

Basava's Many Splendored Life Vis-à-vis Bhagavad Gita, Buddha and Christ

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There are some common denominators that drove me to dwell deep and dig into the lives and living and principles and preaching practices of three great souls, namely **Basava, Buddha and Christ**, that have graced this planet of ours. The most outstanding common feature of these souls is the fact they were fundamentally **Rebels of the First Order**. Basava was born a **Brahmin**, the highest caste of the Hindu religion, Buddha or **Siddhartha Gautum** was born to **Kshtriya** parents, the second highest caste of the Hindu religion and Jesus Christ was born to Jewish parents. The three of them started out to fathom and comprehend the age-old questions that the world's great souls have tried to answer; namely, "**Who am I?; Where did I come from?; Where am I bound to?; What is the mystery and meaning of my life? How can I achieve Liberation or Nirvana or salvation or Lingaiyka?**", etc. Their quests led them to propound thoughts and pronouncements that proclaimed people-oriented precepts and philosophical practices and ways of life that ran contrary to the religions of their parents. Their actions and progressive thoughts were so far ahead of the times of their contemporaries that they were being called and considered as rebels by the statuesque-minded folks of their époques.

The second common denominator that binds the three souls is that they were all the products of the socio-economic environment they were born into; meaning the then existing socio-economic conditions carved out their paths. Basava revolted against the exploitation of the down-trodden poor people in the name of religion and caste based social order of the day, Buddha fought against suffering, sorrow and pain and exploitation of the poor; while Christ rebelled against tyrannical oppression and exploitation of the poor and the meek by the powerful and ruthless rulers, namely the Jewish Kings and the Roman rulers. Both Basava and Buddha were born with a silver spoon in their mouths, while Jesus was born with a wooden spoon, meaning his father Joseph was a poor carpenter, who had trouble paying for his living and his taxes to the rulers. Yet, all the three possessed an inexhaustible treasure trove of compassion and kindness towards the poor and hungry folks. Their childhood days were totally different from each other's. While Basava went to **Kudal Sangam** to study religion, Brahmin teachers came to the royal palace to teach religion to Siddhartha (Buddha); while nobody knows who taught religion to Jesus Christ. His life is cloaked and shrouded in mystery. It is said that his parents took him to Egypt before he was a child to protect him from the clutches of the murderous King, then brought him back to Israel for a short time, and then he disappeared again when he was 13, only to reappear when he was 30 years old

and to give sermons whenever he was not watched by the Roman soldiers and wherever he could find listeners. Thus, he appears to be a self-taught and self-made person.

All the three, Basava, Buddha and Jesus were firm believers of the equality, fraternity and brotherhood of men and deplored discrimination based on the accident of birth in the high or low caste or rich or poor families. Of the three it was only Basava, who preached and practiced equality of gender. While Buddhism and Christianity keep mum on the role of *Shakti* (energy) in our ever expanding universe, Veerashaiva religion speaks eloquently on the importance and role of energy in its *Shaktivishisthadvaita* (supra-energy non-dualism) principle in our ever expanding universe (1). Buddha's story captures our mind for the simple reason, that he sacrificed his luxurious palatial life loaded with pomp and pleasure of the flesh that money could buy, to understand and transcend suffering and sorrow and the cycle of birth and re-birth. He was forced to lead in his formative years a regimented, cocooned life within the four walls of the palace, always under the watchful eyes of his single-minded father, who wanted his son nothing but a great King! Buddha from his childhood days was a firm believer in **Karma** and **Rebirth**, the basic tenets of the Hindu religion. In Buddhism, the concept of Karma – **moral retribution** - seems to have been wrongly connected to soul or supreme consciousness and the karmic fruits are said to transcend from one life to the next life via an individual's reincarnation. Buddhism thinks that like everything else in the world, the soul is impermanent and hence constantly changing. In fact, the Buddhist concept of karma was used to classify the spiritual seekers into various categories and considered spiritual inquiry as wasted opportunity.

Speaking of Buddha, it is mentioned that there were many skeptical 19th Century Western writers, who could not smell a rose even though it was on the tip of their noses, had the audacity to question the historical existence of Buddha (2). Buddha was a firm believer of the **Manu code** that denied women the initiation into twice-born status and as such they were neither to hear nor permitted to read the Vedas. Buddha considered women to be ritually impure, particularly during the menstruation period and after they had child birth(s). He regarded women unfit for **Nirvana** and was reluctant to let women study and preach religion. Buddha seems to have had problem in transcending the gender considerations. After first resisting, until he was persuaded to change his opinion of women at the urging of his aunt **Mahaprajapati**, who had raised him since he was a few days old baby and at the instance of one of his favorite disciples, **Ananda**. He seems to have softened his opposition and granted symbolic subsidiary roles to women. Perhaps, his mind was changed because it was a woman called **Sujata**, who fed him when he was almost on a deathbed during his austerities and thus helped him to live to achieve his life's cherished goal, the *Nirvana*. For a person, who believed implicitly in Karma, it is hard to understand why Buddha

several times dared the angel of death to take his life himself to death; for the angel of death could not dare to touch an individual until her/his time had come. Buddha did not believe in *Atma* (soul) and hence in God (3). Buddha though had seen throughout his childhood and adult life the leaves on the tree getting greener and then going red, the turn yellow before withering off, little did he realize that suffering, sorrow, aging and dying are natural consequences of life. Perhaps his belief in the theory of rebirth blinded him so that he failed to realize the Nature's dictum. Early Buddhism seems to have had trouble in dissociating the "ego" (self) from soul. **Buddha did not believe in the value and virtue of *kayaka*; in that he seems to suggest that there is no need to earn once livelihood to live.**

Buddha's life and philosophy are intimately linked. His philosophy reflects his life. He seems to equate himself to Nirvana when he says to his disciples: "**He, who sees me, sees the *Dharma*, he who sees the *Dharma*, sees me**". Buddhism regards the soul, like God, "as a projection of desire driven human mind." This inference suggests that Buddhism had trouble distinguishing between various levels of the human mind and the sublimely spiritual soul, which is almost free from the shadow of the mind. In negating the presence of *atma* (soul) and God and seeking the nirvana, Buddha seems to be engaging in semantics, for all he did was to replace soul (God) with nirvana with similar attributes. To one who has seen her/his *atma* (God), there is no returning either to her/his Karma or to the endless cycle of birth and death; the same situation that the Buddha has claimed after he achieved his self-enlightenment. In the firmament of the founders of religions of the world, it must be said to the credit of Buddha, and Basava that they stand alone as twin-stars, in not invoking divine intervention or inspiration or revelation. Whatever they pronounced as their spiritual message sprang out of their personal knowledge, experience and spiritual insight.

Buddha had no use for God, while Basava and Christ implicitly and faithfully accepted and believed in God. Buddha's Noble Eight Fold Truths, considered as the path that leads to Nirvana, is composed of (1) right view, (2) right thought, (3) right effort, (4) right speech, (5) right action, (6) right livelihood, (7) right mindedness and (8) right concentration can be conveniently compared with either of the following two *vachanas*:

"If you should speak, your speech should sparkle like the pristine pearls,
If you should speak, your speech should sparkle like a sapphire,
If you should speak, your speech should shine like a crystal,
If you should speak, your speech should please the Lord,
If you do not walk your talk; how are you going to please Lord Kudal Sangama."
"Be careful in your talk and walk,

Be always engrossed in the Linga
A person with such qualities
Is a pristinely true *sharana*, **Akhandeshvara**.

Thus, Basava and Buddha have fundamental differences on at least 5 aspects; namely the philosophy of **Atma**, **Karma**, **Kayaka** and Rebirth and the status of women. Basava discards and disdains form the consideration of Karma and Rebirth. He regards the **atma** as a pristinely pure space ('**sthala**'), where one's supreme consciousness resides, and which mingles with Lord Shiva after the **Lingaiyka**. Basava told us that the soul in men and women is neither male nor female and that women and men are equal in life and in the eyes of Lord Shiva; meaning men and women are the two wheels of the chariot of life runs and that we cannot have one without the other for a smoother ride in life (5a).

Throughout his long-life Buddha seems to have been completely concerned and haunted by misery and its cause and effects rather than treating these aspects as part of the process of living, aging and dying. He developed his concept the Eight-Fold Truth to get rid of the root of misery. Basava showed by his example that one can achieve salvation – nirvana – leading and facing the trials and tribulations of a family life, through detachment, **dasoha** and **kayaka** and practicing the Veerashaiva principle of **panchachara**, namely; *Lingachara*, *Sadachara*, *Shivachara*, *Bratyachara* and *Gana chara* (4). **Buddha was more of a rationalist than a pragmatist; while Basava was more of a pragmatist than a rationalist. "Basava's words teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering and the most comfortable way of dying."** (5b)

Basava and Bhagavad Gita

The **Bhagavad Gita** has been recognized and revered both in the East and the West as the World's second longest meta-physical, pristinely poignant poetical text dealing with this life and the next. It forms the **Bhishmaparva** part of the great epic, **Mahabharat** and is composed of 18 chapters (6). It has been described as the mini-**Upanishad** and probably dates back 2500 to 1500 years B.C. What has the Bhagavad Gita in common with Basava, who lived in the 12th Century AD? Well, that is a legitimate question. Before answering this question, I have a disclaimer. I do not claim to have studied the Bhagavad Gita per se, meaning in Sanskrit. I have, however, read its English translation and commentaries on it. The only thing I remember from the Sanskrit version is one verse that has been burnt into my memory since I was a fourth grader in the Lamington High School, Hubli and that Krishna admonishes and advises Arjuna, who stood frozen, baffled and bewildered on the battlefield of **Kurukshetra**. **Krishna** says, "Forget **Dharma** and take refuge in me alone". Let us compare this view to what Basava said to his **Isthadeva (God)**:

“Thou art my father, Thou art my mother, Thou art my kith, Thou art my kin, there is none other than Thou for me, Lord Kudal Sangama Deva –” While the Gita extols the value and virtue of the Yajna and idol worship, Basava condemns them in the strongest possible manner. The Gita is comprised of 18 chapters; let us see what these 18 chapters say and how Basava matched them with his deeds. Basava walked Krishna’s talk to Arjuna, who was confronting his kith and kin as his enemies on the battlefield of **Kurukshetra**.

Basava and Christ

Even after more than two millennia, Jesus still remains an enigma, a mystery even to the most faithful ones, for his birth date is unrecorded, his birth place unknown, his whereabouts until he was 6 years old are not known and then he vanished from the scene from age of 13 to 29 years. (7) There is no record of his existence, neither are there any of his writings and neither is there any description of his physical appearance (8).

The Bhagavad Gita, the world’s second longest poem and a part of Mahabharata narrated in the Bhishmaparva, is composed of 18 Chapters and deals with various aspects of LIFE . How Basava logically and rationally and realistically approached these 18 aspects of Life as enunciated by the Gita in his own life can be gauged by the following (The author does not lay claim to the summary sentences on the left side*. The Gita means many things to many people.)	
1. Life is a Challenge*.	Basava Accepted It.
2. Life is a Gift.	Basava Shared It.
3. Life is an Adventure.	Basava Dared It.
4. Life is a Sorrow.	Basava Overcame it
5. Life is a Tragedy.	Basava transformed It.
6. Life is a Duty.	Basava Performed It.
7. Life is a Game.	Basava Played It.
8. Life is a Mystery.	Basava Fathomed It.
9. Life is a Song.	Basava Sang Vachanas.
10. Life is an Opportunity.	Basava Grabbed It.
11. Life is a Journey.	Basava Traveled It.
12. Life is a Promise.	Basava Kept It.
13. Life is a Beauty.	Basava Dedicated to Linga

14.	Life is a Spirit.	Basava Transcended It.
15.	Life is a Love.	Basava dished it as Dasoha.
16.	Life is a Struggle.	Basava Conquered It.
17.	Life is a Puzzle.	Basava Solved It.
18.	Life is a Goal.	Basava Accomplished It.

The end of the 18th Century witnessed an explosion of research by scholars to fathom the mysteries surrounding Jesus (9). The four gospels, which serve as the source of information on or about Jesus and his message were distributed anonymously and were not written until after the 1st Century and contain several inconsistencies and contradictions on several key points. Nobody knows when the original gospels were written and who wrote them. During the time the early churches came to be established, gospels' origin was attributed to the then well known "Jewish Christians", who later came to be known as the Christian sect (10a). "A thread of hatred runs through the New Testament" (10b), the same bias against the Jews comes through loud and clear in the gospels of Mathew and John. It was the aging apostle John who decided to paint the philosophical portrait of Jesus. The earliest copies of the gospels date back to the 4th Century and probably represent the edited versions.

The Old Testament, the Jewish scripture, says around 12 centuries BC Moses came down from the mountain and brought the tablets containing the Ten Commandments. Basava, a versatile Sanskrit scholar, who lived during the 12th Century AD, lived among the people he served and pronounced the Seven Commandments: **"Steal not, kill not, speak not the untruth, be not angry, show not contempt for others, don't showcase your pride, don't speak ill of others, this is how you can be pure from within and without and you can please Lord Kudal sangam"**(4, 5a).

The Bible, the most revered and the most widely read religious book in the world, has no single message, its early editors fixed the canons, with the first chapter being more mythological than factual. It is a widely accepted fact that the early Biblical authors have ascribed whatever meaning(s) that suited their personal opinions and biased thinking with total disregard to history and facts. The same is true of almost of all the religions of the world.

Jesus was baptized around 20 AD by his cousin, John, the Baptizer, who was later murdered by the Jewish King. This suggests that Christianity existed in some form before Jesus came on the

scene. Jesus, who began preaching when he was 30, was a special, self-trained and self-taught individual, who possessed and exhibited extraordinary healing and oratorical gifts, although until after of his death around 30 AD, very few of his disciples thought he was a messiah. Jesus seems to have cured blindness, made the disabled to jump and to walk, the lepers to shed off leprosy. With these miracles and his genteel words, he attracted hundreds of people to listen to his soothing pronouncements and sermons. That he was a powerful, mesmerizing speaker is borne out by the fact that he convinced his trusted 12 followers, who lived like orthodox Jews called the Pharisees and practiced the Torah to the word, to disown him the night before he was arrested by the Roman army. Although it was Jesus himself who proclaimed him-self to be the Son of God, in fact it was Peter Simon, who first added the Greek word Christ, meaning messiah, after Jesus to make it Jesus Christ. There is no doubt that Jesus touched his followers' hearts with his deeds and words and compassion and kindness. He advocated passive resistance instead of active revolt against the ruthless and tyrannical Jewish King and Roman occupiers of Israel. Knowing the people to be meek, poor and powerless, he changed the tenets of the Old Testament (Torah) from "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", to "I say to you if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek and if anyone wants to sue you, and take your coat, give your cloak as well and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone, who begs from you, do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. ----- Not to make any future plans and not to save any money. Do not store-up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume ----- store up for your selves the treasures in heaven". (11) "Therefore, I tell you, not to worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink, or what about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and body, more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap, ----- and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (12). He also advised, "Love thy enemies. And pray for those who persecute you, for you may be the children of your father in heaven. Do not resist the evil doer" in the New Testament (13).

Jesus appears not to have put a greater emphasis on earning one's own livelihood or *kayaka*, to use Basavas' terminology. In other words, he condoned and encouraged living on others' charity and sympathy saying that the God who has created the humans will feed them. Thus, he seems to put the responsibility of feeding and living on God. This should not be surprising, for he did not own any thing, slept wherever he could find a place and lived on whatever others gave him. In his most memorable sermon, called the **Sermon on the Mount**, he pronounced (14):

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven, Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted, Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children

of God, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for there is the kingdom of heaven.”

Thus, Jesus advised his listeners to voluntarily live in poverty, to submit to brutal aggression without protestation, to pay taxes to the occupiers as well as to the tyrant king of Israel, not to fight and rebel against the oppressors and to treat others as they themselves wanted to be treated by others. Unlike the Jews of the Old Testament, Christians think that before God created the heaven and the earth, He existed as a “word” and that this word became the “flesh” and lived among humans. (11) There is a dichotomy in Christian theology; ‘God created man in His own image.’ and ‘Men are born in sin.’ The question then is: If God created the man, then how could he be born in sin? Christianity claims that after death a person’s soul hangs and wanders around until the Day of Judgment, when God judges the deeds of all human beings!

Jesus’ death raises several questions. When did Jesus realize the purpose of his life? When did he realize that he was not going to accomplish the goals and objectives he had set for himself? What did he decide to do when he got frustrated about the outcomes of his life’s goals and objectives?

Jesus realized early in his campaign that there was very little he could do; very little to help ameliorate his contemporaries’ situation, for they were deeply mired in bondage, ignorance, misery and suffering and the forces he was fighting were too powerful to overcome. He became totally frustrated and came to the conclusion that sacrificing his life was the only way to awaken the sleeping Israelites. That is when Jesus told his trusted followers at the last supper when he broke bread and shared wine, that they were drinking his blood when they drank the wine. Jesus was not the first martyr in the name of the religion. Some 1500 years before Christ, the Persian prophet, Zoroaster (Zoroastrian) was murdered by the folks who vehemently opposed his new religious ideology, philosophy and preaching.

It is so strange and unfathomable that even after two millennia, the Christian religion that was inspired by Jesus, namely Catholicism, refuses to permit women to teach and preach their religion in a church. This means that the Catholic women are not equal to their men in their ability to preach religion; the privilege and right that the Veerashaiva women folks have been enjoying since the days of the *Anubhavamantapa* in the 12th Century.

Basava stood as the epitome and essence of Lord Shiva and wanted the human beings to be God-like, for he represented the best among the best, the noblest among the noblest, the greatest among the greatest, the humblest among the humblest, the most pious among the most pious, the most

honest among the honest and the most compassionate among the compassionate (**5a**). Due to the negligence on the part of the followers, who have stayed away, strayed away and swayed away, the universal gospel of Basava appears to be gathering dust and rust. Basava's message is more relevant than ever to stop the carnage that is being wrought in the name of religion and hatred that is burning us both from within and without. The mistrust that has crept is transforming friends into enemies and the mindless cruelty meted out to the meekest in the name of God are calling for the revival of the spiritual and philosophical way of life that our 12th Century saint, Basava, practiced. He walked the talk while others talked and talked and are still talking and talking.

The sharanas seeking the supreme **goal** of the *aikya* of their spirit (soul) with the Linga are **duty** bound to tread and traverse with a **game** plan on a **beautiful journey** on the Basava '*patha*', which presents them with an **adventurous challenge**, a **promise** and an **opportunity** and demands them to **struggle** to fathom the **mysterious puzzle** of life by transcending **sorrow** and **tragedy** and dishing out the **gift** of compassion and **love** through *dasoha* while performing *kayaka* and singing the **songs** of vachanas. This long-winding sentence describes how well Basava's teachings compare with those of the Bhagavad Gita, even excel the latter's message, for Basava's principles neither endorse nor enjoin nor empower taking of human lives as Krishna advised Arjuna on the battlefield.

In conclusion, the gospel of compassion, love and respects for individuals that these three great souls preached and practiced transcends the limitations of time and space of the 5-dimensional multi-universe system that some world-renowned modern astrophysicists (**15**) and sub-atomic particle physicists such as Lisa Randall (**16**) have speculated and described.

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