

**M. S. Chandra and Remya V. P.**

## **SIDDHAPATHA OF MANTESWAMY: THE GREAT JOURNEY OF LIGHT**

### ***Abstract***

*Karnataka has a dynamic history of cultural evolutions and uprisings. There were many eras of such milestone events and personalities that has continuity as living traditions. These aspects deserve great attention in comprehending the cultural heritage of the land. The oral epic of Manteswamy kavya or also called the Dharege doddavare kathe is a mine of such unexplored information which, if studied in detail, reveals great history of cultural, spiritual and religious awakening in 15th century. The folk epic has its unique ways of narration and exposition where it conceptually transcends time and space. This paper attempts to trace the journey of Manteswamy from the north to south of Karnataka, a journey which transformed the people and their culture en route and left behind its impact till today even after six centuries. The paper conceptualizes the cultural transformation along the journey as process of making a welfare state in Karnataka.*

**Keywords:** *Manteswamy, cultural routes, siddhapatha, organic response, kalyana rajya*

Karnataka has contributed immensely to folklore of India as well as the world, which consist of different types of folklore like oral epics, stories, songs and other types. Folklore always reflect common man on different walks of life. Karnataka folk is well known for oral epics. Among them *Manteswamy Kavya* and *Male Mahadeshwara Kavya* of south Karnataka, *Junjappana Kavya* of central Karnataka, *Halumatha Kavya*, *Yellamma Kathana Kavya*, *Mylaralingana Kavya* of North Karnataka, *Koti Channayya* and *Siri Padadhana* of Coastal Karnataka are very important. Manteswamy is a cultural hero in south Karnataka folk, who spearheaded spiritual rebellion and social reform in 15<sup>th</sup> century Karnataka. *Manteswamy Kavya* is one of the greatest oral

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epics of the world sung by Neelagararu in south Karnataka particularly in Chamrajnagar, Mysore, Mandya, Maddur, Bangalore and border districts of Tamil Nadu. Those who sing Manteswamy Kavya are known as *Neelagararu* or *Mantedavaruru*. Neelagara tradition is a well-trained school, which preserve this Kavya through oral tradition. Anyone who wants to become a Neelagara should take initiation into this tradition and get trained under a teacher till he masters the entire Kavya.

Folk always preserve the memories of common man rather than rulers, nobles and elites. Folk stories always reached masses or story of masses or mass story. All these cultural leaders found in the folk stories are largely belonged to weaker section of society led continuous struggle for welfare of all or masses, with the intention of establishing equality of all (*sarvarigu samapalu* and *sarvarigu samabalu*) and mass followers of these leaders has built monuments, tradition and oral stories about these leaders (Prakash, 1999). In this continuous process of remembering their leader's oral epics have taken shape. *Manteswamy Kavya* is one such oral epic.

Manteswamy was a social reformer of 15<sup>th</sup> Century and he laid the foundation for Welfare State (*Kalyana rajya*). Idea of Kalyana Rajya was based on rationalist, progressive and welfare ideas with objective of Welfare state, which consist principle of equal opportunities for all, caste and gender justice, dignity of individual, dignity of labour or principle of *Kayaka*, fight against injustice, fight against oppression, special protection for weaker section. Manteswamy was equated with Allamaprabu, who is another great leader fought for Kalyana Rajya in 12<sup>th</sup> century. Neelagararu portrayed Manteswamy as incarnation of Allamaprabhu (Indvadi V. R., 2004). Gaddige or tomb of Manteswamy is in Boppe Gowdana Pura of Kollegal Taluk of Chamrajnagar District, whereas *toru gaddige* or motif tomb of Manteswamy are found across Karnataka.

*Manteswamy Kavya* has the following verse as its invocation

Manteswamy, you are the  
 Light (Jyothi) in the path  
 Light in the street  
 Light in the palace  
 Light in the houses of preacher  
 Light in the houses of poor  
 Light in the houses of wealthy  
 Light in the houses of birth  
 Light in the houses of death

Light in the house of Kuruba

Light in the house Kumbara

Light in the house of Madiga

Light in the house of Vakkaliga

Light in the house of Madivala

Light in the house of Holeya

Your Great Light (paranjyothi) will glow without any discrimination even if we keep on the garbage heap

Your Great light will glow on the all houses of seven kula (clan) and eighteen castes without any discrimination and division.

(Rajashekara, P. K. 2018)

Above verse in Manteswamy Kavya clearly reflects the main objective of life struggle of Manteswamy is to establish *kalyana rajya* (welfare society). At the time when Buddha was vanishing from India and became light of Asia, a huge cultural vacuum or darkness covered in India. 15<sup>th</sup> century struggle of Manteswamy was classic example of India's capacity to produce many small lamps to come over the darkness. Manteswamy tried to light lamp in Karnataka to come over darkness in the absence of Buddha.

*Manteswamy Kavya* is the story of the life and struggle of Manteswamy, where Neelagararu transcends the boundaries of time and space and connects past, present and future. The story begins with *Kalyana Pattanada Saalu* (Chapter), where 15<sup>th</sup> century Manteswamy meets 12<sup>th</sup> century Basavanna in Kalyana. It is the capacity of folk where they cross over the boundaries of time and meet great leaders of past ideologically and philosophically. Other chapters of Manteswamy Kavya deals with great cultural journey of Manteswamy from Kodekal in North Karnataka to Boppegowdanapura of Kollegala Taluk, Chamrajangar Distrcit. This unique journey was by on the banks of rivers and connecting between rivers. This journey connects places known for Siddha, Natha, Kalajnani traditions and other centers of knowledge of that time. In this journey from Krishna riven basin to Kaveri river basin, he performs many miracles to obtain disciples or *shishu makkalu*, who continued the efforts of spreading the light to masses after Manteswamy. The list of disciples he acquired on route include women also. Tombs of all these disciples are located on the banks of Kaveri river, which attract many devotees even today. *Kaliyugada Salu* (chapter) of the kavya deals with future. Many changes in the society which is about to come in the field of agriculture, economy, technology and social behavior are predicted here. These salu (chapters) are the testimonial to capacity of Neelagaras to connect past, present and future.

Neelagararu are well trained school or groups who sing *Manteswamy*

*Kavya*, found in south Karnataka, whereas in north Karnataka we find only followers of Manteswamy. Training begins with initiation into group, generally eldest son of the family. After the initiation he is trained, till he masters the entire *Kavya*, which takes 10 days and 10 nights to recite. Initiation is given to people from any caste or class without any discrimination whoever has interest in it. Procedure of initiation does not indicate any caste symbol and teachings are mainly to lead moral life in society, which are necessary to lead successful life. This is the most secular, democratic and humanistic tradition (Mahadeva, S. 2010) and it is continuation of 12<sup>th</sup> century vachana movement or Kalyana Kranti.

During 15<sup>th</sup> century followers of vachana movement or Basavanna were reduced to Achara Parampare or rituals like wearing linga around the neck, smearing vibhuti on forehead and performing puja rather than moral and spiritual life. Temples were built for Basavanna who critiqued the very notion of temple and propagated body as temple. Four centuries of changes that have taken place after Kalyana Kranti have influenced the leaders of Manteswamy parampare. Lingayat tradition has undergone major changes after the brutal suppression of Kalyana Kranti. Particularly institutionalization, unification, codification and ritualization (importance to Achara Marga), which has kept masses particularly working classes/castes out of Lingayat Tradition. This has created a huge cultural vacuum, Manteswamy criticized the 15<sup>th</sup> century followers of Basavanna and tried to provide cultural identity and establish an alternative system as per original ideals of sharanas of Kalyana and filled the vacuum with light.

Works of Lakkanna Dhanesha, Karasthala Veerendra, Karasthala Nagideva, Gurubasava, Battaleshwara, Margeya Mayideva, Mahalingadeva, Kallumatada Prabudeva, Chamarasa and others during the time of Vijayangara ruler Devaraya II and *Shatsthala Jnanamrutha* of Yedyuru Tontada Siddalinga Yati have contributed immensely to institutionalize Lingayat movement (Indvadi R. V., 1999). All these works have emerged as new handbooks of Lingayat, which prescribed Pachnachara, Ashtavarana and Shatshtala of Achara Marga.

Neelagararu are the first critique of lingayats, where they say that mere tying of stone around the neck does not save individuals, unless we follow moral life. Manteswamy was highly critical of 15<sup>th</sup> century followers of Basavanna in Kalyana region. In his response to 15<sup>th</sup> century social condition he brought light to *Kattala Rajya* (dark state) which can be identified with Kaveri basin, with the intention to create a welfare state. Narrative of this grand story became an oral epic *Manteswamy Kavya*, which was sung and preserved by Neelagararu.

During 15<sup>th</sup> century Vachana Movement which was meant for the emancipation of masses had been brought within the boundaries of religion. This process of veerashivasation is a continuous process even after Manteswamy. Hence, Neelagararu consider the conditions prevailing during

Manteswamy period and contemporary time are similar as at both these times the society was moving away from rationality, philosophy of justice and welfare of all. Neelagararu responded similar way as their leader did by outrightly rejecting process of Veerashivisation. Entire Manteswamy Kavya is the organic response to inorganic assault. Masses or people always respond to injection of hierarchical social order. Living tradition of Neelagararu use the story of Manteswamy to address the injustice of present day.

Manteswamy Kavya is unique, creative philosophical business, where philosophy became actors and rational thinking process became story (Nagaraj, 1996).

### **Siddha Patha: Great Cultural Journey**

Manteswamy started his journey from Chamarajanagar to north in search of Knowledge and found guru Kodekkal Basavanna of 15<sup>th</sup> century. After completing training successfully, he started his journey back to Chamrajnagar. This journey took Twenty-one years of grand journey to cover around seven hundred kilometers from Kodekal of Yadgir district to Boppegowdanapura of Chamrajnagar district of present day is unique in its own way. Probably no other saint of medieval time has undertaken such long and laborious cultural journey. Route chosen for this historical journey appears to be an organic path as it connects major centers of knowledge of that time. Incidentally this journey was on the banks of rivers and connecting various rivers of peninsular India from Krishna basin to Kaveri basin. This journey connects between two different major cultural zones of Kannada speakers' land.

Present day business or commercial routes has reduced the importance of cultural routes. Roads created by Nation states for territorial expansion, defense and tax collection has overshadowed cultural routes and may not be helpful to comprehend any social institutions of present as well as past completely, unless we revisit these cultural routes. Particularly roads created during colonial era was given big blow to cultural routes than any other period. Present day academic training does not give any importance to these cultural routes which pushes us away from social reality. Life of masses of Indian society has association with these types of cultural, social and traditional routes. Millions throng in places like Pandarapur, Male Mahadeshwara Betta, Chikkalluru, Savadatti, Kapadi, Mylara, Jejuri, Siddipet etc. following their own cultural routes. Unless we study these social phenomena in its context or understand these social processes from people's perspective, we may not successful to know social facts of this country. This article attempts to understand Manteswamy parampare from the perspective of people.

In this entire stretch of journey rivers, hills, centers of Natha, Siddha and Kalajnani tradition played important role. More than half of his life was spent in this journey. This is also rare example of Confluence of north and

south Karnataka culture. This is not the journey of an Individual Manteswamy, but also include Rachappaji, Doddamma Tayi, Phalahadayya and other Sharanas. In this long cultural journey Manteswamy made many disciples. Probably only Manteswamy has reached the stature of Allama in oral tradition.

### **Journey from North to South:**

Neelagararu divide entire journey of Manteswamy into two phases *Uttara Desa*- northern country from Krishna to Kaveri river and *Kattal Rajya*-dark state on the banks of Kaveri, where he settles down to spread his thoughts, principles and philosophy.

### **Uttara Desa**

To give justice to philosophy Neelagararu use the concept of incarnation of great cultural leaders like Basavanna and Allama Prabhu. Kodekal Basavanna of 15<sup>th</sup> century is considered as incarnation of 12<sup>th</sup> century Basavanna and Manteswamy is considered as incarnation of Allama Prabhu of 12<sup>th</sup> century. This equation of cultural leaders belonging to two different time and space is an attempt of Neelagararu to focus on philosophy.

Neelagararu consider the journey of Manteswamy from Krishna river basin till Kaveri river as journey of Uttara Desha. He spent lot of time in this journey to achieve the laborious task of spreading the ideas and philosophy of *Kalyana Rajya*. In this struggle he has to face many powerful people like rulers, businessmen, landlords and other elites. In this journey he also got many disciples, devotees and followers. Rachappaji son of Kodekal Basavanna, Doddamma Tayi from Kaginele, Phalaharadayya, Ningayya, Channayya and Channajamma are some of important shishu makkalu or disciples he got during in this journey.

Crossing boundaries and influencing people one should have two strengths. One is, political power using army to conquer other territories through war, another one is changing and influencing common people using moral strength and spiritual awakening through transforming minds of people from darkness to light. Manteswamy has opted the second option of transforming masses. Motif tombs found on the entire stretch of his journey and his tomb at Boppegowdanapura and his followers of eagerly visiting these places of his memory are the testimony to his success in spreading the ideals of Kalyana Rajya.

**Kattla Rajya:** Manteswamy's journey on the bank of Kaveri is known as Kattala Rajya, where he and his disciples settled down. Manteswamy has selected this place to settle down and spread his philosophy of Kalyana Rajya. Gaddige (tomb) of cultural leaders of Neelagararu are found on banks of Kaveri. Manteswamy's gaddige is at Boppegowdanapura, gaddige of Rachappaji and Channajamma are at Kappadi, gaddige of Nanjayya and Channayya at Kurubana Katte, Siddappaji's gaddige is at Chikkalluru.

Siddappaji, the greatest disciple of Manteswamy, who is also the first Neelagara (ghana neeli) was adopted in his journey at Kattala Raja.

### Conclusion

There is always creative tension that cuts through the time and space in Indian subcontinent. People always responded in whatever possible way they could. As seen by many scholars' masses are not merely passive receivers. There has always been organic response to inorganic assault. Existing theories, methodology and academic training is not sufficient to comprehend social facts from peoples' perspective. People always responded in their own way, sometimes its expressions are through performing arts, composition of oral arts etc like Chhau dance of eastern India, Theyyam of Kerala, Tamasha of Maharashtra, oral epics, Vachana literature, Tatva pada (songs of philosophy), Gigi pada etc of Karnataka. This response, I call it tension and this tension was always creative. Manteswamy Kavya of neelagararu was one such response to artificially induced social changes by vested section of society. Manteswamy tradition of Neelagarars is the classical testimony to Dr. B R Ambedkar observation that Indian society is always in mortal conflict between revolution and counter revolution (Ambedkar, 2014).

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