

Rebel Consciousness of Kanakadasa

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Abstract: An attempt has been made in this paper to throw light on the rebel consciousness of Kanakadasa in *Ramadhanya Charite* which is avowedly & explosively rebellious. Though this explosively rebellious quality is seen in the *Keertanas*, which he composed after becoming a dasa, it seems it is enervated and devoid of fervour. As Kanakadasa himself belonged to a shepherd community, it was inevitable for him to offer his neck to the yoke of exploitation. Ever since his childhood he had the first-hand experience of the kind of exploitation directed towards the people, the race of which he was a part. He tries to give voice to such a kind of dumb pain inflicted upon the people from times immemorial.

Keywords: Exploitation, religious beliefs, ritualism, grains, symbolism, allegory.

Paper

The revolution caused by Sharanas in the 12th century against the contemporary religious beliefs and ritualism was the first of its kind in Karnataka. Though the vein of protest against the above mentioned tradition was there among the predecessors of Basavanna and Allamprabhu it assumed fervour only during their days. And then because of the lack of able leadership and unsuitable political atmosphere it becomes dormant. After a gap of two hundred years or so there was another wave of reaction or rebellion against social inequality, ostentation, superstitions, and spurious life style. It was the Haridasa movement. Though there are many Haridasa the glaring names among them are of Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa. It is an accepted belief that *dasya* or servitude to God is away to realise him. The adherence popularised by Kanakadasa.

Kanakadasa's previous name was Thimmappanayaka. He was born in a shepherd family at a village called *Bada* in Haveri district. Like Pampa, another greater poet of kannada literature, who lived in the 10th century, he was a poet and a fighter-two-in-one. He was a provincial ruler. At a moment of fight he was greatly affected & moved by the loss caused to lives and lineages. He renounced the rulership and went to Hampi. There he become a disciple of Vyasaraaya and converted himself into a dasa. He had to face the angry stares of the upper caste people as he did not descend from the one. This is conspicuously conveyed in his *keertanas*. Though he came from the down-trodden section of the society, he was well-read. There is ample room to surmise that he wrote prolific poetry before he becomes a dasa. It appears that he might have written *Mohanatarangini* and *Ramadhanya Charite* before he become a dasa.

An attempt has been made in this paper to throw light on the rebel consciousness of Kanakadasa. Of the two books mentioned above the second one is avowedly & explosively rebellious. Though this explosively rebellious quality is seen in the *Keertanas*, which he composed after becoming a dasa, it seems it is enervated and devoid of fervour. The dasas usually kept on commenting and critising the follies, fallacies and also fanaticism prevailing in the society of their time. But Kanakadasa occupies a peculiar pedestal among them. When a poet is laved in reality there is no need for attesting his text. As Kanakadasa himself belonged to a dalit community, it was inevitable for him to offer his neck to the yoke of exploitation. Ever since his childhood he had the first-hand experience of the kind of exploitation directed towards the people, the race of which he was a part. He tries to give voice to such a kind of dumb pain inflicted upon the people from times immemorial. His book *Ramadhanya Charite* is the best testimony to this.

Kanakadasa was deeply disgusted by the discriminations like king and servant, emperor and feudatory ruler, rich and poor, Brahmin and shoodra etc... which was the result of the political system of his days. It seems he wrote *Ramadhanya Charite* to hold up the mirror to this and induce the correct understang in the society. It is a poem written in mock-epic style. The story is imagined to have happened during the life-time of Rama. The subject of the poem is a quarrel between two personified grains namely *Naredalega* [Ragi] and *Vrihiga* [Paddy] and the manner in which the quarrel was selected by Rama.

The technique of handling puranic and social material/themes metaphorically I reveal Kanakadasa's calibre in creativity. Another peculiar property of this poem is the use of student of English literature Jonsonian bird imagery in *The volpone*. Probably in no text of the world literature we come across the technique of having raised the grains to the level of protagonists and having made them argue vehemently for the pre-eminence of each. Having the struggle between the castes and classes for its major theme it reflects the social condition candidly. "The pain which Kanakadasa put up with because of the exploitation directed towards him by the people of upper castes finds its way out in the poem". [De.Ja.Gow]

When the Pandavas were in vanavasa, sage Shandilya visited their shanty. Then he narrated the story of Rama's generosity, virtuosity and also capacity of wise judgment before Yudhishtira. The narrative manner of the poem is, in indirect speech, as is a common feature of old Kannada poetry. The grains namely Naredalega [Ragi] and Vrihiga [Paddy] represent the lower and higher castes respectively.

Rama, after finishing his vanavasa, and after killing Ravana, on his return journey to Ayodhya, along with his spouse Seeta and colony the Vanaras, sojourned in a forest where the sage Muchukunda's hermitage was situated. At that time all the sages from the surroundings ashramas arrived there and offered him different dishes. Then Rama asked Hanuman to discern the best of the dishes. Then wise Hanuman wished to see the grains. Therefore the sages arranged the grains in array. The grains included jawar, wheat, paddy, ragi etc. Then Rama asked assembly of sages to select the grains of the real essence. Each sage selected different grain when Rama asked to select/choose one grain. On behalf of all sages Goutama said, "since, *Naredalega* [Ragi] its grown more in our province he is the best of all the grains". This pronouncement from the sage angers *Vrihiga* [paddy]. He accuses sage Goutama of partiality. He says that it is not prudent to announce *Naredalega* [Ragi] as the best of the grains when there are jawar, wheat and other grains. He says, "i am of supreme importance. The people have not only considered other grains. He says "I am of supreme importance. The people have not only considered me to be a grain 'per excellence' but also use me compulsorily on all sorts of auspicious occasions, such as wedding *upanayana* etc... in the form of '*Akshate*' consecrated through the recitation over me of mantras. I am of the primary necessity for offerings [*Naivedya*] to Gods, and at the time of commencement of alphabet teaching to the twaddling children". Then turning to *Naredalega* [Ragi] he continued "As a browning brooke can not be commensurable with the holy Gangas, or as a crane is incompatible with a swan, or even as a crow cannot think of matching himself with a cuckoo, so you cannot/or never can think of matching your self with me. You are a corrupt, silly and ignoble fellow". When with these harsh words he accused *Naredalega* [Ragi] who becomes furious and roared, "you are a nasty fellow, you are mean and apathetic. It is meaner still to argue with you and convince, you look down upon the poor. You are the very replica of the manes". With these innuendos *Naredalega* [Ragi] refuted *Vrihiga* [Paddy]. Ultimately his currage of challenging the hole band of the rishis is really laudably. His blaming them, "you are all compromised to silence" is really meaningful. Rama perceiving the fervour of argument consigns both the grains to the prison as a test, and declares that he would pronounce the verdict after six months. Announcing this decision in the congregation of the rishis Rama proceeds to Ayodhya and then after the coronation orders Hanuman to bring the arrested grains before him. On testing it was surprising revelation to the congregation that *vrihiga* [paddy] was weak, so weak that he could not even speak. But *naredalega* [ragi] was astonishingly fresh and active. Hence Rama clares that he was the grain of real essence, and not only that he was also a pet one to him. Thus Rama bestows his own name to the *grain*. Soit was accepted by all present as *Ramadhanya* [grain of Rama], Further erent Gods who were there to witness the coronation showered their blessings upon him lavishly. *Vrisiga* [Paddy] bowed his head in humiliation. By making Rama speak so for grain *Naredalaga* [Ragi], Kanakadasa, while attaching importance to the sustenance and life style of the down trodden, seems to endorse the view point that verity devotion dedication and big-hartedness are the foultain heads that make our life meaningful and worth living. He also seems to endorse the worldly truth that vainglory, ostentatiousness are meaningless elements in our life. In this way *Ramdhanya Charite* seems to be pregnant with the themes of cast struggle. Unlike our contemporary social situation the period of Kanakadasa was full of contrabands of customs. It was zeoparadazing for a man like a Kanakadasa form lower stratum of society to raise his extremist voice against the people and practices of upper cast. Therefore, very wisely he employs the mok'epic style and grain metaphors in his poem, to give an outlet to the enger in him. Though Kanakadasa cards everything very naively through the naiveness itself shoot out his suppressed feelings of an exploited. A close examination of the suggestions that lie behind the words employed reveals the threads of pain forming the warp and woof of the Text.

Major portion of the literature produced by Kanakadasa after his initiation into the servitude to God, includes *Keertanas*. At this period his rebellious spirit assumes the array of irony. When the other disciples of Vyasaraya, who belonged to upper cast sneered and sniggered at him, he spits out his eanger through irony. He says,

“O man thou commeth from vagina
the conduit of urine, and sucked
the flesh at nipples of the mother breast
where is the caste?” (Translation: Self)

By questioning thus he drives home the fact that while origin of all human beings is the same, the discrimination on the basis of race and caste is not only meaningless but complete blindness to reality. According to him it is futile and fallacious to struggle hard over the superiority of caste consciousness. In one of his *Keertanas* he advises the people,

“Do not quarrel over caste
Dost thou know the source of thy caste?
.....
.....
He is truly a high born, who fawns
On the lotus feet of Adikeshava of Kaginele”. (Translation: Self)

This reveals the pains he experienced and also his attitude towards superior-inferior, exploiter-exploited sections of society. His rationality is revealed still more strikingly in his questioning the people

“Unto which caste do the life and soul
Belong along with organs of sense and foul?
What is the meaning of caste to him
Who is laved in Adikeshava’s hymn?” (Translation: Self)

Inspite of all such vibrant insurgent elements, vehement arguments against and frantic attacks on social inequalities, Kanakadasa could not restrain his tongue from calling the Brahmins the *Bhusuras*- Gods of the earth. This shows how watertight the control of the customs over the society was. As the pontifical class of his time was being patronised by emperors as a bull it would bellow menacingly at the people of lower castes. It is rather surprising to find how able and intelligent Kanakadasa was to wage a war against such a system supported by the multitude. His adventurous attempt of vomiting out his voice of unmitigated protest, lest it should suffocate within his throat, is really laudable. But unluckily it could not touch the tympanum of the people of upper castes or may we have to say that they were not courteous enough to listen to it? They were the days when the communal organisation of people of lower castes was actually impossible. In such an odd situation, and orthodox society, Kanakadasa’s attempt of exposing the reality is appreciable.

References

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