

**ABC OF THE
LINGAYATH DHARMA**

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The ABC of the Veerashaiva Religion

PART I

The ABC of the Veerashaiva Religion

(A Note for the Parents of the Elementary School Students)

With a view to support the Veerashaiva parents' efforts to help their children, who are growing up out side of India, to understand and appreciate their religion, its heritage, legacy and way of life, the VSNA has embarked on the publication of a series of books. The present volume is intended for the benefit of the parents, whose children are in the elementary schools. Of necessity, the format used introduces the children to learning their religion through ABCs (alphabets). Instead of saying **A** for apple; **A** is used for **Allama Prabhu, Anubhava Mantapa** and **Asthavarna**. The three of them - **Allama Prabhu, Anubhava Mantapa** and **Asthavarna** – have made monumental contributions to the Veerashaiva religion. The same pattern is followed in this book; that is, for each alphabet an appropriate saint or a religious topic has been suggested. In a couple of cases, appropriate words couldn't be found, for example, **Q** and **Z**. In such cases, attempt has been made to come close to the religious theme.

This write-up is to enable the parents to explain to their children what each of the alphabets stands for in our religion. A very simple style of narration has been deliberately used. It is hoped to publish a new edition of this book in the light of the comments and suggestions from the users of the book. The format presented here calls for the parents to read with their children each alphabet and then explain to them what it means. The following write-up gives the parents enough background narration. To help the parents, the meanings of the underlined words are included in the Appendix I at the end of the book. A set of questions is included as Appendix II at the end of the book.. This is done primarily to encourage and facilitate learning and retention by the children and to forewarn the parents about the type of questions that their children would pose.

A

Allama Prabhu stands tall among the Veerashaiva saints. He is one of the most enlightened souls, mystics and philosophers of the world. His musings and thoughts rank among the world's best literary and philosophical compositions. **Socrates** is regarded as one of the most gifted and admired Greek philosophers. In his school, he taught philosophy and logical thinking to students. **Plato** was the most famous of Greek philosopher and a close friend of Socrates. Most of what we know about Socrates comes from Plato's writings known as 'Socratic Dialogues'. Allama wrote over a thousand **vachanas**, which reflect his profound spiritual accomplishments and **mysticism**. You can spot his vachanas by the marker he uses, namely the word **Guheshvar**. Allama worshipped **Guheshvar** as his **Isthadeva** (personal **God**). All of his vachanas carry this identifying marker. He was the first president of the **Anubhava Mantapa**. From the point of view of philosophy, Allama is respected by the Veerashaivas as more than equal to Socrates.

Anubhava Mantapa means the **Academy of Experience**. It has been called by other names. What one sees in the picture are the remains of this 12th Century institution. This was the place where people from all walks of life met and discussed philosophical, religious and social issues. Men and women enjoyed **Equality**. They used an **Egalitarian** process, which means every body – the rich and the poor, the educated, and the uneducated, the high and low were all treated with equal respect. Why did they use the word, "**Experience**" as a part of its name for this meeting place? The word tells us that the participants learned through their personal experience. No body was forced to believe any thing that they did not accept and experience in their life. The **Veerashaivas** treated women as equal to men more than **800** years ago, because they believed the soul in both to be the same. That is, the soul in them is neither male nor female.

Asthavarna is one of the cardinal principles of the Veerashaiva religion. The word is derived from **Astha** which means **eight** while **varna** means **shield**. These eightfold shields are: (1) **Guru**, (2) **Linga**, (3) **Jangama**, (4) **Bhasma**, (5) **Rudraksha**, (6) **Padodaka**, (7) **Prasada** and (8) **Mantra**. The words Guru, Linga, Bhasma, Prasad and Mantra will be explained later. **Rudraksha** means rosary or a counting -beed. It is made a plant material and used an aid praying. **Jangama** is a Guru; a religious teacher. He owns nothing and wanders from place to place to help educate the devotees on spiritual matters. Because of his/her selfless service to the society, the jangama commands high respect from the faithful. He does not, however, perform the rites of the life-cycle. The saffron-colored clothes he/she wears make him/her stand out. **Padodaka** literally means holy water from the washing of Guru's feet. Washing Guru's feet, is a symbolic gesture. It suggests that all parts of the body including the mind should be clean before worshipping God. The Catholics also practice this formality of washing the feet during the Easter Holidays.

B

B stands for three very important things in our religion. They are **Basava**, **Bhakti** and **Bhasma**. Say again what these three things are: **Basava**, **Bhakti** and **Bhasma**. One more time, please: **Basava**, **Bhakti** and **Bhasma**.

Basava is the pinnacle of the Veerashaiva temple. He is the heart and soul of the Lingayat religion. Basava was born in Bagewadi (Bijapur district, Karnatak) in 1131 A. D. in a **Brahmin** family. Resisting attempts to be initiated into the Brahminical rites, he went to **Kudalasangam**, where he studied the Veerashaiva religion under the guidance and tutelage of Ishanya Guru and Jatadeva Muni. He was an intensely religious and dynamic personality. Humility was his trademark, as implied in his vachana, “There is none lower than I am.....” He was a literary genius, well-versed in the Vedas, the Shivaagamas and the Upanishads.

He was a crusader for righteous actions. He condemned superstitious beliefs. He was firm and steadfast in his beliefs. He quit his official position of the Prime Minister rather than to compromise on his principles. He was a statesman. He championed the cause of equality. He upheld the dignity of labor. He said work is worship: “**Kayakave Kailas**”. To help the disabled and the poor folks, he advanced the principle of dashoha, which means helping people who need help. More than a thousand of his vachanas have been discovered. His vachanas can be recognized by his marker, **Kudalsangamadeva**, his personal God.

His often quoted vachana, which in a sense summarizes the basic concepts and principles of the Veerashaiva religion, runs thus:

Thou shalt not steal nor kill
Nor utter a lie
Neither get angry with anyone
Nor scorn another person.
Nor blow thy own trumpet
Nor hold others to blame
This is the way to inner purity
This is the way to outer purity
This is the way to please,
Our Lord Kudalasangama.

The above vachana reminds us of the Ten Commandments of Moses!

Bhakti is the second word in this group. The unique concept of bhakti was introduced more than three thousands of years ago in the religions originating from India. In simple words it means: dedicated devotion and submission to God without expecting any personal rewards. It also involves a sense of self-less love of God. This concept has been later adopted by other religions such as Christianity and Islam (Sufism). Christianity uses the word “Grace” instead of Bhakti.

The Veerashaivism’s **Shatsthala** principle further describes that the development of bhakti (devotion) helps cultivate the union of the soul with Shiva. It further states that the body is important and essential to the blooming of bhakti.

The most often quoted vachana on Bhakti is by Basava:

It is said that Shiva is fond of music.
Certainly, He is not.
It is said that Shiva is found of the Vedas.
Certainly, He is not.
If Shiva were fond of the music,
Why would Ravana, a devotee of Shiva,
Who sang devotional songs praising Shiva,
Meet his maker pre-maturely?
If Shiva were fond of the Vedas,
Why would Brahma, who was well versed in the Vedas,
Have his head chopped off?
Our Lord Kudalasangamadeva,
Loves neither the music nor the Vedas.
However, He loves Bhakti.

Bhasma means holy ash in the Lingayat religion. It is also called **Vibhuti**, It symbolizes the burning of impurities associated with the mind and the thought. It implies purity. By removing the impurities of the mind, a person is supposed to become pure at heart. During the worship, it is applied to the forehead and the Isthalinga. This implies that the worshipper has washed off his impurities and sins. Bhasma is one of the **Asthavarna**, the eightfold shield, the truthful practice of which protects the devotees.

C

C stands for **Channabasava** and **compassion**. Considering his young age, Channabasava was one of the most gifted philosophers of his time. He was wise beyond his tender young age! Yet, he was the most experienced person in the concept and philosophy of the **Shatsthala** Path of the Veerashaiva religion. He was Basava's nephew. After the Veerashaiva Sharanas left **Kalyana**, he was the one who saved and preserved the Vachana literature by hiding it from the King's soldiers. He went to **Ulavi** with a band of the faithful followers. His writings reflect his spiritual experience and knowledge and sublime wisdom.

Compassion is the cornerstone of our religion. God is pleased when a person shows compassion and kindness to his fellow beings. It shows a person's love for the members of his race and other animals; all created by Shiva. Compassion involves "a deep feeling of sharing with a view to aid or lend support". Please underline the word **sharing** in the above sentence. Sharing with others who need help and support is very important to the Veerashaivas. It reaffirms the principle of **Dashoha**.

D

D is for **Dashoha**. It is a sublime concept, which suggests that we should gladly and voluntarily share our abundance with the less fortunate members of our community. It is not good to hoard or accumulate wealth. It tells us to save for Dashoha a fair share of our honest earning. This way we help the disabled and the helpless, who cannot work and earn their living. You can go to the homeless shelters, give them food and clothing. If there are poor sick people, who cannot afford to buy medicine, give them the medicine so that they can get well. Such acts of kindness please God and make you feel good about yourself.

D is for **Devotion**, which means religious zeal. It also means ardent submission to God. Basava's following vachana further amplifies this zeal:

Thou art my father,
Thou art my mother,
Thou art my kith and kin,

Thou art my kindred soul
Kudalasangamadeva, please do with me,
What Thou pleaseth!

E

E stands for **Egalitarianism** and **Equality** in our religion. The former word means equal political, economical and legal rights for all citizens. This suggests that all people have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This is included in the American Declaration of Independence.

While the word, **Equality** implies that all human beings irrespective of their social status and gender are equal. That is, men and women are equal; the rich and the poor equal. This advises us not to discriminate on any and all pre-texts including physical appearance, color, caste and creed.

F

F means **Fraternity** or **brethren**. Once we receive our **isthalinga** from the hands of our **Guru**, we become equal in the eyes of Lord Shiva. We become brothers and sisters. This means we have to treat every one with proper respect, courtesy, compassion and kindness. Whenever somebody really needs help, stop and help them if you can. Who knows, next time around you yourself may need helping hand!

F also stands for **Festivals**. Festivals are expressions of appreciation, sort of ‘**Thank you, notes**’!! We thank God for His blessings and mercy. We thank our Saints for enlightening us and showing us the Path. On such occasions as the saints’ birthdays, we commemorate their accomplishments and commit ourselves to continue their teachings and traditions (see Veerashaiva Festivals).

G

G stands for two most important things in our religion, namely **God** and **Guru**.

God: All the religions of the world advocate and proclaim their belief in GOD. God is one of the most difficult subjects to describe. No two persons see God in the same way and in the same form! This is reflected in the following story. Once eight blind men were debating about the elephant. They did not agree on any thing, because they had neither seen nor could see the elephant. Then, they decided to go touch the elephant to describe it. Each of them touched a part of the elephant's body and each of them described it variously as a trunk of a tree, a pillar, a snake, a wall etc. The same applies to those who have the eyes to see, when it comes to describing God. We have to experience God through faith and bhakti. There are numerous examples of people who have seen and experienced God's presence. There is nothing phony and strange about this. Mahadeviakka saw God as a bright reddish light on the mountaintop before she merged with Him. American writer, Sophy Burnham, describes scores and scores of such examples in her book titled "The Ecstatic Journey". Just as one cannot see the sweetness hidden in the honey, the ice cream and the sweets we all love to eat, God cannot be seen with the human eye. Faith serves to sustain, while bhakti functions as an aid in the spiritual salvation. There is but ONE GOD. Basava has said, "God is ONE but MANY are His names". The following vachana of Basava describes God's dimensions:

Oh! Lord, you are as wide as the world and sky!
And wider still!!
Your feet go deeper than the world below,
Your crown stands far above the universe,
You are imperceptible and beyond comprehension,
Limitless and incomparable,
You have graced my palm,
In the form of the Staling,
Microscopic but macrosphic in nature,
Oh! Lord Kudalasangamadeva.

Guru

A **Guru** is the most important person in the life of the people of India, particularly where religion is concerned. A Guru is a holy person. The Guru occupies a pivotal place in Veerashaivism. The term has a fine metaphysical meaning. A Guru is the reflection of God. This is more so for the Veerashaivas, for they regard the Guru as the representative of God. A Guru even ranks higher than the Linga. It is the Guru who does religious initiation, who gives the isthalinga, who performs the lingadiksha, who provides

religious instructions and who **enlightens** the devotees. In one word, a guru is regarded and respected as the “**second mother**”. This is reason why the Guru occupies the first place in the Asthavarna principle.

H

H for Humility. It occupies a high place in the life and living of a person. It means being humble and modest and not **egoistic**. Being humble is not a sign of weakness. It reflects one’s courage, one’s strength of character and belief that one should treat others with due respect. Humility and modesty go hand in hand and go to make a **righteous** person. Humility stands as the hallmark of the Veerashaiva religion. Basava, the light of the light of our religion, exemplified humility. Hearken and listen to his vachana:

There is none lower than I am.
There is none higher than Thy devotees.
I swear on Thy name,
I swear on my heart,
Oh! Lord Kudalasangamadeva,
This is the veritable truth for me!

Basava was the Prime Minister of King Bijjal. He was rich and well-to-do. Yet he did not use his wealth for his personal pleasures. Instead, he used it for public welfare. He could have gotten built hundreds of temples if he wanted but he did not. Since he dedicated his wealth to the people, he said to himself and to God:

Lord, the rich build the temples.
What could I, a poor person, do Lord?
My legs are the pillars.
My body the temple and,
My head the golden pinnacle,
Hear me my Lord Kudalasangamadeva,
The so-called permanent fixtures perish,
While the **Jangama** does not.

Here Jangama, a swamiji, is considered to represent God. Thus, Basava implies that God is the only permanent being in this universe and the rest of the material world perishes sooner or later. This vachana also suggests that God is inside the temple of the body.

I

The word, **I**, indicates the most important thing in the life of a **Lingayat**. It stands for the **ISTHALINGA**, the personal God. The Veerashaivas are expected to wear the isthalinga on their person. It is Basava who institutionalized the wearing of the isthalinga. It is the isthalinga that distinguishes the Veerashivas from the other **Shaivites**, who also worship Lord Shiva. It is the Guru, who during the **lingadiksha** ceremony blesses the devotee with the isthalinga and introduces the devotee to the secrets of the **Shadakshara mantra**. Since the isthalinga represents God, the Veerashaivas are not expected and supposed to go the Shiva temples to worship God. They can worship Shiva by worshipping their **isthalinga**. The isthaling is a spherical object with flat base, which is held in the palm of the left hand for worshipping. The palm itself is raised to the level of the eyes (see the figure). Thus, the isthalinga is a valuable aid in **self-realization**.

J

J for **Japa**. It simply means recitation of the mantra or a prayer. While praying, it is usually a customary practice to chant the **mantra**. There are several reasons for chanting the mantra. It helps a person to concentrate on praying. It enables a person to control the mind. It is extremely difficult to control the mind and to focus on praying. It is very difficult to concentrate and focus on praying. It requires a lot of practice. Usually a person learns this from the Guru. An experienced and enlightened person need not recite the mantra while praying. He/she can worship through silent prayer or japa.

K

K stands for **Kayaka** and **Kudalsangamadeva**.

Kudalsangamadeva is the personal god that **Basava** worshipped. It is also the identifying marker that Basava used in his vachanas.

Kayaka on the other hand, represents one of the loftiest concepts of the Veerashaiva religion. The word **Kaya** is derived from the Sanskrit language and it means body; kayaka means that which results from bodily exertion or use of the body. Basava ordained that every able-bodied person, irrespective of his/her social status, should earn his/her living through physical labor. He/she should charge a fair price for his/her work. Basava also stated that irrespective of the nature of the labor/work, all persons are equal.

He, thus, proclaimed the dignity of labor. His often-quoted sentence, “**Kayakave Kailas**” translates into “work is worship”.

L

L represents three very important things in our religion; namely **Linga**, **Lingadiksha** and **Lingaikya**.

Linga

For a long, long time **Linga** has been respected and worshipped as a representation of the Creator of our **Universe**, Lord Shiva. In fact, the practice of the worship of Linga can be traced to the **Indus Valley Civilization** dating back to 5000 years! Since the faithful could not describe and could not hold God while worshipping, they did the next best thing they could do. They conceived the concept of the Linga. There are two types of Lingas: one that is worshipped in the temple and the other that is worshipped in the hand and carried on the person. The linga in the temple is called the **sthavarlinga** (the immovable linga) and the other is called the **isthalinga** (personal god worshipped in left palm). The folks who worship the linga in the temple are known as the followers of **Shaivism**. Those who carry their linga on their person are called the **Lingayats** or the **Veerashaivas**. The Linga is very important to the Lingayats. That is why it occupies the second highest place in the Asthavarna principle. The enclosed **CD Disk** shows how to perform the **Lingapuja**.

The following vachana of Urilinga Peddi encompasses the sublime meaning of the Linga:

Linga is the cosmic Shakti of Parashiva,
Linga is the representation of Shakti, the cosmic power
Linga radiates enlightenment,
Linga is the abode of contentment and tranquility,
Linga is the embodiment of knowledge
Linga is Parashiva himself,
Linga is the Creator of the Universe,
Linga is the pulsating light beyond Hari Hara,
Linga is the refuge for the humans,
Oh! Lord Urilinga Peddi Priya Vishveshvara
Comprehending the Linga,
Is quintessential to gain knowledge.

Lingadiksha

Lingadiksha is a formal religious initiation ceremony during which the Guru gives the lingadiksha to the disciple. The Guru also gives the devotee the holy mantra to recite during the **Lingapuja** (linga worship). The linga issued by the Guru is blessed and accompanies the person from his/her cradle to his/her grave. That is the linga follows the person to his/her death, at which time the individual's soul is supposed to merge with God. The last act is known as the **lingaiyka** or **samadhi**. The same lingadiksha ceremony is performed whether the child is a male or a female.

Lingaiyka

LINGAIYKA literally means mingling with the maker, the Linga. Linga is God. Every human being is endowed with a soul, which is invisible, yet remains inside of the individual. It disappears at death or lingaiyka. The soul is the internal representation of God in a human being. Since death of the human being is inevitable, a person's aim in her/his life is to smoothly achieve this union with the Creator. Thus, Lingaiyka means union with Shiva. **Samadhi** is another term for this union with Shiva.

M

The letter **M** suggests three things: **Mahadeviakka**, **Matha** and **Meditation**.

Mahadeviakka represents what is best in the Veerashaiva religion. She epitomizes bhakti, **vairagya**, piety, melodious music, unmatched literary skills, spiritual enlightenment and sublime philosophy. The Veerashaiva mystics are among the world's greatest mystics. Akka Mahadevi shines like the bright North Star amongst all women, in her 'asceticism to realize God'. Compared to her age, one can say without any hesitation that she stands tall among the galaxy of the world's mystics, both males and females.

Akka Mahadevi was born to Sumati and Nirmal Shetty in the village of Udutadi [the present day Shimoga district, Karnatak State, India]. She learned religion early in her childhood. Ever since she was a child, she had wholeheartedly surrendered herself to God. She was known to sing songs – vachanas – in praise of Him. She was greatly enamored by the love of God.

She was forced to marry the King. Before she married the king, Akka Mahadevi put forth 30 odd conditions. Included among these stipulations were: the freedom to worship, Guru, Linga and Jangama, the Jain King becoming a Veerashaiva and the King

wouldn't force her into a conjugal life unless she gladly agreed to it. The infatuated King accepted all of her stipulations and married her. After the marriage most of the time, Mahadeviakka engrossed and immersed herself in **Shivapuja** and **shiva-chintane** (thought).

When the king approached her and tried to force her by grabbing her garments, she resented the king's intentions and motives and walked away from the king's palatial comfort forever. Nothing else in life mattered to Mahadeviakka except meeting and merging with **Channamallikarjuna**, her cherished isthadevata. She was the very essence and embodiment of vairagya; complete and total renunciation of worldly pleasures and pompous living. Basava and his contemporary **sharanas** wholeheartedly welcomed her presence in the **Anubhava Mantapa**. Her religious discourse and dialog in the Anubhava Mantapa with Allama Prabhu reflect an unmatched expression of mysticism and spiritual attainment that Akka Mahadevi had achieved at such a tender age. Enlightened by Allama Prabhu, Akka mahadevi went to Sri Shaila, a holy place pilgrimage for the Veerashaivas. There she merged with her isthadeva (God) and perennial lover Channamallikarjuna. She gives a beautiful yet vivid description of the vision of God she saw before she merged with Him.

Mathas

A matha in the Veerashaiva religious tradition is the basic religious monastery performing various services such as educational, spiritual and social services and rendering counseling assistance. Swamijis and Gurus usually head the mathas. Depending on the size of a matha, the head of the matha carries the title such as the Mahaswamiji, Jagadguru, etc. The Murusavirmatha (Hubli), the Tontadarya matha (Gadaga), the J. S. S. Matha (Suttur), Taralabalu matha (Sirigeri), Murughamatha (Chitradurga and Dharwad) are some of the examples of the mathas. The Pontiffs of these mathas may have Junior Swamijis under their wings. These mathas have made outstanding contributions to the overall survival, preservation and propagation of the Veerashaiva faith. Some of these institutions have been running boarding and lodging facilities for the benefit of the poor Veerashaiva youths for the past fifty years or more. And some of them have established elementary schools, high schools, arts and science colleges and professional institutions such as dental, engineering and medical colleges. Several of these mathas have become highly active in publishing books on religious subjects. They have also published biographies of prominent Veerashaivas who have rendered outstanding services to the community.

Meditation

Meditation is an intense and concentrated silent form of prayer. It “is the experience of the limitless nature of the mind.” The Indian *rishis* (saints, seers) have been practicing meditation for over “4000 years”; even before the advent of the Vedas, the world’s oldest books on religion and philosophy. **Buddha** practiced meditation over 2500 years ago. It also finds mention in the first Jewish book written some 2500 years ago. Meditation occupies a prominent place in the Greek and Russian churches. St. Basil wrote about it in the 4th Century (A. D.), while **Prophet Mohammed** practiced it in the 7th Century (A. D.).

Meditation requires proper control and frame of mind, elimination of emotions and worldly thoughts from the mind. Meditation enables one to experience peace and tranquility within and without. Meditation enhances one’s discipline, memory, mental and physical well-being, relaxation and spiritual up-lift. Meditation is an extremely personal and private practice. During meditation the mind elevates itself to an upper plane and as soon as it is over, it returns to ground zero. It teaches us to be kind and compassionate.

Nagamma

Akka Nagamma was the older sister of Basava and the mother of Channabasava. Other than this, precious little is known about her. Probably this is true of most of the Lingayat saints of that epoch, for historians of those days only recorded and described events about the royal family only. The same is true with **Jesus Christ**, whose birth date cannot be traced. She was married to Shivaswamy. Author Singiraj, who lived around 1600 A. D., has provided some information about the couple in his book “*Amal Basava Charitre*”. Akka Nagamma and her husband looked after Basava when he was a student at Kudalasangama. She was a highly trained spiritual leader in her own right. She was the heart and soul of the Anubhava Mantapa and was very popular among participants. Basava always could count on her continued support in all his political, religious and social activities.

Neelamma

Neelamma was the daughter of Padmagandhi and Siddharasa. The latter was the brother of Baldeva, a minister in the court of King Bijjala. Since her mother died when she was a small girl, she was raised as a member of the King’s household. She grew up with the King’s daughter. She was very well educated. The King suggested to Basava, who was the King’s Prime Minister at that time, to marry Neelamma. Neelamma gave birth to a boy called Balasangayya, who died in his childhood.

Due to differences of opinion, Basava resigned his position and returned to Kudalasangama. After Bijjala's murder, chaos reigned in Kalyana. Thinking that King's soldiers might hurt Neelamma, Basava sent his trusted friend, Hadapada Appanna, with message to Neelamma. Basava wanted her to join him in Kudalasangama so that they can achieve **lingaiyka** at the same time. Neelamma was a truly accomplished **Sharane** in her own right. She knew the special bond that existed between Basava and Kudalasangamadeva. She also knew that God was everywhere. When she received Basava's message, she expressed her feelings thus:

Behold! Behold! Behold! Oh! Linga!
Behold Basava's game.
He has asked me join him in Sangama to achieve Lingaiyka.
Isn't Lord **Sangayya** here?
It is unbecoming of great soul,
To have an attachment to any place.

Neelamma was known for her dedication and devotion to Lingapuja. Although Shivayogi Siddharama has stated that she has written 111,000 vachanas, only 133 have been discovered so far. Next to Mahadeviakka, the Veerashaiva writers have given Neelamma the highest accolades for her spiritual enlightenment and the sublime content and high standard of her vachana compositions.

Non-Violence

Non-violence means not hurting and wounding any and all living beings including animals. This is one of the **tenets** of the Veerashaiva religion. This tenet is based on the belief that all living creatures are created by God and no body has the right to take another life. Mahatma Gandhi used this ancient principle as a 'weapon' to drive away the British from India and thus liberate India from foreign yolk. Non-violence also forms a part of the Jainism and Bhuddhism, two other old religions with their origin in India. Basava has stated:

“No living creatures will I slay, Oh! Lord,
Nor eat for the pleasure of my tongue”

O

O stands for **Om Namahshiviya**.

Om Namahshiviya is known as the Shadakshara Mantra. A mantra is a vocalized hymn used in a special recitation during praying. The Veerashaivas chant either the Panchakshara mantra or the Shadakshara mantra. The Panchakshara mantra (Namahshivaya) and the Shadakshara mantra (Om Namahshivaya) are used by the Veerashaivas in their prayers.

Om Namahshivaya is composed of three parts: Om + Namah + Shivaya. Om is a Primordial sound, first pronounced by Shiva. Namah means salutation. Shivay, of course, means Lord Shiva, the Universal God. Taken together, the mantra says: "Salutations to Lord Shiva". By chanting the mantra the mind becomes clear, pure and sanctified. The repeated singing of the mantra strengthens one's character, eliminates bad thoughts from the mind. This enables one to develop a righteous mental attitude towards God's creation and encourages one to practice good ethics. Thus, an individual is transformed into a righteous individual.

P

P for **Prasad and Prayer**.

Prasad

As explained earlier, the concept of the Asthavarana forms one of the important principles of the religion of the Veerashaivas. Asthavarana means eightfold shield, which protects the faithful from the impurities and sins associated with the mind. And thereby helps the devotees to achieve spiritual progress. Prasad is one of the Asthavarana. It means sacred or consecrated food; food blessed by the Guru and God. As such the Prasad becomes fit for sharing with the fellow members of the community. Thus, it symbolizes fellowship of the congregation.

Prayer

Prayer is an expression of the love and praise of God. A prayer can simply be defined as the acknowledgement of God's blessing and bounty. 'True prayer is union with God.' Contemplative prayers lead to more profound religious experiences. Praying to God often provides a solace to the troubled soul. There are well documented events with scientific evidence to show how faith and prayer provide beneficial effects and feelings to

the sick and suffering people. Many established hospitals set aside Meditation rooms for those who want to pray and meditate.

Q

The word '**Qualification**' used in the religious context means limitation. God has been described to have form and to be without form. He is here and He is there. He is every where. He is **Parabrahman**. He is the creator of the Universe. If we literally accept this last statement, then we marginalize Him. That means we put limitations to God's ability; in other words, we qualify or limit His ability to do the things. All religions proclaim that He is beyond any limitations or qualifications. To by-pass this, the Veerashaiva religion came up with the **Supra-Shakti-Shiva Advait** concept. According to this concept, Lord Shiva does not Himself create the Universe and the things it contains. He invokes **Shakti**, a Goddess, who is an integral part of Him. She comes into being at His behest, creates the Universe according to Shiva's Will and merges back into Him. The beauty of this concept lies in the fact that it exemplifies the Veerashaiva **precept** that man and woman are coequal.

R

R stands for the three **Rs**', namely **Religion, Rites** and **Rituals**. Religions are highly cherished and respected concepts. More often than not, a religion's origin is ascribed to God. "A religion is the art of bringing one's own life up to an acceptable standard of excellence, morally and ethically". Religion bridges that which is visible with which is apparently invisible. 'It opens up the wonderful world of the phenomenological mysteries of the universe without relying on scientific methodologies.' It is more of an intuitive nature. Religion is a historical phenomenon, though it transcends history. The religions of the world ascribe their origin and appeal in their differing meanings and messages with the universal aim of providing salvation and solace to human beings. Religion is an expression of one's belief and reverence for the superhuman power recognized as the Creator of the universe.

Religious Rites

Religious Rites and **Rituals** occupy a prominent place in a religion and play a prominent part in its practice and popularization.

Religious rites form a part and parcel of a religion. Rites, thus, are a must. Veerashaivism has its own share of religious rites. The following are important

Veerashaiva religious rites: (1) *lingadharana* (wearing of the linga), (2) *lingadiksha*, (3) isthalinga worship, (4) *namakarana* (christening or naming ceremony), (5) marriage and (6) *lingaiyka* (death). Lingadharana means wearing of the linga. The family priest gives the linga to the baby before its birth (usually during the eighth month of pregnancy) or after the baby is born. It is note worthy that the baby, while in the mother's womb, can receive the linga through its mother. This linga is worn until the child is 10 ~ 12 years old, at which time the child is considered fit to receive religious instructions and the isthalinga from a religiously ordained Guru.

The worship of the isthalinga is the most fundamental rite of the Veerashaiva religion. The isthalinga issued by the Guru at the time of the *diksha* (investiture) ceremony, should always be worn on the person for the rest of her/his life. The lingadiksha is a simple but poignant ceremony conducted at the home of the child or in a *matha*. During this ceremony the Guru blesses the aspirant, gives him/her the isthalinga and whispers in her/his ears the *Shadkshara mantra*. The mantra should be recited daily_during the worship of the isthalinga; The isthalinga is an important part of an individual's religious life. It stays with the person from his/her cradle to his/her grave. The same lingadiksha is performed whether the child is a male or a female. This again symbolizes the fact that men and women are equal in the eyes of Shiva and the society.

Religious Rituals

The rituals appear to form a somewhat superfluous part of the practice of a religion. Yet, they are important to the faithful. They are psychologically inspiring, motivating and symbolic manifestations. Rituals are commonly and popularly practiced during the community fellowship and worship. Often times, the rituals directly lead to superstitious beliefs and practices. As such, the practice of religious rituals is looked down upon by the sophisticated people.

S

The letter **S** in the Veerashaiva religion stands for five important things: **Shatsthala**, **Shiva**, **Shivayoga**, **Shunya** and **Swamiji**.

Sthatsthala

The **Sthatsthala** Path occupies a premier place in the Veerashaiva religion. The word Sthatsthala is composed of two parts: **shat** meaning six and **sthala** meaning step. Taken as a whole the word suggests a six step process to achieve salvation in life; that is the

union of the **anga** (body) with the **linga** (God). This path was expounded and systematized by Channabasava, who was regarded and respected as an expert on Sthatsthala Path. In our religion, Sthala also means God..

The six steps of the Sthatsthala Path are: (1) Bhaktasthala, (2) Maheshsthala, (3) Prasadisthala, (4) Pranalingisthala, (5) Sharanasthala and (6) Aiykasthala. The first step implies the understanding the true meaning of Guru, Linga and Jangama, while the second step involves the actual practice. The third step suggests that all things in this world are gifts from God and have to be returned to Him through Jangama. The practice of the fourth step leads to identity of the Jangama with the Linga. The fifth step enables the individual to experience God's presence within herself/himself. The practice of final step leads the individual soul to its cherished goal of the union with the Supreme Soul.

Shiva

Lord Shiva is worshipped as the Creator of this Universe by the faithful. Shiva is the Supreme Consciousness. He has created the humans in His image. He is the one who creates, protects and destroys. Shaivites, as the name suggests are the worshippers of Lord Shiva and the religion of the Shaiites is known Shaivism. Veerashaivism, for all practical purposes, is an off-shoot of Shaivism. Shaivism has existed in India longer than any other religion. The worship of the sthavarlinga goes back to more than 5000 years. This has been confirmed by the results of the archeological excavations of the sites of the Indus valley Civilization in the early 1920s by the British. However, it must say that the Veerashaivas worship Shiva in the form of their Isthalinga, which they carry on their person.

Shivayoga

The word 'yoga' means to join; in the present context it means the union of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul. What we know today about the Yoga is due Rishi Patanjali. It is he who popularized the practice of yoga, which tames and trains body, mind and soul.

The 12th Century Veerashaiva saints have frequently referred to Shivayoga in their vachanas. The Veerashaiva sharanas and authors have described Shivayoga as the union of the anga (body) with the Linga (Shiva) through chitta-shakti. This generation of the cosmic energy requires the stopping of the bodily movements and mental aberrations and concentration of mind, body and vision on the Isthalinga held in the left

palm during the worship. 'Prabhulinga Lile' states that the control of one's vision leads to the control of both the mind and the respiration system. The noblest aim of the Shivayoga is to join the individual soul with the Universal Soul. This union with Shiva requires the breaking of bondage, which in turn requires purity from both within and without. Hence to the Veerashaivas, Shivayoga means the worship of the Linga through contemplation and knowledge. Six different organs/faculties are involved in the practice of Shovayoga. They are: nose (breathing), tongue (speech), eyes (sight), hands (touch), ears (hearing) and heart (life).

When one gazes intensively at the isthalinga resting in the palm, the mind becomes enlightened. When this happens, a person experiences a sublime transformation through which he/she can feel Shiva's presence in her/his heart. Channabasava describes the procedure of doing the Shivayoga thus:

Sit in the Padmasana posture,
Straighten the backbone,
Strengthen the heart,
And look up-wards,
Direct the sensory organs at one point,
With sun and moon in one place,
Firmly focus the light on the Linga in the palm
And look straight at the mid-rib of the Linga.

Channarasa describes the transformations occurring during the practice of Shivayoga thus:

When eyes are fixed,
On the Instalinga in the palm,
Breathing comes under control,
Thus the mind can be controlled,
With steadfast concentration,
Fetters of time can be conquered
And there won't be a trace of illusion.

Shunya

The concept of **Shunya** in the Veerashaiva religion is vast and uniquely metaphysical in nature. It encompasses every thing in the universe yet it includes nothing. It is every thing yet it is nothing. It is like describing God: He has form and is also without form. In

fact, shunya is another name for God in the Veerashaiva religion. It can be compared to **ZERO**. What is the value of zero if it stands alone: NOTHING. However, when it is put after a certain number, it gains **VALUE**. For example, six zeros in a row **OOOOOO** mean absolutely nothing. However, even if smallest number, say 1, is inserted before the first zero, low and behold the valueless six zeros have been transformed into **ONE MILLION!!**

Swamiji

SWAMIJI in culture means an exalted **Guru**. It is the Swamiji who performs most of the religious rites and who imparts religious knowledge. Hence, the Swamiji occupies a very hierarchical position in the conducting of the religious activities. A swamiji is usually the head a matha, the Veerashaiva monastery (see **Mathas** for additional details on this topic).

T

T stands for Tapa, Tenet and Truth.

Tapa means serious mediataion. This requires total dedication. While one is doing the tapa one forgets one's self and completely immerses praying and praising Lord Shiva.

The word **Tenets** means religious principles. All religions have a code of conduct and a set of rules. The Veerashaiva has its own share of tenets. The basic tenets of the Veerashaiva religion have attracted the heart and soul of the people at large. The reasons for this are: (1) it practices and preaches equality of men and women, (2) it practices and preaches that all men are equal of wok and worship are the birth rights of every person, (4) it practices and preaches the worship of ONE GOD, (5) it practices and preaches that people should not be exploited in the name of religion, (6) it practices and preaches the egalitarian way of life, (7) it practices and preaches that those who are more fortunate should help the less fortunate members of the society, (8) it practices and preaches compassion and kindness and (9) it practices and preaches non-violence, (10) it disclaims and disdains from the philosophy of karma, (11) it does not subscribe to the concept of heaven and hell and (12) it neglects and negates the concept of reincarnation.

Truth

Truth is a virtue. It means conforming to facts. It also means honesty, integrity and sincerity. What Uriling Peddi did when the Guru asked about his profession he told the truth. What George Washington told his father when his father asked about cutting the tree, is the truth. What Mahatma Gandhi did in his formative years when he knew was going to be punished if he told the truth is truth. The life of our 12th Century Sharanas is truth. Speaking the truth begets benefits, while uttering untruth causes suffering.

Is there a difference between,
Between the world of the mortals
And that of the gods?
To speak the truth is the world of gods;
To speak the untruth is the mortal world
Kayaka gives you heavenly bliss;
Bad work makes you miserable,
To this, Lord Kudalasangama,
Thou art my witness!

Another of Basava's vachanas illustrates clearly what truth means:

If you should speak,
Your words should shine,
Like the pearls of a necklace.
If you should speak,
Your words should sparkle like a sapphire.
If you should speak,
Your words should be like a colorless crystal.
If you should speak,
God must applaud your words.
If your words do not match your deeds,
Would Kudalasangam care for you?

U

U in the Veerashaiva religion stands for Sharana Urilinga Peddi. His life story runs like the Cinderella story. He hailed from Kandhara (Maharashtra) and was a disciple of the famous vachana-writer, Urilingadeva. The Urilinga Peddi matha is located in Kalyana

(Karnatak). How Urilinga Peddi, whose earlier name was Peddanna, became a Veerashiva sharana itself reads like an interesting story. His profession was stealing! One day he entered Urilingadeva's matha to steal. At that time Urilingadeva was administering lingadiksha to a disciple. Watching this poignant ceremony totally changed his outlook and life, forced him quit his profession and enabled him to resolve to ask for the lingadiksha. He went to the matha to ask the Swamiji to initiate him into the fold. He very well knew his past. He also knew he couldn't change his past. He knew that he could change his future if he wanted. But, he did not have enough courage to ask the Swamiji for the lingadiksha. So Peddanna decided first to serve the matha in some manner and thus to please the Swamiji before asking for a favor. He began collecting and bringing the firewood to the matha. The Swamiji had noticed Peddanna's service to the matha. One day, the Swamiji asked Peddanna what he wanted. Thinking that this was the opportunity he had been waiting for, he asked the Swamiji to give him the lingadiksha.

It was a customary practice with the Gurus to convince themselves about the worthiness of the disciples before accepting them under their wings. The Swamiji asked Peddanna what was his profession. Having decided to turn over a new leaf, Peddanna told the truth that he was thief by profession. Hearing this, the Swamiji refused to give lingadiksha to a confessed thief. Peddanna was not the one to easily give up his hopes! In spite of the set back, Peddanna kept on serving the matha as before. Every time he got a chance, he began to ask the Swamiji for a lingadiksha. This went on for quite sometime. Peddanna's persisting pestering annoyed the Swamiji. So, he picked up a small stone and threw it at Peddanna saying, "Go, and get it". From that day, what the Swamiji had said became Peddanna's mantra and the stone his isthalinga. His Guru was pleased with Peddanna's steadfastness and dedicated commitment. Peddanna continued worked hard and learned the Sanskrit language and became well versed in the Vedas and the Upanishads. He often quotes them in his vachanas. He became enlightened in due course and changed his name to Urilinga Peddi. Hundreds of his vachanas have been discovered.

V

The letter **V** stands for **Vachana**, **Veerashaiva** and **Veerashaivism**.

Vachana

The Shivagamas and the **Vachana** literature constitute the scriptures of the Lingayats. The Shivagamas are thousands of years old. They have served the religious text for the Shaivites – the worshippers of Lord Shiva. It has been stated that Shivagamas contain

most of what the **Vedas** have described. The main difference lies on the emphasis they put on different aspects of the religious practice. However, the Vachanas form the heart and soul of **Veerashaivism**. What is a Vachana? A vachana is a free style poetry written in the Kannada language. What the **Sharanas** experienced in their life, they sang the summary of their experience in the form of a vachana, a free style verse. Thus the vachanas took shape on the anvil of every day life. The writers of these vachanas came from all walks of life. Thus, the truth expounded in the vachanas “has the power of awaking an intense moral feeling”. They talk about civil, domestic, social and spiritual aspects and teach us what is right and what is wrong. They enlighten us on sublime way of living and achieving salvation.

Veerashaiva is a person who practices the principles of the Veerashaiva religion. A Veerashaiva is also known as a Lingayat, the latter terms the wearer of the linga on her/his body. The primary tenets of the principles of our religion have been described under **Tenet**.

Veerashaivism is the religion practiced by the Veerashaiva people. There are over 25 million people practicing this religion in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu states of India. A few thousand are also scattered over in Europe, Australia and North America.

W

W is for **Worship**. Worship means an expression of reverent love and allegiance to God. Worship also expresses devotion and submission to God’s Will. During the worship, one prays to one’s God. Worship without devotion and love, is fruitless and meaningless. It is like tasting the painted sugar cane, sweet less and tasteless.

X

X is as in **EXperience**. It means that one has to learn by doing, for experience is the best teacher. In the present context, it suggests that an individual can experience God’s presence within herself/himself through meditation, worship, **kayaka** and **dasoha**..

Y

Y stands for **Yoga**. Yoga is a disciplined technique of taming and training body, mind and soul. The practice of Yoga, which dates back to thousands of years, has its origin in India. The rigorous and steadfast practice of yoga makes the body supple, renders the

mind nimble and makes the soul pure by removing its impurities. It has been sated that the person practicing yoga acquires special powers. It is Sage Patanjali who first wrote a treatise on the Principles of Yoga, though the yoga practice was in vogue before his time. **Shivayoga** is a form of yoga.

Z

Z is for **Zero** or **Shunya**. Zero literally means Nil. It is valueless! Zero, religious context, can be considered to be synonymous with Shunya. In the Veerasahiva metaphysical context, Shunya has a sublime meaning. It means God. It encompasses every thing. Yet, it is also valueless. The concept is somewhat difficult to visualize and understand.

Take, for example, the number zero [0] itself. By itself, it has no value. Stack six zeros in a line as shown, **000000**, does this change the value of zero? Certainly, not. But, just write I (one) before the first zero to make the sequence **1000000**! Lo and behold, the valueless sequence of six zeros has blossomed into ONE MILLION!! This means zero has a value!!!

Another meaning of **Z**, asks us to **zero in on (concentrate)** Lord Shiva when we are praying and meditating.