

## Rational Introduction of Veerashaivism

### B. Virupakshappa

Not many religions of the world lend themselves to scientific approaches and generalizations. The reason is obvious, for religion and science do not go hand in hand, let alone seeing eye to eye. One speaks of the stellar universe, the other addresses the mundane world; one thinks of the Supreme Reality, the other has on its mind the things that appeal and are accessible to rationally verifiable observations. The one makes pure postulations based on trust and faith, while the other looks for generalizations based on experimental facts. Despite the above rhetoric, one finds commonalities between Science and Veerashaivism; in that, the scientific approach can be brought to bear on the economical, metaphysical, social, and spiritual aspects of Veerashaivism. To quote an instance, Basava speaks of the lunar gravitational force that creates ocean tides in one of his vachanas. Secondly, Basava's principle of Kayaka and Dasoha have not only societal but also economic consequences for the society. Shunya (the Void) the term that the 12th Century sharanas introduced in our scriptures has a scientific connotation. The astronomical scientists have presented evidence of the existence of the 'black-holes' in space. This term suggests "void spaces" or celestial bodies with the intense gravitational field, which are said to 'suck in' everything that

comes within the purview of their field of force.

**Concept of God:** In the metaphysical and philosophical fields, the very concept of God is based on scientific conception and perception. Veerashaivism does not believe, does not practice, and does not preach idol worship. It advocates monotheism. It believes in Nirankar Parabrahman (Formless Supreme Reality), which is variously termed as Bayalu or Shunya (Void) or Parashiva. Another name for this is Linga, from which everything emanates and finally merges into it. The dictum, 'Linga Madhye Jagat Sarvam' describes this more eloquently. It is 'Sat' (existence), 'Chit' (consciousness), 'Ananda' (bliss), 'Nitya' (eternal), and 'Paripurna' (perfect). By definition, our stellar sun is a star, around which nine planets are orbiting. Our mother earth is 93 million miles away from the sun. The farthest planet, Pluto, is 3670 million miles away from the sun. This is the vastness of our solar system alone. Our solar system is a part of the Milky Way, whose wingspan from one end to another is one hundred thousand light-years wide. One light-year is equivalent to the distance traveled by light at a velocity of 186,000 miles per second per year! This comes to about 600,000 million miles!! Our galaxy has 250,000 million stars just

like our sun!!! Galaxy means groups of stars.

Approximately, there are ten billion such galaxies in this universe. The farthest galaxy, which can be seen with the aid of the telescope, is 13 billion miles away from us. According to the science of astronomy, this is what we know of the universe for the present time. Thanks to the Hubble telescope that is orbiting in Space, our universe seems to expand now and then. By this, it is meant that new stars are being discovered now and then with the aid of this telescope in the stratospheric space. What exists beyond the reach of the Hubble telescope is anybody's guess! The void in the Space is called Shunya. In the Lingayat philosophy, it is known as Linga. According to science, the shunya emerges as a dynamic reservoir of infinite energy out of which the universe emerged and evolved. Veerashaiva philosophy considers void to have been formed from the Sat-Chit-Ananda state of Shiva through the mediation Shakti. Such an infinite, powerful universe comes to the devotee's palm in the form of a Linga. Basava has beautifully expressed this:

*Thy wideness is the wideness of the world,  
The wideness of the firmament,  
Aye, wider still.  
Thy feet go deeper than the underworld,  
Aye, deeper still.  
Thy crown is higher than Brahma's egg,  
Aye, higher still,*

*Thou, the Linga, who art imperceptible,  
Beyond comprehension and beyond comparison*

*Didst shrink to the dimensions of a speck  
When coming to my palm,  
Oh! Kudala Sangama!*

In brief, the Ishtalinga worn by the Lingayats on their body is a symbol of the Supreme Reality. When the Lingayats worship the Linga by placing it in their palm, they worship a scientifically existent vibrant stellar universe.

**Spiritual Practice:** Man has emerged out of the universe and the universe has emerged out of Parashiva or the Supreme Reality or the Shunya or the Void. Therefore the divine consciousness of Parashiva is embedded in man more prominently in the Brahmarandhra (pineal gland) which is located in the head. The Guru who is the spiritual incarnate extracts this consciousness from the head by hastamastaka samyoga (touching the disciple's head) by his hand, incorporates it into the ishtalinga, and gives him to worship without the mediation of the priest. One is supposed to constantly wear the ishtalinga on the body and not to be separated from it. The spiritual practice begins with the worship of the ishtalinga under the guidance of a Guru or a Jangama.

Ishtalinga has two parts. The inner part resembles the Linga commonly seen in Shaiva temples, which is known as the Sthavar Linga, static or immobile Linga, which denotes the

soul, universe, and Parashiva. Others, for example, Professor Sakhare, think that the inner part represents a Sharana in the Shivayoga posture. The outer part, called kanthe, is made of ash, camphor, and cashew nut oil suitably treated and proportionately mixed to furnish a black shiny surface, which under constant gazing enables the mind to concentrate.

Ishtalinga is worshipped by holding it on the left palm via dristivoga or Shivayoga, which involves constant gazing while repeating Shiva's name or Shadakshari mantra. This permits a step-wise release of divine energy until the worshipper attains the final stage, whereupon he/she achieves consciousness and infinite energy. This takes him/her to the final destination, namely himself/herself becoming Parashiva. This occurs via Shatsthala or six stages.

The Brahmarandhra (pineal gland) is the seat of cosmic consciousness. It is the Bhavalinga. The soul where the Supreme Reality resides as divine energy is also the center of the life process and is known as pranalinga. Both of these are involved in spiritual practice according to the tenets of Veerashaivism. Thus, the devotee's body itself becomes the temple and hence a Lingayat need not go to the temple to worship God. Basava says:

ಉಳ್ಳವರು ಶಿವಾಲಯ ಮಾಡುವರು ನಾನೇನ  
ಮಾಡಲಿ ಬಡವನಯ್ಯ,

ಎನ್ನ ಕಾಲೇ ಕಂಬ ದೇಹವೇ ದೇಗುಲ ಶಿರವೇ ಹೊನ್ನ  
ಕಳಶವಯ್ಯ, ಕೂಡಲಸಂಗಮದೇವ ಕೇಳಯ್ಯ  
ಸ್ಥಾವರತ್ಯಳಿಪುಂಟು ಜನ್ಮಮಕಲಿವಿಲ್ಲ

\* Here the word Jangama serves dual meanings: Firstly, since it is preceded by the word 'static' (immobile or fixed), jangama means movable or non-static. Secondly, the idol in the temple is made of stone, it is subject to decay and the word 'Jangama' implies a Sharana who according to the Lingayat tenet represents Shiva, the Supreme Reality. As such a Jangama is regarded as an eternal entity. Thus the procedure of the Ishtalinga worship is not based on a mere figment of imagination or subject to superstition.

**Aids of Worship:** Vibhuti, Rudrakshi, and Mantra are the aids of worship. The Vibhuti is a white solid substance scientifically prepared from special ash. It is regarded as Parashiva's divine light and knowledge. It is applied to the linga as well as to different parts of the body during worship. It purifies the body, mind, and soul. Since it is antiseptic and antibacterial, it is supposed to exhibit healing and medicinal properties. When it is smeared all over the body, it is called Vibhuti snana (Vibhuti bath) and in this state, it is said to protect the body from the effects of the cold. People living in the cold Himalayan regions use it in this manner to afford some protection against the elements of nature.

Rudrakshi means a bead, which is supposed to represent Shiva's inner divine vision. Rudra means Shiva and Akshi mean eye. Wearing rudrakshi is said to tone mind and body. The yogis have used it for centuries and have worn it on different parts of the body. It is the dried fruit of a tree grown in the northern regions of India, namely Kashmir and Himalayan regions. It is said to possess and exhibit medicinal properties. In that, it is described to cure high blood pressure, cough, cold, indigestion, etc. Thus it helps restore one's health, both mental and physical.

The mantra used in the prayers is called the "Shadakshari mantra" since it has six letters. The mantra is: Om! Namashivaya" and means, "Oh! Shiva, I bow to you." It describes Shiva in the form of words. Regular chanting of the mantra helps develop the power of concentration and the release of divine energy. The energy emanating from its rhythmic sound influences the body, mind, and soul and calms and soothes both the head and heart. It paves the path of Spiritual progress and thus, the aids of worship used by the Lingayats have a scientific basis and benefits.

**Fruits of Worship:** Padodaka and Prasad are the fruits of worship in Veerashaivism. Guru and Jangama are supposed to be spiritual incarnate. When they visit the disciple's abodes or during the worship when the disciples are supposed to wash the feet of the Guru or Jangama with water. This water is considered to be

sacred. Some devotees sprinkle it on their body, some even put it on their linga. The reasoning behind this is that the energy stored in the Brahmarandhra (pineal gland) passes through the body via the connective nerves and is released through the big toe. This has been described in the Veerashaiva literature. Even washing the Linga with water is supposed to release the spiritual energy stored in the Linga.

Therefore after the Lingabhishekha (bathing of linga with water), the devotee sprinkles this water on their body. Washing the feet of the person has religious overtones even in Christianity, Jesus Christ is said to have washed the feet of one of the members of his inner circle of the follower with him the night before his crucifixion.

**Prasad:** The food before it is offered to Guru, Jangama, or Linga is considered as padartha (Ordinary food). But, when it is first offered to any one of the three entities, Namely – Guru, Jangama, and linga, it becomes transformed into Prasad (consecrated food), meaning it has been blessed by the Holiest of the Holy and thus it has inherited their Spiritual energy by their mere touch or Presence of the Linga. Guru, Linga, Jangama, Padodaka, Prasada, Vibhuti, Rudrakshi, and Mantra are called the Ashtavarnas (eight shields or stages), the Lingayats usually use in the worship of their ishtalinga and their spiritual quest.

**Social Field:** A logical, rational, and systematic approach to a problem, by definition, can be considered as scientific thinking. Based on this observation, we can see a scientific approach in social and economic fields as well. In Veerashaivism, divinity is considered as an equalizing factor in establishing social equality and justice. Our ancestors viewed the human body as made up of seven entities such as blood bones flesh, etc. Scientifically, it is composed of dozen or so elements such as hydrogen carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, calcium, iron, sulfur, etc. Whether a person is high born or low born, male or female, rich or poor, educate or uneducated all have similar basic needs under of the body. Neither the castes we are born in nor our social status distinguishes us as individuals. The determinant factor is the divinity in each of us and not our bank balance. It is only our actions that distinguish us as righteous or unrighteous souls. Equality becomes the norm and the basic common denominator when we are all blessed by divine grace. Basava's Vachana provides a more rational explanation for the above observation:

*Unless the flow of blood appears,  
There is no harbourage.  
Here in the embryo may dwell,  
The function of the seed remains the same.  
Greed, lust, anger, and joy,  
All other passions are the same.  
Whatever one reads or hears, what fruit?*

*Is there a rule or law to judge one's caste?*

*"The embryo needs all seven entities to survive;*

*It is the same birth out of the same womb; With the same self and the soul:  
What, then, the use of the caste?*

*One is a blacksmith if one beats the hot iron;*

*A washerman if one washes the clothes;*

*A weaver if one lays the wrap;*

*A Brahmin if one reads the Vedas;*

*Has anyone in the world been delivered through the ear?*

*Therefore, Oh! Lord Kudala Sangama,*

*The high born is the one who knows,*

*The nature of the Eternal Reality.*

**Economics:** In the field of economics, Basava's concept of kayaka establishes equality. A sense of spirituality is associated with the work ethics of kayaka. It means honest labor with a sense of divinity and then something more. That is why our sharanas said when one is engaged in one's kayaka, one need not worry about worshipping, for through dasoha one would be pleasing and worshipping one's God. This social equality is not Karl Marx's socialism or Lenin's communism. Neither has a sense of divinity associated with it. That is why both of them \_failed. Thus, the Veerashaiva concept of Kayaka and Dasoha permits one to see one's divinity in one's Self.