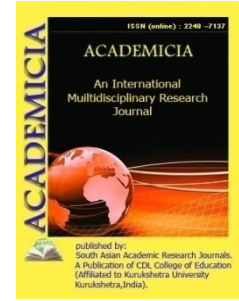




ACADEMICIA
An International
Multidisciplinary
Research Journal
 (Double Blind Refereed & Peer Reviewed Journal)



DOI: 10.5958/2249-7137.2021.02004.8

VACHANA MOVEMENT- A STUDY INTO ITS ORAL TRADITION

Bhimagouda B Patil*

*Assistant Professor of English
 Government First Grade Womens College Bailhongal,
 Karnataka, INDIA

ABSTRACT

Literature is the product of the society. It emerges as a mirror to the society. But, folk lore, oral tradition, quotes, sayings etc., are the life blood of society. They are not only the product but also the very essence of the society. They emerge from the everyday talks, debates and discussions. They do not need scholars to write them in the literary style but every layman possesses the capacity to bring out the feelings and experience into words. These sayings are rarely poetic but often prosaic. They might also be sung but singing and attaching musical value to it does harm to them. This is true of the Vachanas also. Although centuries have rolled since the close of Vachana movement, it still has remained a burning topic to discuss. It has given birth to many theories and speculations. It also has provided a platform and space for definitions and deliberations. It has provided opportunities for the researchers in the field of Kannada literary history. This paper attempts to study the Birth, Growth and Legacy of Vachanas as a part of Oral Tradition. It also tries to bring to the light the contributions of not so popular Vachanakaras who lived before and along with the popular contributors and leaders of the Vachana movement.

KEYWORDS: *Deliberations, Capacity, Tradition, Quotes*

INTRODUCTION

Every revolution is specific; it is always under the influence of region, age, social milieu and thoughts. Every revolution tries to answer the current social convulsions and grows as a representative voice. On the path of every revolution there are hundreds of hurdles at every stage. Stale ideas, mislead principles and corrupt traditions obstruct the social progress and sometimes lead to the devolution of the society. Life begins to decay socially and culturally. To revive this decaying and dying society, to set the economy into motion, to channelize the polity

revolutions take place. Such fundamental changes are led by some persons who become the representative leaders. The Vachana Movement was also a similar one which had taken birth to provide remedies for the immediate socio-cultural needs of the 12th century. Hence, an objective and dispassionate analysis is essential to understand the Vachana Movement.

The Vachana Movement was a soft-spoken yet strong willed peaceful rebellion against the degenerated institutions like the 'Mutt' and attempted to neutralize its influence on the society. The Vedic religion could not identify itself with the social necessity. The practice of tradition, caste compartmentalization, untouchability, etc. was itself regarded as true religion. Astrology, performing the *yagnas*, following the *shastras* had become profession of the priestly class. All these activities had a common sponsorship under the patronage of the ruling class. The kings and the aristocrats donated bountifully to the priests. Sometimes the priests extracted wealth by spreading the hopes of heaven. The desire of heaven and salvation attracted the common people into the trap of the priests. The monarchy and the monastery tried to hold the peasants in their clutch and exploit them with various methods like- exorbitant tax, free service etc. it was similar to *corvee* followed by the European feudal lords. But the 12th century found that the spice and silk trade of India was spreading its wings. Thus the peasants, labourers and traders started to experience the financial crisis. So, they started to avert themselves from the work and faced the ire of the kings and aristocrats. But, it started to affect their personal economy also. The struggle between the labour class and the politico-religious leaders started to have a negative impact. The desire to work more and earn more halted. This situation indirectly instigated the degeneration of work-culture. The professionalism turned into a struggle for survival. All these things needed an injection of rejuvenation. This had to be started from the grass-root level rather than the old mode of pedestal preaching by the learned scholars. Under these conditions the society was longing for a revolution which could become a voice to social discontent, something that would relieve the society from the pressure and give a jolt to the half buried wheels of social progress.

The Vachana Movement was not just a limited process of preaching by the Gurus and the leaders. It was an ocean of turbulence formed by the discussions and deliberations by everyone. The Anubava Mantapa provided a platform for these discussions. Indiscriminate of caste, faith, sex, every person was allowed to participate in it. Another important specialty was the participation of the women. Women from all the castes and professions participated in it. It is a rarity that in the 12th century a social movement would include all the sects and sexes.

The Vachana Movement was against the canonical Vedas and their interpretations by the scholarly priests. It derived its tactical principles from the Shaiva tradition. The demerits and the degeneration of the Shaiva tradition gave impetus to the religious reformation in the name of Veershaiva Movement. The Vachanakaras have sharply criticized that the Vedas as the weapons of oppression in the hands of few priests. The people who had remained silent for centuries, who had lost their social voice and had become dumb, expressed their opinions through the Vachanas from the elevated pedestal of the Anubhava Mantapa.

Propagation v/s Shelving of ideas : Vachanas are the repositories of Truth and Learning. All kinds of opinions including the wrong and false should be available to all human beings, so that the truth can be arrived at through a discussion on them. For example; during all the debates and discussions each person addressed the other as 'ANNA' (elder brother) or 'AKKA' (elder sister). This was not imposed as a moral conscription but a seriously accepted mode of life. Even

today these words are used to address strangers which mark the respect for them. These words brought a sense of affectionate morality into the minds of speakers. It can be easily accepted that some of the abstract ideas like ‘morality’ cannot be taught through books. They have to be practiced each day by everyone. Thus it can be understood that the Vachanas should not be printed and vaulted in the books. They must be propagated and practiced everyday. If done so, this would definitely delete the errors of the previous day and bring a discipline into the new day. This concept is very near to the belief of ‘self-examination’ practiced by all the great persons from the great Buddha to Mahatma Gandhi.

As stated earlier, the Vachanas are the outcome of debates held by the Vachanakaras, especially at the Anubahava Mantapa. The discussions were centered on one major topic- the God and its Realisation. They did not devise an abstract path but used the touchstone method. They used this method to attach divinity to each word spoken; each act performed each day by every person. They brought the God down to earth from the heavenly abode. Thus the God did not remain an enigma to be chased but a realization to be experienced. This magical transformation was again the gift of oral tradition. Such concepts could not be comprehended by reading the books. They had to be passed through the word of mouth and listened by the people living in the neighborhood.

To express the concept of Vachanas in the literary theory of Wordsworth, only half of his definition could serve the purpose- “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. The latter part of the definition- “recollected in tranquility” cannot be applied. The Vachanakaras like Keelarada Bheemanna (Bheemanna the Milkman of Keelara), Dhakkeya Marayya (Marayya the Drummer), Kannada Maritande (Maritande the Thief) were extremely busy in their profession and expressed their Vachanas spontaneously. They never sought the peaceful couch to sit and meditate upon their thoughts to be penned down into regular poetry. Many of the Vachanakaras had followed the same trend of expressing their ideas and they never intended to become the poets. They followed their professions honestly and spoke the Vachanas while performing their professions.

Common-Man’s Language: A perusal of the propagation of Vachanas should also be considered in this context. The Vachanas were primarily targeted to the common man and sought to demystify the God. Large sections of the society had been deprived access to the sacred texts. There was also a lack of access to institutionally validated language. Hence the propagation of Vachanas was a subaltern revolt against the oriental caste-system and also the language of the elite-class scholars. The Jangamas (wandering preachers) played a central role in the propagation of the Vachanas. The Vachanakaras like Urilinga Peddi (Firewood Collector Peddi) – his name suggests his innocence, Peddi means an ignorant, Medar Ketayya (Ketayya the Basket Maker), Hadapad Appanna and his wife Lingamma (Barber couple), Harlayya & Madhuvayya (Cobblers) had never been to school and did not have any sense of literary creation. Yet, they are regarded with high respect because of their contribution to the Vachana Movement because they connected themselves directly to the common man and addressed them in their language. Hence, it can be easily understood that the language used by these Jangamas must be the common man’s language.

The Vachanas are simple in their composition and have reached all the sections of the society. They can be regarded as purely ‘desi’ (rural) contribution to the world of language and

literature. They were never composed on the lines of main stream literature. Hence, to bring them under the umbrella of poetic theories appears to be a mistake, because vouching the oral tradition into the books again leads to the judgemental error. The liberty enjoyed by the Vachanas would again remain confined to the same old tradition- i.e; to be studied by the learned scholars.

‘Ism’ and books: It is an accepted reality that the ‘ism’ and the books propound that ism never go hand-in-hand. Throughout the history it has been witnessed that the great scholars who introduced the theories never tried to shelve them into the books, rather they reached the masses with their thoughts and attempted to bring the changes in *real* and not *ideal*. This was true of the Vachanakaras also because they believed that speaking in the common man’s dialect would be more relevant and effective than dictating the moralities in the written word. A glance into the Vachana Movement reveals that all the contributors cannot write books and the majority of the participants cannot read the books. Hence they followed the easy method of oral tradition. This can be found in various examples- Buddha, Mahaveera, Christ, Prophet Mohammad and all other leaders. They employed the oral method to discuss and delegate the merits and demerits of following the stale thoughts that were prevalent in the society.

In the Vachana Movement, the debates were held in open field with the involvement of all the persons who were present- the scholars and the layman. Each would contribute one’s ideas and speak in the local dialect. The deliberations of these meetings were easily understood and the ideas were shared by all. The level of acceptance was also high as the person would remember the concepts for a long time. The practical methods of practicing the existing religious practices sans demerits enlightened the layman. This became the easy way of life and the members present would feel happy to follow the ‘ism’ that contained the essential grains of their own thoughts.

CONCLUSION

Oral tradition of the Vachana Movement constitutes an integrative cultural and literary heritage among the people. Its importance is determined more by its functional character than its literary nature. This is a unique feature of Vachana Movement which is an embodiment of personal knowledge and an aggregate of the community’s wisdom handed down from one generation to another. It must have been preserved and passed down by a much older generation to another, hence it becomes the duty of the present generation and the future scholars to respect its integrity as a part of oral tradition only and not as a written one.

REFERENCES:

- 1) 52 Sharanara Jivan Charitregalu ed - Basava Samithi Bengaluru.