

he had almost completed his long and arduous journey, it so happened that when he had hardly arrived at Ambalūr night fell. It was another six miles to go to reach his home in Masur. But he could not go any further as the sky was overcast with thick dark clouds and it threatened to rain. So he was obliged to seek shelter in the nearest house which happened to be a potter's. He bought some pots to cook his food. Mali, the young wife of the potter Mala who was away on some long trip, had to play host all by herself. She treated this Brahmin guest with courtesy and hospitality. The pilgrim was greatly impressed with her piety, charming manners and sweet nature.

It started raining heavily accompanied by thunder and lightning. As the house was leaking all over, the hospitable housewife herself had to constantly attend on the guest to provide what little comfort the house could offer. The romantic situation so naturally created caused both of them to fall in love with each other. As a result of this, the halt for a night got extended to a week after which Basavarasa went his way.

In due course, Lord Viswanatha's Grace and Blessing bore fruit as it were, only with a difference of place and Mali gave birth to a son. Mala not knowing anything about his wife's casual affair, felt very happy to have a son. Thinking that it was his own son, he doted on him.

The child was precocious and grew up into a bright, smart boy. He came to know from his mother that he was born to her by the Grace of Kāśī Viswanātha whose prasāda was given to her by a Brāhmin called Basavarasa of Masur. The boy might have also seen Basavarasa visit their house now and then. He might also have overheard people of his village talking among themselves about the illicit connection between Basavarasa and Mali. Being very intelligent and sensitive, he might have felt hurt and insulted when they mocked at him and taunted him. The boy was very bold and outspoken. He never minced matters but called a spade. But he loved his mother very dearly all the same. He knew her to be noble and cultured

despite her caste and status. He admired her many good qualities which he was proud of having inherited.

One day Mala and Mali were in an exulted mood, sitting relaxed after their lunch. They were fondling their darling son. Mala claimed him to be his son and Mali argued that he was her son. Then Mala asked the little boy in a jocular way whose son he was. Out came the reply as a bolt from the blue:

*Tande hāruvanalla, tāyi Māliyu alla
Candrasékharana Varadīnda puṭṭida
Kanda tānenda Sarvajña*

No, my father is no brahmin, my mother is not Mali, I am the son born of Lord Chandrasekhara's Grace.

The father's pride was hurt and the mother's conscience was pricked. She felt alarmed at the boy's candour. A vague fear entered her heart that some day her son himself might expose her infidelity. So she pretended to be terribly angry with the boy's impertinence and created a big scene. And they drove him out of the house calling him insolent.

The autobiographical hints given in those fourteen poems stop at this point. The fifteenth poem takes a leap to the beginning of his spiritual quest. In this poem the poet sadly confesses that ensnaring him in life's many-coloured web and enticing him with the three tastes of the world (perhaps the tastes of youth, wealth and intellectual excellence) God Siva had not revealed His presence within himself.

After being driven out of his house where did he go or wander? What hardships did he suffer? How was he provided? Who was his guardian? How was he educated? Who was his teacher? Did he marry and settle down? Or did he straight away start treading the path of an ascetic? How did he, any way, come to lead a life of austerity? These and many such questions remain unanswered. Leave alone other things, what was his name, the name given to him by his parents?

Thus this is a rational outlook combined with spiritual insight.

As a social reformer he is a revolutionary as the Shivasharanas of the 12th century. He spares no one in his critical observation. However, his neatly made poems cannot stand comparison with the Sayings of Basaveswara and some other Vachanakaras.

The Vachanas of Basaveswara, Allama Prabhu and such others are profound in the sense that they touch deeper psychological layers or the highest states of consciousness. But Sarvajna mostly stops at the moral level though rarely but occasionally diving into mystical depths. Yet he is outstanding in his own way. He is unique in being supremely impersonal. His ascetic self-denial even to the extent of denying himself the personal identity of a name is something unparalleled.

Of various universal human values dealt with, both individual and social, truth and charity and esteemed as the highest values by Sarvajna. Speaking only truth, giving food to the hungry and having concern for others comprise all the essential virtues in a nutshell.

While presenting a realistic picture of life he points out how greed and love of money corrupt men, lead the weaklings to all sorts of vices and spoil the lives of even the right and the just men.

Nuḍisuvudasatyavanu keḍisuvudu dharmavanu
Oḍalané kaṭṭi hiḍivudu lōbhada
Gaḍaṇa kāṇayya Sarvajña

Makes one speak untruth; pollutes justice;
 Prompts one to forego food and starve
 Such is the retinue of greed, Sarvajna.

Similarly is the love and importance attached to gold,
 i.e. money :

Yatiya tapagaḷu keḍugu satiya pativrata keḍugu
Mativantarella bamegaḷogu honnemba
Śrutiya kéḷidare Sarvajña

The penance of a monk is spoilt and so the good-wife's
chastity

And all wise men go crazy and obsessed
If gold's musical note is heard, Sarvajna.

The poet who cautions men against such wrong values must have been himself careful in preserving his moral integrity and mental poise. Matching this integrity is the effective style, unadorned and free from literary mannerisms and devices.

*Narebanda mudukanize duruḷa javvaneyéke
Kuruda laḍḍugeya horagirisi ta nāḍa
Tiriya hōdante Sarvajña*

"Very old and gray-haired men should not yield to the temptation of marrying young women of doubtful character. It is as foolish as a blind man keeping the sweets outside and going round the town for begging."

*Pratyakṣa uragana mastakada halu nanju
Mithya durjanara hole kāyavāpāda
Mastakavu nanju*

"In venomous snakes only the tooth has poison. But the wicked have poison from head to foot."

Udyōgavullavana hodduvudu Siri bandu

"For one has a profession finds oneself covered with wealth."

*Koḍuvātane Mrudanu paḍevātane naranu
Oḍala odavegaḷu keḍedu hōgada munna
Koḍu pātravaridu*

"Giving is virtue but one should have the discretion to give to the right and deserving person."

Satyavanu aridiare satta hāgirabéku

"If one has realised the Truth, one should keep quiet as if dead."

Tanna tānaridage bhinna bhedagaḷilla

"Know Thyself and nothing will appear different."