

## A POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

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Philosophy bakes no bread; but man does not live by bread alone. If our life is not to degenerate into "a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing". We have to adopt and practice a philosophy of life which is true "to the kindred spirit of heaven and earth" and which harmonises the demands of mundane life with the demands of the higher values of life.

Philosophy, as conceived in India, may be described as essentially a criticism of values; according to the late eminent Professor of Philosophy, M. Hiriyanna. And values are a sine qua non for the fullest possible harmonious development of potentialities of man.

Values conform to the ideal accepted and if we churn the history of human thought only a few ideals recur according to the religion, standards of human conduct, the beliefs and customs of a particular race and place. These ideals of life can be summed up as happiness or pleasure symbolized by hedonism or epicureanism or charvaka, duty, honour virtue or obligation as enjoined in many schools of thought and perfection as propounded and propagated by social philosophies of various hues and colours.

Exclusion of any one of these or over-emphasis on any one of these has rendered many a philosophy of life unfruitful and meaningless to some extent. Fortunately for us, our Shiva Sharanas under the banner of Basava recognised this fact and evolved a philosophy of life which incorporated all these ideals with admirable sense of proportion, as the enlargement, embellishment and enrichment of life was of paramount importance in their view. They realized long before Shelley discovered Psyche, Bergson elan vital, Shaw life force, Tagore 'Jeevan Devata' and Sri Aurobindo Life Divine that religion, philosophy, science and everything else is for life and not vice versa. Hence their philosophy is born out of life, for life and for life larger than life, rooted in inner and outer purity.

To start with they redefined in a remarkably radical way our relationship with the unseen power, with the universe, with other human beings and with ourselves. Their concept of god-head is refreshingly new and rationally sound. They proclaimed that neither the humanization of God with grotesque to enchanting forms and names is sensible, nor the deification of man in the name of Avatars is logical. He is as wide as the world; as wide as the sky, wider still, at once immanent and transcendent, not clamouring for sacrifices and other offerings, not interested in leaping hardships on His children, eager to descend into ourselves if we ascend through Bhakti and crowning all, ready to redeem us if we practise purity in thought, word and deed by adopting purity of means and purity of ends.



This world has been variously condemned as maya as a vale of tears, as the place of punishment for those who commit some sin in Kailas, and for those whose 'punya' is exhausted in heaven and as the cradle of all sins and sufferings. This dismal description of the world naturally instilled in men and women the despondent desire to free themselves from its fetters as early as possible, treating worldly life as detestable and despicable. It also generated insincere asceticism, other-worldliness, self-abnegation and fatalism, reducing human life to curse rather than a blessing.

At the touch of Shiva Sharana's philosopher's stone, the world become the Master's Mint and self fulfilment here in this world become the stepping stone to self realization over there. The place of punishment was transformed into the place for fulfilment. No more negation of worldly life, no more negation of wedded love, no more negation of honest work and no more negation of human life in all its ramifications and vicissitudes. This world is real; this life is real; and its higher values are real. Accept them, imbibe all that is best and highest in them and ensure for yourself self-actualization in this very life.

But a word of caution: do not grab from this world more than what is absolutely necessary for you. This world is not for you alone. Billions of men and women, trillions of birds, beasts, insects, trees, plants and herbs already born or still to be born in future, require this very world for sustaining themselves. Their lives are as dear and sacred to them as your own life is to you. Hence do not plunder nature; do not destroy ecology, do not pollute your environment to a dangerous degree. Land, water, air, fire and food are gifts of God. Use them with all moderation as God's Grace - 'Prasada'.

The following vachana of Lord Basava is a beacon light for the modern environmentalists and Earth Summit-wallahs:

"What other punishment is there, O Lord,  
For the offence of keeping the body alive  
By stripping bare the yield  
Of trees and shrubs and corn  
And eating lively creatures that you kill?  
Do not all animate and inanimate beings  
Devour the mass of living things  
From one sense ones to five?  
Therefore, when Kudala Sanga's sharanas  
Have made an offering to Linga  
And taken it back when sanctified  
Being exempt from sin, they are saved".

The concept of 'Prasada' as an offshoot of Kayaka will be the subject matter of a separate paper and hence it need not be elaborated here. Suffice it to say that if the concept of prasada is accepted by all, both in letter and spirit, there will be no problem of environmental pollution, no problem of starvation and no problem of hoarding, smuggling, adulteration and black-marketing.

To consider all living beings in millions of forms as equally entitled to food and shelter in this world is one thing; but



to consider all of them as the myriad mouths of God is another - at once original, inspiring and wonderful. Says Basava:

"Out of your eightyfour hundred thousand faces  
put on just one  
and come test me, ask me.  
If you don't come and ask me  
I'll swear by the names of your elders;  
I'll give,  
my lord Kudala Sangama Deva!"

According to the then belief, there were 84 lakhs of species of life. Basava considers all of them as the many faces of his Master and shows his eagerness to give whatever the face that appears before him asks. This he has defined as 'Sarva Jeeva Daya Paritva' elsewhere. Compassion for all life in myriads of manifestations, willingness to give, sustain and love all of them, to live with all of them and to enjoy the company of all of them - this is his perception of human life. He has summed up this in his dictum 'yatra jeevah tatra sivah'.

Our Shiva Sharanas exhort to us to see God not in temples and other places of worship, but in these innumerable species of life. Lord Basava has rightly observed; 'we can see Linga in the mirror of a devotee's face'. All living beings are the living temples of the Lord, says he:

"The rich  
will build temples for Siva  
What shall I  
a poor man do?  
My legs are pillars,  
the body the temple  
the head a cupola of gold!  
Listen, O Kudala Sangama Deva,  
things immovable shall fall,  
but the moving ever shall survive"

Making temples may be a rich man's past-time, an ostentatious attempt to exhibit his ill-gotten wealth. In the hands of the pujari it becomes tool to fleece the people; and for the poor people it becomes a place for receiving false promises and empty assurances of happiness here and salvation in the other world.

Basavanna freed the innoquous laity from the illusions surrounding temples and the exploitation by the priests and enabled them to be temples themselves, not to build them. How inspiring is this message at a time when quarrels about Mandirs and Masjids are poisoning the very springs of our national life and have overshadowed the real burning problems of human suffering, semi starvation, sky-rocketing of prices, illiteracy, ill-health, population explosion and unemployment and under-employment. There is a race for making crowns of diamonds and chariots and palanquins of gold for temple deities when more than one-third of our population groom below the poverty line.



All this craze for stone images is because they do not consume anything offered to them and the offerings come back to the offerer after the pujari takes his pound of flesh.

"Devotion can be done to Linga with song and dance,  
It never makes demand; you bring and serve it once;  
But, O Lord Kudala Sangama  
Should Jangama arrive, there is no serving them!".

Basava believed in Jangama - the living beings, not "sthavara" the inanimate objects of worship. He has propounded this principle of far reaching consequences and fundamental significance in the following vachana:

The root is the mouth  
of the tree; pour water there  
at the bottom  
and, look, it sprouts green  
at the top;  
The Lord's mouth is his moving men,  
feed them. The Lord will give you all.  
You'll go to hell,  
if, knowing they are the Lord,  
you treat them as men.

The senseless adoration of the lifeless, ignoring the living, has led to so many absurdities in India. Basava highlights one of them in the following sarcastic vachana:

"If they see a stone cobra,  
they say, 'pour milk on it!'  
If they see a living cobra  
they say, 'kill it; o, kill it!'  
If hungry Jangama comes,  
they say 'go away!'  
For the hungerless Lingam  
they say, 'give it food!'  
When they meet the devotees  
of our Lord Kudala Sangama  
and treat them unkindly  
they become like Gods... which strike  
against a stone".

Sheer hypocrisy! Isn't it? You give bread to stone and stone to the hungry! What a travesty of religion! The road to the Lord is through the living - not the non-living! Mere worship of Linga is not enough. No doubt, the concept of Linga is the most sublime, free from the taint of idolatry and triple in character - Ishta, prana and Bhava, and if worshipped in the right spirit, it leads to spiritual enlightenment. But this in itself is not sufficient for self-fulfilment. Listen to Basava:

"If you pour water upon it,  
It won't grow soft;  
Nor wither if you forget  
to water it,  
Worthless the Linga rite!  
O Lord Kudala Sangama,  
If you water Jangama,



The Immovable one gets soft!"

Basava goes further and boldly declares that is is the left over of the devotees which liberates one from bondage, not the "prasada" of his Lord Kudala Sangama:

"Lord, if thou art what thou art, I say:  
"What is thy obligation and thy debt?  
Not through thy mouth a ringle crumb  
Doeth spend itself; to take thy grace  
Is the seed of all my births!  
If because Jangama is Linga, I take  
What's left of the offering, my wheel of births  
Becomes as naught, O Kudala Sangama Lord!"

What a challenging tone! What unshakeable faith in living beings! At one stroke, Basava and his associates freed devotees from abject surrender to the Almighty and instilled in them faith in their own power - the power to uplift themselves, excel themselves and to overcome dependance on the Lord Himself.

It is in this new gospel that they become path-finders -the path of finding fulfilment in sharing one's earnings, yearings and strivings with fellow beings. Happiness is enhanced by sharing and grief diminishes by sharing. Even animals share their gains and griefs with their kith and kin:

"Does not a crow, on seeing a crumb,  
Call to its flocks?  
Does not a hen, on finding a morsel,  
Call, clacking, to her brood?  
If, being a devotee, a man lacks adherence  
to the fold of Bhakthi  
He's worse than hen or crow  
O Lord Kudala Sangama"

Here is the true test of devotion. To share is true devotion; to save for oneself is the opposite of devotion. This latter type of false devotion is rampant everywhere. Hence Basava had to reprimand such selfish devotees as follows:

"Oh, do not feed yourself  
Offering the tree its own plucked flowers,  
Offering the stream the water of the stream,  
Pressing the udders when you have  
Hurt the cow, depriving her calf of milk!"

This is exactly what is meant by 'spouting stacks of words which are hollow inside keeping behind the body, mind and wealth'. It is darting a headless arrow which may fly, but fails to hit the target.

Hence the emphasis on the living, moving and loving human beings and all beings. The greatest reward that life can offer is to love and be loved. Even to smile and to speak to Siva's devotees is a great reward:

"Born in this world of entanglements  
Why should I wish  
Aught else except



To smile, to speak  
To Siva's devotees?  
Why should I be, good sir,  
A proud, conceited, sullen man?  
Vain is his life  
Who has no courtesy!  
You, Sir, should speak  
With our Kudala Sanga's Sharanas  
with open heart".

If the Saranas are pleased with you and claim you as their own, it is enough. You need not beg of Siva even:

"What needs a body grown  
In the moon's cold beams  
To long for light of moon?  
What needs a man who lives  
In the company of Saranas  
To beg of Siva?  
Is't not enough  
If Lord Kudala Sangam Saranas  
Should come and claim me for their own?"

It is, therefore, incumbent on us to greet with folded hands and gentle speech each devotee we meet. Gentle speech is worth all counting of beads, and all penances and true modesty is worth Sadasiva's grace. Hence a journey of a hundred thousand leagues to see a Bhakta is not a waste. It is a meritorious deed.

Further:

"If, seeing a Siva-bhakta just in front  
You bow to him with open eyes,  
The sins of seven births  
Will be in flight!  
If, prostrate before him, you touch his feet  
It is as if  
Your body was offered all to him,  
As if transmuted by the alchemic stone.  
The fellow-ship of Saranas  
Of Kudala Sangama Deva  
will never let you wear  
The garland of rebirths again".

Seek the fellowship of Saranas. Seek their nod of approval. Seek the greatest reward of being claimed by them as their own. This is self-fulfilment here and self-realization there.

Why this emphasis on Saranas? It is because they transcend all inequalities and inequities based on birth, caste, creed, colour, sex and status, because they view the whole of the living world as equally worthy of their solicitude, and because they do not beg of Siva even for boons and benefits. Their love for all living beings knows no boundaries.

"The man who slays is a pariah;  
The man who eats the carrion is a low-born  
Where is the caste here - where?  
Our Kudala Sanga's Sharanas  
Who love all living thing  
They are the well-born ones!"



To love all living beings, to work for their welfare, to share one's possessions and aspirations with them, to co-exist with them, to find pleasure in their happiness, to love them and be loved by them - this, in fact, is the positive philosophy of life - a life-giving, life-sustaining and life-uplifting philosophy of Siva Saranas. All else must be subordinated to this over-riding philosophy of love, sharing, service and sacrifice. What is religion without this?

"What sort of religion can it be  
Without compassion?  
Compassion needs must be  
Towards all living things  
Compassion is the root  
Of all religious faith;  
Lord Kudala Sanga does not care  
For what is not like this".

A soul-stirring, soul-elevating and positive philosophy for the present day society with growing insensitivity to human suffering and sorrow.

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