates of the people's pent-up energy and emotion were opened and lo, a thousand-fold torrent of truth and beauty gushed forth !

The Vachanas of Basaveshwara excel all others in all the three dimensions taken as a whole, although Allama Prabhu may excel him in depth, Channabasava in width and Akka Mahadevi in height. He was the fountainhead of inspiration for all others, and in him the Kannada language found its greatest saviour. Even after the age of Basava Vachanakaras have appeared now and then, and even today there are a few of them. But no-one has ever approximated to the serenity, simplicity and sublimity of the Vachanas of Basava.

After Pampa. Kannada literature had to wait for nearly two centuries to find one more epoch-maker in the person of peerless Basava; but after Basava it had to wait only for half a century to find two epoch-makers of titanic stature-Harihara and Raghavanka (1200). This again is eloquent testimony to the uniqueness and all-comprehensiveness of the revolution which Basava brought about in the life and letters of his time. Harihara and Raghavanka are direct offshoots of the self-same tree-the tree that Basava planted, yielding the same fragrance and the same sweetness in flowers and fruits of different colours at a different place, Hampi.

Basava's movement of universal brotherhood through the cult of Bhakti-Bhakt born of the fusion of reflection and action-came to an abrupt end with the assassination of King Bijjala after Basava had left Kalyan owing to difference with his master in dealing with the Haralayya-Madhuvayya episode. What was left incomplete at Kalyan was continued at Hampi by Harihara and Raghavanka through the medium of Kavya-not Vachana. But this poetry breathed the same lofty ideals which the Vachanas breathed and it propagated the same message of Basava in Ragale and Shatpadi Kavya.



Harihara first followed Pampa in his *Champu Kavya-Girija Kalyanam*-with some deviations here and there; but very soon he realised the inadequacy of this medium for his mighty purpose. Although *Girija Kalyanam* is also a great work of art, competing with Kalidasa's *Kumara Sambhava* in many respects, it is the lives of Sivasarnas in the Ragale from which have immortalised his name. In these Ragales, numbering more than a hundred, Harihara has created a new world of his own, unsurpassed in its character and complexion, in its range and variety, and in its originality and novelty. It is not a world of kings and queens, of warriors and generals and of gods and goddesses; it is a world of devotees drawn from all strata of society, high and low, rich and poor, known and unknown. There are princes, peasants, potters, cowherds, cobblers, washermen, fishermen, labourers and what not? They are from both the sexes, from all the age-groups from childhood to old age ! It is a fascinating world of common human beings all transfiguring their ordinary avocations into the highest spiritual sadhana and attaining emancipation in the end.

Harihara brought about a threefold revolution in Kannada literature-he assayed new forms, gave new content and lent a new purpose to poetry. The most remarkable feature about Harihara as a poet is that he excels both as an epic poet and a lyric poet. Besides, he is one of our most accomplished masters of prose and has bequeathed to us *Pampa Shataka* and *Raksha Shataka* also which are the crest-jewels of Shataka Sahitya.

It is difficult to find a more spontaneous and versatile poet than Harihara. His heart bursts into song whenever he sees Lord Virupaksha, whenever he hears the name of a Sharana and whenever he sees a Bhakta. So effortless, so powerful and so weeping is his poetry that the moment one starts reading it, one is lost in it.

His disciple and kinsman, Raghavanka, followed the trail blazed by his illustrious Guru and relation and struck yet another new path-the Shatpadi. Out of the six Kavyas attributed to him, four have been published, and two of them-*Harischandra Kavya*

and *Siddarama Charite*-have won for him an honoured and enduring place in the firmament of Kannada literature. In them he has displayed the same sparkling originality, the same powerful portrayal of characters, the same unconventionality and the same soaring imagination and effortless expression which his master displayed. In addition to these, he has introduced with astounding success an element of drama in his Kavyas which is so rare in Kannada literature. Dialogues sparkling with wit, repartee, sarcasm and satire are interspersed in his Kavyas in an inimitable manner and this has heightened the aesthetic appeal of his Kavyas.

Raghavanka is more fortunate than his master in the choice of a form for his poetry. Harihara's Ragale was later on imitated by a handful of poets without much success, whereas Raghavanka's Shatpadi was yoked by a host of poets including such luminaries as Kumara Vyasa, Chamarasa, Lakshmeesha, Virupaksha Pandita and others, and still has its adherents.

Although Raghavanka is the originator of the Shatpadi form, Kumara Vyasa (1400) is the pinnacle of this pyramid and takes his place by the side of Pampa and Harihara, who with him constitute the Trinity of Kannada Kavya.

Kumara Vyasa's *Bharata* is a work of massive architecture inlaid with the most exquisite sculpture. It is vibrant with the movements of mighty characters, and its words are aquiver with the flashes of his poetic genius. The characters are vivid, full-blooded, life-like and perfectly moulded with meticulous care for the minutest details. The story centres round the tantalizing personality of Lord Krishna, and when-ever he appears on the scene Kumara Vyasa pours out his heart in rapturous devotion which is the very fabric out of which is woven this great epic of everlasting value.

The Kannada language has reached its high-water mark of flexibility and beauty in the hands of Kumara Vyasa. He never experiences the paucity of proper words. They obey his commands in meek submission, and where old words do not exist to convey his thoughts and feelings properly he coins new words to



the bewilderment of the philologist. Metaphor piles upon metaphor and image follows image in this most popular Kavya in Kannada.

The next epoch-maker is Nijaguna Shivayogi, about whose date there is controversy. It fluctuates from 1300 to 1500 A.D. This much is certain : his *Kaivalya Paddhati* is the first attempt in Kannada to combine music with Poetry. It contains some beautiful songs set to music. Although the finest flowering in this form of literature is Purandara Dasa, Nijaguna Shivayogi will have to be accepted as an epoch-maker in as much as he was the first to compose a Hadugabba and he was the first to write an encyclopaedia, *Viveka Chintamani*, and to write on Vedanta, Yoga and other Shastric subjects in Kannada. He ushered in the epoch of jnana in Kannada literature, and even to this day he reigns supreme over this field. Purandara Dasa is our greatest singer and has left a veritable treasure of devotional songs of enchanting beauty. Kanaka Dasa is next in greatness.

Ratnakaravarni (1450), the architect of another edifice of exquisite beauty—Bharatesha Vaibhava, is the next epoch-maker in Kannada literature. He yoked the Sangatya metre to this golden chariot and succeeded in it immeasurably. Hitherto this metre was the monopoly of folk-songs. In the hands of Ratnakaravarni it became the medium of Maha Kavya.

The character of King Bharata, as delineated by Ratnakaravarni, is unique in world literature. It is a magic web of which Bhoga is the warp and Tyaga the woof. The feet of King Bharata are planted firmly on the earth ; but his head dwells among the stars ! How he switches over from erotics to metaphysics, from statecraft to soul culture, and from self indulgence to self-immolation !

The style is so simple that at first sight we are apt to overlook some of its subtle beauties and delicacies. But Ratnakaravarni reveals layer after layer of his artistic excellence every time we approach him. Viewed from any angle, *Bharatesha Vaibhava* is a work of which any literature could be proud.

This survey closes with Sarvajna, the wizard of worldly wisdom and epigrammatical utterance. Candidly critical, alarmingly outspoken, sharply sarcastic, he spares none, including himself, from his searching scurting and acid test. Still he is human, all too human. Behind his merciless rapier-thrusts there is a kind and generous heart. He hates our shams and superstitions, faults and foibles, pettinesses and pretensions, and not us, his fellow beings. His words and ideas have become the very life stuff of the common Kannadiga and his name is a household word even in the remotest Kannada village.

What Pampa is for the Champu form, Basava for Vachana, Kumara Vyasa for Shatpadi, Ratnakaravarni for Sangatya, Purandara Dasa for Hadugabba, Sarvajna is for the Tripadi form. Sarvajna is a people's poet par excellence.

Let me conclude with a few pregnant lines of this revolutionary poet which convey the eternal and inspiring message of Kannada literature :—

When lightesters pariah dwelling,  
Is it also outcaste for that ?  
Oh, talk not of high caste and outcaste ;  
The man on whose homestead God's blessing doth shine  
Is surely a noble of lineage divine. -Sarvajna

All tread the same mother earth ;  
The water we drink is the same ;  
Our hearth-fire's glow no distinction doth show,  
Then whence cometh caste, in God's name ? -Sarvajna

Curtesy : **Basava Journal**  
Vo No-7-1983