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# SPEAKING OF ŚIVA



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# SPEAKING OF ŚIVA



TRANSLATED WITH AN  
INTRODUCTION BY  
A. K. RAMANUJAN

PENGUIN BOOKS

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England  
Viking Penguin Inc., 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010, U.S.A.  
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia  
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4  
Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

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First published 1973  
Reprinted 1979, 1985

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
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Set in Monotype Bembo

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This is one of the volumes sponsored by the Asian Literature Program of the Asia Society.

Versions of these translations appeared in: *The East-West Review*, Spring and Summer 1966, Volume II, Number 3; *TriQuarterly*, Number 11, Winter 1968; *Vedanta & the West*, November/December 1970, Number 206; and *Transpacific*, Number 7, Volume II, Number 3, Spring 1971.

This book has been accepted in the Indian Translations Series of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco).



for my father  
Attipat Āsūri Krishnaswāmi  
(1892–1953)





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## Translator's Note

*Speaking of Śiva* is a book of *vacanas*. A *vacana* is a religious lyric in Kannada free verse; *vacana* means literally 'saying, thing said'.

Kannada is a Dravidian language, spoken today in the south Indian state of Mysore by nearly 20 million people. Of the four major Dravidian languages, Kannada is second only to Tamil in antiquity of literary tradition. There is evidence for at least fifteen centuries of literary work in Kannada. Yet in all the length and variety of this literature, there is no body of lyrics more strikingly original and impassioned than the *vacanas* of the medieval *Vīraśaiva*<sup>1</sup> saints. They all speak of Śiva and speak to Śiva: hence the title.

The most intense and significant period of *vacana* poetry was a span of two centuries between the tenth and the twelfth. Four saints of the period are represented here: Dāsimayya, Basavaṇṇa, Allama, and Mahādēviyakka, without doubt the greatest poets of the *vacana* tradition. Though *vacanas* continue to be written to this day and later writers have occasionally composed striking ones, not one of the later 300 or more *vacanakāras* comes anywhere close to these four saint-poets in range, poetry, or passion.<sup>2</sup>

1. '*Vīraśaiva*' means 'militant or heroic śaivism or faith in Śiva'. The *Vīraśaivas* are also commonly known as *liṅgāyatās*: 'those who wear the *liṅga*, the symbol of Śiva'. Orthodox *liṅgāyatās* wear the *liṅga*, stone emblem of Śiva, in a silver casket round their necks symbolizing His personal and near presence. Śiva, the 'auspicious one', is elsewhere one of the Hindu trinity of gods: Brahma the creator, Viṣṇu the preserver, Śiva the destroyer. In the *vacanas*, Śiva is the supreme god.

2. Many thousand *vacanas* are attributed to each major saint. The legends, given to excesses, speak of millions. Over 300 *vacana*-writers

In these Viraśaiva saint-poets, experience spoke in a mother tongue. Pan-Indian Sanskrit, the second language of cultured Indians for centuries, gave way to colloquial Kannada. The strictness of traditional metres, the formality of literary genres, divisions of prose and verse, gave way to the innovations and spontaneity of free verse, a poetry that was not recognizably in verse. The poets were not bards or pundits in a court but men and women speaking to men and women. They were of every class, caste and trade; some were out-castes, some illiterate.

Vacanas are literature, but not merely literary. They are a literature in spite of itself, scorning artifice, ornament, learning, privilege: a religious literature, literary because religious; great voices of a sweeping movement of protest and reform in Hindu society; witnesses to conflict and ecstasy in gifted mystical men. Vacanas are our wisdom literature. They have been called the Kannada Upaniṣads. Some hear the tone and voice of Old Testament prophets or the Chuang-Tzu here. Vacanas are also our psalms and hymns. Analogues may be multiplied. The vacanas may be seen as still another version of the Perennial Philosophy. But that is to forget particulars.

Faced with such an embarrassment of riches, no clear principle would do for the choice of poems for translation. So, giving in to the vacana spirit, I have let the vacanas choose me, letting them speak to my biases; translating whatever struck me over the past two decades. A translation has to be true to the translator no less than to the originals. He cannot jump off his own shadow. Translation is choice,

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are known to date. Many more are being discovered. Several thousand vacanas are in print and on palmleaf. Scholars at the Karnatak University, Dharwar, and elsewhere, are engaged in the task of collecting, collating and editing the manuscripts.

interpretation, an assertion of taste, a betrayal of what answers to one's needs, one's envies. I can only hope that my needs are not entirely eccentric or irrelevant to the needs of others in the two traditions, the one I translate from and the one I translate into. I have tried to choose (a) good poems, (b) poetry representative of the poet, (c) poems thematically typical of the vacana tradition, and (d) a few unique in idea, image, or form.

In the act of translating, 'the Spirit killeth and the Letter giveth Life'. Any direct attack on the 'spirit of the work' is foredoomed to fuzziness. Only the literal text, the word made flesh, can take us to the word behind the words. I have tried therefore to attend closely to the language of the originals, their design, detail by detail; not to match the Kannada with the English, but to *map* the medieval Kannada onto the soundlook of modern English; in rhythm and punctuation, in phrase-breaks, paragraphs and lineation to suggest the inner form of the originals as I see them. Medieval Kannada manuscripts use no punctuation, no paragraph-, word-, or phrase-divisions, though modern editions print the vacanas with all the modern conventions. The few liberties I have taken are towards a close structural mimicry, a re-enactment in English, the transposition of a structure in one texture onto another. Valéry said of a translation of St John of the Cross: 'This is really to *translate*, which is to reconstitute as nearly as possible the *effect* of a certain cause'. The relevant formal features of the vacanas are discussed in the Introduction.

There are three parts to this book: an introduction, the poems, appendixes and notes. There are short biographical notes on each of the four saint-poets represented. The book ends with two appendixes, one on Viraśaiva religious philosophy, and one on the contemporary Lingayat community by anthropologist William McCormack; and notes on a few textual points and allusions.

The editions I have used are acknowledged at the end of each section-note. The poems follow the Kannada editions in numbering and arrangement.

### NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The transliteration system used for Kannada names and words in this book is very close to the accepted Sanskrit transliteration system. The only difference is in marking length for the mid-vowels e ē o ō, whereas Sanskrit has only ē ō. Words of Sanskrit origin are given in their Kannada forms: e.g., Kāmalatā in Sanskrit would become Kāmalate in Kannada. I have transliterated the *anusvāra* by the appropriate nasal which one hears in pronunciation: e.g. for *liṅga*, I write *liṅga*.

### VOWELS

	FRONT		CENTRAL		BACK	
	short	long	short	long	short	long
HIGH	i	ī			u	ū
MID	e	ē			o	ō
LOW			a	ā		
Diphthongs:		ai				
		au				

### CONSONANTS

	velar <sup>1</sup>		palatal		retroflex		alveolar		dental		labial	
stops <sup>2</sup>	k	kh	c	ch	ṭ	ṭh			t	th	p	ph
	g	gh	j	jh	ḍ	ḍh			d	dh	b	bh
nasals	ṅ		ñ		ṇ		n					m
fricatives	h		ś		ṣ		s					
liquids					l		l	r				
semivowels			y									v

1. Velar, palatal etc. indicate positions of articulation.

2. Stops, nasals etc. indicate manner of articulation.

The above charts indicate rather roughly the phonetic values of the letters. A few striking features of Kannada pronunciation may be pointed out for the use of English readers interested in trying to pronounce the Kannada words the Kannada way.

1. Kannada long vowels are simple long vowels, unlike their English counterparts, which are (usually) diphthongs as in beet, boot, boat.

2. Among other things, Kannada has three kinds of consonants unfamiliar to English speakers: the dentals (t th d dh), the retroflexes (ṭ ṭh ḍ ḍh ṇ ṣ ḷ), the aspirated stops (kh gh ch jh th dh ṭh ḍh ph bh).

The dentals are pronounced with the tongue stopping the breath at the teeth, somewhat like French or Italian dentals, in words like tu, du, Dante.

The retroflexes are made by curling back the tongue towards the roof of the mouth, somewhat as in some American English pronunciations of party, morning, girl.

The Kannada sounds represented by ph, th, ch, kh, etc. are aspirated (but more strongly) like English word-initial stops as in pin, kin, tin. In Kannada, even the voiced stops bh, dh, gh, etc. are aspirated, unlike any English voiced consonant. The sounds represented by p t ṭ c k are unaspirated everywhere, sounded somewhat like the English consonants in spin, stain, skin.

3. There are no alveolar stops in Kannada corresponding to English t, d; but Kannada s, l, n are produced by the tongue at the alveolar position as in English.

4. There are long (or double) consonants in the middle of Kannada words. English has them only across words: hot tin, seven nights, sick cow etc. They are indicated in the texts by double letters as in Kannada, Basavanna.

5. The Kannada r is flapped or trilled somewhat as in the British pronunciation of ring, berry.





## Acknowledgements

IN translating medieval Kannada to modern English, many hands and minds have helped. My thanks are due to The Asia Society, New York, and personally to Mrs Bonnie Crown, Director of the Asian Literature Program, for support, publishers, advice, deadlines streaked with kindness; William McCormack for an anthropological essay on Lingayat Culture written specially for this volume (pp. 175-187); M. Cidananda Murti, who read critically each translation, checked it against the texts and his accurate learning; M. G. Krishnamurti, Girish Karnad and C. Kambar, who read and discussed with me the early drafts and increased my understanding of the poetry of the originals; Leonard Nathan, poet and translator, for his suggestions regarding the English detail; my colleagues, Edward Dimock, Milton Singer, J. A. B. van Buitenen, Norman Zide and Ron Inden, for discussions on bhakti; the Staff of the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilization for making the illegible legible, in more senses than the obvious; my wife for her scepticism and her faith; her perceptions have chastened and enriched page after page.

Acknowledgements have to stop somewhere. 'What do I have that I have not received?'

*Chicago, 1969*

A. K. RAMANUJAN



# Introduction

## THE TEMPLE AND THE BODY

The rich  
will make temples for Śiva.  
What shall I,  
a poor man,  
do?

5

My legs are pillars,  
the body the shrine,  
the head a cupola  
of gold.

Listen, O lord of the meeting rivers, 10  
things standing shall fall,  
but the moving ever shall stay.

BASAVAṆṆA 820

BASAVAṆṆA was the leader of the medieval religious movement, Vīraśaivism, of which the Kannada vacanas are the most important texts. If one were to choose a single poem to represent the whole extraordinary body of religious lyrics called the vacanas, one cannot do better than choose the above poem of BasavaṆṆa's. It dramatizes several of the themes and oppositions characteristic of the protest or 'protestant' movement called Vīraśaivism.

For instance: Indian temples are traditionally built in the image of the human body. The ritual for building a temple begins with digging in the earth, and planting a pot of seed. The temple is said to rise from the implanted seed, like a human. The different parts of a temple are named after body parts. The two sides are called the hands or wings, the *hasta*; a pillar is called a foot, *pāda*. The top of the temple is the head,

the *śikhara*. The shrine, the innermost and the darkest sanctum of the temple, is a *garbhagrha*, the womb-house. The temple thus carries out in brick and stone the primordial blueprint of the human body.<sup>1</sup>

But in history the human metaphor fades. The model, the meaning, is submerged. The temple becomes a static standing thing that has forgotten its moving originals. Basavaṅṅa's poem calls for a return to the original of all temples, preferring the body to the embodiment.

The poems as well as the saints' legends suggest a cycle of transformations – temple into body into temple, or a circle of identities – a temple is a body is a temple. The legend of saint Ghaṅṅākaraṅṅa is a striking example: when the saint realized that Śiva was the supreme god, he gave himself as an offering to Śiva. His body became the threshold of a Śiva temple, his limbs the frame of the door, his head the temple bell.

The poem draws a distinction between *making* and *being*. The rich can only *make*<sup>2</sup> temples. They may not *be* or become temples by what they do. Further what is made is a mortal artifact, but what one *is* is immortal (lines 11–12).

This opposition, the standing *v.* the moving, *sthāvara v. jaṅgama*, is at the heart of Viraśaivism. The Sanskrit word *sthāvara*, containing the same Indo-European root as in English words like 'stand', 'state', 'estate', 'stature', 'static', 'status', carries connotations of these related words. *Jaṅgama* contains a cognate of English *go*. *Sthāvara* is that which stands, a piece of property, a thing inanimate. *Jaṅgama*

1. Some interpreters extend the symbolism further: if a temple has three doors, they represent the three states of consciousness (sleep, waking, and dream) through any of which you may reach the Lord within; if it has five doors, they represent the five senses etc.

2. A distinction often found in Indo-European languages between making and doing is suggested by lines 2 and 5. Kannada has only one word for both: 'māḍu'.

is moving, moveable, anything given to going and coming. Especially in Vīraśaiva religion a Jaṅgama is a religious man who has renounced world and home, moving from village to village, representing god to the devoted, a god incarnate. Sthāvara could mean any static symbol or idol of god, a temple, or a liṅga worshipped in a temple. Thus the two words carry a contrast between two opposed conceptions of god and of worship. Basavaṅṅa in the above poem prefers the original to the symbol, the body that remembers to the temple that forgets, the poor though living moving jaṅgama to the rich petrified temple, the sthāvara, standing out there.

The poem opens by relating the temple to the rich. Medieval South Indian temples looked remarkably like palaces with battlements; they were richly endowed and patronized by the wealthy and the powerful, without whom the massive structures housing the bejewelled gods and sculptured pillars would not have been possible. The Vīraśaiva movement was a social upheaval by and for the poor, the low-caste and the outcaste against the rich and the privileged; it was a rising of the unlettered against the literate pundit, flesh and blood against stone.

The poem enacts this conflict. Lines 1-5 speak of 'making temples'. 'They' are opposed to 'I', the poor man, who can neither make nor do anything. In lines 6-9 the poet recovers from the despair with an assertion of identities between body and temple; legs are pillars, the body a shrine, the head a cupola, a defiant cupola of *gold*. From 'making' the poem has moved to 'being'. Lines 10-12 sum up the contrasts, asserting a universal: What's *made* will crumble, what's standing will fall; but what *is*, the living moving *jaṅgama*, is immortal.

The first sentence of the poem has a clear tense,<sup>3</sup> placing

3. In one textual variant, the tense is the future tense; in others, the past.

the making of temples in time and history. The second movement (lines 6–9) asserting identities, has no tense or verb in the Kannada original, though one has to use the verb *to be* in the English translation for such equations, e.g., 'My legs are pillars'; Kannada has only 'My legs themselves, pillars'. The polarities are lined up and judged:

the rich	: the poor
temple	: body
make	: be
the standing (sthāvara)	: the moving (jaṅgama)

The sthāvara/jaṅgama contrast is not merely an opposition of thing and person. The Viraśaiva trinity consists of guru, liṅga, and jaṅgama – the spiritual teacher, the symbolic stone-emblem of Śiva, and His wandering mendicant representative. They are three yet one. Basavaṅṇa insists, in another poem, 'sthāvara and jaṅgama are one' to the truly worshipful spirit. Yet if a devotee prefer external worship of the stone liṅga (sthāvara) to serving a human jaṅgama, he would be worthy of scorn.

Jaṅgama in the last sentence of the poem is in the neuter (jaṅgamakke). This makes it an abstraction, raising the particular living/dying Jaṅgama to a universal immortal principle. But the word jaṅgama also carries its normal association of 'holy person', thus including the Living and the Living-forever.

#### VACANAS AND HINDUISM

Anthropologists like Robert Redfield and Milton Singer speak of 'great' and 'little' traditions in Indian civilization; other pairs of terms have been proposed: popular/learned, folk/classical, low/high, parochial/universal, peasant/aristocratic, lay/hieratic. The native Indian tradition speaks of

*mārga* ('classical') and *deśi* ('folk'). The several pairs capture different aspects of a familiar dichotomy, though none of them is satisfactory or definitive. We shall use 'great' and 'little' here as convenient labels. Reservations regarding the concepts and the dichotomy will appear below.

The 'great' tradition in India would be inter-regional, pan-Indian; its vehicle, Sanskrit. The 'little' tradition would consist of many regional traditions, carried by the regional languages. It should not be forgotten that many of the regional languages and cultures themselves, e.g., Tamil, have long traditions, divisible into 'ancient' and 'modern' historically, 'classical' and 'folk' or 'high' and 'low' synchronically. Such languages have a formal 'high' style and many informal colloquial 'low' dialects. These colloquial dialects may be either social or sub-regional. Cultural traditions too tend to be organized similarly into related yet distinct sub-cultures socially and regionally. Even the so-called 'great' tradition is not as monolithic as it is often assumed to be. Still, taken in the large, one may speak of pan-Indian Sanskritic 'great' traditions and many regional 'little' traditions. But traditions are not divided by impermeable membranes; they interflow into one another, responsive to differences of density as in an osmosis. It is often difficult to isolate elements as belonging exclusively to the one or the other.

A Sanskrit epic like the *Mahābhārata* contains in its encyclopedic range much folk material, like tales, beliefs, proverbs, picked obviously from folk sources, refurbished, Sanskritized, fixed forever in the Sanskritic artifice of eternity. But in a profoundly oral culture like the Indian, the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* itself gets returned to the oral folk-traditions, contributing the transformed materials back to the 'little' traditions to be further diffused and diffracted. It gets 'translated' from the Sanskrit into the regional languages; in the course of the 'translations', the regional poet infuses it with his rich



local traditions, combining not only the pan-Indian 'great' with the regional 'little', but the regional 'great' with the regional 'little' traditions as well. Thus many cycles of give-and-take are set in motion. Such interaction and exchange is well expressed in the following parable of the transposed heads:

A sage's wife, Māriamma, was sentenced by her husband to death. At the moment of execution she embraced an outcaste woman, Ellamma, for her sympathy. In the fray both the outcaste woman and the brahmin lost their heads. Later, the husband relented, granted them pardon and restored their heads by his spiritual powers. But the heads were transposed by mistake. To Māriamma (with a brahmin head and an outcaste body) goats and cocks but not buffaloes were sacrificed; to Ellamma (outcaste head and brahmin body) buffaloes instead of goats and cocks.

According to Whitehead's *Village Gods of South India*, the legend probably represents the fusion of the Aryan and Dravidian cults in the days when the Aryan culture first found its way into (South) India. It could stand just as well for transpositions in the 'great' and 'little' traditions.

For the sake of exposition we may speak of several parallel components in the 'great' and 'little' traditions in Hinduism. We may consider these under four tentative heads: (a) social organization, (b) text, (c) performance, (d) mythology. For the 'great' traditions they would be respectively, (a) the caste hierarchy, (b) the Vedas, (c) the Vedic rituals, (d) the pan-Indian pantheon of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Indra etc.

We may recognize elements parallel to these four for the 'little' traditions. Instead of the Vedic texts there would be *purāṇas*, saints' legends, minor mythologies, systems of magic and superstition – often composed in the regional languages. These are mostly local traditions, though they may seek, and often find, prestige by being re-written in Sanskrit and absorbed into the pan-Indian corpus. Parallel to the Vedic

rituals, every village has its own particular kinds of 'cultural performance' – local animal sacrifices, magical practices, wakes, vigils, fairs. The social organization of the 'little' traditions would be the local sects and cults; the mythology would centre round regional deities, worship of stone, trees, crossroads and rivers. (See diagram on page 34.)

Vacanas are *bhakti* poems, poems of personal devotion to a god, often a particular form of the god. The vacana saints reject not only the 'great' traditions of Vedic religion, but the 'little' local traditions as well. They not only scorn the effectiveness of the Vedas as scripture; they reject the little legends of the local gods and goddesses. The first of the following examples mocks at orthodox ritual genuflections and recitations; the second, at animal sacrifice in folk-religion:

See-saw watermills bow their heads.  
So what?  
Do they get to be devotees  
to the Master?

The tongs join hands.  
So what?  
Can they be humble in service  
to the Lord?

Parrots recite.  
So what?  
Can they read the Lord?

How can the slaves of the Bodiless God,  
Desire,  
know the way  
our Lord's Men move  
or the stance of their standing?

The sacrificial lamb brought for the festival  
ate up the green leaf brought for the decorations.

Not knowing a thing about the kill,  
it wants only to fill its belly:  
born that day, to die that day.

But tell me:

did the killers survive,  
O lord of the meeting rivers?

BASAṬAṆṆA 129

Religions set apart certain times and places as specially sacred: rituals and worship are performed at appointed times, pilgrimages are undertaken to well-known holy places. There is a holy map as well as a holy calendar. If you die in Benares, sinner though you are, you will go straight to heaven. The following vacana represents the contempt of the saint for all sacred space and sacred time:

To the utterly at-one with Śiva  
there's no dawn,  
no new moon,  
no noonday,  
nor equinoxes,  
nor sunsets,  
nor full moons;  
his front yard  
is the true Benares,  
O Rāmanātha.

DĀSIMAYYA 98

In his protest against traditional dichotomies, he rejects also the differences between man and woman as superficial:

If they see  
breasts and long hair coming  
they call it woman,

if beard and whiskers  
they call it man:

but, look, the self that hovers  
in between  
is neither man  
nor woman

O Rāmanātha

DĀSIMAYYA 133

The Viraśaiva saints – unlike exponents of other kinds of Hinduism, and like other bhakti movements of India – do not believe that religion is something one is born with or into. An orthodox Hindu believes a Hindu is born, not made. With such a belief, there is no place for conversion in Hinduism; a man born to his caste or faith cannot choose and change, nor can others change him. But if he believes in acquiring merit only by living and believing certain things, then there is room for choosing and changing his beliefs. He can then convert and be converted. If, as these saints believed, he also believes that his god is the true god, the only true god, it becomes imperative to convert the misguided and bring light to the benighted. Missions are born. Bhakti religions proselytize, unlike classical Hinduism. Some of the incandescence of Viraśaiva poetry is the white heat of truth-seeing and truth-saying in a dark deluded world; their monotheism lashes out in an atmosphere of animism and polytheism.<sup>4</sup>

4. In the light of these considerations, it is not surprising that Christian missionaries were greatly attracted to South Indian bhakti texts and traditions, often translated them, speculated that bhakti attitudes were the result of early Christian influence. Also, Christian texts and lives (especially the New Testament, and the lives of saints) strike many Hindus as variants of bhakti.

How can I feel right  
 about a god who eats up lacquer and melts,  
 who wilts when he sees fire?

How can I feel right  
 about gods you sell in your need,  
 and gods you bury for fear of thieves?

The lord of the meeting rivers,  
 self-born, one with himself,

he alone is the true god.

BASAVANNA 558

The pot is a god. The winnowing  
 fan is a god. The stone in the  
 street is a god. The comb is a  
 god. The bowstring is also a  
 god. The bushel is a god and the  
 spouted cup is a god.

Gods, gods, there are so many  
 there's no place left  
 for a foot.

There is only  
 one god. He is our Lord  
 of the Meeting Rivers.

BASAVANNA 563

The crusading militancy at the heart of bhakti<sup>5</sup> makes it double-edged, bisexual, as expressed in poems like the following:

Look here, dear fellow:  
I wear these men's clothes  
only for you.

Sometimes I am man,  
sometimes I am woman.

O lord of the meeting rivers  
I'll make war for you  
but I'll be your devotees' bride.

BASAṬAṆṆA 703

### THE 'UNMEDIATED VISION'

Why did the vacanakāras (and certain other bhakti traditions in India and elsewhere) reject, at least in their more intense moods, the 'great' and 'little' traditions? I think it is because the 'great' and 'little' traditions, as we have described them, together constitute 'establishment' in the several senses of the word. They *are* the establishment, the stable, the secure,

5. The vacanas often divide the world of men between *bhakta* (devotee) and *bhavi* (worldling), men of faith and the infidels – reminiscent of Christian/Heathen, Jew/Gentile, divisions. One amusing legend speaks of a Śaiva saint who lived in the world, devoting his energies to converting worldlings to the Śaiva faith – by any means whatever: bribes, favours, love, and if needed physical force, coercing or persuading them to wear the Śaiva emblem of holy ash on the forehead. One day, Śiva himself came down in disguise to see him. But he did not recognize Śiva and proceeded to convert him, offering him holy ash, trying to force it on him when he seemed reluctant. When his zeal became too oppressive, Śiva tried in vain to tell him who he was, but was forced down on his knees for the baptism of ash – even Śiva had to become a Śaiva.

the sthāvara, in the social sense. In another sense, such traditions symbolize man's attempt to establish or stabilize the universe for himself. Such traditions wish to render the universe manipulable, predictable, safe. Every prescribed ritual or magical act has given results. These are spelled out in clear terms in a *phalaśruti*.<sup>6</sup>

Ritual, superstition, sacred space and sacred time, pilgrimage and temple-going, offerings to god and priest, prayers and promises – all forms of 'making' and 'doing' – all of them are performed to get results, to manipulate and manage carefully the Lord's universe to serve one's own purposes, to save one's soul or one's skin. Salvation, like prosperity, has a price. It can be paid – by oneself or by proxy. The 'great' and 'little' traditions organize and catalogue the universe, and make available the price-list.

But the vacanakāras have a horror of such bargains, such manipulations, the arrogance of such predictions. The Lord's world is unpredictable, and all predictions are false, ignorant, and worse.

Thus, classical belief systems, social customs and superstitions (Basavaṇṇa 581, 105), image worship (Basavaṇṇa 558), the caste system (Dāsimaṃyā 96), the Vedic ritual of *yajña* (Basavaṇṇa 125), as well as local sacrifices of lambs and goats (Basavaṇṇa 129) – all of them are fiercely questioned and ridiculed.

Vacanas often go further and reject the idea of doing good so that one may go to heaven. Righteousness, virtue, being correct, doing the right things, carry no guarantee to god.

6. A *phalaśruti* is 'an account of the merit which accrues through a religious act. For pilgrimage, it is of the general form "the place of x . . . when visited at the time . . . together with the performance of observance a, b, c, d, . . . yields the following results"; they are almost always both secular and religious, as the curing of a disease and securing a better existence in the next life.' Agehananda Bharati, 'Pilgrimage in the Indian Tradition', in *History of Religions*, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 145.

One may note here again that making and doing are both opposed to being or knowing (in a non-discursive sense).

Feed the poor  
tell the truth  
make water-places  
and build tanks for a town –

you may then go to heaven  
after death, but you'll get nowhere  
near the truth of our Lord

And the man who knows our Lord,  
he gets no results.

ALLAMA 959

All true experience of god is *kṛpā*, grace that cannot be called, recalled, or commanded. The *vacanas* distinguish *anubhava* 'experience', and *anubhāva* 'the Experience'. The latter is a search for the 'unmediated vision', the unconditioned act, the unpredictable experience. Living in history, time and cliché, one lives in a world of the pre-established, through the received (*śruti*) and the remembered (*smṛti*). But the Experience when it comes, comes like a storm to all such husks and labels. In a remarkable use of the well-known opportunist proverb ('Winnow when the wind blows'), Chowḍayya the Ferryman says:



Winnow, winnow!  
 Look here, fellows  
 winnow when the wind blows.

Remember, the winds  
 are not in your hands,

Remember, you cannot say  
 I'll winnow, I'll winnow  
 tomorrow.

When the winds of the Lord's grace  
 lash,  
 quickly, quickly winnow, winnow,  
 said our Chowḍayya of the Ferrymen.

#### CHOWḌAYYA OF THE FERRYMEN

A mystical opportunist can only wait for it, be prepared to catch It as It passes. The grace of the Lord is nothing he can invoke or wheedle by prayer, rule, ritual, magical word or sacrificial offering.<sup>7</sup> In *anubhāva* he needs nothing, he is

7. Though the saints generally reject external ceremony the Vīraśaivas have developed their own ceremony and symbols; but they are nothing elaborate like the Vedic. Vīraśaiva orthodoxy depends on the eight coverings or emblems, the *aṣṭāvaraṇa*. Some of the *vacanas* mention these, but they are clearly secondary, and mere literal observance of these will not make one a *bhakta*.

i. The guru or the spiritual guide leads the soul to Śiva.

ii. The *liṅga*, the only symbol of Śiva, is to be worn inseparably on his body by the devotee. There is no suggestion in any of the known *vacanas* that the *liṅga* was a phallic symbol. The *Liṅga* is Śiva himself, externalized as a form by the guru.

iii. The *jaṅgama* is a travelling religious teacher, ideally free and pure. To the Vīraśaivas the *jaṅgama* is the lord on earth, as *liṅga* and guru are other aspects of Him. The *jaṅgama* also represents the community of saints, for which every *vacanakāra* thirsts.

iv. The *pādōdaka* is the holy water from the feet of the guru, imbibed by the devotee as a mark of his devotion. All things are sanctified by guru, *liṅga* and *jaṅgama*.

Nothing; for to be someone, or something, is to be differentiated and separate from God. When he is one with him, he is the Nothing without names. Yet we must not forget that this fierce rebellion against petrification was a rebellion only against contemporary Hindu practice; the rebellion was a call to return to experience. Like European Protestants, the Viraśaivas returned to what they felt was the original inspiration of the ancient traditions no different from true and present experience.

Defiance is not discontinuity. Alienation from the immediate environment can mean continuity with an older ideal. Protest can take place in the very name of one's opponents' ideals.

We should also remember that the vacana ideals were not all implemented in the Viraśaiva community; the relation of ideals to realization, the city of god and the city of man, is a complex relation, and we shall not embark here on an

v. The prasāda, or 'favour', is signified by food consecrated by the touch of the guru. In Hinduism privilege of food and drink mark and separate caste from caste, male from female, the pure from the polluted. Ideally, pādōdaka and prasāda unite the devotees through commensality and companionship, whatever be their rank, sect or occupation. Such identity and equality are achieved by bhakti to the guru. Note also the importance of water in the ritual, unlike the Vedic fires.

vi. The vibhūti is holy ash prepared by a man of virtue and learning according to elaborate rules, to the accompaniment of sacred chants. Ash is also associated with Śiva, the ascetic who covered His body with it.

vii. The rudrākṣa, 'the eyes of Śiva', are seeds sacred to all Śiva-worshippers, strung into necklaces, bracelets and prayer beads.

viii. The mantra, a sacred formula of five syllables (pañcākṣarā: Namaś-Śivāya 'Obeisance to Śiva'), is the King of Mantras, the only one accepted by the Viraśaivas. According to all Śaivas, these five syllables are 'far weightier than the 70 million other mantras put together'. S. C. Nandimath, *A Handbook of Viraśaivism*, p. 63.

anthropology<sup>8</sup> of contemporary Lingayat community, for it would require no less to describe the texts in context.

What we have said so far may be summarized in a chart. The dotted lines indicate the 'permeable membranes' that allow transfusion.

HINDUISM		STRUCTURE	ANTI-STRUCTURE
		<i>Establishment:</i> <i>'Public' Religion</i>	<i>Protest:</i> <i>'Personal'</i> <i>Religion</i>
		Great Tradition	Little Tradition
Text	Vedas etc.	Local Purānas etc.	v. Bhakti
Performance	Vedic ritual	Local sacri- fices etc.	
Social organi- zation	Caste- hierarchy	Sects and cults	
Mythology	Pan-Indian deities	Regional deities	

Following Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process*, I am using the terms structure and anti-structure. I would further distinguish between anti-structure and counter-structure. Anti-

8. cf. L. Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus*, Chicago, 1970. See also W. McCormack's anthropological appendix to this work.

structure is anti- 'structure', ideological rejection of the idea of structure itself. Yet bhakti-communities, while proclaiming anti-structure, necessarily develop their own structures for behaviour and belief, often minimal, frequently composed of elements selected from the very structures they deny or reject. The Vīraśaiva saints developed in their community, not a full-scale 'Communitas' of equal beings – but a three-part hierarchy, based not on birth or occupation, but on mystical achievement: the Guru, the Elders, and the Novices. (Poems like Mahādēvi 45, 60, 77 celebrate this mystical hierarchy.) The saints are drawn from every social class, caste and trade, touchable and untouchable – from kings and ministers to manual workers – laundrymen, boatmen, leatherworkers. Such collapsing of classes and occupations in the new community of saints and saints-to-be, however short-lived, led to Vīraśaiva slogans like *kāyakavē kailāsa* (Basavaṇṇa), 'Work is heaven', 'to work is to be in the Lord's Kingdom'. Kāyaka could also mean the work of ritual or other worship; here I think it means 'labour, work'. Furthermore, in the new community, instead of the multiple networks of normal social relationships, we have face-to-face dyadic relations with each other, with the guru, especially with God. Such dyads are symbolized by intimate relationships: lover/beloved, father/son, mother/child, whore/customer, master/man (e.g., Basavaṇṇa 62, 70, 97 etc.).

There are many varieties of bhakti;<sup>9</sup> here we refer only to the kind exemplified by the vacanas. In the Northern

9. Two kinds are broadly distinguished: *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*. Nirguṇa bhakti is personal devotion offered to an impersonal attributeless godhead (nirguṇa), without 'body, parts or passion'; though he may bear a name like Śiva, he does not have a mythology, he is not the Śiva of mythology. By and large, the Vīraśaiva saints are nirguṇa bhaktas, relating personally and passionately to the Infinite Absolute. Saguṇa bhakti is bhakti for a particular god with attributes (saguṇa), like Krishna. The woman saint Mahādēviyakka, in this selection, comes

traditions, Kabir's poems would be a parallel example. The 'great' and the 'little' traditions flow one into the other, as in an osmosis. They together constitute the 'public religion' of Hinduism, its 'establishment' or 'structure' as defined above. Bhakti as anti-structure begins by denying and defying such an establishment; but in course of time, the heretics are canonized; temples are erected to them, Sanskrit hagiographies are composed about them. Not only local legend and ritual, but an elaborate theology assimilating various 'great tradition' elements may grow around them. They become, in retrospect, founders of a new caste, and are defied in turn by new egalitarian movements.

Vīraśaivas were protesters not only against the Hinduism of their time, but also against Jainism, the powerful competitor to Hinduism. Basavaṅṅa's and Dāsimayya's lives were desperate struggles against both Brahminism and Jainism. The jainas were politically powerful in the area and represented privilege. Ideologically, their belief in *karma* was absolute; the individual had inexorably to run through the entire chain of action and consequence, with no glimmer of grace. To this absolute determinism, the Vīraśaiva saints opposed their sense of grace and salvation through bhakti. Yet they shared with Jainism and Buddhism the doctrine of *ahimsa* or non-violence towards all creation (cf. Dasarēśwara, p. 54), the abhorrence of animal sacrifice and ritual orthodoxy. Śaivism in general, and Vīraśaivism even more so, has been rightly described as 'a revolt from within, while Buddhism and Jainism were revolts from the outside'. (Nandimath, p. 53.)

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close to being a good example, though not a full-blown one – for she speaks little of the mythological or other attributes of Śiva, say, his divine consort Pārvati or his mythic battles with evil demons. Yet she is in love with him, her sensuality is her spiritual metaphor. Vaiṣṇava bhakti, bhakti for Krishna or Rāma, generally offer the best examples of saguṇa bhakti.

Some Vīraśaivas, however, disclaim all connections with Hinduism.

### THE VACANA FORM AND ORAL POETICS

The Sanskrit religious texts are described as *śruti* and *smṛti*. *Smṛti* is what is remembered, what is memorable; *śruti*, what is heard, what is received. Vīraśaiva saints called their compositions *vacana*, or 'what is said'. *Vacana*, as an active mode, stands in opposition to both *śruti* and *smṛti*: not what is heard, but what is said; not remembered or received, but uttered here and now. To the saints, religion is not a spectator sport, a reception, a consumption; it is an experience of Now, a way of being. This distinction is expressed in the language of the *vacanas*, the forms the *vacanas* take. Though medieval Kannada was rich in native Dravidian metres, and in borrowed Sanskritic forms, no metrical line or stanza is used in the *vacanas*.<sup>10</sup> The saints did not follow any of these models. Basavaṅṅa said:

I don't know anything like timebeats and metre  
nor the arithmetic of strings and drums;

I don't know the count of iamb and dactyl.  
My lord of the meeting rivers,  
as nothing will hurt you  
I'll sing as I love.

BASAVAṅṅA 949

It is not even he that sings; the Lord sings through him.

10. One of the general meanings of 'vacana' is 'prose'. The *vacana-kāras* did not think of themselves as poets, for Poetry (poesy?) too is part of court and temple and punditry, part of *sthāvara*.

The instrument is not what is 'made', but what one 'is'.  
The body can be lute as it can be temple.

Make of my body the beam of a lute  
of my head the sounding gourd  
of my nerves the strings  
of my fingers the plucking rods.

Clutch me close  
and play your thirty-two songs  
O lord of the meeting rivers!

BASAVANNA 500

The vacana is thus a rejection of premeditated art, the *sthāvaras* of form. It is not only a spontaneous cry but a cry for spontaneity – for the music of a body given over to the Lord.

The traditional time-beat, like the ritual gesture, was felt to be learned, passive, inorganic; too well organized to be organic. Here too, the *sthāvara*, the standing thing, shall fall, but the *jaṅgama* shall prevail. The battles that were fought in Europe under the banners of Classical/Romantic, rhetoric/sincerity, impersonal/personal, metre/*vers libre* were fought in Indian literature in genres like the vacana.

But then 'spontaneity' has its own rhetorical structure; no free verse is truly free. Without a repertoire of structures to rely on, there can be no spontaneity. In the free-seeming verse, there are always patterns that loom and withdraw, figures of sound that rhyme and ring bells with the figures of meaning. It is not surprising that M. Cidānanda Murti<sup>11</sup> has shown how the apparently metreless metre of the vacanas has a *tripadi*-base. *Tripadi* is a popular 3-line form of the oral tradition used widely both in folk song and in folk epigram.

11. In a Kannada article published in his *Sarīsōdhanā taraṅga*, Mysore, 1966, pp. 190–204.

Scholars like Parry and Lord have studied the techniques of oral verse-making in folk-epics. They have paid little attention to shorter forms. Several features noted for heroic oral poetry do appear in the vacanas: in particular a common stock of themes that occur in changing forms, repetitions of phrases and ideas, the tendency to cycles or sequences of poems. But the extensive use of formulae and substitutes in the strict sense and a distinct given prosody, both characteristic of the oral bardic traditions, are generally absent in the vacana, a genre of epigram and lyric.

The vacanakāras, however, did use stock phrases, proverbs, and religious commonplaces of the time. This stock, shared by Southern and Northern saints, the Upaniṣads and the folk alike, included figures, symbols and paradoxes often drawn from an ancient and pan-Indian pool of symbology. Bhakti saints, like the vacanakāras, have been called the 'great integrators',<sup>12</sup> bringing the high to the low, esoteric paradox to the man in the street, transmuted ancient and abstruse ideas into live contemporary experiences; at the same time, finding everyday symbols for the timeless.

They also travelled within and across regions, claimed kindred saints of other regions in their geneological tree of gurus. Thus the Viraśaiva saints named the 63 Tamil Saints among their forebears. Śaivism knits faraway Kashmir with South India, and within South India the saints of Tamil, Kannada and Telugu. Both Kābir of the Hindi region,

12. See V. Raghavan, *The Great Integrators: the Saint-singers of India*, Delhi, 1966, for a discussion of saints from other regions, as well as their relation to each other and the Indian heritage. Here, we omit other parallels of, and influences on bhakti, like the Muslim Sufi mystics, the esoteric cults of tantra and yoga in their Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina versions. Nor can we consider here the gifts of bhakti poets to modern India, in poetry (e.g. Tagore in Bengal, Bharati in Tamil); in politics (Gandhi), religion and philosophy (Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Aurobindo).



and Caitanya of Bengal, were inspired by southern precedents. Chronologically from the seventh century on, century after century, bhakti movements have arisen in different regions and languages, spanning the whole Indian sub-continent, in Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, and Punjabi, roughly in that order. Like a lit fuse, the passion of bhakti seems to spread from region to region, from century to century, quickening the religious impulse. Arising in particular regions, speaking the local spoken languages, it is yet inter-regional – both ‘parochial’ and ‘universal’. Even modern urban bhakti groups include in their hymnals, songs of several languages and ages.

So it is not surprising that

from the Upaniṣads onwards, a large number of similes and analogies have been pressed into service, ‘the Seed and the Tree, the Sea and the Rivers, the Spider and its Self-woven web, the Thread and the Gems, the Warp and the Woof, the River and the Boat, the Chariot and the Charioteer, the King and his Subjects, the Child and its fantasies, the Stage and Acting, the Puppet and Puppeteer, the Dream, the Dance, and the Sport (Lilā)’.<sup>13</sup>

To take a few examples: see Mahādēviyakka 17 for the Spider and its self-woven Web (as silkworm and cocoon), 20 for the puppet at the end of a string; Basavaṅṅa 8 for the Sea of Life, 33 for the mind as monkey; 144 for the river and the sea.

Yet it should not be imagined that the common stock was used in exactly similar ways. Only the components were the same; the functions, the emerging meanings, were often startlingly different. For instance, the image of the insect weaving a web out of its body is an ancient one. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* has this description of Brahman, the creator:

13. Raghavan, op. cit., p. 37.

As a spider emerges (from itself) by  
 (spinning) threads [out of its own body] . . .  
 so too from this self do all the life-breaths,  
 all the worlds, all the gods, and all contin-  
 gent beings rise up in all directions.<sup>14</sup>

Mahādēviyakka/ has the following:

Like a silkworm weaving  
 her house with love  
 from her marrow,  
and dying  
 in her body's threads  
 winding tight, round  
 and round,  
I burn  
 desiring what the heart desires.

Cut through, O lord,  
 my heart's greed,  
 and show me  
 your way out,  
 O lord white as jasmine.

MAHĀDĒVIYAKKA 17

Note the startling difference in the feeling-tone of these passages, the coolness of the Upaniṣad and the woman-saint's heart-rending cry for release. The classical text describes the object, the Cosmic creator; the vacana describes the subject, the speaker's feelings towards herself. The one describes creation by and out of the creator; the other describes the self trammelled in its self-created illusions. One speaks of the birth of worlds, awesome, wondrous, non-human; the other speaks of a death, small, calling for compassion, all too human.

Though Basavaṇṇa says in the poem quoted earlier,

14. II-1.20 trans. R. C. Zaehner, *Hindu Scriptures*, New York, 1966,

'I'll sing as I love,' rejecting conventional patterns of verse-making, the *vacanas* evolve a distinctive structure (as, in the religious dimension, anti-structure develops a counter-structure). Their metre is not syllabic but syntactic; the regularities and returning units are not usually units of sound, but units of syntax and semantics. The oral origins of the poetry are clear in its favourite structure. The poetics of the *vacana* is an oral poetics.

'Grammatical parallelism<sup>15</sup> belongs to the poetic canon of numerous folk-patterns,' says Roman Jakobson. He also cites work on parallelisms in Vedic, Chinese, Finnish and notably Hebrew verse. While this is no place to undertake a full technical analysis, it is necessary to indicate a few major symmetries and patterns in *vacana* poetry and their function.

A simple-looking poem like the following has many symmetries:

1. The master of the house, is he at home, or isn't he?
2. Grass on the threshold,
3. dirt in the house:
  
4. The master of the house, is he at home, or isn't he?
5. Lies in the body,
6. lust in the heart:
  
7. no, the master of the house is not at home,
8. our Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

BASAVANNA 97

English syntax does not allow a natural and succinct translation of all these symmetries. A literal translation will indicate some of them, including the actual word repetitions, and suggest the departures that the present translation has made from the original;

15. Roman Jakobson, 'Grammatical parallelism and its Russian facet', *Language*, Vol. 42.2 (1966), pp. 399-420.

1. *maneyoḷage maneyoḍeyaniddānō illavō?*
2. *hostilalli hullu huṭṭi,*
3. *maneyoḷage raja tumbi,*
4. *maneyoḷage maneyoḍeyaniddānō illavō?*
5. *tanuvoḷage husi tumbi,*
6. *manadoḷage viṣaya tumbi,*
7. *maneyoḷage maneyoḍeyanillā,*
8. *kūḍalasaṅgama dēvā*<sup>16</sup>

The literal translation is as follows, with parallel grammatical constructions indicated by letters (A, B, C, D, a, b, c); similarly structured 'metrical' lines by roman numerals (I, II, II):

		A	B	C	D
1.	I	house-inside	house-master	is-he,	or is-he-not?
		a	b	c	
2.	II	threshold-on	grass	having-grown,	
		a	b	c	
3.	II	house-inside	dust	having-filled	
		A	B	C	D
4.	I	house-inside	house-master	is-he,	or is-he-not?
		a	b	c	
5.	II	body-inside	lies	having-filled,	
		a	b	c	
6.	II	heart-inside	carnal-desires	having-filled,	
		A	B	C	
7.	I	house-inside	house-master	is-not	
8.	III	Meeting-of-Rivers God			

16. We must remember that all the line-divisions are arbitrary. Though editors make their own 'cuts' according to syntax, the original manuscript has no indication of line-, phrase- or word-division, nor punctuation. Note also the absence of distinctions like house/home; both are *mane* in Kannada.

For instance, lines 1 and 4 are simple repetitions, enclosing 2 and 3 which use the same basic phrase pattern in the Kannada original:

2. *hostilalli hullu huṭṭi*: threshold-on grass having-grown
3. *maneyoḷage raja tumbi*: house-inside dust having-filled

The syntactic construction is the same, but the slots are filled with different words.

Lines 5 and 6, like 2 and 3 use the same syntactic construction but the words are chosen from entirely different semantic domains: body and mind. Because the syntax is the same in 2, 3 and 5, 6, a metaphoric ratio is created by the parallelism:

threshold: house:: body: heart

Line 7, 'The master of the house is not at home' repeats the construction in 1 and 4, with a difference: 1 and 4 are questions, and 7 is the answer to it. (cf. the original and the literal translation above.)

The last line 'Lord of the Meeting Rivers' is the regular signature-line which appears in poem after poem – a singular line with no parallels within the poem but repeated as a refrain across poems: it has the effect of binding together into a cycle all the poems of the saint. Further, the signature-line, though repeated in every poem, does not have everywhere the same vocative function. For instance in poem 97, it is ambiguous: it is both an address to the lord, and an attribute of 'the master of the house'; so that the whole poem is about the absence of the Lord of the Meeting Rivers in the heart of the devotee. As elsewhere in parallelistic texts (e.g., Vedic Sanskrit, Chinese, Russian, Biblical Hebrew) 'the occasional isolated single lines' chiefly signal the beginning or the end of an entire text or its paragraphs.<sup>17</sup>

But the repetitions or parallelisms are also ordered towards

17. Jakobson, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

a crescendo. In the above poem, it is a climax of denial. In Basavaṇṇa 563 (quoted on p. 28) after a disgusted crescendo listing of 'the pot is a god. The winnowing/fan is a god. The stone in the street is a god etc.', there is a climax of assertion: 'There is only/one god. He is our Lord/of the Meeting Rivers.' Sometimes there are inverse parallels – a 'chiasm': in 105, 'a snake-charmer and his noseless wife' meet head-on 'a noseless woman/and her snake-charming husband' – the inversion representing the mirror-effect of this encounter with the Self as the Other.

In Mahādēvi 336, the three central images are parallel constructions, each therefore a metaphor for the other and all of them approximations to a description of the lord's perfect love. But the three metaphors (arrow, embrace, welding), chosen from three different semantic areas, are also a progression, three phases of love as well as the act of love.

Repetition of word and construction, repetitions with a difference, combined with progressions towards a climax of assertion or reversal are devices of oral composition. These carry with them a number of paired opposites or lexical partners which appear in similar syntactic positions; they imply each other, they negate each other; they are often held together as a pair by rhyme or alliteration (e.g., *liṅga/aṅga*).

As shown earlier, a poem like 820 is built around several pairs of such oppositions: temple/body (*dēha/dēgula*), *sthāvara/jaṅgama*. Some of the other pairs are body/mind (B. 36), creature/creator, the faithful/the unbeliever (*bhakta/bhavi*), lord/human soul (*liṅga/aṅga*), other gods/Śiva (quoted on p. 19).

The oral origins and qualities of this poetry are demonstrated and reinforced by the never-failing vigorous tones of speech, the imperatives (Basavaṇṇa 162), instructions (500, quoted on p. 38), warnings (212), pleas (350), curses (639), questions and answers (97), oaths (430), vocatives (848),

outcries (8), chatty talk (703) and the recurring invocation to Śiva, the eternal addressee.

Linguistically too, the vacana-poets were the first to use the changing local sub-standard spoken dialects of their birth-places in poetry, while contemporary poets wrote in a highly stylized archaic language, preferring again the jaṅgamas of language to the śhāvaras. In fact vacanas and inscriptions are the most important witnesses to the dialectal speech of medieval Kannada country. In their urgency and need for directness, they defied standard upper-class educated speech and stylized metrical literary genres, as they defied ritual and orthodoxy. Such untrammelled speech in poetry has a fresh 'modern' ring to it in imagery, rhythm and idiom – a freedom that modern literary writers in Kannada have not yet quite won.

The common language of the vacanas did not exclude Sanskrit words (and even common Sanskrit quotations); instead the vacanakāras used Sanskrit with brilliant and complex effects of contrast, setting it off against the native dialectal Kannada. To take one instance, Mahādēvi 17 (quoted on p. 41) opens with the sentence:

*teraṇiyahuḷu tanna snēhadinda maneya māḍi tanna  
nūlu tannanē suttī suttī sāva teranante*

Like a silkworm weaving  
her house with love  
from her marrow,  
                                and dying  
in her body's threads  
winding tight, round  
and round . . .

In that Kannada clause, there is only one Sanskrit-derived word *snēha*, meaning in common usage 'friendship, fondness, love, any attachment'; but etymologically it means 'sticky substance' like oil or marrow (in my translation of the un-

translatable I have tried to suggest both by 'love' and 'marrow'). The word stands out (like the Greek/Latin in Shakespeare's Anglo-Saxon) gathering double meanings to itself. The sticky substance out of which the worm weaves its threads, as well as the attachments in which humans tangle themselves, are suggested and inter-related in one stroke by the word *snēha*. Furthermore, here as elsewhere in the *vacanas*, the use of Sanskrit itself becomes symbolic, symbolic of abstraction. The god's names are partly Sanskrit: e.g., in *Cennamallikārjuna*, *cenna* 'lovely' is Kannada, the rest Sanskrit. But, because of the transparent Kannada, the Sanskrit too is never opaque or distant for long; it becomes double-faced as in the case of *snēha* above, by etymological recovery: even linguistically the Body stirs in the Temple. The etymologies of the Sanskrit names are never far from the surface, and often participate in the poetry. The proper name *Guhēsvara* 'Lord of Caves' is appropriate to Allama: his favourite imagery is of dark and light (e.g., 219, on p. 154). *Mallikārjuna* ('Arjuna, Lord of goddess *Mallikā*' – the god's name including His beloved – or literally, 'Lord White as Jasmine'), is appropriate to *Mahādēvi* whose metaphor is love itself, and who is ever thrilled by the lord's beauty. *Rāmanātha*, or *Śiva* as worshipped by *Rāma* as his lord, is right for *Dāsimayya* who urges the greatness of *Śiva* over all other gods. With his water-imagery (cf. 8) and themes of merging social differences, *Basavaṇṇa*'s god is *Kūḍalasaṅgamadēva*, the Lord of the Meeting Rivers. Interestingly enough, the last name combines in itself both Kannada (*kūḍalu*, 'meeting of rivers') and Sanskrit (*saṅgama*, synonymous with *kūḍalu*). Such quickening of etymologies in the poetry is one reason for translating attributive proper names into literal English – hoping that by using them constantly as a repetitive formula they will keep their chanting refrain quality and work as unique proper names.



## THE 'LANGUAGE OF SECRECY' (SANDHYĀBHĀSA)

The range of vacana expression spans a pan-Indian stock of figures, homely images of everyday experience, the sense and idiom of the earth, as well as an abstruse esoteric symbolism. The esoteric vacanas are called *beḍagina vacana* (fancy poems), more riddle than poem and, oftentimes, with a whole occult glossary for key. This glossary is made up of a common pool of symbols and concepts drawn from yogic psychology and tantric philosophy. Allamaṣṛabhu, the most metaphysical of the vacanakāras, has many *beḍagina vacanas*, and we have included a few. For instance, Allama 218:

They don't know the day  
is the dark's face,  
and dark the day's.

A necklace of nine jewels  
lies buried, intact, in the face of the night;  
in the face of day a tree  
with leaves of nine designs.

When you feed the necklace  
to the tree,  
the Breath enjoys it  
in the Lord of the Caves.

The paradoxical images of this poem have a surrealist brilliance in themselves. To a learned Vīraśaiva, the poem would mean the following:

The night and day are obviously ignorance and awareness. It is in the experience of the ignorant that we find the jewel of wisdom, a necklace of nine liṅgas. In awareness is knowledge and discrimination (the tree), carefully nurtured. But only when the wisdom of the

ignorant experience is fed to the discrimination of the aware, the *Līṅga* of the Breath finds true joy.

Such a dark, ambiguous language of ciphers (*sandhyābhāṣa* or 'intentional language') has been much discussed by scholars of Yoga and tantra.<sup>18</sup> Riddles and enigmas were used even in Vedic times. In the heterodox and esoteric cults, such systems of cryptography were intended to conceal the secret doctrine from the uninitiated and the outsider. But riddle and paradox are also meant to shatter the ordinary language of ordinary experiences, baffling the rational intelligence to look through the glass darkly till it begins to see. (Just as often, it may degenerate into a mere mental gymnastic.) It is 'a process of destroying and reinventing language' till we find ourselves in 'a universe of analogies, homologies, and double meanings'.<sup>19</sup>

A related device is a favourite with *vacanas*: extended metaphor, a simile which projects a whole symbolic situation suppressing one part of the comparison, as in *Basavaṅṅa* III. One of the most moving uses of the extended analogue is *Mahādēviyakka's* love of God, where all the phases of love become metaphors for the phases of mystical union and alienation. For instance:

I have *Māyā* for mother-in-law;  
the world for father-in-law;  
three brothers-in-law like tigers;

and the husband's thoughts  
are full of laughing women:  
no god, this man.

And I cannot cross the sister-in-law.

18. cf. Eliade's *Yoga*, pp. 249-54.

19. *ibid.*, p. 251.

But I will  
 give this wench the slip  
 and go cuckold my husband with Hara, my lord.

My mind is my maid:  
 by her kindness, I join  
 my Lord,  
     my utterly beautiful Lord  
     from the mountain-peaks  
     my lord as white as jasmine

and I will make Him  
 my good husband.

MAHĀDĒVIYAKKA 328

Mahādēviyakka's poem explicitly takes over conventions of Indian love-poetry (available in Sanskrit as in the regional languages).<sup>20</sup> An abhisārikā, a woman stealing out of a houseful of relatives to meet her lover, is the central image. The method is the method of allegory, explicitly equating, one-for-one, various members of a household with various abstractions: Māyā or Primal Illusion is the mother-in-law, the world is the father-in-law. Some of the equations are implicit, and they draw on a common background of philosophical concepts. For instance, the three brothers-in-law are the three *guṇas*, the three ultimate components which make all the particulars of nature what they are; these three are inescapable as long as one is part of nature, they keep a tiger-vigil. The husband is Karma, the past of the ego's many lives. The sister-in-law, who also keeps the speaker imprisoned, is apparently the *vāsanā*, the binding memory

20. Vaiṣṇava bhakti poems make the fullest use of these conventions, especially in the personnel and affairs of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. For examples, see *In Praise of Krishna, Songs from the Bengali*, translated by E. D. Dimock and D. Levertov, New York, 1967.

or 'smell' that the Karma-Past carries with it. The kind confidante or maid is the Mind, who alone helps her meet her Lord and keep the tryst.

Note how all the relationships mentioned are those 'made' by marriage. The house is full of in-laws,<sup>21</sup> acquired, social ties. Not one person is related to the woman by birth. (The mother-in-law in a South Indian family of this region could be a blood-relation, a paternal aunt. This only adds a further nuance, the conversion by ritual of a blood-kin into an in-law.) A net of marriage rules and given relations binds her. These are what you make and enter into, not what you are born with. This elaborate build-up of social bonds is shattered by the cuckolding climax of the poem, with the Lord as the adulterous lover. Here a vulgar Kannada word is used to speak of the 'cuckolding', the 'fornication'. The whole poem, written in a colloquial, vigorous speaking style, moves toward the word *hādara* or fornication, enacting by linguistic shock the shock of her explosive desire to shatter the entire framework of so-called legitimacies. Elsewhere also Mahādēviyakka rejects outright all notions of modesty as a virtue. She is supposed to have thrown off her clothes at one point, in defiance of the indecent pruderies of the society around her.

This stresses the view that love of God is not only an unconditional giving up of all, but it is necessarily anti-'structure', an anti-social 'unruly' relationship - un-making, undoing, the man-made. It is an act of violation against ordinary expected loyalties, a breakdown of the predictable and the secure. Some such notion is at the heart of this complex of metaphoric action. The Lord is the Illicit

21. The English over-emphasizes the 'law' aspects, by its various 'in-law' compounds in the kinship system. Kannada has unitary words for all the 'made' relations: *atte* (mother-in-law), *māva* (father-in-law), etc.

Lover; He will break up the world of Karma and normal relationships, the husband's family that must necessarily be violated and trespassed against, if one should have anything to do with God.

Such a poem is an allegory with no need for a key. Sometimes in the *vacanakāra's* quest for the unmediated vision, there comes a point when language, logic and metaphor are not enough; at such points, the poet begins with a striking traditional metaphor<sup>22</sup> and denies it at the end:

Looking for your light,  
I went out:

it was like the sudden dawn  
of a million million suns,

a ganglion of lightnings  
for my wonder.

O Lord of Caves,  
if you are light,  
there can be no metaphor.

ALLAMA 972

## CONCLUSION

In describing some of the general characteristics of *Viraśaivism* through the *vacanas*, we have also described aspects of other *bhakti-movements* in India. The supreme importance of a guru, the celebration of a community of saints, worship as a personal relationship, the rejection of both great and little

22. *The Bhagavadgītā* XI, 12 'If in [bright] heaven together arise the shining brilliance of a thousand suns, then would that perhaps resemble the brilliance of that [God] so great of Self.' Tr. R. C. Zaehner, Oxford, 1969.

traditions (especially caste barriers), the wandering nature of the saint, the use of a common stock of religious ideas and symbols in the spoken language of the region, and the use of certain esoteric systems, these are only some of the shared characteristics. Such sharing actually makes for one more pan-Indian tradition, bhakti, with regional variations.

Both the classical (in Sanskrit and in the regional languages) and folk literature of India work with well-established languages of convention, given personae, and elaborate metrical patterns that mediate and depersonalize literary expression. The literary ideal is impersonality. But vacanas are personal literature, personal in several senses:

(a) Many of them express the real conflicts of real persons, represent a life more fully than anything in the older literature. For instance, Basavaṅṅa speaks of himself as the minister of of a non-Vīraśaiva king, accused by his own men of betraying his god for a king.

(b) They are uttered, not through a persona or mask, but directly in the person of the poet himself, in his native local dialect and idiom, using the tones and language of personal conversation or outcry.

(c) Even the few given conventional stances of bhakti are expressed in terms of deeply-felt personal relations; the loves and frustrations of bhakti are those of lover and beloved (e.g., Mahādēvi), mother and child, father and son, master and servant, even whore and customer.

(d) Compared to other Indian religious literatures like the Vedic hymns, the vacanas describe the devotee's state directly and the god only by implication; the concern is with the subject rather than the object (of worship).

Furthermore, bhakti religions like Vīraśaivism are Indian analogues to European protestant movements. Here we suggest a few parallels: protest against mediators like priest, ritual, temples, social hierarchy, in the name of direct,

individual, original experience; a religious movement of and for the underdog, including saints of all castes and trades (like Bunyan, the tinker), speaking the sub-standard dialect of the region, producing often the first authentic regional expressions and translations of inaccessible Sanskritic texts (like the translations of the Bible in Europe); a religion of arbitrary grace, with a doctrine of the mystically chosen elect, replacing a social hierarchy-by-birth with a mystical hierarchy-by-experience; doctrines of work as worship leading to a puritan ethic; monotheism and evangelism, a mixture of intolerance and humanism, harsh and tender.

The vacanas express a kin-sense and kindness for all living things – not unknown to classical Hindu religion, but never so insistent and ardent – a love of man, beast and thing, asserting everywhere that man's arrangements are for man and not man for them. Basavaṅṅa cries out in one vacana (194):

They say: Pour, pour the milk!  
 when they see a snake image in a stone.  
 But they cry: Kill, kill!  
 when they meet a snake for real.

His most-quoted saying in Kannada asks, 'Where is religion without loving-kindness?' A poignant example of such loving-kindness towards all creation was the saint named Dasarēśwara. He did not even pick flowers to offer them to a god; he gathered only blossoms that fell of themselves:

Knowing one's lowliness  
 in every word;  
 the spray of insects in the air  
 in every gesture of the hand;  
 things living, things moving  
 come sprung from the earth  
 under every footfall;

and when holding a plant  
or joining it to another  
or in the letting it go

to be all mercy  
to be light  
as a dusting brush  
of peacock feathers:

such moving, such awareness  
is love that makes us one  
with the Lord  
Dasarēśwara.

DASARĒŚWARA





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# SPEAKING OF ŚIVA



## BASAVAᅇA

THE biography of Basavaᅇa has many contradictory sources: controversial edicts, deifying accounts by Viraśaiva followers, poetic life-histories, pejorative accounts by his Jaina opponents mentioned in the vacanas of contemporary and later saints. Basavaᅇa was a political activist and social reformer, minister to a king in a troubled century; it is not surprising that he should have been praised as a prophet by followers and condemned as a zealot and conspirator by his enemies, of whom he had many.

Leaving aside the scholarly and other controversies regarding the dates and the events of Basavaᅇa's life, here is one generally accepted version:

Basavaᅇa was born in A.D. 1106 and died in 1167 or 1168. His birthplace was probably Maᅇigavaᅇi. His parents seem to have died early in his childhood and he grew up under a grandmother's care; he was later looked after by his foster-parents, Mādirāja (or Mādarasa) and Mādāmbike of Bāgēvāᅇi, who are often considered his own parents. His foster-father, Mādirāja, appears to have been learned in the traditional classics; Basavaᅇa's Sanskrit learning obviously derives from his early education and environment. There are also records of a brahminical initiation ceremony (*upanayana*) in 1114 A.D. There is some reason to believe that Bijjaᅇa, later Basavaᅇa's patron and king, married the daughter of Mādirāja, and so was well-known to Basavaᅇa even from his early years.

Basavaᅇa had always been devoted to Śiva; by the time he was sixteen he decided to spend his life in the worship and service of Śiva. He found the caste-system of his society and the ritualism of his home shackling and senseless. As

Harihara, his fifteenth-century poet-biographer says, "Love of Śiva cannot live with ritual." So saying, he tore off his sacred thread which bound him like a past-life's deeds . . . and left the shade of his home, disregarded wealth and propriety, thought nothing of relatives. Asking no one in town, he left Bāgēvāḍi, raging for the Lord's love, eastwards . . . and entered Kappaḍisaṅgama' where three rivers meet.

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers, *Kūḍalasaṅgamadēva*, becomes his chosen god; every vacana by Basavaṅṅa has his chosen god's name in it, usually as the closing signature-line.

In Kūḍalasaṅgama, he found a guru, with whom he studied the Vēdas and other religious texts. Though he began his worship with an external symbol (*sthāvaraliṅga*), he soon found his *iṣṭaliṅga*, his own personal, chosen, liṅga. Legend says that the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Son, Basavaṅṅa, we want to raise you in the world; go to Maṅgaḷavāḍa where King Bijjaḷa reigns.' Basavaṅṅa woke up and found it unbearable to follow the Lord's decree, leaving the temple and the Lord of the Meeting Rivers behind. He cried out that the Lord was merciless, 'taking away earth from under a man falling from the sky, cutting the throat of the faithful'. The Lord appeared to him again in a dream in the midst of his distress and said to him that he would appear next day to him through the mouth of the Sacred Bull. Next day while Basavaṅṅa waited worshipfully, leaning his body on the Stone Bull in the temple, the Lord formed a liṅga in the heart-lotus of the Bull, and enthroned on the tongue, came into Basavaṅṅa's hand, and initiated him. From then on, Basavaṅṅa was freed from places. He was his Lord's man and prepared himself to create a society of Śiva's men.

Basavaṅṅa then went to Kalyāṅṅa where his uncle Baladēva was Bijjaḷa's minister, and married his uncle's daughter

Gaᅇgāmbike. Soon he was a trusted friend of King Bijjaᅇa, and rose in his court. When his uncle Baladēva died, Basavaᅇᅇa succeeded him as Bijjaᅇa's minister, and assumed many powers of state. He also gave his foster-sister, Nīlalōcane, to Basavaᅇᅇa in marriage.

Meanwhile, Basavaᅇᅇa's devotion matured from strength to strength. 'Not only was he the king's treasurer (*bhaᅇᅇāri*) but he became the Treasurer of the Lord's Love (*bhakti-bhaᅇᅇāri*)'. As the Lord and his jaᅇgamas (wandering devotees) are both one, he fed and served the Lord's men. For 'they are the face and mouth of the Lord, as the root below is the mouth of a tree'. Devotees from far and near walked a beaten path to Kalyāᅇa to see Basavaᅇᅇa and enjoy his hospitality. Many were converted to Śiva-worship by the fire of Basavaᅇᅇa's zeal and stayed in Kalyāᅇa, thus swelling the numbers of Vīraśaivas. Basavaᅇᅇa also undertook the work of initiating the newcomers himself. A new community with egalitarian ideals disregarding caste, class and sex grew in Kalyāᅇa, challenging orthodoxy, rejecting social convention and religious ritual. A political crisis was at hand.

Naturally, there was fierce opposition to this rising utopian ginger-group. Its enemies gathered around Bijjaᅇa and battered at his faith in his minister with gossip and accusation. Bijjaᅇa was swayed by this barrage of accusations and waited for a suitable opportunity to curb the rise of Vīraśaivism in his country.

In the new egalitarian Vīraśaiva community a wedding took place between two devotees; the bridegroom was a former outcaste and the bride an ex-brahmin. The traditionalists thought of this unorthodox marriage as the first blow against a society built on the caste-system. So Bijjaᅇa sentenced the fathers of the bride and the bridegroom to death; they were dragged to death in the dust and thorn of the streets. The Vīraśaiva community, instead of being cowed by it, was



roused to revenge and violence against 'state and society'. Basavaṅṅa, committed to non-violence, tried hard to convert the extremists but failed. In his failure, he left Kalyāṅa and returned to Kappaḍisaṅgama, where he died soon after (1166/1168?).

Meanwhile, extremist youths were out for revenge; they stabbed Bijjaḷa and assassinated him. In the riots and persecution that followed Vīraśaivas were scattered in all directions.

But in the brief period, probably the span of one generation, Basavaṅṅa had helped create a new community. Many great men like Allamaḗrabhu, saint of saints, were in Kalyāṅa in that period. He helped clear and shape the ideas of the Vīraśaivas. Many others like Siddharāma, Mācidēva, Bommayya ('the lute-playing Bommayya'), and the remarkable radical woman-saint Mahādēviyakka were part of the company of saints. A religious centre called Anuḗbhava-maṅṅapa ('the Hall of Experience') was established in which the great saints met for dialogue and communion, shaping the growing new community. A hundred and ninety thousand jaṅgamas or mendicant devotees are counted as having lived in Kalyāṅa under Basavaṅṅa's direction, helping spread the new religion.

Basavaṅṅa's achievement, in addition to the great vacanas he composed, was the establishment of a Vīraśaivism, with eight distinctive features,<sup>1</sup> based on a rejection of inequality of every kind, of ritualism and taboo, and exalting work (*kāyaka*) in the world in the name of the Lord.

Basavaṅṅa's vacanas have often been arranged according to an enlarged six-phase system (cf. appendix). For instance, Basavanāḷ, following no doubt earlier editors and commentators, divides the phases into several sub-phases; the rationale for such divisions is esoteric and technical. I shall

1. cf. footnote p. 32.

content myself here with an indication of the main six-phase classification, according to the editor:

<i>Bhakta</i>	1-527
<i>Māhēśvara</i>	528-765
<i>Prasādi</i>	766-795
<i>Prāᅇalingi</i>	796-918
<i>Aikya</i>	919-958

It is significant that though each saint goes through all the stages, he is most intensely expressive in some rather than in all equally. Further studies of this interesting typological framework and these expressive distributions in the saints' works will be rewarding. For instance, nearly half the vacanas of Basavaᅇᅇa are in the first phase of a man struggling with the world, its ills and temptations (compare Allama).

For the texts, the order and the numbering of the Basavaᅇᅇa vacanas I have used S. S. Basavanāᅇ's edition (Dharwar, 1962).



## 8

Look, the world, in a swell  
of waves, is beating upon my face.<sup>1\*</sup>

Why should it rise to my heart,  
tell me.

O tell me, why is it  
rising now to my throat?

Lord,

how can I tell you anything  
when it is risen high

over my head

lord lord

listen to my cries

O lord of the meeting rivers<sup>2</sup>

listen.

## 9

I added day by day

a digit<sup>3</sup> of light

like the moon.

The python-world,

omnivorous Rāhu,<sup>4</sup>

devoured me.

Today my body

is in eclipse.<sup>5</sup>

When is the release,

O lord of the meeting rivers?

\* Notes to poems begin on p. 189.

## 21

Father, in my ignorance you brought me  
through mothers' wombs,  
through unlikely worlds.

Was it wrong just to be born,  
O lord?

Have mercy on me for being born  
once before.

I give you my word,  
lord of the meeting rivers,  
never to be born again.

## 33

Like a monkey on a tree  
it leaps from branch to branch:  
how can I believe or trust  
this burning thing, this heart?<sup>6</sup>  
It will not let me go  
to my Father,  
my lord of the meeting rivers.

36

Nine hounds unleashed  
 on a hare,  
     the body's lusts  
 cry out:  
     Let go!  
     Let go!

Let go! Let go!  
 cry the lusts  
 of the mind.

Will my heart reach you,  
 O lord of the meeting rivers,

before the sensual bitches<sup>7</sup>  
 touch and overtake?

52

Like a cow fallen into a quagmire<sup>8</sup>  
 I make mouths at this corner and that,

no one to look for me  
 or find me

till my lord sees this beast  
 and lifts him out by the horns.

59

Cripple me, father,  
 that I may not go here and there.  
 Blind me, father,  
 that I may not look at this and that.  
 Deafen me, father,  
 that I may not hear anything else.

Keep me  
 at your men's<sup>9</sup> feet  
 looking for nothing else,  
 O lord of the meeting rivers.<sup>10</sup>

62

Don't make me hear all day  
 'Whose man, whose man, whose man is this?'

Let me hear, 'This man is mine, mine,  
 this man is mine.'

O lord of the meeting rivers,  
 make me feel I'm a son  
 of the house.<sup>11</sup>

64

Śiva, you have no mercy.  
 Śiva, you have no heart.

Why why did you bring me to birth,  
 wretch in this world,  
 exile from the other?

Tell me, lord,  
 don't you have one more  
 little tree or plant  
 made just for me?

70\*

As a mother runs  
 close behind her child  
 with his hand on a cobra  
 or a fire,

the lord of the meeting rivers  
 stays with me  
 every step of the way  
 and looks after me.

\* This poem is taken from Basavanāḷ's appendix to the poems.



97

The master of the house, is he at home, or isn't he?  
 Grass on the threshold,  
 dirt in the house:  
 The master of the house, is he at home, or isn't he?

Lies in the body,  
 lust in the heart:  
 no, the master of the house is not at home,  
 our Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

99

Does it matter how long  
 a rock soaks in the water:  
 will it ever grow soft?

Does it matter how long  
 I've spent in worship,  
 when the heart is fickle?

Futile as a ghost  
 I stand guard over hidden gold,<sup>12</sup>

O lord of the meeting rivers.

## IOI

When a whore with a child  
takes on a customer for money,

neither child nor lecher  
will get enough of her.

She'll go pat the child once,  
then go lie with the man once,

neither here nor there.  
Love of money is relentless,

my lord of the meeting rivers.<sup>13</sup>

105

A snake-charmer and his noseless wife,<sup>14</sup>  
snake in hand, walk carefully  
trying to read omens  
for a son's wedding,

but they meet head-on  
a noseless woman  
and her snake-charming husband,  
and cry 'The omens are bad!'

His own wife has no nose;  
there's a snake in his hand.  
What shall I call such fools  
who do not know themselves

and see only the others,

O lord  
of the meeting  
rivers!

## III

I went to fornicate,  
but all I got was counterfeit.

I went behind a ruined wall,  
but scorpions stung me.

The watchman who heard my screams  
just peeled off my clothes.

I went home in shame,  
my husband raised weals on my back.

All the rest, O lord of the meeting rivers,  
the king took for his fines.

125

See-saw watermills bow their heads.  
 So what?  
 Do they get to be devotees  
 to the Master?

The tongs join hands.  
 So what?  
 Can they be humble in service  
 to the Lord?

Parrots recite.  
 So what?  
 Can they read the Lord?

How can the slaves of the Bodiless God,<sup>15</sup>  
 Desire,  
     know the way  
     our Lord's Men move  
     or the stance of their standing?

129

The sacrificial lamb brought for the festival  
 ate up the green leaf brought for the decorations.<sup>16</sup>

Not knowing a thing about the kill,  
 it wants only to fill its belly:  
 born that day, to die that day.

But tell me:  
     did the killers survive,  
     O lord of the meeting rivers?

132

You can make them talk  
if the serpent  
has stung  
them.

You can make them talk  
if they're struck  
by an evil planet.<sup>17</sup>

But you can't make them talk  
if they're struck dumb  
by riches.

Yet when Poverty the magician  
enters, they'll speak  
at once,

O lord of the meeting rivers.

144

The crookedness of the serpent  
is straight enough for the snake-hole.

The crookedness of the river  
is straight enough for the sea.

And the crookedness of our Lord's men  
is straight enough for our Lord!

Before  
the grey reaches the cheek,  
the wrinkle the rounded chin  
and the body becomes a cage of bones:

before  
with fallen teeth  
and bent back  
you are someone else's ward:

before  
you drop your hand to the knee  
and clutch a staff:

before  
age corrodes  
your form:

before  
death touches you:

worship  
our lord  
of the meeting rivers!

162

Look at them,  
busy, making an iron frame<sup>18</sup>  
for a bubble on the water  
to make it safe!

Worship the all-giving lord,  
and live  
without taking on trust  
the body's firmness.

212

Don't you take on  
this thing called bhakti:

like a saw  
it cuts when it goes

and it cuts again  
when it comes.

If you risk your hand  
with a cobra in a pitcher<sup>19</sup>  
will it let you  
pass?



350\*

a grindstone hung at the foot  
a deadwood log at the neck

the one will not let me float  
and the other will not let me sink

O time's true enemy  
O lord of the meeting rivers

tide me over this life at sea<sup>20</sup>  
and bring me to

\* This poem is taken from Basavanāḷ's appendix.

420

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.<sup>21</sup>

430

Out of your eighty-four hundred thousand<sup>22</sup> 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.

Come in any face and ask me;  
 I'll give,  
 my lord of the meeting rivers.

468

I drink the water we wash your feet with,<sup>23</sup>  
 I eat the food of worship,  
 and I say it's yours, everything,  
 goods, life, honour:  
     he's really the whore who takes every last bit  
     of her night's wages,

and will take no words  
 for payment,

he, my lord of the meeting rivers!

487

Feet will dance,  
 eyes will see,  
 tongue will sing,  
 and not find content.  
 What else, what else  
 shall I do?

I worship with my hands,  
 the heart is not content.  
 What else shall I do?

Listen, my lord,  
 it isn't enough.  
 I have it in me  
 to cleave thy belly  
 and enter thee

O lord of the meeting rivers!

494

I don't know anything like time-beats and metre  
 nor the arithmetic of strings and drums;  
 I don't know the count of iamb and dactyl.<sup>24</sup>

My lord of the meeting rivers,  
 as nothing will hurt you  
 I'll sing as I love.

500

Make of my body the beam of a lute  
 of my head the sounding gourd  
 of my nerves the strings  
 of my fingers the plucking rods.

Clutch me close  
 and play your thirty-two songs  
 O lord of the meeting rivers!

555

Certain gods<sup>25</sup>  
 always stand watch  
 at the doors of people.  
 Some will not go if you ask them to go.  
 Worse than dogs, some others.  
 What can they give,  
 these gods,  
 who live off the charity of people

O lord of the meeting rivers?

558

How can I feel right  
 about a god who eats up lacquer and melts,  
 who wilts when he sees fire?<sup>26</sup>

How can I feel right  
 about gods you sell in your need,  
 and gods you bury for fear of thieves?

The lord of the meeting rivers,  
 self-born, one with himself,

he alone is the true god.

563

The pot is a god. The winnowing  
 fan is a god. The stone in the  
 street is a god. The comb is a  
 god. The bowstring is also a  
 god. The bushel is a god and the  
 spouted cup is a god.

Gods, gods, there are so many  
 there's no place left  
 for a foot.

There is only  
 one god. He is our Lord  
 of the Meeting Rivers.

581

They plunge  
wherever they see water.

They circumambulate  
every tree they see.

How can they know you  
O Lord  
who adore  
waters that run dry  
trees that wither?

586

In a brahmin house  
where they feed the fire<sup>27</sup>  
as a god.

when the fire goes wild  
and burns the house

they splash on it  
the water of the gutter  
and the dust of the street,

beat their breasts  
and call the crowd.

These men then forget their worship  
and scold their fire,  
O lord of the meeting rivers!

639

You went riding elephants.  
 You went riding horses.  
 You covered yourself  
 with vermilion and musk.

O brother,  
 but you went without the truth,  
 you went without sowing and reaping  
 the good.

Riding rutting elephants  
 of pride, you turned easy target  
 to fate.

You went without knowing  
 our lord of the meeting rivers.

You qualified for hell.

686

He'll grind till you're fine and small.  
 He'll file till your colour shows.

If your grain grows fine  
 in the grinding,  
 if you show colour  
 in the filing,

then our lord of the meeting rivers  
 will love you  
 and look after you.

703

Look here, dear fellow:  
I wear these men's clothes  
only for you.<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes I am man,  
sometimes I am woman.

O lord of the meeting rivers  
I'll make wars for you  
but I'll be your devotees' bride.

705

If a rich son is born  
to one born penniless,  
he'll delight his father's heart  
with gold counted in millions;

if a warrior son is born  
to a milk-livered king  
who doesn't know which way  
to face a battle, he'll console  
his father with a battlefront  
sinking and floating  
in a little sea of blood;

so will I console you  
O lord of the meeting rivers,  
if you should come  
and ask me.



820

The rich<sup>29</sup>  
 will make temples for Śiva.  
 What shall I,  
 a poor man,  
 do?

My legs are pillars,  
 the body the shrine,  
 the head a cupola<sup>30</sup>  
 of gold.

Listen, O lord of the meeting rivers,  
 things standing<sup>31</sup> shall fall,  
 but the moving<sup>32</sup> ever shall stay.

831

I'm no worshipper;  
 I'm no giver;  
 I'm not even beggar,

O lord  
 without your grace.

Do it all yourself, my lord of meeting rivers,  
 as a mistress would  
 when maids are sick.<sup>33</sup>

847

When  
like a hailstone crystal  
like a waxwork image  
the flesh melts in pleasure  
how can I tell you?

The waters of joy  
broke the banks  
and ran out of my eyes.

I touched and joined  
my lord of the meeting rivers.  
How can I talk to anyone  
of that?

848

Sir, isn't the mind witness enough,  
for the taste on the tongue?

Do buds wait for the garland maker's word  
to break into flower?

Is it right, sir, to bring out the texts  
for everything?

And, sir, is it really right to bring into the open  
the mark on our vitals  
left by our lord's love-play?

860

The eating bowl is not one bronze  
and the looking glass another.

Bowl and mirror are one metal.  
Giving back light  
one becomes a mirror.

Aware, one is the Lord's;  
unaware, a mere human.

Worship the lord without forgetting,  
the lord of the meeting rivers.

885

Milk is left over  
from the calves.  
Water is left over  
from the fishes,  
flowers from the bees.

How can I worship you,  
O Śiva, with such offal?  
But it's not for me  
to despise left-overs,  
so take what comes,

lord of the meeting rivers.

## DĒVARA DĀSIMAYYA

DĒVARA DĀSIMAYYA or 'God's Dāsīmāyā' was probably the earliest of the vacana poets. Commentators, and later saints like Basavaṇṇa, make admiring references to him in their writings.

He is said to have been born in Mudanūru, a village full of temples, in the tenth century. His village has a Rāmanātha temple among its many temples, dedicated to Śiva as worshipped by Rāma, the epic hero, an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Every vacana of Dāsīmāyā is addressed to Rāmanātha, 'Rāma's lord'.

Legend says that he performed ascetic penance in a dense forest when Śiva appeared to him, advised him not to punish his body to follow the way of the liṅga, the all-encompassing symbol. The Lord taught him that working in the world (*kāyaka*) was a part of worshipping and reaching Him. Dāsīmāyā became a weaver. So he is also known as Jēḍara Dāsīmāyā or 'Dāsīmāyā of the weavers'.

Today in Mudanūru, popular tradition identifies several places where Dāsīmāyā set up his weaver's looms.

Many stories are told about Dāsīmāyā's achievements as a propagator of Viraśaiva religion. Once he met jungle tribes who hunted wild animals and lived on their flesh. He converted them to the non-violent ways of liṅga worship and taught them the use of the oil-press for their living. Another time, he was challenged by brahmins. They said to him: 'Your Śiva is the chieftain of demons; he covers his body with ash. Give him up. Worship our Viṣṇu and find a place for yourself.' He answered: 'Your Viṣṇu in his incarnations has come through the womb of a pig; and stolen butter from villagers. Was that right and proper?' In the course

of the argument he said that Śiva was everywhere. The brahmins challenged him to show Śiva in their Viṣṇu temple. Dāsimayya accepted the challenge, and invoked Śiva. When they all entered the temple, the image in the shrine was not that of Viṣṇu but a liṅga. The brahmins, struck by the miracle, were all converted.<sup>1</sup>

When he decided to marry, he found suitable a girl named Duggaḷe. He went to her parents in the village of Śivapura. Showing them some sand, he said he would marry their daughter if she could boil it into edible rice.<sup>2</sup> Duggaḷe, a devotee, washed the saint's feet, sprinkled the sand with some of the washings and cooked it. The sand became rice. Dāsimayya, convinced that Duggaḷe was a true devotee, married her.

Once he started weaving on his loom an enormous turban-cloth in the Lord's name. It was a marvel of workmanship. When he took it to the fair to sell it, no buyer could price such beauty. When a thief in the crowd tried to steal it, a sharp wheel whirled out of it and slashed his hand. The people thought that the cloth was holy and magical and would not buy it. On his way back home he was met by an old man. The old man was shivering in the cold and asked him for the cloth. Dāsimayya gave it to him at once. The old man laughed, tore up the precious piece to bits right before his eyes, wrapped one strip on his head, another round his body, still another on his hand; the rest he swathed round his staff. Dāsimayya looked on and said calmly: 'It is yours. You can use it as you wish.' He brought the eccentric old

1. This legend, taken with poems regarding the supremacy of Śiva over all other gods (e.g. 4), speaks of the struggle of Vīraśaivism in the saint's times. 'Vīraśaivism' means 'militant or heroic Śaivism'. Dāsimayya's signature Rāmanātha, 'Lord of Rāma', is also significantly chosen to assert Śiva's primacy.

2. A common marriage-test for brides in Indian folklore – somewhat like spinning straw into gold in the Rumpelstiltskin tale.

man home, fed him and served him in all possible ways. The old man was Śiva himself. Pleased with Dāsimayya and his wife, and their way of life, and filled with compassion for their hardship and poverty, Śiva gave Duggaḷe a handful of rice. He asked her to mix it with the rest of her store. The divine rice made her store inexhaustible (*akṣaya*) and self-renewing.

Dāsimayya became a famous teacher in the kingdom of Jayasīṃha the Cālukya king. The king was a *jaina*. But Suggale, his queen, came from a Śaivite family and received initiation from Dāsimayya. The king and his jaina followers were outraged by this act and planned to defeat the saint in argument. Once they hid a boy in the bole of a tree and told Dāsimayya that their omnipresent god was also in the tree. In demonstration, they called out to the tree. But no answer came as expected. When they looked into the tree, the boy was dead. The boy's mother cried and begged of Dāsimayya to give him life, which he did. His enemies also tested him by asking him to drink of a filthy poisoned tank; by the help of Śiva, Dāsimayya drew away all the filth and poison and drank the water without harm. Dāsimayya's body, inviolate, foiled all assassins. Finally his enemies went to the king, complained to him about all the jaina temples that had become rededicated to Śiva since the queen's initiation. The king had an argument with his queen, who was living apart. She told him that Śiva was the true god and challenged all the anti-Śaivites to an argument with Dāsimayya. A day was set. Pundits of every cult and colour joined the religious battle in the king's court. Dāsimayya's arguments were unanswerable and silenced all opponents. Yet the jainas, thinking evil in their hearts, brought a deadly serpent hidden in a pitcher and asked Dāsimayya to show his god in it. When he took off the lid, the serpent spread out its hood and hissed venomously. The saint said, 'Śiva is the only god,'

and held the reptile in his hand. At once it turned into a crystal liṅga which he set down, establishing a temple on the spot. The king was converted; he and all his family received initiation from Dāsīmāyā. The 700 jaina temples were converted into liṅga temples, and the 20,000 citizens of the city became Śaivites.

Dāsīmāyā returned to Mudanūru and resumed his weaving. When he wished to give up the world and enter god, he went to the Rāmanātha temple and told Rāmanātha: 'I've lived my life and done everything by your grace. Now you must return me to yourself.' Rāmanātha was pleased and appeared to him in his true form. Dāsīmāyā's wife Duggaḷe said to the Lord: 'My husband's path is mine. With him you must take me too.' So he and Duggaḷe praised the Lord together and entered the infinite.

All these legends speak eloquently of Dāsīmāyā, the missionary for Vīraśaivism, and the way he converted men of all sorts, jungle tribes, brahmins and jaina kings, to his religion. They also speak of the early conflicts of Vīraśaivism with all the contemporary religions. Śrī Śaila, the centre for Vīraśaiva saints, seems to have become such a centre as early as the tenth century, the time of the earliest vacana saint, Dāsīmāyā. His vacanas do mention earlier saints and their vacanas but his and others' references are all we have for evidence.

We are indebted to Rao Bahadūr Pha. Gu. Haḷakatti's (Bijapur) 1955 edition for the vacana texts and the above legends. The order and numbering of the vacanas follow his arrangement.

The first twenty-one vacanas of Dāsīmāyā deal with a variety of themes like the nature of god (e.g. 4), salvation, etc. The rest are arranged by the editor according to the six-phase system (cf. Appendix I):

<i>Bhakta</i> phase	23-87
<i>Māhēśvara</i>	88-98
<i>Prasādi</i>	99-113
<i>Prāṇalingi</i>	114-124
<i>Śaraṇa</i>	125-141
<i>Aikya</i>	142-147





## 4

You balanced the globe  
 on the waters  
 and kept it from melting away,<sup>34</sup>

you made the sky stand  
 without pillar or prop.

O Rāmanātha,  
 which gods could have  
 done this?

## 23

In the mother's womb  
 the child does not know  
 his mother's face

nor can *she* ever know  
 his face.

The man in the world's illusion  
 does not know the Lord

nor the Lord him,

Rāmanātha.

24

If this is my body  
would it not follow my will?

If this is your body  
would it not follow your will?

Obviously, it is neither your body  
nor mine:

    it is the fickle body  
of the burning world you made,

Rāmanātha.

25

Hunger the great serpent  
has seized the vitals  
and the venom is mounting  
from foot to brow.

Only he is the true Snake-man  
in all the world  
who can feed this hunger food

and bring the poison down,

Rāmanātha.<sup>35</sup>

26

A fire  
 in every act and look and word.  
 Between man and wife  
 a fire.  
 In the plate of food  
 eaten after much waiting  
 a fire.  
 In the loss of gain  
 a fire.  
 And in the infatuation  
 of coupling  
 a fire.

You have given us  
 five fires  
 and poured dirt in our mouths

○ Rāmanātha.

42

A man filled grain  
 in a tattered sack  
 and walked all night  
 fearing the toll-gates

but the grain went through the tatters  
 and all he got was the gunny sack.

It is thus  
 with the devotion  
 of the faint-hearted

○ Rāmanātha.

## 43

Can assemblies in session  
give charities to men?

Everyone who goes to war  
goes only to die.

Only one in a hundred,  
may be one in a thousand,

gets to spear the enemy.

O Rāmanātha  
how can every tamarind flower  
be fruit?<sup>36</sup>

## 44

For what  
shall I handle a dagger  
O lord?

What can I pull it out of,  
or stab it in,

when You are all the world,

O Rāmanātha?

## 45

The five elements  
have become one.

The sun and the moon,  
O Rider of the Bull,<sup>37</sup>  
aren't they really  
your body?

I stand,  
look on,  
you're filled  
with the worlds.

What can I hurt now  
after this, Rāmanātha?

## 49

For your devotees  
I shall be  
bullock; for your devotees  
I shall be  
menial,  
slave and watchdog  
at the door:

Maker of all things, for men  
who raise their hands  
in your worship

I shall be the fence of thorns  
on their backyard

O Rāmanātha.

55

When a man is of the Lord  
and his wife, of the world,  
what they eat is still  
shared equally:

it is like  
bringing a dead dog  
into the attic  
and sharing bits  
of its carcass,

○ Rāmanātha.<sup>38</sup>

72

You have forged  
this chain  
of eighteen links<sup>39</sup>  
and chained us humans:

you have ruined us  
○ Rāmanātha  
and made us dogs forever  
on the leash.

80

The earth is your gift,  
the growing grain your gift,  
the blowing wind your gift.

What shall I call these curs  
who eat out of your hand  
and praise everyone else?

87

Whatever It was

that made this earth  
the base,  
the world its life,  
the wind its pillar,  
arranged the lotus and the moon,  
and covered it all with folds  
of sky

with Itself inside,

to that Mystery  
indifferent to differences,

to It I pray,  
O Rāmanātha.



90

He will make them roam the streets;  
 scrape them on stone for colour of gold;  
 grind them for sandal;  
 like a stick of sugarcane  
 he will slash them to look inside.

If they do not wince or shudder,  
 he will pick them up by the hands,

will our Rāmanātha.

94

What does it matter  
 if the fox roams  
 all over the Jambu island?  
 Will he ever stand amazed  
 in meditation of the Lord?  
 Does it matter if he wanders  
 all over the globe  
 and bathes in a million sacred rivers?<sup>40</sup>

A pilgrim who's not one with you,  
 Rāmanātha,  
 roams the world  
 like a circus man.

96

Did the breath of the mistress  
have breasts and long hair?

Or did the master's breath  
wear sacred thread?

Did the outcaste, last in line,  
hold with his outgoing breath  
the stick of his tribe?

What do the fools of this world know  
of the snares you set,  
O Rāmanātha?

98

To the utterly at-one with Śiva

there's no dawn,  
no new moon,  
no noonday,  
nor equinoxes,  
nor sunsets,  
nor full moons;

his front yard  
is the true Benares,

O Rāmanātha.

## 120

I'm the one who has the body,  
you're the one who holds the breath.

You know the secret of my body,  
I know the secret of your breath.

That's why your body  
is in mine.

You know  
and I know, Rāmanātha,

the miracle

of your breath  
in my body.

## 121

God of my clan,  
I'll not place my feet  
but where your feet  
have stood before:  
I've no feet  
of my own.

How can the immoralists  
of this world know  
the miracle, the oneness  
of your feet  
and mine,

Rāmanātha?

123

Bodied,  
one will hunger.

Bodied,  
one will lie.

O you, don't you rib  
and taunt me  
again  
for having a body:

body Thyself for once  
like me and see  
what happens,

O Rāmanātha.

124

When, to the hungerless figure,  
you serve waters of no thirst,  
whisper the sense-less word  
in the heart,  
and call without a name,

who is it that echoes O!  
in answer,  
O Rāmanātha,

is it you,  
or is it me?

126

Unless you build,  
Space will not get inside  
a house;

unless the eye sees,  
mind will not decide  
on forms;

without a way  
there's no reaching  
the other;

O Rāmanātha  
how will men know  
that this is so?

127

Fire can burn  
but cannot move.

Wind can move  
but cannot burn.

Till fire joins wind  
it cannot take a step.

Do men know  
it's like that  
with knowing and doing?

128

Can the wind bring out  
and publish for others  
the fragrance  
in the little bud?

Can even begetters, father and mother,  
display for onlookers' eyes  
the future breast and flowing hair  
in the little girl  
about to be bride?

Only ripeness  
can show consequence,

Rāmanātha.

131

Rāmanātha,  
who can know the beauty  
of the Hovering One

who's made Himself form  
and of space  
the colours?

133

If they see  
breasts and long hair coming  
they call it woman,

if beard and whiskers  
they call it man:

but, look, the self that hovers  
in between  
is neither man  
nor woman

○ Rāmanātha

144

Suppose you cut a tall bamboo  
in two;  
make the bottom piece a woman,  
the headpiece a man;  
rub them together  
till they kindle:

tell me now,  
the fire that's born,  
is it male or female,

○ Rāmanātha?

## MAHĀDĒVIYAKKA

MAHĀDĒVI, a younger contemporary of Basavaṅṅa and Allama in the twelfth century, was born in Uḍutaḍi, a village in Śivamogga, near the birthplace of Allama. At ten, she was initiated to Śiva-worship by an unknown guru. She considered that moment the moment of her real birth. Apparently, the form of Śiva at the Uḍutaḍi temple was Mallikārjuna, translated either as 'the Lord White as Jasmine' or as 'Arjuna, Lord of goddess Mallikā'. 'Cenna' means 'lovely, beautiful'. She fell in love with Cennamallikārjuna and took his name for a 'signature' (*anikita*) in all her vacanas.

She betrothed herself to Śiva and none other, but human lovers pressed their suit. The rivalry between the Divine Lover and all human loves was dramatized by the incidents of her own life (vacana 114). Kauśika, the king (or chieftain) of the land, saw her one day and fell in love with her. He sent word to her parents, asking for her hand. In addition to being only human, he disqualified himself further by being a *bhavi*, an unbeliever. Yet he persuaded her, or rather her parents, partly by show of force, and partly by his protestations of love. It is quite likely that she married him and lived with him, though some scholars dispute the tainting fact. Anyhow it must have been a trying marriage for both. Kauśika, the wordling, full of desire for her as a mortal, was the archetype of sensual man; Mahādēvi, a spirit married already to the Lord White as Jasmine, scorning all human carnal love as corrupt and illegitimate, wife to no man, exile bound to the world's wheeling lives, archetypal sister of all souls. Significantly she is known as Akka 'elder sister'. Many of Mahādēvi's most moving vacanas speak of this conflict (cf. 114). Sometimes, the Lord is her illicit lover (cf. 88),



sometimes her only legitimate husband (cf. 283). This ambiguous alternation of attitudes regarding the legitimacy of living in the world is a fascinating aspect of Mahādēvi's poetry.

At one point, Kauśika appears to have tried to force his will on her and so she leaves him, cutting clean her relations with the whole world of men. Like many another saint, enacting his true homelessness by his wanderings, she left birthplace and parents (102). She appears to have thrown away even modesty and clothing, those last concessions to the male world, in a gesture of ultimate social defiance, and wandered about covered in her tresses (124).

Through a world of molesting male attentions she wandered, defiant and weary (294), asserting the legitimacy of her illicit love for the Lord, searching for him and his devotees. She walked towards Kalyāṇa, the centre of Viraśaiva saints, the 'halls of Experience' where Allama and Basavaṇṇa ran a school for kindred spirits.

Allama did not accept her at once. A remarkable conversation ensued, a dialogue between sceptic and love-child which turned into a catechism between guru and disciple. Many of Mahādēvi's *vacanas* are placed by legend in this famous dialogue.<sup>1</sup> When Allama asked the wild-looking woman for her husband's identity, she replied she was married forever to Cennamallikārjuna. He asked her then the obvious question: 'Why take off clothes, as if by that gesture you could peel off illusions? And yet robe yourself in tresses of hair? If so free and pure in heart, why replace a sari with a covering of tresses?' Her reply is honest:

Till the fruit is ripe inside  
the skin will not fall off.

1. Recorded or reconstructed in *Śūnyasampādane* (ca. fifteenth century) cf. note on Allama Prabhu, p. 144.

I'd a feeling it would hurt you  
 if I displayed the body's seals of love.  
 O brother, don't tease me  
 needlessly. I'm given entire  
 into the hands of my lord  
 white as jasmine.

MAHĀDĒVIYAKKA 183

For other such contexts, see also vacanas 104, 157, 184, 251, 283, and the notes on them.

At the end of this ordeal by dialogue she was accepted into the company of saints. From then begins the second lap of her journey to her Lord. She wandered wild and god-intoxicated, in love with him, yet not finding him. Restless, she left Kalyāṇa and wandered off again towards Śrīśaila, the Holy Mountain, where she found him and lost herself. Her search is recorded in her vacanas as a search for her love, following all the phases of human love as set forth by the conventions of Indian, especially Sanskrit, poetry. The three chief forms of love, love forbidden (e.g., 328), love in separation (e.g., 318) and love in union (e.g., 335) are all expressed in her poems, often one attitude informing and complicating another in the same poem (e.g., 318).

She was recognized by her fellow-saints as the most poetic of them all, with a single symbolic action unifying all her poetry. She enlists the traditional imagery of pan-Indian secular love-poetry for personal expression. In her, the phases of human love are metaphors for the phases of mystic ascent. In this search, unlike the other saints, she involves all of nature, a sister to bird, beast and tree (e.g., 73). Appropriately, she chose for adoration an aesthetic aspect of Śiva, Śiva as Cennamallikārjuna, or the Lovely Lord White as Jasmine.

Like other bhaktas, her struggle was with her condition, as body, as woman, as social being tyrannized by social roles,

as a human confined to a place and a time. Through these shackles she bursts, defiant in her quest for ecstasy.

According to legend, she died into 'oneness with Śiva' when she was hardly in her twenties – a brief bright burning.

I have used L. Basavarāju's edition of Mahādēviyakka's vacanas: *Akkana Vacanagaḷu* (Mysore, 1966). The numbers follow Basavarāju's edition, which does not classify her vacanas according to the six-phase system.

## 2

Like

treasure hidden in the ground  
taste in the fruit  
gold in the rock  
oil in the seed

the Absolute hidden away  
in the heart

no one can know  
the ways of our lord

white as jasmine.<sup>41</sup>

## 11

You're like milk  
in water:<sup>42</sup> I cannot tell  
what comes before,  
what after;  
which is the master,  
which the slave;  
what's big,  
what's small.

O lord white as jasmine  
if an ant should love you  
and praise you,  
will he not grow  
to demon powers?

## 12

My body is dirt,<sup>43</sup>  
 my spirit is space:  
   which  
 shall I grab, O lord? How,  
 and what,  
   shall I think of you?  
   Cut through  
   my illusions,  
   lord white as jasmine.

## 17

Like a silkworm<sup>44</sup> weaving  
 her house with love  
 from her marrow,  
   and dying  
 in her body's threads  
 winding tight, round  
 and round,  
   I burn  
 desiring what the heart desires.

Cut through, O lord,  
 my heart's greed,  
 and show me  
 your way out,

O lord white as jasmine.

## 18

Not one, not two, not three or four,  
but through eighty-four hundred thousand<sup>45</sup> vaginas  
have I come,

I have come  
through unlikely worlds,  
guzzled on  
pleasure and on pain.

Whatever be  
all previous lives,  
show me mercy  
this one day,

O lord  
white as jasmine.

## 20

Monkey on monkeyman's stick  
puppet at the end of a string

I've played as you've played  
I've spoken as you've told me  
I've been as you've let me be

O engineer of the world  
lord white as jasmine

I've run  
till you cried halt.

26

Illusion has troubled body as shadow  
troubled life as a heart  
troubled heart as a memory  
troubled memory as awareness.

With stick raised high, Illusion herds  
the worlds.  
Lord white as jasmine  
no one can overcome  
your Illusion.

45

It was like a stream  
running into the dry bed  
of a lake,  
like rain  
pouring on plants  
parched to sticks.

It was like this world's pleasure  
and the way to the other,  
both  
walking towards me.

Seeing the feet of the master,  
O lord white as jasmine,  
I was made  
worthwhile.

## 50

When I didn't know myself  
where were you?

Like the colour in the gold,  
you were in me.

I saw in you,  
lord white as jasmine,  
the paradox of your being  
in me  
without showing a limb.

## 60

Not seeing you  
in the hill, in the forest,  
from tree to tree<sup>46</sup>  
I roamed,  
    searching, gasping:  
    Lord, my Lord, come  
    show me your kindness!

till I met your men  
and found you.  
    You hide  
lest I seek and find.  
Give me a clue,  
O lord  
white as jasmine,  
    to your hiding places.



65

If sparks fly  
I shall think my thirst and hunger quelled.

If the skies tear down  
I shall think them pouring for my bath.

If a hillside slide on me  
I shall think it flower for my hair.

O lord white as jasmine, if my head falls from my shoulders  
I shall think it your offering.

68

Locks of shining red hair  
a crown of diamonds<sup>47</sup>  
small beautiful teeth  
and eyes in a laughing face  
that light up fourteen worlds –

I saw His glory,  
and seeing, I quell today  
the famine in my eyes.

I saw the haughty Master  
for whom men, all men,  
are but women, wives.

I saw the Great One  
who plays at love  
with Śakti,  
original to the world,

I saw His stance  
and began to live.

## 69

O mother<sup>48</sup> I burned  
in a flameless fire

O mother I suffered  
a bloodless wound

mother I tossed  
without a pleasure:

loving my lord white as jasmine  
I wandered through unlikely worlds.

## 73

O twittering birds,  
don't you know? don't you know?

O swans on the lakeshore,  
don't you know? don't you know?

O high-singing koils,<sup>49</sup>  
don't you know? don't you know?

O circling swooping bees,  
don't you know? don't you know?

O peacocks in the caverns,  
don't you know?  
don't you know?

Tell me if you know:

where is He,

my lord  
white as jasmine?

## 74

O swarm of bees  
 O mango tree  
 O moonlight  
 O koilbird  
 I beg of you all  
 one  
 favour:

If you should see my lord anywhere  
 my lord white as jasmine

call out  
 and show him to me.

## 75

You are the forest

you are all the great trees  
 in the forest

you are bird and beast  
 playing in and out  
 of all the trees

O lord white as jasmine  
 filling and filled by all

why don't you  
 show me your face?

77

Would a circling surface vulture  
 know such depths of sky  
 as the moon would know?

would a weed on the riverbank  
 know such depths of water  
 as the lotus would know?

would a fly darting nearby  
 know the smell of flowers  
 as the bee would know?

O lord white as jasmine  
 only you would know  
 the way of your devotees:  
 how would these,

these  
 mosquitoes  
 on the buffalo's hide?

79

Four parts of the day<sup>50</sup>  
 I grieve for you.  
 Four parts of the night  
 I'm mad for you.

I lie lost  
 sick for you, night and day,  
 O lord white as jasmine.

Since your love  
 was planted,  
 I've forgotten hunger,  
 thirst, and sleep.

87

Listen, sister, listen.  
 I had a dream

I saw rice, betel, palmleaf  
 and coconut.  
 I saw an ascetic<sup>51</sup>  
 come to beg,  
 white teeth and small matted curls.

I followed on his heels  
 and held his hand,  
 he who goes breaking  
 all bounds and beyond.

I saw the lord, white as jasmine,  
 and woke wide open.

88

He bartered my heart,  
 looted my flesh,  
 claimed as tribute  
 my pleasure,  
 took over  
 all of me.

I'm the woman of love  
 for my lord, white as jasmine.

93

Other men are thorn  
 under the smooth leaf.  
 I cannot touch them,  
 go near them, nor trust them,  
 nor speak to them confidences.

Mother,<sup>52</sup>  
 because they all have thorns  
 in their chests,  
                   I cannot take  
 any man in my arms but my lord  
  
 white as jasmine.

102

When one heart touches  
 and feels another  
 won't feeling weigh over all,  
 can it stand any decencies then?

O mother,<sup>53</sup> you must be crazy,  
 I fell for my lord  
 white as jasmine,  
 I've given in utterly.

Go, go, I'll have nothing  
 of your mother-and-daughter stuff.  
 You go now.

104

Till you've earned  
 knowledge of good and evil

it is  
 lust's body,  
 site of rage,  
 ambush of greed,  
 house of passion,  
 fence of pride,  
 mask of envy.

Till you know and lose this knowing  
 you've no way  
 of knowing  
 my lord white as jasmine.<sup>54</sup>

## 114

Husband inside,  
lover outside.  
I can't manage them both.

This world  
and that other,  
cannot manage them both.

O lord white as jasmine

I cannot hold in one hand  
both the round nut<sup>55</sup>  
and the long bow.

## 117

Who cares  
who strips a tree of leaf  
once the fruit is plucked?

Who cares  
who lies with the woman  
you have left?

Who cares  
who ploughs the land  
you have abandoned?

After this body has known my lord  
who cares if it feeds  
a dog  
or soaks up water?



## 119

What's to come tomorrow  
let it come today.  
What's to come today  
let it come right now.

Lord white as jasmine,  
don't give us your *nows* and *thens*!

## 120

Breath for fragrance,  
who needs flowers?

with peace, patience, forgiving and self-command,  
who needs the Ultimate Posture?

The whole world become oneself  
who needs solitude,

O lord white as jasmine.<sup>56</sup>

## 124

You can confiscate  
money in hand;  
can you confiscate  
the body's glory?

Or peel away every strip  
you wear,  
but can you peel  
the Nothing, the Nakedness  
that covers and veils?<sup>57</sup>

To the shameless girl  
wearing the White Jasmine Lord's  
light of morning,  
you fool,  
where's the need for cover and jewel?

131

Sunlight made visible  
 the whole length of a sky,  
 movement of wind,  
 leaf, flower, all six colours<sup>58</sup>  
 on tree, bush and creeper:  
all this
 is the day's worship.

The light of moon, star and fire,  
 lightnings and all things  
 that go by the name of light  
 are the night's worship.

Night and day  
 in your worship  
 I forget myself

O lord white as jasmine.

157

If one could  
 draw the fangs of a snake  
 and charm the snake to play,  
 it's great to have snakes.

If one can single out  
 the body's ways  
 it's great to have bodies.  
 The body's wrong  
 is like mother turning vampire.

Don't say they have bodies  
 who have Your love,  
 O lord  
 white as jasmine.<sup>59</sup>

184

People,  
 male and female,  
 blush when a cloth covering their shame  
 comes loose.

When the lord of lives  
 lives drowned without a face  
 in the world, how can you be modest?

When all the world is the eye of the lord,  
 onlooking everywhere, what can you  
 cover and conceal?

199

For hunger,  
there is the town's rice in the begging bowl.

For thirst,  
there are tanks, streams, wells,

For sleep,  
there are the ruins of temples.<sup>60</sup>

For soul's company  
I have you, O lord  
white as jasmine.

200

Make me go from house to house  
with arms stretched for alms.

If I beg, make them give nothing.

If they give, make it fall to the ground.

If it falls, before I pick it up, make a dog take it,

O lord  
white as jasmine.

## 251

Why do I need this dummy  
 of a dying world?  
 illusion's chamberpot,  
 hasty passions' whorehouse,  
 this crackpot  
 and leaky basement?

Finger may squeeze the fig  
 to feel it, yet not choose  
 to eat it.

Take me, flaws and all,  
 O lord

white as jasmine.

## 274

Every tree  
 in the forest was the All-Giving Tree,  
 every bush  
 the life-reviving herb,  
 every stone the Philosophers' Stone,  
 all the land a pilgrim's holy place,  
 all the water nectar against age,  
 every beast the golden deer,  
 every pebble I stumble on  
 the Wishing Crystal:  
     walking round  
 the Jasmine Lord's favourite hill,

I happened  
 on the Plantain Grove.<sup>61</sup>

283.

I love the Handsome One:

he has no death  
decay nor form  
no place or side  
no end nor birthmarks.

I love him O mother. Listen.

I love the Beautiful One

with no bond nor fear  
no clan no land  
no landmarks  
for his beauty.

So my lord, white as jasmine, is my husband.

Take these husbands who die,

decay, and feed them  
to your kitchen fires!

294

O brothers,<sup>62</sup> why do you talk  
to this woman,  
hair loose,  
face withered,  
body shrunk?

O fathers, why do you bother  
with this woman?  
She has no strength of limb,  
has lost the world,  
lost power of will,  
turned devotee,

she has lain down  
with the Lord, white as jasmine,  
and has lost caste.



## 313

Like an elephant  
lost from his herd  
suddenly captured,

remembering his mountains,  
his Vindhya,  
I remember.

A parrot  
come into a cage  
remembering his mate,  
I remember.

O lord white as jasmine  
show me  
your ways.  
Call me: Child, come here,  
come this way.

## 317

Riding the blue sapphire mountains  
wearing moonstone for slippers  
blowing long horns  
O Śiva  
when shall I  
crush you on my pitcher breasts

O lord white as jasmine  
when do I join you  
stripped of body's shame  
and heart's modesty?

318

If He says  
He has to go away  
to fight battles at the front<sup>63</sup>  
I understand and can be quiet.

But how can I bear it  
when He is here in my hands  
right here in my heart  
and will not take me?

O mind, O memory of pasts,  
if you will not help me get to Him  
how can I ever bear it?

What do  
the barren know  
of birthpangs?

Stepmothers,  
what do they know  
of loving care?

How can the unwounded  
know the pain  
of the wounded?

O lord white as jasmine  
your love's blade stabbed  
and broken in my flesh,

I writhe.  
O mothers  
how can you know me?

## 321

The heart in misery  
has turned  
upside down.

The blowing gentle breeze  
is on fire.<sup>64</sup>  
O friend moonlight burns  
like the sun.

Like a tax-collector in a town  
I go restlessly here and there.

Dear girl go tell Him  
bring Him to His senses.  
Bring Him back.

My lord white as jasmine  
is angry  
that we are two.

## 322

My husband comes home today.  
Wear your best, wear your jewels.

The Lord, white as jasmine,  
will come anytime now.

Girls, come  
meet Him at the door.

323

I look at the road  
for his coming.  
If he isn't coming,  
I pine and waste away.  
If he is late,  
I grow lean.

O mother, if he is away  
for a night,  
I'm like the lovebird<sup>65</sup>  
with nothing  
in her embrace.

324

Better than meeting  
and mating all the time  
is the pleasure of mating once  
after being far apart.

When he's away  
I cannot wait  
to get a glimpse of him.

Friend, when will I have it  
both ways,  
be with Him  
yet not with Him,  
my lord white as jasmine?

328

I have Māyā for mother-in-law;  
 the world for father-in-law;  
 three brothers-in-law, like tigers;

and the husband's thoughts  
 are full of laughing women:  
 no god, this man.

And I cannot cross the sister-in-law.

But I will  
 give this wench the slip  
 and go cuckold my husband with Hara, my Lord.

My mind is my maid:  
 by her kindness, I join  
 my Lord,  
     my utterly beautiful Lord  
     from the mountain-peaks,  
     my lord white as jasmine,  
 and I will make Him  
 my good husband.

336

Look at  
love's marvellous  
ways:

if you shoot an arrow  
plant it  
till no feather shows;

if you hug  
a body, bones  
must crunch and crumble;

weld,  
the welding must vanish.

Love is then  
our lord's love.

## ALLAMA PRABHU

THERE are two traditions regarding Allama's life. One considers him Śiva himself, arriving in the world to teach the way of freedom. To try him, Śiva's consort, Pārvati, sent down her dark side, Māye or Illusion. Allama's parents are named allegorically 'Selflessness' (*nirahāṅkāra*) and 'The Wise One' (*suññāni*). Māye was born to parents named 'Selfishness' (*mamakāra*) and 'Lady Illusion' (*māyādēvi*). In this version, Allama was not even born: his parents undertook penance for their 'truth-bringing sorrowless' son, and found by their side a shining child. Thus, unborn, he descended into the world. Later, when he was playing the drum in a temple, Māye fell in love with him, and appointed him her dancing master. She tried all her charms on him but could not move him. Pārvati, who had sent him the temptation, realized that tempting him was useless and withdrew Māye to herself. A more human variant of this Descent-version speaks of Allama and the enchantress as minions of Śiva and Pārvati, cursed to be born in the world.

There are differences from variant to variant in the names of the parents, the place, and manner of birth. The most vivid tradition of this kind is the earliest, written up by Harihara, a brilliant fifteenth-century poet who wrote the lives of the Virāṣaiva saints in galloping blank verse. According to Harihara: Allama, talented temple-drummer, son of a dance teacher, falls in love with Kāmalate ('love's tendril'). In marriage, they were new lovers; their love was without 'end, beginning, or middle'; 'drowned in desire' knowing no weight or impediment. But Kāmalate was suddenly stricken down by a fever and died soon after. Allama wanders in his grief like a madman, benumbed, his memory eclipsed,



his heart broken, calling out for the dead Kāmalate, in field, forest, village. While he was sitting in an out-of-town grove, downcast, scratching the ground idly with his toenail, he saw something: the golden kalaśa (pinnacle, cupola) of a temple jutting forth from the earth, like 'the nipple-peak on the breast of the Goddess of Freedom'. When he got the place dug and excavated, however, there was no Kāmalate. But before him stood the closed door of a shrine. Careless of consequence, Allama kicked the door open, and entered. He saw before him a yōgi in a trance, concentrated on the liṅga. His eyes and face were all aglow, his locks glowing, a garland of rudrākṣi seeds<sup>1</sup> round his neck, serpent earrings on his ears. Like the All-giving Tree, he sat there in the heart of the temple. The yōgi's name was Animiṣayya (the One without eyelids, the open-eyed one). While Allama stood there astonished, Animiṣayya gave into his hand a liṅga. Even as he handed over the liṅga, Animiṣayya's life went out. In that moment of transference, Allama became enlightened, and wandered henceforth where the Lord called him and where the Lord took him.

This experience of the secret underground, the cave-temple, is what is probably celebrated in the name Guhēśvara or Lord of Caves, which appears in almost every Allama vacana.

Other vacana saints recognized him instantly as the Master. Basavaṅṅa, Mahādēvi, Cennabasava, Siddharāma, Mukṭāyakka and others considered him their guru. Basava was known as *Aṅṅa* 'elder brother', Mahādēvi as *Akka* 'elder sister', but Allama was *Prabhū* or Master to everyone. A later poet, Cāmarasa, devoted an entire work *Prabhuliṅgalīle* to the Master's life, miracles and teachings. The *Śūnyasampādane* or 'the Achievement of Nothingness', an important source for Viraśaiva thought and poetry, was written round the life

1. Sacred to Śiva, also used as prayer beads; serpents as ornaments are also characteristic of Śiva.

and work of Allama, and describes his encounters with contemporary saints. According to all accounts, Kalyāṇa was established as the rallying centre of Vīraśaiva saints by Allama's spiritual presence as much as by Basavaṇṇa's efforts as minister of state. The company of saints, presided over by Allama, came to be known as *anubhava maṅṭapa* or 'the mansion of Experience'.

Allama's rejection of external ritual and worship was most complete. In his encounters with Basavaṇṇa, Mahādēviyakka (cf. section-notes on them) and others he leads them to understand their own imperfect rejection of externals: he teases, probes, questions their integrity. He stresses Basavaṇṇa's temptations in the world to which he has yielded even though in good works. He mocks at Mahādēvi flaunting her nudity to the gaze of the world and yet covering herself with her tresses. The Vīraśaiva rejection of various occult practices of the time is best illustrated by the episode of Gōrakṣa. Gōrakṣa was the leader of Siddhas or occult practitioners in search of supernatural powers (probably not to be identified with Gorakhnātha dated between the ninth and twelfth century, the master of a medieval occult tradition in North India,<sup>2</sup> despite the similarity of name and other circumstances). Whatever be the historical truth of the legend, the significance is clear.

Siddhas were after Siddhis, or 'miraculous powers'. In the course of yogic practices, the yogi acquires inevitably certain occult powers, suspending various powers of nature:

being one he becomes many, or having become many, becomes one again; he becomes visible or invisible; he goes, feeling no obstruction, to the further side of a wall or rampart or hill, as if through air; he penetrates up and down through solid ground, as if through

2. For a succinct account of Siddhas cf. M. Eliade's *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, New York, 1958, pp. 301-7.

water; he walks on water without breaking through, as if on solid ground; he travels cross-legged in the sky, like the birds on the wing; even the Moon and the Sun . . . does he touch and feel with his hand; he reaches in the body even up to the heaven Brahma . . .<sup>3</sup>

While such powers are essential indications of the saint's progressive release from the conditions of earthly existence, they are also temptations to power, tempting the yogi to a vain magical mastery of the world (Eliade's phrase).<sup>4</sup> Both Hindu and Buddhist doctrines warn the novice against these temptations on the way to *samādhi* or *nirvāṇa*, or 'release'. Allama's magical contest with and victory over Gōrakṣa is symbolic of Vīraśaivism's rebuke to occult practices.

Gōrakṣa, the leader of the Siddhas, had a magical body, invulnerable as diamond. Allama mocked at his body, his vanity. Legend says that he gave Allama a sword and invited him to try cutting his body in two. Allama swung the sword at him, but the sword clanged on the solid diamond-body of Gōrakṣa; not a hair was severed. Gōrakṣa laughed in pride. Allama laughed at this show-off and returned the sword, saying, 'Try it on me now.' Gōrakṣa came at Allama with his sword with all his strength. The sword swished through Allama's body as if it were mere space. Such were Allama's powers of self-emptying, his 'achievement of Nothingness'. Gōrakṣa was stunned – he felt acutely the contrast between his own powers and Allama's true realization, between his own diamond-body in which the carnal body had become confirmed and Allama's body which was no body but all spirit. This revelation was the beginning of his enlightenment. Allama said to him:<sup>5</sup>

3. From a buddhist text quoted by Eliade, op. cit., p. 178.

4. *ibid.*, p. 177.

5. *Śūnyasamīpādane*, ed. S. S. Bhoosnurmath, Dharwar, 1958, p. 449.

With your alchemies,  
 you achieve metals,  
 but no essence.

With all your manifold yogas,  
 you achieve  
 a body, but no spirit.

With your speeches and arguments  
 you build chains of words  
 but cannot define the spirit.

If you say  
 you and I are one,  
 you were me  
 but I was not you.

Legend describes Allama's perfect interiorization: To men living and dying in lust, he taught the divine copulation of yogic practice; to alchemists, he brought the magical inward drop of essence that transmuted the base metal of fear; to holy men living in the fearful world, exploiting trees for clothing, stripping root and branch in their hunger, drinking up river and lake in their thirst, Allama taught the spirit's sacrifice, converting them from the practice of animal sacrifice to the sacrifice of bestial self.

Thus by mockery, invective, argument, poetry, loving kindness and sheer presence, Allama brought enlightenment to laymen, and release to the saints themselves.

Allama's vacanas say little of his early life, passions or conflicts. His vacanas were all uttered after he reached full enlightenment. Unlike others (e.g. Basavaṅṅa), he leaves few traces of early struggle or his biographical past. In a saint like Allama, 'the butterfly has no memory of the caterpillar'.

According to some, such an image of Allama, untempted and undivided by human passions, is a censored image, clipped and presented by scholars who love absolutes.

Allama's vacanas have been distributed in the Basavarāju edition (*Allamana Vacana Candrike*, Mysore, 1960) as follows:

Preliminary vacanas	1-63
<i>Bhakta</i>	64-112
<i>Māhēśvara</i>	113-156
<i>Prasādi</i>	157-173
<i>Prāṇalingi</i>	174-310
<i>Śaraṇa</i>	311-606
<i>Aikya</i>	606-1321
(including songs set to music 1289-1321)	

The overwhelming impression that Allama leaves of masterful wisdom and awareness without lapses is clearly reflected in the proportions of his vacanas in the different phases, or sthalas: over half the vacanas are about the later steps of the saint's ascent, the largest number are about the state of union and realization. Compare these proportions with those of Basavaṇṇa, where the greatest number is in the first bhakta-stage.

42

Look here,  
 the legs are two wheels;  
 the body is a wagon  
 full of things.

Five men<sup>66</sup> drive  
 the wagon  
 and one man is not  
 like another.

Unless you ride it  
 in full knowledge of its ways  
 the axle  
 will break,  
 O Lord of Caves.

59

Where was the mango tree,  
 where the koilbird?<sup>67</sup>

when were they kin?

Mountain gooseberry<sup>68</sup>  
 and sea salt:

when  
 were they kin?

and when was I  
 kin to the Lord  
 of Caves?

A little bee born  
 in the heart's lotus  
 flew out and swallowed  
 the sky.

In the breeze  
 of his wing, three worlds  
 turned upside down.

When  
 the cage of the five-coloured swan  
 was broken, the bee fell  
 to the ground with broken wings.

Living among your men,  
 O Lord of Caves,  
 I saw the lovely tactic  
 of truth's coming on.<sup>69</sup>

I saw:  
 heart conceive,  
 hand grow big with child;  
 ear drink up the smell  
 of camphor, nose eat up  
 the dazzle of pearls;  
 hungry eyes devour  
 diamonds.

In a blue sapphire  
 I saw the three worlds  
 hiding,  
 O Lord of Caves.<sup>70</sup>

109

If mountains shiver in the cold  
with what  
will they wrap them?

If space goes naked  
with what  
shall they clothe it?

If the lord's men become worldlings  
where will I find the metaphor,

O Lord of Caves

211

I saw an ape tied up  
at the main gate of the triple city,  
taunting  
every comer.

When the king came  
with an army,  
he broke them up at one stroke  
and ate them.

He has a body, no head, this ape:  
legs without footsteps,  
hands without fingers;  
a true prodigy, really.



Before anyone calls him, he calls them.  
I saw him clamber over the forehead of the wild elephant  
born in his womb  
and sway in play  
in the dust of the winds.

I saw him juggle his body as a ball  
in the depth of the sky,  
play with a ten-hooded snake  
in a basket; saw him blindfold  
the eyes of the five virgins.  
I saw him trample the forehead  
of the lion that wanders in the ten streets,  
I saw him raise the lion's eyebrows.  
I saw him grow from amazement  
to amazement, holding a diamond  
in his hand.

Nothing added,  
nothing taken,

the Lord's stance  
is invisible  
to men untouched  
by the Liṅga of the Breath.<sup>71</sup>

213

With a whole temple  
in this body  
where's the need  
for another?

No one asked  
for two.

O Lord of Caves,  
if you are stone,  
what am I?

218

They don't know the day  
is the dark's face,  
and the dark the day's.

A necklace of nine jewels  
lies buried, intact, in the face of the night;  
in the face of day a tree  
with leaves of nine designs.

When you feed the necklace  
to the tree,  
the Breath enjoys it  
in the Lord of Caves.<sup>72</sup>

219

It's dark above the clutching hand.  
It's dark over the seeing eye.  
It's dark over the remembering heart.  
It's dark here  
with the Lord of Caves  
out there.

277

When the toad  
swallowed the sky,  
look, Rāhu  
the serpent mounted  
and wonder of wonders!  
the blind man  
caught the snake.

Thus, O Lord,  
I learned  
without telling the world.<sup>73</sup>

299

I heard the dead rooster crow  
 that the cat<sup>74</sup> devoured.  
 I saw the black koil come  
 and eat up the sun.  
 The casket burned and left  
 only the sacred thread.

The Liṅga of the Breath  
 breaks all rules  
 and grows unorthodox.

No one may trace  
 the footstep on the water;  
 the sound of the word  
 Guhēśvara\*  
 is neither here  
 nor there.

\* Lord of Caves

316

What's this darkness  
 on the eyes?  
 this death on the heart?  
 this battlefield within,  
 this coquetry without,  
 this path familiar to the feet?

319

A wilderness grew  
 in the sky.<sup>75</sup>  
 In that wilderness  
 a hunter.  
 In the hunter's hands  
 a deer.

The hunter will not die  
 till the beast  
 is killed.

Awareness is not easy,  
 is it,  
 O Lord of Caves?

396

I was  
 as if the fire in the tree  
 burned the tree

as if the sweet smells  
 of the winds of space  
 took over the nostrils

as if the doll of wax  
 went up in flames

I worshipped the Lord  
 and lost the world.

429

When the honey-bee came  
I saw the smell<sup>76</sup> of flowers  
run.

O what miracles!

Where the heart went  
I saw the brain  
run.

When the god came,  
I saw the temple run.

431

Outside city limits  
a temple.  
In the temple, look,  
a hermit woman.

In the woman's hand  
a needle,  
at needle's end  
the fourteen worlds.

O Lord of Caves,  
I saw an ant  
devour whole  
the woman, the needle,  
the fourteen worlds.<sup>77</sup>

451

Show me once  
the men

who have cut the guts  
of the eye

roasted the kernels  
of the heart

and learned  
the beginnings  
of the word

O Lord of Caves.<sup>78</sup>

459

The world tires itself thinking  
it has buried all shadow.

Can shadows die  
for limbed animals?

If you rage and curse here  
at the thief out there  
on the other shore,  
will he just drop dead?

These men, they do not know  
the secret,  
the stitches of feeling;  
would our Lord of Caves  
come alive  
just because they wish it?

461

For a wedding of dwarfs  
 rascals beat the drums  
 and whores  
 carry on their heads  
 holy pitchers;

with hey-ho's and loud hurrahs  
 they crowd the wedding party  
 and quarrel over flowers and betelnuts;

all three worlds are at the party;  
 what a rumpus this is,  
 without our Lord of Caves.

492

○ Happening that never happened,  
 ○ Extremist Character,  
 why get worshipped  
 at the hands  
 of the dying?

○ Lord of Caves,  
 it's a shame  
 to get worshipped  
 at the hands  
 of men  
 who get hurt  
 and die.



532

A tree<sup>79</sup> born  
 in a land without soil,  
 and look!  
 eight flowers  
 thunderbolt-coloured.  
 Fruit on the branch  
 ripen at the root.

O Lord of Caves,  
 only he is truly your man  
 who has eaten  
 of fruit fallen  
 loose from the stalk  
 in places no eye has seen:

only he,  
 no one else.

537

The fires of the city<sup>80</sup> burned in the forest,  
 forest fires burned in the town.  
 Listen, listen to the flames  
 of the four directions.  
 Flapping and crackling in the vision  
 a thousand bodies dance in it  
 and die countless deaths,

O Lord of Caves.

541

He's powerful, this policeman!  
 broke off the hands and feet of water  
 lopped off the nose and ears of fire  
 beheaded the winds  
 and impaled the sky on a stake.<sup>81</sup>

Destroyed the king and his two ministers.

Closed and shot the bolts of the nine gates  
 and locked them up  
 killed nine thousand men  
 till he was left alone

our Lord of Caves.

550

Poets of the past  
 are the children of my concubines.  
 Poets to come  
 are infants of my pity.  
 The poets of the sky  
 are babies in my cradle.

Viṣṇu and Brahma  
 are my kinsmen and sidekicks.

You are the father-in-law  
 and I the son-in-law,

O Lord of Caves.<sup>82</sup>

556

If it rains fire<sup>83</sup>  
you have to be as the water;  
  
if it is a deluge of water  
you have to be as the wind;  
  
if it is the Great Flood,  
you have to be as the sky;  
  
and if it is the Very Last Flood of all the worlds,  
you have to give up self  
  
and become the Lord.

616

Who can know green grass flames  
seeds of stone  
  
reflections of water  
smell of the wind  
  
the sap of fire  
the taste of sunshine on the tongue<sup>84</sup>  
  
and the lights in oneself  
  
except your men?

629

One dies,  
another bears him to the burial ground:  
still another takes them both  
and burns them.

No one knows the groom  
and no one the bride.  
Death falls across  
the wedding.

Much before the decorations fade  
the bridegroom is dead.

Lord, only your men  
have no death.

634

In the mortar without water,<sup>85</sup>  
pestles without shadows.

Women without bodies  
pound rice without grains,

and sing lullabies  
to the barren woman's son.

Under streamers of fire,  
plays the child of the Lord.

668

The wind sleeps  
to lullabies of sky.

Space drowns,  
infinity gives it suck  
from her breast.

The sky is silent.  
The lullaby is over.

The Lord is  
as if He were not.<sup>86</sup>

675

Light  
devoured darkness.

I was alone  
inside.

Shedding  
the visible dark

I  
was Your target

O Lord of Caves.

699

Sleep, great goddess sleep,  
heroine of three worlds,  
spins and sucks up  
all, draws breath  
and throws them down  
sapless.

I know of no hero  
who can stand before her.  
Struck by her arrows,  
people rise and fall.

775

A running river  
is all legs.

A burning fire  
is mouths all over.

A blowing breeze  
is all hands.

So, lord of the caves,  
for your men,  
every limb is Symbol.

802

Whoever knew  
that It is body of body,

breath of breath  
and feeling of feeling?

Thinking that it's far,  
it's near,  
it's out here  
and in there,

they tire themselves out.

809

Some say  
they saw It.  
What is It,  
the circular sun,  
the circle of the stars?

The Lord of Caves  
lives in the town  
of the moon mountain.

836

For all their search  
they cannot see  
the image in the mirror.

It blazes in the circles  
between the eyebrows.  
Who knows this  
has the Lord.

959

Feed the poor  
tell the truth  
make water-places  
for the thirsty  
and build tanks for a town –

you may then go to heaven  
after death, but you'll get nowhere  
near the truth of Our Lord.

And the man who knows Our Lord,  
he gets no results.



966

For the wildfire, the forest is the target;  
for the waterfire<sup>87</sup>, the water;  
for the body's fire, the body;  
for death's conflagration, the worlds  
are target;

for the angry fire of your men, all men of ill-will;

yet for your illusion's lashing flames  
I'm no target, O Lord of Caves.

972

Looking for your light,  
I went out:

it was like the sudden dawn  
of a million million suns,

a ganglion of lightnings  
for my wonder.

O Lord of Caves,  
if you are light,  
there can be no metaphor.

## APPENDIX I

### The Six-Phase System

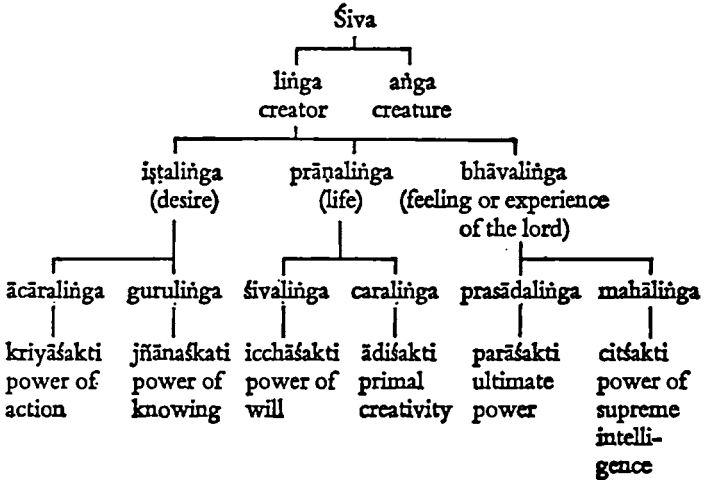
(*Ṣaṣṭhala Siddhānta*)

A RATHER esoteric intellectual system underlies the native arrangement of vacanas. Though not strictly relevant for the appreciation of vacana poetry, such a system is one of the many 'contexts' of these texts.

The vacanas and later Vīraśaiva texts in Kannada and Sanskrit speak of the mystical process as a succession of stages, a ladder of ascent, a metamorphosis from egg to larva to pupa to the final freedom of winged being. Often the devotee in his impatience asks to be cut loose from these stages of metamorphosis as in Mahādēvi 17.

Six phases or steps (*sthala, sōpāna*) are recognized. The devotee at each stage has certain characteristics; each stage has a specific relationship between the *aṅga* or the soul and the *liṅga* or the Lord. Liṅga creates all of creation out of no purpose, for it has no desires; so creation is described as *Lilā* or the Lord's play. The Lord's creative power is known as *Māyā* or *Śakti*, often translated as Illusion. Creation comes into being by the lord's engagement (*pravṛtti*); liberation for the *aṅga* is attained through disengagement (*nivṛtti*). The description of the first is a cosmology, not very different from the Śāṅkhya philosophy. The description of the disengagement is in the form of the Six phases. *Māyā* or *Śakti* creates desire and engagement not only for all creation but for each individual creature; *bhakti* ('devotion'), love for the Liṅga, is the counter-move. *Bhakti* disengages the creature from *Māyā*, and takes him step by step nearer to the Liṅga till he becomes one with him. Both *śakti* and *bhakti* are therefore powers of the Lord, moves and countermoves, not different from one another except in direction; one evolves, another devolves; one breathes in, the other breathes out.

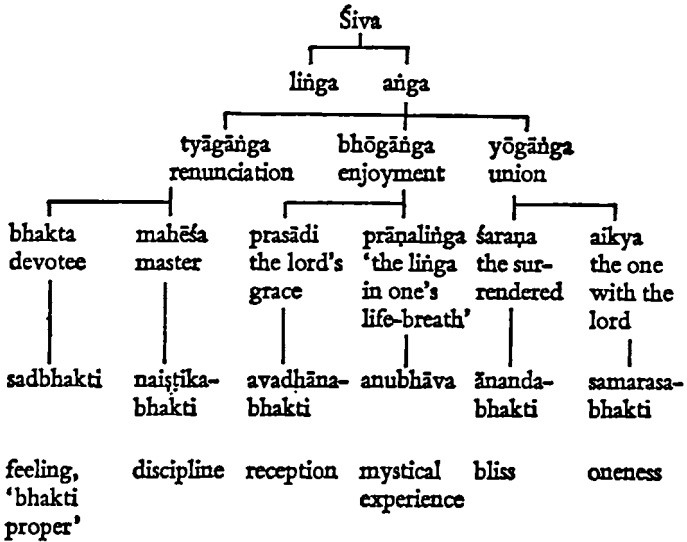
The Liṅga has six *sthalas* or phases; the aṅga or creature has a corresponding six. These are best displayed in two corresponding diagrams, with somewhat rough glosses:



### Aspects of Liṅga (the Lord)

Note that each of the liṅgas (aspects of the creator) is associated with a specific śakti, a motive for evolution, just as each of the aṅgas (stages of the creature) has a specific bhakti, a motive for disengagement.

From left to right, we see a hierarchic arrangement for śakti as well as for bhakti. In the liṅga diagram, it is probably better to speak of the various liṅgas and their attendant śaktis as *aspects* in the order of importance; for the aṅga, they are *stages*. One may also observe here that the tree-arrangement is by binary oppositions. In the first branch, it is liṅga *v.* aṅga. In the second branching, it is a combination of two oppositions, a Hegel-like dialectical triad. In diagram 1, it is (*iṣṭa* and *prāṇa*) *v.* *bhāva*, representing the opposition of Life in the World (Desire and Life) and the Life in the Lord (Experience of God). In diagram 2, it is (*tyāga* and



*Stages of Aṅga (human soul)*

*bhōga*) v. *yoga*, the opposition of the means in the world (Renunciation and Enjoyment) to the end beyond (Union with the Lord). It is obvious that the members of the two triads, like all the members of the final sestets, correspond to one another precisely: as the identity of aṅga and liṅga would require. Such identity is the beginning of creation as it is the 'end' of the creature; all differentiations (and diagrams) are only in the middle.

Further, the last six-way branch is the result of binary divisions under each of the previous three. The two members of each binary are related to each other as complements: *kriyā/jñāna* or doing/knowing; *icchā/ādi* or will/primal creation; *parā/cit* or the ultimate power/the ultimate intelligence in diagram 1; *sadbhakti/naiṣṭikabhakti* or devotion/discipline; *avadhāna/anubhāva* or receiving/experiencing; *ānanda/samarasa* or bliss/harmonious union in diagram 2. In some texts these six are made to correspond with six inner organs (*antahkarana*) and the six outer organs of classical Hindu psychology; the latter correspond (somewhat asymmetrically) to the five elements. These

correspondences, including the aṅga/liṅga sets, are best expounded in table form:

<i>The elements</i>	<i>Outer Senses</i>	<i>Inner Senses</i>	<i>Śakti-type</i>	<i>Liṅga-type</i>	<i>Sthala Phase</i>	<i>Kind of Bhakti</i>
Earth	smell	<i>citta</i>	<i>kriyā</i> or action	<i>ācāra</i>	<i>bhakti</i>	<i>śraddha</i> or <i>sad-bhakti niṣṭhe</i>
Water	taste	<i>buddhi</i>	<i>jñāna</i> or knowing	<i>guru</i>	<i>mahēśvara</i>	<i>niṣṭhe</i>
Fire	sight	<i>ahaṅkāra</i>	<i>icchā</i> or will	<i>Śiva</i>	<i>prasādi</i>	<i>avadhāna</i>
Air	touch	<i>manas</i>	<i>ādi</i> or primal power	<i>jaṅgama</i>	<i>prāṇaliṅgi</i>	<i>anubhāva</i>
Sky or Space	hearing	<i>jñāna</i>	<i>parā</i> or ultimate power	<i>prasāda</i>	<i>śaraṇa</i>	<i>ānanda</i>
Sky or Space	heart(?)	<i>bhāva</i>	<i>cit</i> or supreme intelligence	<i>mahā</i>	<i>aikya</i>	<i>samarasa</i>

Some would add to this table a set of corresponding *cakras* or centres of power in the human body, a hierarchy or route of ascent for the life-force beginning with the peritonium through the genitals, umbilicus, heart, neck, between-the-eyes, and the crown of the head. Reaching the last would result in union with the supreme reality, *aikya* or *samarasa* according to the Vīraśaiva chart.

We should say a little more about the phases of *bhakti*, the 'stages of Life's way' for the devotee. These stages, described by an expert theologian of the movement, Cennabasava, fit remarkably well the actual stages of each saint's development. It is a convenient typology of saints' legends. The poems in our selection, following the Kannada editions, are arranged according to this six-phase order (cf. section-introductions to Basavaṅṅa, Dāsimaṅṅa and Allama pp. 65, 95, 148).

1. In the *bhakta*-phase he practises *bhakti* (devotion) and worships *ācāraliṅga*, which is attended by *kriyāsakti* or the power of action.

Example: Basavaṅṅa 59.

2. In the next phase, he moves from bhakti to niṣṭhe or discipline. This is a phase of endurance, or ordeals and temptations. Poems in this phase, like Basavaṇṇa 563, lash out against the unregenerate and the unfaithful, often ambiguously addressed to oneself as well as to other sinners.

3. The third phase, prasādi, is more peaceful than the second. In this phase, the devotee realizes that he is secure in the Lord's keep and sees his workings everywhere. All things are offerings, all acts acts of devotion. The very senses that tempted the devotee by their blandishments become sites for the Lord's six-fold presence: the six aspects of the Liṅga are distributed through the six senses.

'The nostrils are ācāraliṅga

The tongue is guruliṅga

The eyes are śivaliṅga

The tongue is jaṅgamaliṅga

The ears are prasādaliṅga,

And feeling (bhāva) is mahāliṅga . . . thus your devotee receives the Lord in every limb,' says Cennabasava. Each sense dedicates its special experience as its offering: the nostrils their sense of the world's smells, the eyes vision, the tongue its taste, etc. Thus are the senses transformed. So is the world of experience. In this stage, no explicit offering need be made. For 'sound, touch, shape, taste, smell and the five senses move constantly towards the liṅga. Each [sense] knows its enjoyment is all for the Lord and towards Him' (Cennabasava). 'When the ground turns policeman where can the burglar run? Is there anything held back from the man whose every limb is Liṅga?' Before they touch one's senses, sensations are already dedicated to the Liṅga. For in this stage, the Lord is 'the hearing ear in the ear, the seeing eye in the eye'. One's limbs and senses are Śiva's limbs, Śiva's senses. Thus I becomes Thou. His acts cease to be karma, they cannot smear him. This bhakti is avadhāna or 'receiving'.

4. In the next stage, avadhāna ('receiving') gives place to anubhāva ('experiencing'), for the devotee moves from the outer world to the inner. Seeing Śiva in all things, he is filled with compassion. As all things are offerings, he 'fasts, partaking of a feast,' 'uses pleasure and yet is virgin' (Basavaṇṇa). In the above three, the actions of the bhakta are still important; in the next three his awareness becomes

primary. So far, he is a novice, disciplining body and mind, controlling their distractions, making the outer inner. In the fourth stage or *prāṇalīngi* (devoted to the *līngā* in the breath) the devotee turns inward. His heart is cleansed, his intelligence clear, his ego and senses stilled, he begins to see the light of the Lord in himself. For the *Līngā* of the Breath (*prāṇalīngā*), 'the body is the altar, its ritual bath is in the Ganges of the sky, it worships with fragrance without flowers. In the heart's lotus, the sound of Śiva Śiva. Such is oneness, O Lord of Caves' (Allama).

5. In the fifth stage, he is with the Lord and suffers only as a loving woman suffers her lover's absence, living in two worlds, half-mad, half in a coma, 'a fool of god'. Many of Mahādēvi's *vacanas* belong to this phase: e.g. 79, 120. In this *śaraṇasthala*, he knows he is not contained in his skin, nor made of earth, water, air, fire, and space, nor a thing of the five senses.

6. As Śiva and Śakti are primordially one, *śarana* and *Līngā* become one. There is no worship any more, for who is out there to receive such worship? This is Oneness or *aikyasthala*. Like space joining space, water water, the devotee dissolves nameless in the Lord, who is not another.

Characteristically, the devotee believes that all schemes may dissolve and all stages may merge. The *vacanakāras* say that in any one *sthala* all other *sthalas* are inherent; that the six stages may only be a manner of speaking of the unspeakable, an ascent on the ladder with no rungs.

On the other hand, later theologians with their penchant for systems have given each phase six sub-phases, each sub-phase further phases and detail as many as 216 stages in life's way. But such excesses need not detain us and are inimical to the true *vacana*-spirit.

As some of the considerations of the six phases of the 'pilgrim's progress' illuminate certain *vacanas*, we have offered, in the introduction to each section, a chart of each saint's *vacanas* classified according to the six-phase system. Such classifications are traditional, and do not fit everywhere. But they make, if nothing else, a useful index of themes.

## APPENDIX II

### On Lingayat Culture

*by William McCormack*

Lingayats are members of a Kannada-speaking caste-sect of southern India who qualify, by virtue of wearing on their bodies the symbol (*linga*) of their god Śiva, to receive His blessings. A modern attempt was made to show Lingayats as having a religion separate from 'Hindu' when 'Lingayats' received discrete entry in the Indian Constitution of 1950. But we believe Lingayats to be Hindus because their beliefs are syncretistic and include an assemblage of many Hindu elements, including the name of their god, Śiva, who is one of the chief figures of the Hindu pantheon. A. K. Ramanujan documents this point in his introduction to the present book, where he discusses Hindu symbolic elements in *vacanas*.

It is true that the Lingayat founding prophet, Basavaṅṅa, preached against Hindu caste in his *vacanas* and seemingly attacked the religious and secular mediator role of Brahmans, who are Hinduism's hereditary caste of priests. But Lingayats today, like other Hindus, accommodate to teachings of Hinduism which hold the terms 'Brahmanism' and 'Hinduism' to be interchangeable, and place Brahman priests at the head of society, its social as well as its religious leaders, and its models for personal and moral worth. If this fact of a Hindu's unquestioned acceptance of the honourable precedence of Brahman priests above 'ordinary' men is fully grasped, then we can better understand how close religion is to the Hindu's perception of his combined social and personal self. As a Hindu, one does not readily admit to one's own lack of understanding of the Brahman's beliefs and religious practices. Such an admission would be a kind of sin. At the same time, it would also amount to an admission of social incompetence, for acknowledgement of imperfection in these matters would be to lower oneself on a ladder of personal



worth which derives its symbols of moral success always from what Brahmans have already ostensibly achieved. Caste thus sets very severe limits to human understanding and the expression of personal interests and inner feelings. It is this limitation on self-expression, set by the multitude of rules of 'correct' behaviour appropriate to one's hereditary caste station in life, that Indian poets and prophets like Basavaṇṇa reacted against. In reporting their inner emotional experiences to others, they often effectually symbolize a freedom of emotional life about which ordinary persons may only dream. For Basavaṇṇa, caste exacted too high a price in terms of individual development and feelings of independence for the self – a price which Basavaṇṇa and other medieval and modern Indian poets have been spiritually unwilling or unable to pay. The rank and file of Lingayats, on the other hand, have been less able to resist the all-encompassing socio-cultural mesh of Brahmanism: 'As in the case of Christianity in some parts of India, the social barriers of caste have proved too strong for the . . . orthodox [Lingayat] religion' ('Lingayats', in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Scribner's Sons, New York, 1909).

Basavaṇṇa's importance in the Kannada country has been verified in the archaeology of the region, for inscriptions have been deciphered which mention his life in the twelfth century. No inscription mentions the other writers whom Lingayats believe to have been Basavaṇṇa's contemporaries. Thus Basavaṇṇa's putative nephew is singled out in the above-mentioned article as 'perhaps only a mythical person'. Similarly, there are no contemporary biographies of Allama Prabhu, who perhaps taught philosophical monism through his vacanas. Nor is there a biography of Akkamma (Mahādēvi), a female ascetic and mystic associated with the Śrīśaila shrine in the Telegu-speaking region of South India. 'Akkamma' means 'respected elder sister', and she is recognized in popular lithographs by her absence of clothing save for a hair cloak. We lack documentation for the details of even Basavaṇṇa's life.

Lacking information on the lives of these saints, I attempted an effort to ascertain their emotional attitudes and outlooks by analysis of the content of their writings, and thus made a frequency count of selected categories of metaphors in vacanas attributed to Basavaṇṇa, Allama Prabhu, and Mahādēvi. The categories chosen were metaphors

about animals, about persons, about natural objects (including plants), and about objects of cultural interest (meaningful because local or Hindu traditions have selected them for attention, e.g., preference for one art style rather than another). The frequency count for a very large sample of Basavaṅṅa's vacanas revealed the pattern that his metaphors concerned either persons (nearly 50 per cent) or cultural categories (50 per cent), and practically excluded the other two categories. (For an adaptation of this method to computer technology, see B. N. Colby, 'Cultural Patterns in Narrative', *Science*, Vol. 151, 18 February 1966, pp. 793-8.) When Basavaṅṅa did very rarely select an animal metaphor, it pertained to the dog, an animal he apparently disliked. For Hindus, the dog is associated with impurity: it eats garbage and human faeces, and if a Hindu priest is bitten by a dog, he is forever disbarred from performing rituals for his clients. One can speculate that the dog symbolized impurity to Basavaṅṅa's unconscious as well, though at a conscious level he rejected the significance of impurity and rejected especially, according to Lingayat traditions, the Hindu beliefs about the impurity of women. On the other hand, an historical interpretation of Basavaṅṅa's dislike for dogs is equally interesting, in that the black dog cult of Śiva was in competition with early Lingayatism for the allegiance of Śiva worshippers. Yet a third interpretation of Hindu ambivalence about animals and women is the psychoanalytic one, and for this the reader is referred to E. Erikson's book on *Gandhi's Truth* (Faber & Faber, 1970).

Lingayats, sometimes styled as 'strict Śiva-devotees', or Viraśaivas, were estimated to number nearly four million in 1959. They then constituted about 16 per cent of the total population of Mysore State, a Kannada-speaking state drawn in 1956 along linguistic lines according to the Indian States Reorganization Act of 1955. The general elections of 1957, 1962, and 1967 showed Lingayats to be the most popular and powerful political force in Mysore, due to their position as the single largest caste group, with a voting plurality, in the state. Before the 1956 state reorganization, state politics had been putatively controlled by the *Vokkaliga*, or 'farmer', caste, and Lingayats too were and are mainly farmers. But the reorganization of the state enlarged its territory by adding Kannada-speaking areas

where Lingayats made up as much as 50 per cent of the population. Of Lingayat subcastes, the two largest are known by the names of occupations which only a minority can practise: the jaṅgamas, or priests, and the banajigas, or traders. The current president of the National Congress Party of India, Śrī Nijaliṅgappa, would trace his ethnic origins to the banajiga subcaste of Lingayats. Thus a social-science value to this book and to A. K. Ramanujan's explication of vacana symbolism is that we here make a beginning in communicating certain universal aspects of symbols which give Lingayats a certain regional integration and historical continuity as a group.

In the southern districts of modern Mysore State, and especially in Mysore District itself where is situated the palace of the former princely ruler of the state, there is a tendency to regard jaṅgamas and aradhya (Śaiva) Brahmans as closely related if not identical castes. In these districts, priestly functions such as the ministrations of life-cycle rituals – that is, the public ceremonies which mark the changes in the status and life-pattern of individuals (birth, marriage, death rituals) – may be performed for Lingayats by priests of either caste. The other major function of jaṅgamas pertains to Lingayats everywhere, and is not open to aradhya Brahmans: this is to provide most of the recruits for the Lingayat ascetic orders, especially for the order of the red-robed *virakta* monks. As is the case with Brahmanism generally, priests who officiate at life-cycle rituals may be married, but ascetics like the Lingayat *viraktas* are celibate, preside over their own monasteries, and do not perform birth, marriage, or death sacraments. *Viraktas* are not drawn exclusively from the jaṅgama subcaste, but there has been a tendency to favour recruiting boys from the priestly jaṅgama families – which are bound by that restriction against widow or divorcee remarriage which is generally felt to be a Brahman trait in southern India.

The chief occasions which traditionally require the presence of jaṅgama (or aradhya) priests are the ceremonies performed at the birth of a child, its naming about a fortnight after birth, the puberty maturation of a girl (first menstruation), marriage, and death. The audience for these life-crisis rituals is drawn from relatives, friends, and neighbours, so that no new friendships are established by these celebrations. It is a case of strengthening and reinforcing old acquaint-

tances, and renewing the ties of blood and kin relationship. In the same way, the marriage contract negotiated by the parents of bridal couples tend toward the renewal of old kinship bonds, the preferred spouse among Kannada-speakers being a mother's brother's, or a father's sister's, child. Or, a mother's brother may wed his sister's daughter, thereby contracting a marriage which cross-cuts the 'generation gap'.

When a child is born, the father sends for that jaṅgama priest who serves the family by hereditary right, and the priest initiates the infant by ceremonially tying a liṅga to the child's body. Thus a child born to Lingayat parents is the recipient of full sectarian membership soon after his birth. On some occasions, usually at a Lingayat monastery, the initiation ceremony may be repeated in more elaborate form. Those who are not born Lingayats undergo this same ritual if they agree to perform a lifetime vow of strict vegetarianism. The cabalistic interpretation of liṅga-wearing is that the liṅga represents the wearer's soul, which is not different from the divinity, Śiva. Thus the personal liṅga is a small replica of the black stone image of Śiva found in temples. The liṅga worn by adults, however, is covered over with a black tar-like substance which hardens so that the whole resembles a robin's egg in shape and size, and is worn in a silver case suspended from the neck by a special cord to slightly above belt level.

When a boy receives the initiation rite in a monastery, it provides him with a kind of licence for priesthood, and as such the ceremony is slightly different for him and his peers. The ritual proceeds in three stages, and requires several hours for completion. First, the five founding fathers of Lingayat priestly lineages are worshipped in the form of five pots which have been ritually dressed and enthroned on a ceremonially cleaned place. If jaṅgama boys are being initiated, a string connects each with his own ancestral pot. In the second stage, the importance of the liṅga is dramatized by the chanting of Sanskrit magical formulae. Then the liṅga is tied to each initiate, and the sacred six syllables of Śiva are whispered into each candidate's ear. Finally, there is a period of advice on religious and social conduct, during which the group is lectured by the officiating teacher, who must be a celibate and has a special title (*pattadswamy*).

Water is prominent in the worship of Śiva, and in Lingayat rituals it is usually applied to the feet, especially the toes, of an officiating jaṅgama priest. Cabalistically, the worship of the jaṅgama's feet symbolizes the unity of the worshipper's inner self with the jaṅgama, and of all with the Holy Spirit of Śiva. The water itself is regarded as consecrated by these acts – like the water poured in worship of the liṅga in a Śiva temple, or the waters of the Ganges River. After the ritual address to the jaṅgama's feet, both he and the worshipper pour the consecrated water over their own liṅgas, held in the left hand. This water they drink, in the belief that it carries Śiva's blessing, as a Hindu would drink Ganges water or the temple 'liṅga water'.

Most Lingayat life-cycle rituals include worship of the priest's feet. Funerals present a practical difficulty, since the decedent, the principal actor in the ritual, cannot actively worship, but the difficulty is resolved by the priest's placing his foot on the head of the corpse. At weddings the bridal couple are themselves worshipped by participants as embodiments of Śiva and his heavenly consort Parvati, thus foot-worship and water ritual find no prominent place. Worship of the jaṅgama's feet is performed in the Lingayat's home on holidays forming part of the local festival calendar, on fortnights when the moon changes its course as between waxing and waning, on Mondays (Śiva's sacred day), and on special occasions at the will of the householder.

Jaṅgamas, like Brahman priests, serve as astrological advisers. They can also serve as matchmaker for their client families when those families are unrelated and the anticipated marriage is not to be between cousins or between an uncle and his niece.

Folksongs form an integral part of the Lingayat religion, and are not unrelated to life-cycle ceremonies. Women sing traditional songs at the first menstruation ceremony for a matured girl and at all stages of the marriage ritual, that is, on the day of betrothal, on the wedding day, on the day the marriage is consummated, and on Wednesdays and Saturdays in the respective houses of the bridal couple for one to five weeks after the marriage. Funerals are an occasion for male folk-singing, performed with more elaborate instrumental accompaniment and greater professionalism than

female singing, by more or less permanent musical groups. The themes of female folksongs are in line with female interests: women sing from legends about Lingayat heroines, and in praise of the Goddess, who takes many forms including those of first cause of the universe (Śiva's mother) and Parvati (Śiva's wife). The folksongs also describe the delights of holidays and the psychology of family living. The same songs are sung when women are working at home or in the fields, at leisure in the evenings, carrying a coconut or other sacrificial offering to a temple or to graves of Lingayat saints or heroes, and so on. Singing groups include anyone who is available for the occasion and wishes to participate, thus they are mixed in age and made up of relatives, neighbours, and friends belonging to the same village, but women rarely visit other villages or towns to perform their folksongs. One popular folksong illustrates how themes of family psychology can be mixed with legend and symbolization of caste purity. This is the song which pits Parvati, Śiva's pure but dissatisfied wife, against his beloved mistress, Ganga ('water', mother of rivers, symbol of fertility, shown iconographically in association with Śiva's head), who is quiet and beautiful but was born to a very low caste status. The pattern of village prostitution does draw women from low castes to serve men of higher birth, so there is a note of realistic feminine jealousy in this situation. The folksong first presents Parvati ridiculing Ganga's low birth and scorning Ganga's dietary habits of allegedly eating fish and crocodile, for, as a member of a fisher and ferryman caste, Ganga does presumably eat non-vegetarian, therefore ritually 'unclean', food. Parvati then imagines the sorry spectacle of Ganga in working dress carrying a basket of stinking fish on her head. Śiva is upbraided for his loss of wisdom in bringing such a girl into the family, and is even accused of having made the mistake without benefit of free will: 'It is written in fate that you will catch the feet of a dirty girl.' Finally, Parvati complains that Śiva has brought this tongue-tied Ganga from a low social position and placed her, however impure, in a position of superiority over herself, the legal wife.

The folksong performances of male singers are much more organized affairs, for the groups often have leaders and choral arrangements, and the occasion and purpose of the singing are more defined. But

there is also a recreational aspect to male folk-singing, or *bhajana*, and the more professional male groups receive travel expenses from the organizers of religious fairs, festivals, and processions in diverse villages and towns. Because *vacanas* enjoy wide public interest and often have professional status, men perform them more frequently than do women. The relatively simple language of some of the *vacana* lyrics lend themselves to singing, but the structures and sense of longer sentences is sometimes broken by the requirements of melodic line and repetition. Similar alterations of the *vacana* texts occur when the few classical artists who sing them perform over local radio or in concerts.

Another type of cultural performance is the readings of purana stories in praise of Lingayat saints and deities, and this inspires gatherings in the Lingayat monasteries every evening during the holy month of 'Shravana' (July-August). In a modern-oriented monastery, the evening purana programme may include items of contemporary interest, such as the dedication of a Lingayat author's book or a musical performance. But there will also be purana stories about nineteenth- and twentieth-century Lingayat saints. For example, one of these concerns the *virakta* Hangal Kumarswamy, who was active in organizing educational institutions and free boarding clubs to assist rural students in gaining modern education. The traditional purana themes, like the folksongs, are more concerned with praising saints and deities in order to win symbolic merit for the audience, and with advising people on the perennial problems in family psychology. The specialist's skill in purana performance consists, not in reading the text aloud – an assistant often does that – but in explaining and making relevant to the lives of the assembled persons the passage which is read out. Most Lingayat puranas are written in a six-line verse form, and one stanza, or as little as two to four lines, is read out and explained, often at great length, before another section is taken up. In a month's reading, perhaps 25 to 35 per cent of the written text will be covered. Along with *prabacan*, which is a much simpler performance and not limited to exposition of one text, the purana readings ritually express a distinct Lingayat theosophy. This mystical doctrine is usually explained in terms of the 'six principles' (*shatsthala*) for individual spiritual development, and Lingayats feel that it ranks

with any that Brahmanism has produced. Indeed, according to the Lingayat Sanskrit scholar, Dr S. C. Nandimath (*Handbook of Vīraśaivism*, Dharwar, 1941), there are philosophical similarities with the monism preached by the eighth-century Vedantin, Sankaracharya.

For the average villager, the most concrete and therefore the most meaningful manifestations of Lingayat ritual are the several religious fairs which are celebrated to honour Lingayat saints and heroes. These fairs, held mainly during the slack season for agriculture and during Shravana, provide an opportunity for individuals, *bhajana* singing groups, and whole families to vacation away from the village. Besides enjoying relief from the village pressures for conformity, some villagers bring oxen to these meets and engage in trade. The main business of fairs is a religious procession, for which an image or picture of the deity or saint in whose name the fair is held is placed in a chariot, usually a four-wheeled wooden vehicle with a tower-like superstructure. The date of the fair is fixed by calendar, but the exact time of the procession is fixed by astrological calculation, in the belief that spiritual beings draw the chariot which only seems to move by human traction. Thus procession time is a very lucky time to be at the place of procession, and a tremendous flocking of pilgrims characterizes the scene, in a way that is analogous, though on smaller scale, to the crowding to reach the confluence of the Ganges and Jumna rivers at Allahabad during the world-famous Kumbha Mela fair. Several smaller processions with *bhajana* accompaniment go along with the main chariot, and may also receive offerings and honour from the crowd as they pass. Ahead of the chariot stretch many groups of drummers and dancers, costumed to represent legendary figures of Śiva's heavenly court. In front of the chariot, teams of men carry one or more tall flag poles, which are believed to have protective power for what comes behind, so that there is a competitive show of devotion by the pole-bearers to carry the heavy pole recklessly forward alone and unassisted for some few yards. Usually water is poured on the ground before the chariot to ritually purify the ground and show honour, and the image in the chariot receives food-offerings and honour from the waving of burning oil lamps that are affixed to the platters of food. The platters are carried to the chariot by women, but priestly attendants receive the offerings to



the image – as they would do in a temple – and these priestly mediators then return a portion of the offerings to the givers.

On the occasion of a fair, sacrificial offerings are made also to any near and relevant temple deity, usually at dawn, in late afternoon, or in early evening. There are stalls at the religious fairs for the sale of ritual articles, like *liṅgas*, the white ash (*vibhuti*) which Śiva-worshippers wear on the forehead, or religious beads (the so-called 'Śiva's eyes', or *rudrakshi* beads). Besides these, there are food and drink stalls, as also publishers' stalls selling pictures of the saints and deities, framed or unframed, and various popular books and religious pamphlets at prices ranging from a quarter of a rupee to as much as seven or eight rupees for the larger astrological handbooks. The ten- to seventy-page pamphlets are produced for purely commercial sale by twenty or so small family firms, and are regularly available on railway platforms, from street-peddlars on market day, and from the small book stalls in the bazaars. The same or similar materials are published by several different firms, so that a would-be purchaser will not have difficulty in finding a popular item. The category of popular books includes the larger collections of *vacanas* and the more complete printed texts of purana stories, whereas pamphlets include only fragments. It is the more educated and sophisticated people who form the audience for the popular books, and they obtain them from the publishers, from monasteries (which often are publishers for the longer puranas), and in a few general bookstores which typically sell also English publications and Kannada novels.

Women do not serve on the committees which manage the fairs, nor on the various temple and monastery trust committees as a rule, but women do sponsor cultural performances through their own 'Akkamma' or 'Big Sister' clubs. These are mainly urban phenomena, and one of their main interests, the advancement of women's education, is an urban idea. Another, closely related, interest is the protection of female orphans. To this end women arrange for the marriages of nubile orphans, and feed, clothe, and house orphans with the help of state grants allotted to 'orphanages'. Folk-singing is a regular adjunct to a women's club meeting, but many of these songs derive their themes from participation in the new national life in India, and some may be in Hindi. Besides Hindi, some clubs teach

handiwork, as inspired by Gandhian idealism, and regularly conduct public celebrations of Gandhi's birthday and the new local holidays (*nadhhabba*, so-called 'district festivals') which symbolize patriotism. In at least three cities, the Akkamma clubs provide nursery-school services.

The strongest forces in Lingayat educational development have been the *virakta* monks, who have been active in this field since 1900 and whose efforts have had general impact since 1920. The main thrust of their efforts at organization has been towards providing free boarding hostels in places where high schools and colleges can service village boys. In a few cases the monks have started their own colleges and high schools, in cities as also in rural areas. State financial assistance is forthcoming for most of these efforts. In providing hostelry to village children, the monks not only give financial assistance – charity cases are handled from the general funds of the monasteries – but also provide a kind of social and human environment which the village parents and castemen approve of. The hostels are a kind of way-station to the more secular and interdenominational life of the urban universe, and in some cities, paying guests are so numerous at the hostel that it takes on the appearance of an American college dormitory. There are many more applicants than places in the dormitory, so screening hearings are held before admission is granted. This makes for a certain 'esprit de corps' among those admitted and also gives the students' experience more status value to the parents and their castemen. A nice balance has to be struck in these matters, however, as dormitories qualify for state assistance only if they are open to children of all castes and sects.

Thus alongside of the more traditional forms of Viraśaiva religious communication described above – the life-cycle rituals, religious fairs, purana and folksong performances, and so forth – there has arisen a new form of sectarian communication that is more closely geared to contemporary Indian national educational and political institutions. One of the more significant new rituals is instruction and written examination over book-learned sectarian doctrine. This new type of 'initiation' ritual serves to rehearse individuals in educational processes for gaining positions in the state bureaucracy through merit achievement rather than by birth into a particular

family and caste status. Any interpretation of the degree to which traditional birth-status criteria still play a role in recruitment to office, in spite of the modernist thrust of achievement orientation, is a difficult one, however, and the question of Lingayats *qua* Lingayats in education is fraught with nearly as many twists and turns and sensitivities to special privilege as the debates about state support to private schools in America. Ethnic politics generally operate in Mysore State through an informal and pragmatic control of elections and appointments by the dominant faction in the 'dominant caste' (i.e., the caste with the statewide plurality). Thus there is no 'caste state' to attract the criticism of a watchful public. But the official definition of 'social and educational backwardness' made in the late 1950s and early 1960s seems – even today, after a series of experiments and a Supreme Court decision (M. R. Balaji and others *versus* the State of Mysore, *All India Reporter*, 1963) – to double the ordinary chances of a Lingayat's gaining state aid in high school or college, or gaining admission to medical and engineering schools financed by the state. The present definition of 'backwardness' is that the income of the student's family not exceed an annual figure of Rupees 1,200, and to the watchful public, this seems a definition much subject to manipulation. Relatively little is known on the degree of Lingayats' involvement in Sanskritic philosophical learning, ordinarily exclusively a Brahman privilege in traditional Hinduism, which might show that an element of 'structural rivalry' had existed for a long time in prelude to the situation here described. It is known that in the nineteenth century, Lingayat and Brahman Sanskrit scholars (or Śāstris) sometimes engaged in public challenges and debates, anticipating the present competition between Lingayats and Brahmans for top positions in the educational system. The traditional *shatsthāla* philosophy of Lingayats, referred to above and also explicated by A. K. Rāmānujan in the Introduction, is often regarded by modernists as if it were a 'contraculture' (see Werner Stark, *The Sociology of Religion*, Vol. II, *Sectarian Religion*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967, pp. 95, 129) to Brahmanist learning – in the fashion of sects everywhere – and its function does seem to be more to express sectarian competitiveness than to transmit a set of sectarian beliefs. This competition has been described for contemporary Mysore by several

knowledgeable observers, including M. N. Srinivas, a leading anthropologist in India, who views the competition as a persistence of traditional caste attitudes (*Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, Asia Publishing House, New York, 1962).

In conclusion, we have seen that the Lingayats are a numerous caste-sect, who are composed of several occupational subcastes of the Kannada-speaking country, and who have a particular stake in the worship of Śiva according to their own special views. Where the general psychology governing their religion touches on other than universals of human nature, it can be seen to be Hindu, though their belief in special features of their worship is strong, perhaps partly because wearing one's own personal *liṅga* is a kind of commitment that others, who only visit the *liṅga* representation in Śiva temples, do not have. A modern development in Lingayatism has been the group's commitment to secular educational achievement, especially as guided by the celibate *viraktas* who are today living out the paradox that, though ideally committed to a life of ascetic withdrawal from society, they are in fact leading the society towards modernization.

It does seem fitting that in the country where Gandhi, a 'mahatma' or religious figure, led the first drive for nationhood, monks prove to be the most successful in generating and mobilizing support for educational progress and social change. In addition, it can be noted that *vacanas* are today understood by many modernist Lingayats to have autobiographical significance; thus for some Lingayats the *vacanas* hold a position analogous to the position that Gandhi's *Autobiography* holds for some Gandhians. The point is that these writings set forth life-principles which exemplify ethical progress, and they could thus be made to serve as a solid foundation for a revitalization of Indian traditions and national identity. Those criteria for ethical progress sought by the Lingayat modernists in the *vacanas*, namely, humanism and universalism, are not significantly different from those proposed for modern anthropology by the Gandhian and anthropologist, Nirmal Kumar Bose (his *Cultural Anthropology*, Asia Publishing House, 1962, pp. 103-7).

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30 September 1969

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## Notes to the Poems

These notes offer brief glosses on images, conventions, technical terms, ambiguities, subtleties of form or meaning in the Kannada original which the English translation could not quite convey. Cross-references to other poems, themes, and to relevant portions of the Introduction and the Appendixes, are also included. The numbers in the notes refer to vacana texts.

### BASA VAṆṆA

1. The world as raging sea: a traditional metaphor, *Samsārasāgara*; *samsāra* is 'world', or 'life-in-the-world'. Basavaṇṇa was both statesman and saint, living in two worlds. In these and other poems he expresses the conflict of the two worlds.
2. *Lord of the meeting rivers*: *Kūḍalasaṅgamadēva*, a form of Śiva, Basavaṇṇa's chosen personal god. *Kūḍalasaṅgama*: a holy place in North Karnatak (South India) where two rivers meet. Basavaṇṇa first found enlightenment here. Almost every poem of Basavaṇṇa is addressed to Śiva as the lord of the meeting rivers. In this poem, the name is not just a formula or a signature line, but participates in the water-imagery of the poem.
3. *digit*: digits or phases of the moon.
4. *Rāhu*: the cosmic serpent of Indian mythology who devours the moon, causing eclipses.
5. The eclipse-image here, unlike the sea in 8, carries with it the hope of natural release (*mōkṣa*).
6. *The heart as monkey*: a traditional image for the restless distracted heart (*manas*). In Kannada, the word *mana* or *manas* could mean either heart and mind. cf. 36. In this and the previous poem, the Lord is the Father: a favourite stance of bhakti or personal devotion. Other stances are Lover/Beloved and Master/Servant.
7. *sensual bitches*: *karaṇḍriyaṅgaḷeniba soṇaga*. *karaṇḍriya*'s are

the various faculties or sense-organs of mind (or heart, *manas*) and body. The *nine* sense-organs is a puzzle. The numbers differ in different texts. Here is an upaniṣadic list – the senses of apprehension are eye, ear, nose, tongue, skin; and the senses of performance are vocal organs for speech, hands for prehension, feet for locomotion, sex organ for procreation, and the organ of elimination of waste (S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *The Development of Indian Psychology*, Mysore, 1963, p. 22).

The poem uses forms of *manas* for what I have rendered as mind (l.9) and as heart (l.10). The heart is the quarry in this hunt.

8. The soul as a cow (*paśu*) in a quagmire: one of the attributes of Śiva is *paśupati*, the lord of beasts. *Paśu* in Kannada has a double sense of both 'cow or bull' and 'beast, creature'. The Tamil Śaiva doctrines speak of three elements: *paśu*, creature or creation, *pāti*, the lord or creator, and *pāśam*, the attachment or love of the two. Vacana 52 makes indirect use of the three-fold doctrine of *paśu-pāti-pāśam*.
9. *your men*: *śarana*, a Vīraśaiva technical term, literally 'the ones who have surrendered (to god)'.
10. Like 33 and 36, 59 is also about the distractions of a worldling, struggling for oneness with the Lord. This struggle is related to the yogic ideal of 'stilling the waves of the mind', reducing the distractions of the senses.
11. In a world of disrelations, the devotee seeks relation and belonging. *Son of the house* (*maneya maga*) may be taken in the obvious sense, as a legitimate heir of the house, to express Basavaṅṅa's need for belonging. Or it may refer to the practice of rich masters and kings adopting servants as 'sons of the house' who lived inseparably with them, and committed ritual suicide when the masters died. Inscriptions of the period amply attest to the practice. M. Cidānandamurti in his Kannada book, *Kannaḍa śāsanagaḷa sāmśkṛtika adhyayana*, *The Cultural Study of Kannada Inscriptions* (Mysore, 1966), has a chapter on ritual suicide in the Kannada area (cf. especially pp. 306-7). In a footnote (312) he even makes the suggestion that the devotee's relation to the *līṅga* he wore on his body was that of a 'son of the house': when the *līṅga* was accidentally lost, the devotee often committed

suicide. Later saints condemn such excessive practices. In 62 the father/son and master/servant stances merge.

12. Ghosts are believed to stand guard over hidden treasure, though they cannot touch it. The rock/water relation is reversed in ghost/gold: the rock is not affected by water, but the ghost cannot affect the gold. The gold symbolizes the worldling's untouched spirit.
13. Vacanas are often ironic parables. cf. also 105, 111.
14. Snake-charmers are bad omens if met on the way. The noseless wife may either mean a dumb woman or a deformed one, another bad omen.
15. The god of love, Kāma, once tried to distract Śiva's penance. Śiva opened his fiery third eye and burned him down. From then on, Love became *anaiga*, the bodiless or limbless one. Śiva's burning down of the god of Desire is the ideal paradigm for all ascetic conquest of temptations.
16. Local animal sacrifices, no less than Vedic sacrifices, are abhorrent to Vīraśaivas.
17. *Struck by an evil planet*: struck by misfortune, the action of malefic planets. The rich unregenerate worldling is a familiar target in the vacanas. cf. 820. The Vīraśaiva movement was a movement of the poor, the underdog.
18. *iron frame*: the original words *kabbunada kaṭṭu* are ambiguous. Here is an alternative translation:

Look at them,  
 busy, giving iron tonics  
 to a bubble on the water  
 to make it strong!

It is customary in North Karnatak to give an 'iron decoction' - water boiled with iron - to weakling children to strengthen them.

19. Love of god, like liberty, is a matter of eternal vigilance. The traditional Indian metaphor for the 'strait and narrow path' is *asidhārāvratā*, 'walking the razor's edge'. Here the bhakta being sawn by the saw of bhakti is obverse of the traditional 'walking on the razor's edge'.

The cobra in the pitcher is one of many ordeals or truth-tests to prove one's trustworthiness, chastity, etc. Other such tests are walking on fire, drinking poison.



20. The world as sea: cf. note on 8.
21. Liṅga and jaṅgama are one. Jaṅgama is Śiva's devotee, his representative on earth; literally jaṅgama means 'the moving man'. cf. 820.
22. 84 and its various multiples are familiar figures in Indian esoteric literature: 84 is the number of yogic postures; and the number of *Siddhas* (occult masters); the soul goes through a cycle of 84,000 births.
23. *I drink the water we wash your feet with*: a Vīraśaiva ritual, *pādodaka*. The devout Vīraśaiva washes the feet of his guru and imbibes the water as holy. Offerings of food, or *prasāda*, are also part of the guru-worship ritual (cf. Introduction, p. 33). Note also how the lord is not satisfied with even Vīraśaiva ritual offerings. Nindā-stuti, the ambivalent, invective-like invocation or prayer to a god, is a well-known genre of Indian religious poetry. Here, for instance, the god is called a whore.
24. The familiar *yaçana* opposition of *measure v. spontaneity*. Iamb and dactyl are here used as loose English equivalents for the Kannaḍa *amrtagaṇa* and *dēvagaṇa*, kinds of metrical unit.
25. This and the next three poems attack idolatry: the folk-worship of menial gods, man-made images, vessels, trees and rivers.
26. One of the earliest references to the 'lost wax method' of making images.
27. The allusion is to the sacrificial fire of Vedic ritual. Vīraśaivism has no fire-rituals.
28. The bisexuality of the bhakta – cf. Mahādēvi 68, Dāsimayya 133.
29. cf. Introduction, pp. 19–22.
30. *cupola*: *kalaśa*, often translated 'pinnacle'.
31. *things standing*: *sthāvara*, the static temple.
32. *things moving*: *jaṅgama*, the living moving representative of Liṅga on the earth.
33. The master/servant stance (*dāsa-bhāva*).

## DĀSIMAYYA

34. The phrase *karagaḍantiriside* in the first sentence is ambiguous and can also be rendered thus:

You balanced the globe  
on the waters  
like a pot on a dancer's head.

35. The punctuation in the Halakatti edition is obviously wrong. I have made a small correction in the punctuation to make sense of the syntax.
36. As in 35, I have corrected the punctuation to make sense of the syntax. The first lines suggest that large assemblies do not act, only the king gets to give charities – just as only one in a thousand gets to kill the enemy and the rest die routine deaths.
37. *Rider of the Bull*: a mythological attribute of Śiva. Such attributes are rarely mentioned in these poems. However, the phrase *nandivāhana* may also refer to Śiva's 'bull-riding minions,' his *gaṇas*.
38. The contrast in this vacana between the *bhakta* 'devotee, man of the lord', and the *bhavi* 'worldly man' is a favourite contrast with the vacana-poets. As in this vacana, *bhavi* usually means also a non-Vīraśaiva; the contrast is not without its overtones of zealotry as Christian/heathen, Jew/Gentile.
39. The *eighteen links* are the traditional eighteen bonds listed in Hindu texts: past, present, and future acts; body, mind, and wealth, substance, life, and self-regard; gold, land, and woman; lust, anger, greed, infatuation, pride, and envy.
40. *and bathes in a million sacred rivers*: this could also be, 'or bathes in Kōṭīrītha,' a sacred place on the Narmada river.

#### MAHĀDĒVIYAKKA

41. I have, as elsewhere, taken the liberty of translating literally into English the name of Śiva here, Cennainallikārjuna. For such names carry aspects and attributes of Śiva. Further, such proper nouns, if left as they are in the English translation, are inert and cannot participate in the poems as they do in the originals. Other possible translations of the name are 'Arjuna of Jasmīnes' or 'Arjuna, Lord of goddess Mallikā'. 'Arjuna' means 'white, bright'.

The first four similes for the mystery of immanence are traditional, and used by other vacana writers as well.

42. A fresh use of conventional metaphor, 'milk and water'. When milk and water are mingled, no-one can separate them, except the legendary swan gifted in discrimination. The swan is the wisdom of the guru.
43. Akka has several complex attitudes towards the body – rejection, indifference and qualified acceptance. cf. also 17, 104, 117, 157. Her attitude to clothes and modesty are also part of her 'body-image'.
44. The spider and its web-house of illusions is an ancient Indian image for Māyā or Illusion. Here Akka appropriately changes the spider into a silkworm. (cf. Introduction, p. 41).
45. *eighty-four hundred thousand*: cf. note on Basavaṅṅa 430. Karma and the chain of births are cut short by bhakti. Bhakti, and its faith in the Lord's grace, is the answer to the inexorable logic of Karma.
46. Akka, more than all other vacanakāras, is aware of the world of nature. Hers is an outdoor world. cf. 73, 74, etc.
47. One of the few descriptions in vacanas of Śiva as a personal god, with a crown of diamonds. 'All men are His wives' gives another turn to Akka's attitude to human males – transforming her love of the lord as representative of all human/divine relations. Śiva and Śakti, the Lord and his Creative Power, are the eternal primordial pair in tantra and in yoga.
48. *mother: avva* could be her own mother, or any female companion.
49. The *koil* is the Indian cuckoo.
50. *parts of the day: jāva* or Sanskrit *yāma*, a unit equal to about three hours.
51. Śiva (unlike the crowned image of 68) is here seen in his more normal aspect, as an ascetic – a captivating, not forbidding ascetic.
52. *avva*, as in 69, a general vocative for female addressees. Unlike other poems (e.g. 69), this poem is apparently addressed to her own mother.
53. Here two words are used, *avva* and *avve*, the latter meaning her own mother. This is emphasized by the last part of the poem.
54. This vacana is part of Akka's answer to Allama according to *Śūnyasampādane* (cf. p. 112). Allama asked why Akka is using her hair to cover her body while she professed to have given up all.

She replied that the skin will fall off when the fruit is really ripe. He counters it with 'You don't know whether you're in the lord or the lord in you. If the skin breaks before its time, the juice within will rot.' To this she answered with *vacana* 104 – till one has full knowledge of good and evil (*guṇādōṣa*), the body is still the house of passions etc.; nor can you reach the lord without such knowing. She is going through such an ordeal by knowledge. cf. 251, which continues her reply.

55. *round nut*: *beḷavalada kāyi*, a large unripe hard-shelled nut.
56. The interiorization of ritual offering. (cf. Introduction). Compare it with 131, where ritual is rendered unnecessary because all nature is in a state of worship.
57. Reference to her nakedness, her defiance of notions of modesty.
58. Leaf and flower as well as lamps and camphorfire are regular offerings (*pūje*) to the lord in homes and temples. Here, Akka sees day and night offering such worship themselves, replacing ritual.
59. This poem on the body is usually cited as Akka's answer to Allama's challenge: 'As long as you carry the pollutions of a body and the [five] senses, you cannot even touch the Lord.'
60. In the way of bhakti, it is customary to reject privilege and comfort, and court exile and beggary – in an effort to denude oneself and to throw oneself entirely on the lord's mercy.
61. 274 is supposedly Akka's exclamation on reaching the paradisaical Srisaīla, the Holy Mountain. The All-giving Tree, the life-reviving herb etc. are all attributes of an alchemist's paradise, a paradise that various occult sects seek, where there is no want, disease, base metal, or unfulfilled wish. The plantain grove was the abode of Gorakhnātha, the master-magician or Siddha – cf. note on Allama.
62. Addressed to men who molested her, when she wandered naked.
63. The hero's going to war is one of the conventional reasons for separation of lovers in Indian love-poetry.
64. The typical accompaniments of fulfilled love, like soft breeze and moonlight, do not comfort a love-sick woman; they burn. Another conventional reason for separation is the lover's pique.
65. *lovebird*: *jakkavakki* or *cakravāka*, a fabled bird that cannot live apart from its mate.

## ALLAMA PRABHU

The word prabhu, 'lord, master', is an honorific title added to the name Allama. There are controversies about the name Allama as well as his signature-line Guhēśvara, here translated as 'lord of caves'. Guhēśvara is one of Śiva's names and points up His yogic aspects. It is significant that Allama, preoccupied with awareness and ignorance, obsessed with images of light and darkness, should have chosen Guhēśvara as his favourite name for Śiva. Several forms of the name appear in the texts: Guhēśvara, Gohēśvara, Gogēśvara, Goggēśvara.

66. *Five men*: the five senses.

67. Koilbirds (Indian cuckoos, songbirds) come to mango trees in springtime. Both are celebrated in Indian poetry as indispensable to spring.

68. Mountain gooseberry and salt from the sea, though far from each other in origin, come together in the preparation of gooseberry pickle. Allama here alludes to a common Kannada proverb, as in the first sentence he alludes to a common poetic theme.

69. A *beḍagina vacana*, a 'fancy poem' or riddle poem (see Introduction p. 48). L. Basavarāju's edition contains several traditional commentaries on the esoteric symbolism of such poems. The following notes are directly indebted to L. Basavarāju's collations.

Poem 95 may be glossed as follows: ignorance (the bee) born in the heart, obscures the light, overturns the worlds, even though it begins in a small way. Only when one realizes the impermanence of the body (five-coloured cage of the swan, traditional symbol for the soul), does the bee lose its power.

70. Another riddle poem. The *liṅga* (or Śiva) is born in the heart, manifests itself in the hand as an *iṣṭaliṅga* for action and worship. (For the different *liṅgas*, see Appendix I.) The camphor is self-awareness, perhaps because camphor sublimates, burns without residue. The pearl (by a pun on the word *mukti*, meaning both pearl and salvation) is a symbol of salvation. Diamonds are the

cosmic meanings. The blue sapphire is Māye, illusion. Note the dazzling use of synaesthesia, the surrealist 'disarrangement of the senses', to express mystical experience.

71. In this superb and difficult vacana, Allama speaks about the different stages of ignorance and realization. The triple city represents the three kinds of bodies everyone has: *sthūla* or the gross (material, perishable), *sūkṣma* or the subtle (invested by the material frame), *liṅga* or the imperishable original of the gross visible body. The triple city has one main gate, life-in-the-world or *samsāra*. The mind-monkey mocks every comer, even the king (soul) with his army (senses). The mind-monkey has form and movement, but no awareness (no head); one can see it move, but not track down its movements (legs without footsteps); it has a will but no grasp (hand without fingers). Self-love (the wild elephant) is his offspring, which he rides and plays tricks on. Capturing the tenfold senses (ten-hooded snake) held in his will (basket), he blindfolds the five higher Powers (five virgins = the five *śaktis*: *icchā* or wish, *kriyā* or power of action, *mantra* or power of the word, *ādi* or the primal creativity, *parā* or the transcendent power; see Appendix I) with *samsāra* or worldliness. The lion in the ten streets is the life-breath in the ten paths of the body; the monkey tramples on the life-breath – but in this contact with the breath of life, he reaches enlightenment, holding true knowledge (diamond) in his will (hand). The last section describes the experience of such enlightenment: 'nothing added, nothing taken'. (For the Liṅga of the Breath or *prāṇaliṅga*, see Appendix I.)
72. For explanation, see Introduction, p. 48.
73. A description of enlightenment. The sky is the soul, the toad is the life-breath in its highest centre (*brahmarandra*); Rāhu the cosmic serpent (see note on Basavaṅṅa 9) is the serpent-path that winds through the body's centres (*cakras*) awakened by yoga. (For the *cakras*, see M. Eliade's *Yoga*, pp. 241–5.) Nowhere are the complex relationships between bhakti, tantra and yoga more richly expressed than in these vacanas of Allama. He uses yogic and tantric imagery and terminology, alludes to their techniques of ecstasy, yet finally rejects them in favour of bhakti,

grace, awareness. See pp. 145-7. The blind man is the devotee who sees without the benefit of eyes and grasps the cosmic serpent.

74. The cat is supreme knowledge, the rooster worldly knowledge. When supreme knowledge takes over worldly concern, the latter 'dies into life'. The black koilbird is the power of action or *kriyāśakti*, who takes over revealed knowledge (sun). The mind (casket) is abolished, only the experience (sacred thread) remains. No one can trace the process of enlightenment (footstep on the water); the experience of God (the sound of the word Guhēśwara) is indivisible, cannot be located as being here or there.
75. In the soul (sky) grows the wilderness (unawareness). Desire (the hunter) hunts down life (deer). Till life ends, desire has no end either.
76. The smell is *vāsanā*, 'latencies', the smell of past lives. As often in these riddle poems, the symbol is suggested by a pun: *vāsanā*, while a technical term for 'latencies', literally means 'smell'. Poetic, mystical as well as dream-symbols are often such puns.  
The bee here is perfect knowledge of god (note the different meaning for bee in Allama 95). Heart (*manas*) and mind as intellect (*buddhi*) are distinguished here. The temple is the body (see Basavaṇṇa 820).
77. The city-limits symbolize the physical limits of the body; the temple, the inner mental form (*citpiṇḍa*). The power of knowledge, or *jñānaśakti*, is the hermit-woman, holding the mind (needle) on which are balanced the fourteen worlds. When the great enlightenment begins (the ant), it devours all these distinctions.
78. This vacana speaks of the devotee's discipline: the conquest of the eye's illusions, the burning-away of the heart's self-will and self-doubt, the intervening creations of language.
79. Awareness (tree) arises after the clearing of the physical nature (land without soil), yields eight kinds of subtle bodies (flowers) that become fruit on the branches (of right living), finally reaching basic (root) knowledge.
80. In the natural body (city), made of the five elements, arises the fire of supreme knowledge which burns the forest of worldly life - after which this very fire returns to consume the body.

81. The body is made of the five elements. Four are mentioned here: water, fire, wind, sky. The policeman is the devotee's awareness; the king and his two ministers are apparently the soul, its will and its history (or conduct). The nine-gated city is the body with its nine openings. The 9,000 men are the impressions of the many inner and outer senses.
82. Past, future, and present are conquered by the devotee. To such a devotee, even Viṣṇu and Brahma (two out of the great Hindu trinity, Viṣṇu, Brahma and Śiva) are sidekicks. The mind-*śakti* (*cicchakti*, Appendix I) is born (daughter) of Śiva-consciousness, the devotee is wedded to it – hence he is the son-in-law of Śiva. 500 is an excellent example of some vacana-characteristics: the familiar irreverence towards the great gods, the cheeky name-dropping, the playful use of deeper meanings and esoteric categories.
83. The poem alludes to *pralayas* or 'deluges' that end each of the four eras of the cycle of creation.
84. References to symbolic conceptions of immanence: fire is hidden in wood and grass (which makes them inflammable; seeds of self in stone-like insensitiveness. The reflections of water are the illusions of a mind never still; the smell of wind is the smell of past lives, the latencies (see note on 429), that attend the breath of life. The body's heat (fire) has in it the sap of worldly desire. The carnal tongue must learn to taste the sunshine of awareness, must 'taste the light'.
85. *mortar without water*: the body purged of mind's will and its distortions.  
*pestle without shadows*: the sense of the One.  
*women without bodies*: the six Powers or *śaktis* (see Appendix I).  
*rice without grains*: truth being pounded and purified.  
*the barren woman's son*: the Unborn Lord, without beginning or end.
86. This vacana describes the last stages of the process of enlightenment. The wind is the devotee's life-breath; the sky, the soul; the lullabies are the words *śivōham śivōham*, 'I am Śiva, I am Śiva.'
87. The waterfire refers to the belief that the oceans contain a core of fire.





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