

SOCIO-SPIRITUAL VISION OF K.B.SIDDAIAH IN HIS POETIC JOURNEY

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Kenkere Bailaiah Siddaiah is a Dalit Poet in Kannada Literature. He re-defined the traditional meaning of the term Dalit. It was believed in the Indian social context that it is merely Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes are considered as Dalits. K.B. admits that Dalit is not the caste but it is a discourse which involves all down-Trodden section who are being suffered from misery and pain for many centuries. Dalits were minority in limited sense of the term. But K.B. extends meaning and scope of the term and has considered it as majority that is Bahujan in the present political and cultural context. Thus K.B. has a great vision of the world today which leads one towards re-thinking and re-visiting term dalit .

K.B.Siddaiah is popularly known as K.B.in Karnataka and siddaiah in Indian literature as well. He is a distinguished poet-critic of the time immemorial and versatile folk cultural leader and the voice of Dalit, farmers and women. In the combination of three KB established an award as Daraisthree in the year 2004 and in the name of them he began to award three who are distinctively identified in accordance with the service that they have done to the society as a whole.

He is also a dominant protagonist of the culture. If there is any kind of injustice or exploitation done to any sections of the society he is first man to protest either in media or in person. His very birth in untouchable community leads him so and when he is touched first by letters, he could become liberated and the letters themselves liberated from clutches of upper caste. There is a liberation at sides as Mercy is twice blessed as Shakespeare admits in The Merchant of Venice. As a result K.B. has got re-birth and rejuvenated himself and determined to liberate illiterate oppressed and depressed castes. He thought that it is his responsibility to bring radical change in Indian society by educating them. But it is not so easy and immediate task in any movement. There was Dalith Panth and Dalit Sangarsha Semite is actively working in Maharashtra and in Karnataka in 1970 and there was already Prof. B. Krishnappa, Dalitha Kavi Siddlingaiah and Devanooramahadeva and Prof Nanjundaswamy, the stanch leader and voice of farmers and the several. The poem *Hole Madigara Hadu/ The Song of Untouchables* of Siddalingaiah has played vital role in the Dalit Movement of the time. Devanooru Mahadeva has opted prose for writing and Siddlingaiah has chosen poetry. It was a crucial moment for K.B. to start his journey in Kannada literature. Ultimately he has made a choice of *long verse* form to write poetry which is known as KHANDAKAVYA. It is poetic verse, a unique form invented and popularized by him. As K.B. is well versed both in Kannada and English literature, he could

express his unique views in both the languages. A poet in the views of Tolstoy has an innocent infant, he has a comprehensive soul to meet and greet every mind and heart of layman of the land. He loves and has embarrassed every complex and crucial situations and contemplates to understand, conceptualize situation with a new term and express it in a dynamic way. He is the master of creating new terms by splitting in accordance with the accent and sound and gives new contextualized sense. He interprets every word of his poetry in a mystic way. As a poet he has strong faith in mysticism that he admits in the poem *Daklakatha Devekavya*.

*O mother as you rock the world
And rock the child
Bear me again in your womb
Walk this infant from the cave of your vagina
Into the cave of contemplation.*

Here in the above context the poet brings out that once the mother bears him in her womb the stigma of untouchability will not be so strong.

He has contributed a lot to the Kannada terminology with new perception with folk touch. He is greatly influenced by Lohia, Tolstoy, Buddha, Basavanna, Ambedkar, Gandhiji and Kuvempu. Hence he is communicating himself with them and introspects himself in the present context and visualize future with his indigenous insight. He does not express anything without meditation. The poet is virtually and literally incorporated the mode of meditation in any point of his expression. It is in meditation he can absorb the context and conceptualize the text. Therefore K.B. is unique in his way of thinking and expression both in writing and speech. There is a clarity, fluency and proficiency in it. He has such a unconquerable will and memory like Satan of Milton. He has esemplastic power to register the words and unifying power to blend the past and present. It is relevant to refer T.S. Eliot words in this context, “*I shall show you fear in a handful of dust*”. He produced four volumes of four different poems having only 150 pages. It is the personality of the poet to concise his expression and let readers to extend and enlarge according to their perspectives. The first poem BAKALA having only twenty two pages in eight segments is milestone in the history of Long Verse. This concised short poem has created place for K.B. as poet in Kannada poetry and vibrates the so called intellectuals. He has a skill of using the language at any length with relevant mystic and current illustrations and concise at any short. He can bounce his thoughts and ideas back and forth in a poetic away in lively and effectively. He believes that writing is more powerful and immortal in the world. There is a popular saying that “*Highly intellects are highly idiots*” but K.B. is *highly innocent as an infant* because a true poet / an artist is infant as Tolstoy puts it. In short a poet should free from the bias. He should be impersonal as a catalytic. The poetic voice of K.B. is very significant in the kannada poetic tradition. K.B. began his writing as voice of subaltern with his article *Kathalodane Mathukathe* is published in *Panchama*. It is an interaction with darkness. He got acquainted with Buddha way, K.M. Shankarappa, Allama and bakthi pantha through L. Basavaraju he reached Lohia and Kuvempu and found way of Gandhi and Ambedkar. It becomes a long faithful poetic journey to give light and enlighten the minds of downtrodden who are in the utter darkness.

In the spectrum of Dalit poetry K.B.’s preoccupation centers around folk legends which invariably finds their roots in the consciousness’. Here K.B. creates a distinct and unique path which is free from rage and wrath outburst found earlier in abundant measure. His poetry attempts to give an antidote to the excess of liberalization and globalization. In the passage of time in the dalit movement the new idiom is most essential to create a new space to stand and express himself democratically. After the long storm, the agitated minds become calm and

contemplates the situations as well. KB's contribution is understood in the context where Dalit poetry reflects both internal and external imbalance. His poetic journey has four stages like BAKALA, DAKLAKATHADEVE KAVYA, ANATHMA and GALLEBHANI published in 1988, 1999, 2003 and 2009 respectively as long verse in kannada dalit poetry. Having eight segments in just 22 pages of Bakala has given space to the poet in Indian poetry. It is observed that the stuff and noble thoughts of a poet in the poetry are enough to get noble place in the scheme of things.

The choice of content / subject is must for poetry and the subject of the poetry must have a great tradition which should direct the present and helps to decide the future. The transaction of knowledge of the past shows the historical sense of poet which enables him to present in the current. The poet himself admits that 'A true poetry should sustain the attention and create an interest in the mind of the readers but not feel monotony'.

Bakala is a remarkable production during the dalit movement. KB has really sustained a kind of an artist in his mind and expressed his unexpressed voice for centuries. His long stamped and sealed lips were outburst in mystic words. For the poet strongly believes that the tender heart tenders the cruel. It is relevant to illustrate that Dr. Rajkumar, the legend of Kannada film industry is captured by a notorious smuggler of ivory is moved of his noble attitude and ultimately worshipped and released him harmless. It is a kind of healthy reformation begun in the contemplation of the poet.

Bakala Muni becomes Heppu Muni – Meditating Bakala.

Bakala is about the guru of the untouchables who made his appearance from somewhere ,blessed his followers or devotees and disappeared after that. The protagonist ruminates about this phenomenon and questions incessantly all the elders to tell him about the whereabouts of his guru. This guru who is contemporary in turn went and joined Bakalamuni who is a sage worshipped by the people of untouchable community. What elders say is that Bakalamuni saw the earth even before it acquired the solid condition and it was he who gave the shape and form to the jelly. He saw and experienced the wars of the Ramayana and the Mahabhararatha. The moment he realized it he who was caused for these wars, he left the orb of the earth and entered into the nether world and vanished for good.

The poet admits that the incessant humiliation in the society should not be considered as an insult but it is an indigenous experience of life which enables the poet to meditate and probe into the forces behind the sufferings and misery rather it gives way to come out of it. Hence he takes it as a challenge to set tradition of Bakala. The poet is inculcated the wild practical experiences and transformed it into mild in his idiom of poetry. There s no room for cynical and sentimental attitude throughout his poetry. Though untouchables are not being touched, the liberated poet like KB touched the mind and heart of the everyone.

There is a sprout on the burning Rock in Bakala. The protagonist of the poem encounters Bakalamuni even as the later is traversing through the dark world beneath the earth and allows him to enter through the crown of his head. But Bakalamuni goes out of protogonost's system through the later sole. Bakalamuni is the guru of the Jambhava community and through him we can see the pain, misery, suffering and predicament of the Indian people. As Polunki Ramamoorthy says that " Bakala is the music of misery and song of the ". Since time immemorial the Mahabharatha is the pollution of land and the Ramayana is the pollution of woman. The life of common man from Homer's Odyssey to T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land is...

The long line of ants in the dark night

The chain of white ants

The swarming armies.

Bakala realizes the roving eye cannot get pictures right but it is the inward eye that can see everything steadily and without distortion. Unless the lap becomes burning rock and sprout, a woman cannot become a mother in the true sense. As Eliot rightly said that “ *Great poetry communicates before it is understood*”. *The Waste Land* of Eliot engrossed spiritual sterility of modern man in pain whereas Bakala of KB is felt and experienced misery and pain twisted the liver and felt pity.

For a spoon of rice nine mouths

Opened

For which mouth the corner edge of her sari

For which a spoon of rice.

There is an acute poverty where the mother is struggling to feed every mouth with a spoon of rice but it is impossible to feed every mouth. In fact the mother closed the opened mouth of eight with corner edge of her sari and feed the one but she consoles them with her love and compassion. How long could she console them with her only love is the fundamental question of Bakala to the mother. A woman in a society when she cannot express her plait, she closes her mouth with the corner edge of her sari. It is the way that she controls her emotions. In the same way a mother closes mouths of eight out of nine and manages the situation with her at most motherly love and affection.

It is a painful story of a man:- Bakala is the result of incessant mediation of the poet. The poem has revealed a new dimension in Kannada poetry by the burning days and boiling nights coalesce and weave with each other to produce an unprecedented pain. The poet has never exhibited anger or hatred against anyone. He has narrated the thread of unmitigated misery in a state of serenity that is more powerful than the voice of militancy which craves to extract “Measure for measure”.

In the second poem *Daklakatha Devi Kavya* KB followed the traditional pattern of employing Prose and Verse. Daklas are people who are protected by the untouchables and hence are still lower in the social hierarchy. The cry of misery acquires myriad tones as every segments demands mitigation of pain and hence amelioration is unattainable. Since this poem came after Bakala, KB finds an opportunity to locate the internal conflicts that plagued the dalit movements. The Daklas as has been pointed out are the foster-children of untouchables. According to the myths of this community Heppumuni was the first son of Jaladevi deserving the sobriquet “Dakla” which means *refractive* respecting no controlling force. He eventually becomes the guru to the community of Daklas.

KB does not keep Daklayya away from the orbit of contemporary transactions for too long. In fact he makes him carry on his shoulders his two sons and narrates them the stories pertaining to Gandhiji, Basavanna and Ambedkar. This is KB’s method of linking the past and the present in an attempt to underscore the relevance of the great leaders’ life and teachings. The issue of touch and pollution is the poet’s attention in *Daklakatha* than in *Bakala*. KB has contemplated on various aspects of these phenomena. The mysticism of the poet which establishes:-

O mother as you rock the world

And rock the child

Bear me again in your womb

Walk this infant from the cave of your vagina

Into the cave of contemplation.

Therefore, once the mother bears him in her womb the stigma of untouchability will not be so strong.

The poem ends with a dialogue between Dakla and Devi. The former roams in the sky on a horseback. This horse has been created by Dakla Devi through her magical powers. But Dakla's floating ends when Dakla Devi wishes the end of his flight. The first thing he asks her on his descent is that he is very hungry and he should be served something to eat. Devi's reply is neither stunning nor unexpected, she simply says my baby is suffering from measles and I am worried about its condition. You get down from your horse and see for yourself if there is something to eat. In a fit of anger he beats her black and blue and says that he is a man and he cannot attend the feminine task of the kitchen. But soon Devi transforms him into a woman. Dakla is shocked at her power. He begs her to restore his masculinity. She says "so it be. He becomes a normal man again. Devi then begins her journey. Dakla follows her silently carrying the bundle of old clothes on his head.

The bundle of pain and misery remains intact and the fleeting glimpses of Jesus, Buddha, Gandhi, Ambedkar and Basavavanna have only provided temporary assurance of a more promising goal. But we only see the redemption of the journey and destination is still far away. It can be seen that grievous insult of woman gives ways to expose her right strength on man.

Anathma is third poem that came after *Bakala* and *Daklakatha DeviKavya*. It deliberately contains the references to local and global problems. The poet seems to be a bit concessive to the reader in this poem as he has not employed so tough language when compared to the first two poems. Suddenly America and Bagdad enter into the scheme of things. KB describes the American cruelty and the condition of Mother India in the following manner:

*The bier approached near
 Carrying the corpse of Mother India
 Descending from the attic
 Of the "White House" of America
 After having consumed
 Many lives of Bagdad
 Drinking their blood
 Crossing many streets of the untouchables
 Many many streets of untouchables.*

This poem does not shy away from addressing very contemporary topics. But one recurring metaphor that has remained constant in KB's hunger. As he himself admits, "hunger and Alphabet" are my two eyes. Hunger prays and pleads with in me that 'I am hungry'. This hunger remains hungry however much it eats. Just like the hunger of Allama. Allama is the twelfth century mystic poet who is the source of inspiration to KB. That is why he says he ate the left overs from Allama's plate in *Bakala*. That means he leaned very heavily on Allama's philosophy and therefore tried to be a little more independent in *Daklakatha*. The poet goes beyond the philosophy of elders and throws a direct question to the creator:-

O God! Take birth like me
 Then
 Try to touch and be polluted!
 Try to take like me, like me take birth!

Untouchability does not endanger self-pity any more in the poet, in fact it is a sure source of self-awareness enabling to recognize the genuine man. Just as food is God is to hungry man, whoever

touches an untouchable first after his birth is a real guru. Searching for the real man inside one's own self is a great journey and anyone who undertakes such a journey is traveler.

Such a traveller wished to become an artist and when he stood before the canvas holding his brush and paint he began to think whether to start the picture from the head or from the foot. He felt that the head represented the Brahmin and the foot represented shudra. He gave up the idea of portraying the picture from the consciousness of the body. He delved deep into his experience to search for the new man. There is a darkness in the consciousness of the body. As you go down, the lamp will not burn there; you have to depend on the light of your inward eye. This is bodiless lamp.

Anatma visualizes four great lamps in this fashion. Ambedkar's voice from behind, Gandhiji on the one of the lamps, Buddha on another, Allama in the opposite direction. The wick lamp meditates in the middle of these Great Four Lamps.

The poet has tried to engage Allama in a dialogue once again in Anatma. But he is aware of the fact that he can never speak coherently before Allama. He believes that poetry is a great stutter. It is incomplete mumbling. Any poet in the world should stutter to convert whatever he has seen into poetry. Poetry is a cave built by the poet and he mumbles inside the cave. His earnest wish is that his mumbling should be heard by the listener which can be rightly called readers friendly poetry.

There is a search to find success and the question that crops up is whether it lies in one's birth or one's ability to touch. The biggest challenge is to take birth like an untouchable. Similarly, the dance of the alphabet. It may not touch. It may touch him but tangentially. Therefore he has to live as a bonded laborer.

The recurring image of Ekalavya that self taught has an unequivocal message. That is the bottomless hunger of the down-trodden community can only be appeased if all concerned gear themselves to 'learn'. The biological hunger can be overcome only by intensifying the intellectual hunger. The poem ends thus:

*The soldier of learning gave an eye of the Guru
To the idol of clay
In the manner of learning
Awareness itself had turned into a Guru
Contemplating constantly
Awareness as guru
The disciple himself had become the guru.
This is the only way to
Erase the origin of birth the pollution of touch
When countless human beings
Are polluting
Even as they take birth
And die then and there.*

In the 4th poem *GalleBani* or *The Cobbler's Trough* the poet himself has provided an excellent introduction to the volume in which he has expressed some of very significant thoughts about how the craft of a cobbler traces the "Socio-Spiritual Travelling" of the progress of our history. The poet firmly believes that quotidian life, humaneness, culture, religion, politics, arts, agriculture and many other human transactions all these are involved in that great journey. He remembers William Blake's immortal observation in which Blake says "If dog tethered at the

gate of an owner in dying of hunger that surely indicated the death of the state". Therefore the poet thinks that the writing of poetry, politics and spirituality are unconnected activities. When a cobbler is deeply involved in his task it nothing but his socio-spiritual meditation. Gallebani or the Cobbler's Trough is born out of the conviction that spiritually results from the womb of misery and pain suffered by a Dalit, a peasant, a woman or a cobbler. What we 'social' is not very different from 'spiritual' as they have natural kinship being accommodated in the womb of reality. Gallebani attempts to express this union in its own way.

KB draws our attention to a very important thing which has not been said by many Dalit poets so far that is " My poetry is struggling to find a path of redemption to everyone. It is born out of "Social-Spiritual Consciousness", if you will. This state has neither the beginning nor the middle nor the end. Gallebani orients in the direction of ever-changing reality and hence it has transcended the preoccupation of targeting the opponent in the changing scenario. The idea is to achieve the redemption of all aims at the destruction of none.

Therefore Gallebani or Cobbler's Trough is a trough containing water always up to the brim in which he immerses the hide he uses to mend the chappals. With the constant contact with water the hide becomes highly malleable and therefore it yields easily to the edge of the blade. This process reminds the poet of that great event in history where Haralayya made a pair of sandals out of his own skin to Basavanna, the saint. The water of the cobbler trough graduates to the status of 'thiratha' and it is used on all auspicious occasions even by the Brahmins during the wedding ceremonies according to popular belief.

The poet likens his poetry writing to the manner in which a cobbler infuses life into the hide and a blacksmith bends iron following his fancy. The poet of course has words and only words at his disposal. Though these words he has tried to build a structure of poetry that is veritable monument of pain.

As Nataraj S Budalu, the renowned poet-critic providing a key to understand Gallebani has rightly said that KB's latest poem demands the reader to grow beyond all the known categories and expectations of poetry with which he is familiar. He has said that no uncertain terms that KB has positioned the kannada reader in such a situation that he has to pick up his poetry from the pit in which earlier on Madara Chennaiah and Basavanna the 12th century saints placed the Lingam and asked at the Bhaktas to pick it up. Kannada consciousness can take in Pamapabaratha Jaimunibaratha, Prabulingalile and Manteswamy Kavya simultaneously. And therefore it will devote zestfully to the poetry of Kuvempu, Bendre, Madhura Chenna and K.B.Siddaiah.

Siddhaiah has demonstrated in Gallebani that his poetry should go beyond the familiar meaning.

*O Poet, you are a great strategist
And a magician indeed
Weld the word and meaning
In the inner courtyard of silence
Just behold the words and their meaning
The word is Shiva
The word is Shiva.*

Since the poet has meditated around Gallebani, it is natural that it should occupy him unceasingly. Therefore he mirrors it in myriad ways.

In the cobbler's trough

*The hide has form
It does not have a form
The hide is Shiva....
Death dominates the poem just as its closest kin hunger does;
These are no bodies
That resemble the sticks of a broom
When knot is loosened
They resemble too
The pieces of the hide....*

The poet who is the only voice to record this pain of death and suffering asks the deity ironically:

*Why have you snatched my tongue
What words did I utter
Which have caused schism in the households
And upset the communities
The poet is born from the dead body
To solve the riddle of death
To understand how the dead bodies
Find no one cremate them...*

Even the amidst the unpromising landscape there is the wonder of paper-boat sailing on the buffeting waves and this is an indication of the promise, however faint it may be. The poet has passed the milestones of bitterness and his aim is now only to meditate on the possibility of achieving the redemption of all. He has the voice of his fellowmen as source of sturdy assurance; some dead, some alive, show him the way to reach the destination. He leans rather heavily on the words of wisdom handed on from the past but at the same time he is vigilant to register the instruction indicated by the people of our time.

KB achieves all this without exhibiting any anxiety to be understood instantaneously. In that sense he is a true poet demanding the reader or coalesce the parts strewn helter-skelter in the relentless movement of the montage. From Bakala to Gallebani KB has traversed quite a long distance in terms of reflecting the Indian reality vis-à-vis the conditions of the Dalits. His indirect way of hinting at establishing equality in our own society might appear or be too docile and counter-productive in the eyes of the more militant and proactive poets. But in his poetic career of two decades KB has never identified himself with the advocates of drastic and draconian change. For, in the heart of his hearts, he seems to believe that change takes place at a glacially slow pace and as long as our path is illumined by the Lights called Buddha, Allama, Ambedkar and Gandhi compassion will occupy the space monopolized by distrust and hatred. KB has kept the hide in his cobbler's trough which has the accumulated thickness of centuries and every passing day will make it more malleable. Since the water in the trough is holy, it must be sprinkled on people the hide is converted fit to be worn by saints.

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