CHAPTER V
1. COMPARATIVE ESTIMATE OF THE THREE WORKS

Having treated each work in a detailed manner in separate chapters, we are in a position to make a comparative estimate of the three works.

1.1. Common Points

At the outset we must set forth, in brief, the aspects common to all the three authoresses and their works.

1.1.1. Authoresses and their Approach

As already noted the heroes of the works happen to be closely related to their composers. All the three works adore their heroes. Love and admiration for the heroes are prominently discernible, as the two motivating factors, in the composition of the works. Feelings of joy and satisfaction in diverting their talents to sing the glories of their loved ones permeate the texture of the works. A sense of gratitude towards the heroes also finds strong expression, because of the condusive atmosphere created by the latter, for the flowering of their talents.

1.1.2. Life inside the Palace

The three works together present almost a complete picture of the life inside the palace. The account may be considered
quite accurate for two reasons. Firstly, the composers themselves belonged to either royal households or had full access to the palace. Secondly, the works treat the princes for their principal charactecs. This also enable the works to draw a realistic acccount of the life style of the princes of their respective periods.

One of the special features of the palace was, that it was dominated by women. All the chores of the palace from kitchen work to security of the main gate, were looked after by women. They helped the kings and queens in their routine work. The foreign travellers have noted this aspect with great sense of surprise. This fact is borne out by the works. Tirumalāmbā mentions that the king moved from one place to another inside the palace holding the hands of the maids. Rāmabhadrāmbā gives a splendid description of the elaborate preparation and help rendered by a bevy of beauties, for the lunch in Raghunātha's palace. She also mentions that not only the performance of Nātya but the maintenance of the Nātyadālā was also under the control of women.

These ladies accompanied the kings in their favourite pastimes. They enjoyed water-sports quite often. Tirumalāmbā gives very elaborate description of the water tank inside the palace walls and the women sporting therein. She even mentions the dress worn by women while playing in waters. She says that the ladies donned shorts exposing their bodies.
Gangādevī devotes about twenty verses for the description of
water-sports. The ladies accompanied by the prince indulged
in the pleasant sport of roaming in woodlands, collecting
flowers therein. This favourite pastime known as Kusumāva-
cayalīlā, which finds reference in almost all literary works.
The ladies kept (the prince) company in cool resorts during
summer, sang and danced for his sake.

The Princes, who were scholarly themselves, patronised
poets and scholars and artistes. They spent their spare time
in poetic and scholarly assemblies, taking active part in the
proceedings. All the three works refer to the courts of their
heroes resplendent with learned scholars and gifted poets.
Regarding the kings' physical diversions, VPC speaks of equ-
estrian sports i.e. Ṣavakrīdā as a most loved pastime of empe-
ror Acyutarāya.

The ladies who were in huge numbers, equally intimately
related to the princes, are spoken of as being friendly to one
another. The works refer to their mutual cordiality of rela-
tions and common purpose of pleasing the princes.

Perhaps, the only thing missing in the information provi-
ded in this regard, is a reference to the presence of eunuchs
in the palace. The foreign travellers observe that eunuchs
were in the service of kings, as guards in large numbers, and
they were very much trusted by their masters.
1.1.3. Description of Physical Beauty of Princes

All the three works carry very detailed descriptions of the physical charms of men, given by women. These descriptions in such detail, are the first of their kind, found in Sanskrit literature. An aspect that completed a prince's toilet, in the medieval times, is the garland of flowers he wore on his long tresses. All the three works note the long hairs of their respective heroes and describe them as enchanting with various fragrant flowers. Other works of the period also testify to this practice.

1.1.4. Reference to Courtesans

The important part played by the courtesan women in the medieval society is borne out by the reference made to her in the works. Her participation in any function connected with the royal house, both at times of peace and war, was a must. Courtesans were officially in charge of providing entertainment to the royal families. Rāmabhadrāmbā, mentions that a train of public women accompanied the marching army and kept constant company, to the warring soldiers. The respectability, a courtesan commanded, during those times becomes clear by the fact that she took part in the anointing ceremony also. She poured holy water over the head of the prince, after the Brahmins and others.
1.1.5. Warfare

War was a major experience of the period of Vijayanagara. All the three works being sketches of heroic men, the poetesses were compelled to devote enough space for the portrayal of war in their works. War preparations were huge and elaborate. The works give a graphic description of the armies, about to set foot in the warfield. All stages of preparation and accomplishment, starting from the march of the army up to the victory over the enemy, are most diligently recorded. Details of methods of warfare, such as laying siege to different types of forts, are available in these works. In fact, it is found that the art and science of capturing forts are expounded in their minute details only in literary works, both in Sanskrit and other languages. Thus, these works are considered our precious sources of medieval warfare. Gangadevi gives the method of capturing a hill fort (Giridurga) and Ramabhadramba gives a splendid account of the troops of Raghunatha Nayaka capturing the water fort (Jaladurga), using a number of boats to surround the fort. Tirumalamba describes the manner in which the island city of Srirangapatnam was captured by bridging the river Kaveri, which was in spate. The battle pictures drawn by our poetesses can be compared to the most realistic and powerful ones, in any other great piece of literature.

1.1.6. The Boom of War Drums

The Vijayanagara forces had a very special practice of sounding as many instruments as possible to create a din before
the march of the army to any warfield, which, perhaps, was
supposed to enthuse the aproticipants.

Tirumalāṃbā devotes some three long passages in her Campū
to the description of the war music. Gangādevī devotes about
half a dozen verses to describe the tumultuous noise created
by the drums. The din created by the war drums and other
intruments mingled with the twangs of the bows (of the bow-men),
the neighing noise of horses, roaring rumble of the elephants,
the war-cries of soldiers and the singing of bards, is aptly
compared to the thunderous roar of the milky ocean churned by
the mount Mandara and the dāmaru sound of the God of annihila-
tion while he is engaged in violent dance at time of dissolution.

The poetasters also give the names of a variety of intruments used for the purpose of creating this thunderous din.
Tirumalāṃbā mentions about twelve intruments in which percuss-
ion, stringed and wind intruments are included.

It is interesting to note that Muniz also records this
peculiar practice of the Vijayanagara forces. After giving a
description of the deafening noise, he says, 'I should cease
to speak more of this because I should never finish.'

The three works record the names of a variety of weapons
used in the warfare. Gangādevī mentions some six weapons used
by the foot soldiers. Tirumalāṃbā says that innumerable wea-
pons such as Mallets, Nooses, Discusses, Javelines, Arrows and
Swords were used.
Ramabhadramba mentions the use of gun-powder and matchlocks, in plenty. Use of intoxicating drinks among the warriors was also common.

1.1.7. Reference to Mohammadan Soldiers

All the poetesses refer to the wars of their heroes with Mohammadans. However, Gangadevi and Ramabhadramba give some details about the Mohammadan soldiers; their appearance, and abilities. Both point out at the reddish eyes of the soldiers. Gangadevi refers to their long beards and very curved eye brows. Ramabhadramba mentions that the Mohammadan soldiers were very proud and were very terrifying in their appearance. Both the poetesses agree in noting that they were formidable warriors.

1.1.8. Social Practices

Some of the social practices prevailing in their times are found mentioned in the works. Gangadevi refers to the practice of taking bath and wearing white robes when the king went to see the new born for the first time. The custom of making liberal gifts to the Brahmins and others on the happy occasion of the birth of a son, is alluded to by all the poetesses. Tirumalamba refers to the special Hindu custom of drawing 'Rangavalli' as an auspicious mark. Ramabhadramba makes mention of a regional custom, when she says that the women belonging to the respected families did not cover their
With so many points in common, it is clear that the three works together, in addition to giving a fairly good idea of the historical and political situation, also throw valuable light on the social and cultural atmosphere of the upper strata of society of their times.

2. Historical Sense Displayed in the Works

Though Gangādevī gives very valuable information of her period, her poetic sensibilities take an edge over her historical sense. While she gives very vivid descriptions of situations, she withholds the most precious information for a historian. Her attention is completely centred round Kampana, the hero, thus leaving aside both his friends and foes. Recording the names of only Bukkarāya and Dēvāyī, Kampana's parents and the two Sanghamas, his younger brothers, the poetess runs the risk of being too narrow in her historical outlook. In this respect Rāmabhadrāmbā deserves a special mention. She records the names of all noted personalities, who participated in the war waged by Rāghunātha Nāyaka. All the important names of both the allies and enemies of Rāghunātha are found mentioned in RNBM. She mentions about eighteen persons by name. This obviously, has enhanced the historical value of the work by leaps and bounds. Her factual portrayal of the historical events of the time, has made her work a valuable source book of the
history of the period. Rāmabhadrāmbā's narration is considered to be 'more historically accurate sequentially probable'. Her account of the Toppur War and Raghunātha's role therein is also hailed as full by historians. Nevertheless, Ganga-devī's work has a unique place among historical kāvyas written during the Vijayanagara period, for two reasons. It is the earliest work on Vijayanagara history, is the first one. Second one is that it is the only poetic composition which treats the eventful Madhura War, so important a milestone in the establishment of the empire.

Rāmabhadrāmbā apart from being a historically sensitive lady, had a keen eye for minute details of her surroundings. Description of the Tanjore Palace and its various apartments come alive through the pen of Rāmabhadrāmbā.

Some scholars are of the opinion that VPC of Tirumalāmbā is more important as a source book of history than a poetic work of literary merits, because, 'the authoress appears to narrate the events of which she herself was an eye witness'. Not many works are available on the reign of Acyutarāya. Yet Tirumalāmbā's VPC and Rājānātha's monumental work Acyutarāyā-bhyudayam together fill the gap. While naming the persons, Tirumalāmbā also like Ganga-devī, restricts herself to the hero and his parents. Other members of the family do not find a mention. Even the name of Kṛṣṇadevarāya the great, is ignored. However, this might serve as a clue to the kind of relation
that existed between Acyutarāya and Kraṣgadevarāya. Tirumallāmbā, appears to be different from others in as much as she gives the names of the mothers of the chief women characters of the Campū. Obamāmbā, Acyutarāya’s mother is introduced as the daughter of Rāmāmbikā and Rācirāja. Varadāmbikā’s mother’s name is given as Trapāmbikā. This is a piece of information available only in VPC.

In conclusion, it may be observed that, Rāmabhadrāmbā’s historical sense is more pointed and prominent. Excepting on only one occasion, where Raghunātha Nāyaka’s father Acyutappa Nāyaka is depicted as doing penance and Lord Raganātha appearing in person in answer to his sincerity, the authoress has not been carried away by flights of fancy. All the facts mentioned by her are borne out by other records. RNBM has all the characteristic features of being a biographical record.

3. Poetic Ability

So far as poetic diction is concerned Gangādevī, scores over her successors. The grace of her style and the spontaneity of her verses stand unparalleled. She has been able to suppress her scholarship in order to project her poetic talent. The sense of judgement, she displays as a connoisseur of poetry is also very satisfying. In order to appreciate her sound aesthetic sense it is beneficial to compare her remarks about poetry with that of others. Madhava, a poet of the court of
king Virūpākṣa, grand son of Bukkarāya has written a work by name 'Narakāsura Vijayam'. In the introductory verses of the kāvya, he refers to Śrīhārṣa's style as 'dripping with rasa' and that of Bhāravi as 'oozing out honey'. However, while viewing from the critical standards in the field of Sanskrit poetry, neither Śrīhārṣa's kāvya could be considered 'rasavat kāvya', nor Bhāravi's diction would be sweet as honey. On the contrary, the former is referred to as an erudite scholar and the latter is known for his 'depth of meaning' i.e. artha gāmbhirya. Gangādevi, very prudently compared Bhāravi's poetry to the Bakulā flower which continues to give its fragrance even when crushed.

While comparing MV with VPC, Dr. Venkataramanaiah observes '.....As an artist, Tirumalāmbā is far inferior to Gangādevi whose MV, though fragmentary must be regarded as a perfect literary gem. Gangādevi's literary have won universal acclamation as pointed out earlier.

Tirumalāmbā's style is considered as 'elegant' by some scholars. This may be accepted with a slight modification viz., 'not throughout'. Tirumalāmbā's work being the first available Campū work by a lady has an importance of its own. She has tried her hand both at prose and poetry. Though she does not display uniformity in the elegance of style, some portions are very attractive and bears testimony to her poetic talents. Over doing the descriptions is one of the major
errors of Triumalāmbā's composition. Both Gabgādevī and Rāma-
bhārāmbā haveable to overcome this error, is a tribute to
their artistic ability and poetic sensibilitites. Tirumalāmbā's
claim to be a poetess is only next to Gancādevī.

Chronologically occupying the last place among the three
to be poetesses, Rāmabhadrāmbā refuses to be pushed last, so far
poetic ability is concerend. As an artist, though not superior
to Gangādevī, she has a charm of her own. She has displayed
much ingenuity in her narration, has introduced quite a few
novel items as the dance recital etc., making her work more
original in execution. Her versification is also quite simple
with internal rhyme marking its diction. With all these Rāma-
bhadrāmbā may be placed along with Tirumalāmbā besides Gancādevī

4. The Poetesses and the Social Condition of the Period

Polygamy was the order of the day, when our poetesses
wrote. Women had accepted polygamy absolutely, poetesses being
no exception. A woman loved and respected her husband, des-
pite his shifting loyalties. She believed that he loved her
deeply though she saw him in the company of numerous women.

All the three poetesses under consideration, describe
the love-sports of their heroes, all the time with a word of
appreciation for him who is so adept in entertaining so many
women. Gancādevī gives a detailed account of the love-sports
of king Kampana with a bevy of beauties and still considers
herself to be his beloved. Tirumalāmbā glorifies the love and marriage of Acyutarāya and Varadāmbīkā, and yet holds that she herself is the 'end all and aim all of Acyutarāya's love'. Rāmabhadrāmbā, time and again draws a parallel between Raghu-
nātha Nāyaka surrounded by his queens and maids, and Śrī Kyāya in the company of his numerous spouses. The poetess, who, simply adored the Nāyaka, declares that he is her lord-Nātha.

Our poetesses lived and wrote at a time when the idea of ideal love 'which binds a man permanently to a single woman and vice versa' was totally forgotten. Instead, what existed was 'one man should love several women and several women one man'. Commenting on this sad state of affairs prevailing in his times, the author of Manucarita observes 'I believe that he has no love for them nor they for him'. He despised those women 'who dare not even get angry with their husband, although he has intercourse with other women in their very presence'. The period in which our poetesses lived did not allot any independent status to women. They were considered as objects of enjoyment irrespective of their education and accomplishment. The women themselves acquiesced to the view held by men. The man to whom they were wedded ruled their thoughts and imagination. No wonder our poetesses chose the heroic deeds of their husbands for their poetic themes.

The women belonging to the noble classes, it is understood never worked, but spent most of their time in 'luxurious sloth'
and 'diverted themselves with intrigues against their co-wives to secure the fleeting affection of their inconstant husbands'. If, this is one view⁴⁸, a foreigner Domingo Paes, observes with regard to the three principal wives of Kṛṣṇadēvari, that they had equal status and 'all of them were great friends and each one lives by herself'⁵⁰. One has to assume the kind of cordiality expressed in the second view, for poets. Instead of wasting their time in luxurious sloth, these ladies devoted their time to literary pursuits; instead of diverting themselves with intrigues against their co-wives, they attracted the attention of their husbands by their talents. All the poets display a rare magnanimity which is as surprising as it is soothing. When polygamy was deep rooted in society, women had to be magnanimous. Examples in this direction are not wanting. To quote an instance, Lokamahādevī, wife of Vikramāditya II of the Calukya dynasty (740 A.D), it is said, permitted her husband to marry again on her failing to give birth to a heir⁵¹.

5. Our Poetesses and their Foreign Counter parts

Now we can attempt to see around the world to know, how the counter parts of our poetesses outside the country fared as it would enable us to place them properly on the literary map of women poets.
The European literary production of women, perhaps, has its beginning in Sappho 'the poetess of Lesbos, whose passionate love poems have been admired and imitated in all ages' 52. This Greek poetess is assigned the date C.600 B.C. After Sappho, not many women took deep interest in literary activities until the medieval ages. From the 14th century onwards names of women start dotting the literary map of Europe, though sparingly. The records give names of about hundred women who are remembered for their outstanding contributions. These poetesses have lent grace, beauty and variety to literature by their productions.

In Christina, the French lyrical poetess 53 (1363-1429), we find a contemporary of Vyagadevi. Another lady Christina (1629-1689), queen of Sweden, has certain qualities common with Tirumalamba, queen of Achyutaraya. It is said that her accomplishments and gifts made Stockholm for the time being 'the Athens of the North' 54. In Madeleine (1608-1701), the French novelist a contemporary of Ramabhadramba, there is a woman who is proud of women's education like Ramabhadramba herself. In Lucy Hutchinson (born 1620), the English biographer, who wrote the 'Life' of her husband John Hutchi- nson, all the three poetesses have a common point, as it has been already pointed out that, all the three wrote about their husbands.
There were quite a few women who exhibited their talents during the 16th and 17th centuries, as novelists, lyricists, literary hostesses, fairytale tellers, memoirists, biographers etc., in French, English, German and such other European languages. However, barring the instances of Anne-Lefèvre Dacier (1654-1750), the French scholar, who translated Homer, and Colonna Vittoria (1490-1547), a Latinist, there is no other instance of a lady belonging to the medieval period, who attained scholarship in a classical language. Viewed as against this background, the achievements of Gangādevī, Tirumalamba and Rāmakṛṣṇambā appear brilliant because they, not only mastered the language but also rose to the level of producing literary works of lasting value in it.