

VACHANAS OF DEVARA DASIMAYYA: A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY

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Abstract:

Devara Dasimayya is one of the senior among the 'Vachanakaras' of 12th century A.D. He was elder to prominent Vachanakaras like Allama Prabhu, Basavanna, and Akkamahadevi. He belonged to weavers community and believed to be lived in a village Mudanur, which is at present in the district of Gulbarga in Karnataka. His signature-word (Ankita) attributed to his deity was 'Ramanatha'. Vachanas of Devara Dasimayya focus more on the concept of sincere work and critical response to superfluous devotion, deception, discrimination based on gender, the shallowness of religious institutions.

Keywords: Devara Dasimayya, Vachanas, Vachanakaras, Philosophy.

Introduction

There is a tradition in *vachana* literature to address *vachana* composers earlier than Basavanna as *adyas*. Devara Dasimayya is one such outstanding *vachana* poets who hailed during the Pre-Basava period in Kannada literature. Dasimayya recalls his predecessor *vachana* poets with high regards. As such, there is a tradition to treat or speak about their preceding *vachana* poets with great honour and respect among *vachana* composers. Though Dasimayya refers to his predecessors in the lineage of *vachana* poets, nothing much is known about them.

Dasimayya popularized Kannada prosodic formats like *kanda* and *ragale* of the ornate period and amply made use of *prasa* and *matra* features. It is a historical fact that external forms of *vachana* literature preserved and nurtured by Dasimayya were univocally and unquestionably accepted and adopted by the succeeding *vachana* poets later. "One of his significant contributions to *vachana* literature is the way how meaning could be easily derived out of his *vachanas*."¹ As Devara Dasimayya amply made use of diction as well as sound features that were prevalent in traditional literature, his *vachanas* prove to be more effective. His elaborate expressions

¹ *Jedara Dasimayya (in Kannada)*. p.38

expounding his intellectual thoughts utilize popular similes and metaphors which are easily comprehended by the readers. It is a paradox that readers of the present generation make use of dictionaries and glossaries to understand Dasimayya's compositions, not that they are difficult, but it is just because such readers are not fairly acquainted with the vocabulary used by the poets of those days. "It is a fantastic experience to realize how Dasimayya blows up and elaborates our understanding not only with his subtlety in meaning, but also through his vivid expressions."² It is such nuances in meaning and refinement in expressions that present a meaningful and thoughtful reading experience for the discerning readers of the poet. All these paved way for the future *vachana* poets to get into a begilded path to bring out their compositions. That way Dasimayya is undoubtedly like more than setting out of a river which absorbs all that come during its course, engrossing and assimilating the essence of the soil that it flows upon. Dasimayya's views regarding the reformation of the society in his compositions are innate and thought provoking which make him a forerunner and a celebrity in the lineage of *vachana* poets. In general *vachana* composers are known for their coinage of new words and their brilliant usage. It might not be out of focus to consider Dasimayya as a pathfinder in this endeavour. "Power of vocabulary cannot be easily defined or described in any simple way. It is to express something in a subtle and superior manner."³

As we know now, *vachana* composers were adepts in coining new terms. In a way Devara Dasimayya was a pathfinder for them. For instance, consider words like "ಕಷ್ಟಜಾತಿ"(kaṣṭajāti) – ಕಷ್ಟಜಾತಿಗಳು ಲಿಂಗವ ಮುಟ್ಟಿ ಪೂಜಿಸಲಾಗದು. People belonging to *kaṣṭajāti* should not worship touching *linga*, ಅಕ್ಕುಲಿಜ (akkulija) – not born in an upper caste, ಉರಸು (urasu) – find comfortable – ಜ್ವರ ಬಡಿದ ಬಾಯಿಗೆ ನೊರೆಹಾಲು ಉರಸುವುದೇ? Could somebody suffering from fever find fresh milk comfortable?, ಒಡತನ - oḍataṇa – to live together etc. A word like ಲಿಂಗಲಿಪಿ-*lingalipi* is undoubtedly a new word in Kannada dictionary. Whenever we discuss about coinage of new words in *vachana* literature, Devara Dasimayya pervades over all others. He is a master of religious words used in *vachana* literature. A word like ಪ್ರಸಾದ-*prasāda* may also be considered in this direction. Though he precedes many other *vachana* composers, he expresses his gratitude to his predecessors.

Devara Dasimayya was interested in worldly affairs. He amply made use of the experiences of other Siva devotees and *saranas* of those days. This becomes clear from his signature name or pseudonym (*ankita*) itself. Dasimayya might have lived around 1140 A.D. There might have been *vachana* composers a couple of decades

² *op.cit.* 39

³ *op.cit.* 45

earlier to him. In spite of this Dasimayya may be considered as an ‘ace predecessor’ among the lineage of *vachana* poets in Kannada literature. Another critic opines that “Dasimayya was rational in his approach, he was both a devotee and an able composer of *vachanas*, he was also a teacher and a preacher and aptly a forefather of *vachana* literature. Kannada literature is fortunate to have a poet of his merit and order.”⁴

Devara Dasimayya’s *vachanas* have been popular through the ages the essential roots of which have grown into a huge tree. No doubt that the *vachana* literature reached its great heights during the period of Basavanna and his contemporaries. But one should not forget that it was Dasimayya and *vachana* composers of his period paved a precious way for the development of *vachana* literature of the later period. A critic lauds Dasimayya saying that “Dasimayya is the precursor for all that was written and expressed by succeeding *vachana* writers like Allama, Basavanna, Chennabasavanna, Akkamahadevi, Siddarama and others. In a way it was Devara Dasimayya who put up a strong foundation for the thoughts, attitudes and poignant expressions of the later *vachana* poets.”⁵ Dasimayya’s elevated poetic faculties, his style and expression, his distinct vocabulary and worldly experience stood as guidelines for the succeeding *vachana* poets. While *campū* form of literature which saw its climax during the period of Pampa and his contemporaries as well as successors was striving for a rebirth during the later period, it was Dasimayya who fairly employed a new metrical composition for his poetry and thus made way for a similar flow of poetic grandeur in Kannada literature. “Dasimayya brought into practice another word ‘*vachanagama*’ thus giving the status of the vedas and shastras to *vachana* literature.”⁶

Dasimayya’s contribution in taking the essence of *vachana* literature to the common man was significant. He made *vachanas* easily understandable to the people of the society. He uplifted the status of *vachana* literature the language as well as content of which were appreciated by the people from all quarters of the society. Dasimayya never felt that he was an outstanding poet. He was aware that the experiences of his predecessors went into the form of *vachanas* for which he also became a vehicle. As far as the life of the poet is concerned, we do not have a clear picture about it but for some material elevated and charged with a degree of emotions. In Basavanna’s *vachanas* we come across some account about Dasimayya’s life and compositions.

⁴ *op.cit.* 68

⁵ *op.cit.* 15

⁶ *op. cit.* 27

One of the vachanas of Basavanna goes like this :

***“A poor person I am without devotion,
I begged at Kakkayya’s door,
I stood at Chennayya’s house too for alms,
All the revered ancients gave me the alms of devotion,
Lo! my bowl was full Oh! Kudalasangamadeva”***

Here, Basavanna recalls with all gratitude the favours he received by his ancestors in the path of devotion. The style and orientation of Basavanna’s *vachanas* resemble those of Devara Dasimayya and Basavanna as well as his contemporaries owe a lot for their predecessors.

We could see another *vachana* of Dasimayya which finds a parallel in Basavanna.

***Why should I worry what I have for today or tomorrow?
Lord Siva who bestows everything to me is never that poor
Oh! Ramanatha.”***

Basavanna :

***“What to have for today or for tomorrow,
My family is starving badly, What next?”***

Dasimayya :

***If I trust my neighbours and call them,
Why not a fox turn into a horse and
Come to my help? As the whole world knows
The linga which has fallen into the stream
Comes and sits on my palm at a fair call,
The Lord does not heed to those who call him
Without trust, Oh! Ramanatha.***

Basavanna:

***They do not believe, they have no trust,
People of this world know not how to trust,
If they trust and call him, surely he will listen,
If anybody blows a trumpet to call him
Without trust, how can he heed to them, Oh! Kudalasangamadeva.***

Phrases and special usages from the *vachana* of Devara Dasimayya have influenced not only later *vachana* poets, but also on the people of the society. Our folks make use of many such expressions as idioms and proverbs. For instance, ಕತ್ತೆ ಬಲ್ಲದೆ ಕಸ್ತೂರಿಯ ವಾಸನೆಯ? (How does a donkey know the fragrance of kasturi

(musk)?, ಹಣಸಿಯ ಹೂವೆಲ್ಲಾ ಕಾಯಾಗಬಲ್ಲವೇ? (How could all the tamarind flowers grow into fruits?)

Conclusion

Devara Dasimayya's contribution, as a pioneer in the lineage of *vachana* poets is outstanding. His philosophy, style that he employed in his compositions, his utmost devotion towards Siva and his worldly knowledge are simply splendid. Basavanna, as a dominant *vachana* poet of his time has wholeheartedly lauded with gratitude the contribution of Dasimayya to *vachana* literature. He gratefully acknowledges the inspiration and fund of knowledge he got from his predecessor. Dasimayya was the one who paved way towards attaining salvation through devotion. It was the efforts of Dasimayya and his followers to sow the seeds of equality and fraternity in the society without giving any way to caste and creed, rich and poor hierarchies in the society which have borne fruits down to present ages. It is a part of history that the multi-cultural Kannada *desi vachana* literature has paved a way to unity, fraternity and egalitarianism.

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