

Vachana Literature

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The vachana literature heavily influenced the 12th century bhakti movement led by Basavanna. Vachanas written by sharanas brought awareness to many people about the simplicity of life and religion. These vachanas also inspired many people to follow Dharma (righteousness) and to give up superstitions. There were millions of vachanas, but many of them were lost. Luckily we still have hundreds of thousands of vachanas remaining with us, and as veerashaivas, we have the implied responsibility to understand, follow, and even spread the essence of these wonderful teachings to the world. In this article, I will make an attempt to interpret a couple of vachanas by Basavanna.

The first vachana that I will elaborate on is a vachana about kindness and how it is related to dharma (religion).

dayavillada ðharmavu yāvudayya
dayavebeku sakalapraëigaraøi
dayavedharamada moolavayya
kuðala sangayyanantalladollanayya

Is there religion without kindness?
Let there be kindness in everything.
Kindness is the backbone to virtuous living.
The unkind are unwanted by kudalasangama.

In those days of exploitation in the name of the holy scriptures, Basavanna greatly emphasized on kindness. The priestly class was discriminative to the lower classes, treating them badly. For example, the lower classes were deprived of good food, clothing, education, and sometimes even water from local wells.

Basavanna is frustrated at the way people *use* religion and hence the trivial question (Is there religion without kindness?) that Basavanna starts off with. Kindness, as he stated in the vachana above, is the “backbone to virtuous living”. Kindness is one of the most valuable qualities that man needs to have. The goal of religion is to worship god and Basavanna is saying that “the unkind are unwanted by kudalasangama” to warn people of the effects of being unkind.

The next vachana I will be talking about is an expression of bhakti, Basavanna’s love and devotion to Lord Kudalasangama.

vacanadalli nāmāmāta tumbi
nayanadalli nimma mūruti tumbi
manadalli nimma nenahu tumbi
kiviyalli nimma kēruṭi tumbi
kūðala saīgama devā
nimma caraëakamaladoøagānu tumbi

Fill my words with your sweet name;
Fill my eyes with your beautiful form;
Fill my memory with the thoughts of your blissful presence;
Fill my ears with your name and fame;
OKudalasangamadeva,
Fill my being into your lotus feet;

In this vachana, Basavanna conveys his devotion to the Almighty. Basavanna chooses to speak only the good. He chooses to see the good in all. He chooses to think only positive thoughts. He chooses only to hear good things. Having lived such a pious life, ego can creep into anyone. Hence, Basavanna surrenders himself at the feet of the Lord. Through this vachana, Basavanna is implying that we should all follow a positive and spiritual living.