Means to Mystic Experience
CHAPTER FOUR

MEANS TO MYSTIC EXPERIENCE

Before we deal with the means to mystic experience which, in turn is a means to liberation we have to know the philosophical foundation of both the mystic experience and liberation.

According to the vacanakāras, God creates the world for the sake of man or the bound soul. The world thus created by Paraśiva serves as an arena where man should achieve his liberation at least before the destruction of the world. In other words, the world is an arena where man is tested by God or it is God’s moral workshop (kārāraṇa kammata). The world is a place where man can either strengthen his bond with the cycle of births and death or liberate himself from such a cycle. Every birth or rebirth in that creation is a fresh opportunity provided by Paraśiva for using or misusing our freedom. Man is born into a family and moves about in an environment, not by choice, but as judged and determined by God, according to man’s karma. Man is also provided with a body, sensory and motor organs, intellect, mind, will and ego in addition to the world at large. But his life in a particular family and environment is not unalterably fixed but is left to the free choice of man to alter it in any manner he likes.

All this unmistakably suggests that the complex called man including body, motor organs, sense organs, mind, etc. as well as the physical objects are things which cannot be claimed by man as
his. All these instruments (*karaṇas*) are gifted to the self by the creator.

Jeḍara Dāsimayya, a senior contemporary of Basvaṇṇa says in unambiguous words,

(1) The ground is your gift,
    The crop too is your gift;
    The wind that whirls round and blows is your gift ...²

(2) Body is your gift,
    The life principle (*jīva*) is your gift, too ...³

(3) The bullocks are your gifts,
    The seeds are your gift, too;
    The water that windingly flows is your gift ...⁴

However, man because of his ignorance is not aware of the gift and behaves as if they are his own.

A real teacher of Vīraśaiva religion and philosophy must convince the devotee that all things created by God should be regarded as things gifted by God. More importantly, a man who becomes aware of this must be grateful to Paraśiva for gifting them. He should also be grateful to him for creating the world for *his sake*. Such a man in order to express his gratefulness becomes a devotee. Showing *bhakti* (devotion) is the best form of being grateful to Paraśiva. Jeḍara Dāsimayya pities those who are not grateful to Paraśiva for the gifts he has bestowed on them.
While Jeđara Dāsimayya regards the whole world as a gift of God. Cennabasavanṇa thinks that the world is a loan leant to the devotees. It is the duty of human beings who are rational, to realize this at the earliest. The best attitude to this loan is not just thanking Paraśiva but repayment of what is borrowed from Paraśiva in an appropriate manner. Realization of this sort convinces us that nothing in the world, not even our body, our senses, our mind and our intellect, is really ours. From this it follows that we should free ourselves as far as possible from acting for the sake of body, sense, etc. which are really not ours. Devotion cannot be called complete if there is devotion to the gratification of the body and senses. Because gratification of sensual desires still implies the dominance of selfishness. This further means that we should surrender gradually the body, senses, etc., and finally, the soul to Paraśiva himself. This is not an easy task but unless this is done repayment of the loan is not done effectively. In one of his vacanas Cennabasavanṇa says:

Having repaid the loan your devotee has gone to Śivalōka
Having returned the earth element to the earth,
Having returned the water element to water,
Having returned the fire element to fire,
Having returned the air element to air,
Having returned the space element to space ...\(^5\)

To say that the aspirant has returned all his debts to Paraśiva is to say that he is not selfish. Since he has offered
('repaid') all his senses, body, mind, etc for what should he be selfish? This does not, however, mean that he has dissociated himself from his body, senses, etc. He is still associated with the senses, etc., but he does not regard them as his, i.e., he is not selfish. On the contrary, his soul has become pure and such a pure souls is eligible to unite with Liṅga. Its union with Liṅga is Liṅga-aṅga-sāmarasya.

The vacanakāras have laid down certain rules for the repayment of the lone and for purifying the soul. These are enshrined in the doctrine of aṣṭāvaraṇa, the doctrine of pañcācāra and the doctrine of śaṭ-sthala.

THE DOCTRINE OF AṢṬĀVARAṆA

The doctrine of aṣṭāvaraṇa insists that the devotee should follow eight rules

1. He should become a disciple of a Guru.
2. He should worship Liṅga offered by him.
3. He should show devotion to Jaṅgama.
4. He should sip holy water (pādōdaka)
5. He should eat holy food (prasāda)
6. He should smear himself with holy ash (vibhūti)
7. He should wear garland of rudrākṣa
8. He should utter the mantra “Om Namahśivaya”

Now let us see how the devotees by following these rules becomes a pure soul eligible for mokṣa and mystic experience.
(1) **Guru**: The aspirant who has been tormented by various kinds of evils realizes that the human existence is full of pain and suffering. There are hardly any moments of happiness. Occasionally he is happy but neither the moments of happiness are longer nor are they qualitatively satisfying. Most of them are mixed with suffering. Having realized this he decides to turn to spiritual life in order to escape from them permanently. The spiritual life has its own rules and regulations and is based on certain philosophical foundations of which he is ignorant. Therefore, he seeks the guidance of a spiritual teacher (guru) who is well grounded in spiritual matters.

The vacanakāras unanimously lay a great emphasis on the necessity of the guru. They sometimes describe him as an embodiment of divinity and at other times as an incarnation of Paraśiva. For example, Cennabasavaṇṇa says

Hara (Paraśiva) in order to show his form
Condescended in the form of guru and
Became mantra to (the aspirant’s) mind;
*Prasāda* to his gross body and
Liṅga to his palm ...\(^6\)

Similarly, Uriliṅga Peddi also says that

Śiva assuming a human body became a guru
And descended to the mortal world
In order to compassionately give initiation
To the disciples ...\(^7\)
These descriptions of guru appear as unbridled and empty flattery, but it is not so. In fact, they have two justifications:
(a) A guru is one who by means of mystic experience identifies himself with Paraśiva. Therefore, it is necessary that people should regard him as an incarnation of Paraśiva. The guru who promises liberation to an aspirant initiates him into the Vīraśaiva doctrine. He teaches him how both the worldly pleasures of the senses and the heavenly pleasures which are just an extension of the earthly pleasures, are qualitatively and quantitatively inferior and therefore unworthy of pursuit; he also teaches how liṅgāṅga-sāmarasya is superior and therefore worthy of pursuing. (b) He also guides him in his spiritual efforts; that is, he teaches him how to worship the liṅga, how to revere the guru and the jaṅgama, how to live a moral and spiritual life and how to meditate, in order to achieve the liṅgāṅga-sāmarasya.

It is true that every man according to, Vīraśaivism, has divine sparkle. But it is the guru who by initiation and indoctrination helps the aspirant to manifest it and without him the aspirant's longing for liberation is frustrated. This is the reason why Basavaṇṇa says

In making a pot
The clay comes first; ...
In knowing Śiva's path
The Guru's path comes first ...⁸
Even though the aspirant’s self-effort and loyal adherence to the religious, moral and spiritual injunctions is necessary, it is the guru who guides the aspirant in all such matters. It is he who initiates him to the ways and means of the mystic experience and it is he who takes upon himself the responsibility of the aspirant’s continuous spiritual progress. The aspirant has to depend on the guru for the reason that he has already accomplished the goal. In fact only such a spiritually accomplished person is called guru in the proper sense of the term and he alone is able to guide others. A teacher who is unable to guide his disciples successfully is like one blind man leading another.

(2) **LIŃGA** : An accomplished teacher is important to his disciple in two ways: (i) he initiates the novice into Vīraśaivism by offering him a thumb sized object called *iṣṭaliṅga*. (ii) He teaches him the ideas and ideals of Vīraśaivism which the novice has to work out to the rest of his life.

The Sanskrit word ‘Liṅga’ means ‘cause’ or ‘reason’ (ground). Since Paraśiva is the cause of creation, maintenance, destruction, bondage and release, he is rightly called ‘Liṅga’. However, in ordinary parlance, it may mean either Paraśiva or the image of Paraśiva; again the Liṅga-image may be either the Liṅga established in temples, or the thumb-sized black shining object, called *iṣṭaliṅga*. Though many of the vacanakāras used the word ‘Liṅga’ interchangeably, a few have reserved the word ‘Liṅga’ to
denote Paraśiva, while reserving the word ‘iṣṭaliṅga’ to refer to the thumb-sized black object. In the present context, the word ‘Liṅga’ means ‘iṣṭaliṅga’ and it is always regarded as the symbol (kuruhu) of Paraśiva or Liṅga.

According to the vacanakāras, every devotee is divided (bhakta) from Paraśiva or Liṅga. It is believed that consciousness that man has is a part of Paraśiva who is infinite consciousness; it is for this reason that is invariably called an element of divinity. The divinity that is in man is not manifest to him, for his mind is clouded by ignorance (marevu). Just as the fire inherent in the flint-stone or ghee inherent in milk manifests only under certain special circumstances, so also the divinity inherent in man becomes manifest only under special circumstances. The help of the guru is one such special circumstance. The divinity in man is drawn out, as it were, by the guru in a special ritual act called ‘hasta-mastaka-samīyoga’ ('hand-forehead contact')⁹. The latter act implies (1) that there is consciousness in the forehead of man, (2) that the guru extracts it by this special act and (3) that what is extracted, consciousness, is established in the iṣṭaliṅga. The aspirant places it on his left palm while worshipping it¹⁰. The disciple now onwards thinks that the iṣṭaliṅga which he worships is not simply a limited physical image or a symbol of the infinite Paraśiva, but equal to Paraśiva¹¹.
All vacanakāras without exception have highest regard for it, for it is regarded as a visible form of the invisible Paraśiva. For example, Basvaṇṇa says:

Thy wideness is the wideness of the world,
The wideness of the firmament,
Ay, wider still;
Thy feet go deeper than the underworld,
Ay, deeper still.
Thy crown is higher than Brahma’s egg,
Ay, higher still.
Thou Liṅga, who art imperceptible,
Past understanding and beyond compare,
Did’st shrink to the dimensions of a speck
When coming to my palm,
O, Kūḍala Saṅgama Lord!!

The aspirant should always wear it on his person, and worship it thrice a day and should never part from it.

The īṣṭaliṅga serves two important purposes in the practice of spiritual discipline. (1) The guru who offers it convinces the aspirant that God is always with him externally in the form of īṣṭaliṅga and internally as consciousness which is essentially the same as Paraśiva. This notion of his association of Liṅga always keeps him aware that he cannot hide anything from Paraśiva and that therefore, he must be morally and spiritually alert. (2) The īṣṭaliṅga also serves as an object of concentration which should ultimately lead to deep meditation.
The two purposes which the īṣṭaliṅga serves are interrelated. The first purpose implies that the constant moral and spiritual alertness, makes the aspirant’s soul pure such that it becomes eligible for deep meditation leading to Līṅga-aṅga-sāmarasya. An impure soul cannot unite with Paraśiva and in fact, cannot concentrate on anything.

One may object that the īṣṭaliṅga has only a religious significance and not a spiritual one, because for meditation we can choose any object, a flower, a black spot on a white wall, or the light of a lamp and not necessarily an īṣṭaliṅga. But since the vacanakāras insist that wearing of the īṣṭaliṅga is a compulsory religious act, the same must be used for meditation also. Moreover, the aspirant should think that he is concentrating on Paraśiva when he is actually concentrating on the īṣṭaliṅga which is only symbol of Paraśiva, so that when his soul in the course of meditation merges in the infinite consciousness he should think that he merges in Paraśiva.

However, anyone who thinks that the īṣṭaliṅga is Mahāliṅga or Paraśiva has not only not understood the meaning of the īṣṭaliṅga, but also has not progressed spiritually. His worship of the īṣṭaliṅga based on this metaphysical ignorance leads only to what can be clearly regarded as image worship or object worship which the vacanakāras condemn vehemently. However, one who has
realised his soul as divine (śivāṃśīka) need not necessarily continue to worship iṣṭalīṅga.

(3) **JĀNGAMA**: The word 'Jaṅgama' literally means "that which moves about". In this sense not only human beings but all other living beings are jaṅgama. However, technically speaking, the word seems to have acquired three meanings: (1) one who is born in the Jaṅgama caste, (2) one who moves about from place to place in order to preach the doctrines of Vīraśaiva religion and philosophy and to see to it that the followers of Vīraśaivism practise the Vīraśaiva moral codes and religious norms; (3) 'the moving God' (jaṅgama-liṅga). In fact, the latter two meanings are interrelated. This is evidenced from the fact that the vacanakāras treat jaṅgama as identical to Liṅga. In other words, a man who has realized God in himself identifies himself with God and naturally wishes to partake his bliss with others. With this in view he wanders about preaching people the doctrines of Vīraśaivism. He is called moving Liṅga (jaṅgama-liṅga) in contrast to immovable Liṅga (either the Liṅga established in temple or Paraśiva himself).

(4) **PĀDŌDAKA**: The three concepts of guru, Liṅga and jaṅgama suggest that guru, Liṅga and jaṅgama are on par with each other. In other words, guru, and jaṅgama are those who have realized Paraśiva (Liṅga) and have identified themselves with him. The aspirant shows equal devotion to them. His devotion includes two more aspects, pādōdaka and prasāda.
There is a strong belief among the Vīraśaivas that anything that touches guru or jaṅgama or Liṅga becomes holy. Especially, the water (udaka) that washes the feet of guru or jaṅgama is so holy that the devotee who sips it, becomes himself holy and the wall, the windows, doors, etc on which it is sprinkled become auspicious places. The importance attached to pādōdaka is expressed in one of his vacanas by Cennabasavāṇṇa, as follows:

One who says that the pādōdaka and prasāda given by a jaṅgama to Liṅga must not be consumed is a traitor of Liṅga and traitor of jaṅgama...One must not see the face of such cāndāla. However, the sipping of the holy water is only symbolic, like the act of worshipping the Liṅga.

(5) PRASĀDA : The concept of prasāda plays the central role in the spiritual life of a Vīraśaiva aspirant. Doctrinally, it is as important as the concept of Liṅga. Just as a Vīraśaiva without a Liṅga cannot be expected to attain liṅgāṅga-sāmarasya so also he cannot be expected to attain his goal without being serious about prasāda.

A close examination of the vacanas reveals that the term 'prasāda' is a complex concept having many layers of meaning. Although the term means 'grace' it has nothing to do with grace of either God or guru. In a loose sense it is grace, because it is 'given' by guru or Liṅga or jaṅgama. What is offered (arpita) to God (Liṅga) or guru or jaṅgama is called padārtha or draavya and such a thing
'becomes' prasāda (holy food). The aspirant should know that everything is created by God and he, as a token of gratefulness, has to offer the food to God, the giver, in order to make it holy food. One who eats his food without offering it to God, that is, one who does not eat prasāda, is not only not holy but an ungrateful sinner as termed by Cennabasavaṇṇa

He who give to Liṅga and receives
Is a prasādi,
That which is left after the jaṅgama has fed
Is prasāda;
That is, look you,
The beginning of prasāda.
If you would know
The primordial prasāda it is this.
If one takes it (food) without
Serving the jaṅgama and offering to Liṅga,
Lord Kūḍala Cenna Saṅgama
Will cast him into a pond of worms

In the rudimentary state, when man holds a crude anthropomorphic conception of God, things that are offered to God, should only be specially prepared food, such as sweet, ghee, etc; but later he realizes that he can offer food that he eats or drinks daily, such as rice, roti, milk, etc. In the strict sense we must gratefully remember God not only at the beginning of the breakfast, lunch, and supper, but while eating every morsel of food. Thus Basavaṇṇa says:
To eat in silence is no discipline;  
Once you have made an offering  
To Liṅga, you must say,  
At every morsel, To Śiva I bow'.  
The body's attributes would be shed  
If you would eat remembering  
Kūḍala Saṅga15

Prasāda is not eaten for its nutritious or hygienic value, nor for the value of its taste. A real prasādi (one who believes in, and takes regularly, prasāda) is one who consumes anything eatable, whatever is its taste16. Similarly, it is not prasāda if a rich man eats it several times or if a poor man eats it stealthily. The intention of prasāda eating must be becoming holy. A man who consumes prasāda without that intention does not become a holy man. "They say what is offered is prasāda and what is left is prasāda, does not a cat eat what is offered and what is left?"17 asks Allama Prabhu. His question implies that a cat which eats prasāda does not have that intention, and therefore, does not become holy.

In a still higher sense, the concept of prasāda transcends the concept of edible object. According to this concept a devotee offers not only edible object, but the foods of all the five senses, namely, form, taste, smell, touch, and sound. This means that whatever our senses experience, must be first offered to the creator before they are enjoyed by us. In this sense the whole world must be offered to God. In this stage the way of offering also undergoes a thorough
change: the devotee does not offer them with his hand to Liṅga at a particular place and a particular time; he offers them mentally at all places and at all times. As Cennabasavaṇṇa says:

Before the objects touch the body  
They must be offered to Liṅga  
Before the objects touch the mind  
They must be offered to Liṅga  
Before the objects touch the ear,  
Eyes, nose, tongue and skin  
They must be offered to Liṅga,  
If one is a prasādi ...¹⁸

Elsewhere he says:

One must not consume anything,  
Unless one offers it to the liṅga worn on the person;  
But if we try to offer to liṅga  
Which is placed on the palm,  
It cannot be offered;  
The real way of offering is this:  
The smell is offered in the nose itself;  
The taste in the tongue itself;  
Form in the eyes themselves; (and so on)¹⁹

We must offer everything because God has created not only food and drinks but other things as well, such as, what we see, what we hear, what we smell, etc. If offering the food of one sense (taste) makes it a prasāda, offering of ‘foods’ of other senses must also make them prasāda. Seen from this angle, there is nothing in the world which is not prasāda.
In a still higher stage, the devotee offers his sense organs and motor organs and the antahkarana, because these like the sense objects are created by God. This means that the individual personality has undergone a total transformation such that the individual thinks that there is nothing in him that can be called his own. The sense organs, the motor organs, the mind, the intellect, the ego, which he used to regard his own are not really his own now. Sometimes such a person has frequent mystic experiences. In fact, mystic experience cannot take place unless the aspirant offers everything of his, such that he becomes pure. 'Pure' does not mean 'clean', but 'unmixed with or dissociated from the bad influence of sense organs, motor organs and the internal organs'. Such a man's personality is called 'prasāda-kāya'. He does not see Liṅga outside but experiences it in his own personality. Therefore, he is also called prāṇaliṅgi (one who has established Liṅga all over his personality).

In the rudimentary stage of his spiritual discipline the aspirant thinks of Paraśiva only at the time of worship, that is, twice or thrice a day. But as his spirituality progresses he comes to realize that not only the food that he eats or drinks but everything that he sees, touches, etc is a prasāda of Paraśiva. Still later, he learns the art of meditation in which his soul has a communion with the world soul. This meditation is the means to self-realization. For a fruitful meditation a complete purification of all
the senses and the internal organs is necessary. At the prāṇatiṁgli-
sthāla that is what he has done. In the śaraṇa-sthāla the aspirant has offered his own soul. Only such a surrender makes him a complete devotee, śaraṇa (one who has fully surrendered all that is his to Paraśiva).

One who has surrendered all his mind, intellect, sense, etc soon realizes that Paraśiva has pervaded his entire personality, controls and guides all his mental and physical activities. He is no more his earlier individual self. He claims nothing for himself. He now perceives Paraśiva where he was earlier perceiving himself.

There is a mouth which enjoys within
The mouth that eats;
There is an eye which enjoys within
The eye that sees;
There is an ear which enjoys within
The ear that hears; (and so on)

This means that the senses of the aspirant are the senses of Paraśiva. Because it is not the devotee but Paraśiva who is within them that ultimately enjoys the sense objects.

Can the mind think (Paraśiva)? It cannot.
What is the reason? Because the thinker thinking in His thought is He Himself;
Can eye see (Him)? It cannot.
Because He who sees standing at the door of the eye
Is He himself; ...
Can the machines work (of their accord)?
No, they cannot. The reason is that He is the controller of the machines. It is for this reason that it is rightly said that Paraśiva and śaraṇa have one personality (bhakta-dehika-deva,). Sayings like,

Being at the tip of my ear it is
You that hear the auspicious sounds;
Being at the tip of my skin it is
You that experience the auspicious touch; ...
Being at the tip of my tongue it is
You that taste the good taste; ...(and so on)

"God having the devotee as his body", "The individual is the plate (from which God eats)" etc., clearly mean that the food that the devotee eats is really enjoyed by Paraśiva.

The salient feature of the śaraṇa-sthala is his conviction that God is everywhere. What was once just a belief is now confirmed by frequent mystic experiences. This conviction has transformed both his social and spiritual behaviour. The act of offering something - be it food or his own sense or mind - is, speaking metaphysically, senseless, because offering implies a distinction between the offering devotee and the receiving God. It is senseless because the devotee has identified himself with Paraśiva and one who has identified oneself with Paraśiva cannot offer anything. The reason is not that since he has achieved everything, he need not offer anything, but that he does not distinguish himself from Paraśiva. This reason implies (1) that there is nothing left in the devotee to
offer to Paraśiva, because he has offered not only all objects of sense, but his own self completely and (2) that since he has identified himself with Paraśiva there is no devotee (different from Paraśiva) who can offer something.

The concept of prasāda means two things: (1) The disciple in the beginning believes that God is different from himself, that he should worship God, and offer food, and later, his own sense, etc. (2) The same devotee having reached the goal (union with Paraśiva) frees himself from such practices as worship, offering, etc. In the beginning it is necessary, at the end it is unnecessary.

(6) VIBHŪTI : Vibhūti (or bhasma) or sacred ash plays an important role in the aspirant's spiritual life. Ash is always a symbol of something that is burnt. Holy ash is a symbol of burning of two important things which are impediments in any spiritual way. These are (1) ignorance (marevu) and (2) karmas. Because of ignorance man has forgotten his original divine nature (śivasvarūpa). He mistakes himself for mind, intellect, ego, body, etc. He wrongly thinks that gratification of bodily desires is the sole aim of his life. In order to satisfy these desires he goes on doing all kinds of act (karma) which only bind him to the saṁsāra.

Man has three kinds of bodies - sthūla (gross), sūkṣma (subtle) and kāraṇa (causal). A man who is wandering in saṁsāra has to get himself freed from the grip of all the karmas, or in other words, from the grip of the bodies. Of these karmas prārabdha is
the longest lasting one. Even if all the other karmas are burnt, the existence of our body points to the fact that prärabdha is not yet burnt, because our sthūla śarīra (gross body) is its effect. To overcome the grip of these three bodies, is not to kill them but only to escape their evil influence. This is symbolically termed tripura-saṁhāra, where tripura stands for the threefold body and saṁhāra stands for the destruction of the evil influence (of the threefold body) which induces us to commit actions which bind us to saṁsāra. Normally Parasiva is said to be tripura-saṁhāri (the destroyer of the threefold body)\textsuperscript{25}. Symbolically speaking, one who has burnt the influence of his threefold body is free from rebirth. The mythological depiction of Parasiva as being besmeared with ash is a symbolic expression that he has no karmas and, as such, he is the supreme ideal of spiritual life. In other words, one who smears his body with external sacred ash is symbolically aspiring for becoming one with a body of sacred ash which is what remains when the threefold body which is the result of marevu (ignorance) is burnt.

(2) Man because of his ignorance entertains various kinds of desires. These desires take man away from Parasiva, on the one hand, and drives him into the vicious circle of births and deaths (bhava-cakra). When man comes in contact with a guru he learns from him the art of burning the desires so that his impure soul becomes a pure soul. Only a pure soul which is completely free
from selfish desires is eligible for union with Parasiva. The art of burning desire is symbolically called kāmadahana, (mythologically Parasiva is said to be the one who performs the act of kāmadahana). Here also the sacred ash is what remains after the desires are burnt.

Vibhūti is also sometimes called 'aiśvarya'. The word 'aiśvarya' does not mean wealth, but 'lordliness'. To be Īśvara (Lord), especially in this context, is to be a controller of one's own senses. Thus, vibhūti which is aiśvarya means controlling the senses or reducing the desires, ignorance and karmas to ashes. The aspirant is expected to smear certain parts of his body with vibhūti. It is good if the learned guru teaches the aspirant the philosophy behind this article of faith, that is, if he reminds the aspirant of burning down his desires.

(7) RUDRĀKṢI: Rudrākṣi (or rudrākṣa) is a bead considered as holy by all Śaivas, including Vīraśaivas. Usually, a garland of 108 rudrākṣa is worn around one's neck and the same is used for telling the beads prior to meditation. The significance, therefore, of rudrākṣi lies in helping the aspirant to achieve concentration which is necessary for meditation.

(8) MANTRA: The Sanskrit word mantra stands in the Vīraśaiva context for a five or six syllable word, namely, namahśivāya or Om namahśivāya.
The aspirant is advised by the guru to utter this *mantra* as a mark of his devotion to Paraśiva. The word *mantra* comes from the Sanskrit root *man* which means 'to think'. Thus uttering *mantra* enables the aspirant to think of Paraśiva always.

Though the devotee utters the *mantra* five times a day in the beginning, he should increase the frequency later. Still later he should only whisper the *mantra* so that it should not be heard by others. Still later, he should utter it mentally. One who utters it mentally is remembering God and one who remembers God always is spiritually pure and is able to achieve oneness with God. The behind *mantra*-recitation is this, that if one contemplates Paraśiva always he has no thoughts of other things. This is same as saying that though the aspirant is engaged in worldly acts his mind, without deliberate efforts, is thinking of Paraśiva. In other words, the aspirant is engaged in total devotion. A mind which is divided between worldly things and devotion cannot boast of total devotion. Therefore, *mantra*-recitation which does not lead to totality of devotion is incomplete, if not futile.

There are certain other things which are equally essential for the possibility of mystic experience. Among these are (1) the company (*satsaṅga*) of the spiritually advanced people, like saints (*sādhus*) and wise people (*jñānis*) and (2) divine grace (*anugraha*).

(1) *Satsaṅga* :- The vacanakāras, it seems, had formed an association called, Anubhava maṇṭapa, whose establishment had
this sole objective, that experiences (anubhava) of the śaraṇas must be shared amongst all those who attended the meeting. It seems that they met daily and discussed the problems relating to the spiritual life, such as, what is mystic experience, what is God, what is liṅgāṇa-sāmarasya, what are the six sthalas (stages), what is kāyaka, what makes a man a real śaraṇa, etc. These activities of the Anubhava-maṇṭapa, therefore, naturally kept the minds of the fellows sāmarasya-oriented.

Even when the aspirants did not attend such meetings, they did require the company of the spiritually advanced people. There could be aspirants who either lived outside Kalyāṇa (and therefore, could not attend the meetings at the Anubhava-maṇṭapa) or there were some in Kalyāṇa itself who for some reason or the other, could not attend these meetings. Such aspirants, also wanted the company of the spiritually oriented people in order not to wean away from the spiritual goal. The company of the spiritually advanced people also inculcates in the aspirant the idea of the guru or jaṅgama as a goal or ideal.

Another reason which the vacanakāras advance for the necessity of satsaṅga is this: that an aspirant learns the art and science of spiritual life more easily in the company of a spiritually advanced teacher than from the scholarly books or discourses authored by his teacher. Learning to lead a spiritual life leading to mystic experience is more like learning to handle a machine than
like learning a philosophical doctrine. The problems which the aspirant perceives are readily solved by the spiritually advanced.

Suppose the aspirant begins to live in the company of wicked people or people who are spiritually less advanced. This new association of the wicked people may sway him back to worldly life, for it is easier to climb down the spiritual ladder than to climb it up. If he is in the company of the spiritually less advanced, his problems are not solved by them and therefore, there is no spiritual progress.

2. Anugraha: In addition to self-effort, the aspirant must also depend on grace (anugraha) of Parasiva. The grace of Paraśiva is important for two reasons.

(a) The individual soul has collected innumerable karmas in its history of beginningless bondage. Before these karmas fructify and exhaust it collects some more karmas. This means that it is impossible to be free completely from karmas. To make this impossibility possible the aspirant requires divine grace. Basavaṇṭha stressing the need for divine grace says:

Does the mud go if you wash a wall
Over and over again?
Pray, Lord, remove the taints
Inhabiting my flesh.
My heart - can you not see?
Is like the dough
That's kneaded in a rug!
Only by making obeisance to you,
Kūḍala Saṅgama Lord,

Can I be pure!32

He knows clearly that he is incapable of purging himself completely of the evils that deter him from attaining the spiritual goal. Therefore, he prays to God to free him from those evils33.

Divine grace is not arbitrary. God, according to Vīraśaivas, confers grace on the devotees depending upon their spiritual progress. Just because Paraśiva is said to be compassionate it does not follow that he confers grace on everybody. He punishes wicked people according to their evil deeds and confers grace according to their spiritual merits.

[b] Just as for the destruction of the old karmas divine grace is necessary, for prevention of new karmas and for strengthening the existing devotedness also divine grace is required34.

THE DOCTRINE OF PAÑCĀCĀRA

While the eight elements of aṣṭāvaraṇa are essential for generating religious faith, the pañcācāra ('five acts') are expressions of that faith. Just as a mother who loves her child expresses it in the form of an act, so also the Vīraśaiva who is initiated and indoctrinated is expected to express his faith in the form of five acts. Faith in religious doctrines is quite unlike faith in theoretical doctrines. The mother cannot say “I love my child, but I am not ready to sacrifice anything for my child”. If she did not sacrifice her happiness it means that she did not love her child and if she
sacrificed it follows that she loved her child. Similarly, a Vīraśaiva cannot say "I believe that Paraśiva is the giver of all things, but I do not like to be grateful to him". His belief must express in some act or the other. But if one is a thoroughgoing exponent of subjective idealism but behaves like a realist, one is not surprised.

These five acts are binding on the part of a Vīraśaiva. Therefore, they must be observed as if they are vows (uratas). These five acts are: liṅga-cāra, sadācāra, śiva-cāra, gaṇācāra and bhṛtya-cāra.

1. Liṅga-cāra: Liṅga-cāra is the vow not to worship any deity other than Liṅga, thus ensuring one's loyalty to Liṅga. Actually, observance of liṅga-cāra is beneficial in a definite way. The aspirant is prevented from worshipping many deities, for that would result in loss of faith in Liṅga and in failure to concentrate on any deity. One who does not worship Liṅga for attaining concentration leading to mystic experience mechanically worships it and it is futile as it leads him nowhere. In fact, perfect liṅga-cāra should reflect the view that Paraśiva is everywhere and should lead the aspirant to think that all that he thinks and does are for Liṅga (Paraśiva).

Cennabasavanṇa says

Look, you! I do everything for Liṅga,
Give everything for Liṅga
And think for Liṅga, since I have no bodily qualities ...[^35]
This vacana reveals the highest degree of sense of sacrifice that a devotee can show to Liṅga.

2. Sadācāra : Sadācāra is the vow to maintain good behaviour (sadācāra), which includes abstention from telling lies, killing, stealing, anger, hatred, etc.\textsuperscript{36} and development of truthfulness, compassion\textsuperscript{37}, etc. While liṅgācāra is man's attitude to Paraśiva, sadācāra is one man's attitude to another man. The perfect observance of this vow makes a man pure or unselfish and eligible for mystic experience. A man who is engaged in all kinds of self-centered activities cannot be expected to have mystic experience.

3. Śivācāra : Though the word 'Śiva' means 'Liṅga', 'śivācāra' does not mean 'liṅgācāra'. Śivācāra is one devotee's act towards another devotee of Śiva. One should behave with Śiva-devotees without taking into consideration their caste, class, etc\textsuperscript{38}. One should whenever possible help his fellow devotees. If one behaves the way Paraśiva and jaṅgama approve, then his behaviour must be called śivācāra\textsuperscript{39}. To maintain a cohesive community śivācāra is necessary.

4. Gaṇācāra : Gaṇācāra is an act which aims at prevention of religious and moral regression. It is natural that man in the company of spiritually advanced people develops spiritual habits and in the company of wicked people develops immoral habits. The Vīraśaiva saints and mystics prescribe avoidance of the company of
the wicked. A devotee who is intent on *Līṅgāṅga-sāmarasya* must not mix with people who make fun of, or hate the principles and practices of Vīraśaivism, or the devotees of Śiva. If he cannot tolerate such talks, he should leave such places. The extreme form of *gaṇācāra* is elimination of such people. To live amongst such people without being angered by their ill talks is the best attitude.

Though *gaṇācāra* is an attitude of an individual to his society or community it is no less religious.

5. *Bhṛtyācāra*: *Bhṛtyācāra* is an act of *bhṛtya*, servant, meaning an attitude of servitude or humility. According to this prescription, one should go to the places where guru, *jaṅgama* and spiritually advanced people stay and serve them with humility. He should offer them money, gold, etc., which they use for the betterment of the society. This at once makes a man unselfish and humble. He regards willfully himself as the servant of the Śiva-devotees. Such a self-less man deserves mystic experience.

While many vacanakāras stick to ‘Five Acts’ Cennabasavaṇṇa prescribes seven, sometimes eleven and sometimes fifty acts. But all these are divisions and subdivisions of the ‘Five Acts’, and, like them aim at purifying the soul in order to make it eligible for mystic experience.
THE DOCTRINE OF ŠAṬ-STHALA

The word ‘Šaṭ-sthala’ which literally means six places or stages refers to six stages of spiritual progress. The aspirant in these six stages is technically called (1) bhakta, (2) maheśa, (3) prasādi, (4) prāṇaliṅga, (5) śaraṇa and (6) aikya. Similarly the degree of intensity of his devotion corresponding to these six stages is called (1) śraddhā, (2) niṣṭhā or naiṣṭhika, (3) avadhāna, (4) anubhāva, (5) ānanda and (6) samarasa. It must be noted that šaṭ-sthala is not temporally posterior to aṣṭāvaraṇa. In other words, the aspirant practises aṣṭāvaraṇa in six stages of the spiritual discipline.

These six stages are progressive in the sense that the aspirant in the preliminary stages has many illusions about himself and the world and a lower intensity of devotion. In course of time he overcomes the illusions, develops self-control and attains proper knowledge and high degree of spirituality in the higher stages.

(1). BHAKTA-STHALA :- The aspirant who in the first stage is called bhakta suffers from the wrong notion that duality of himself and God is real. He also suffers from the mistaken notion that the iṣṭaliṅga offered by his guru is the real God. Thinking that the iṣṭaliṅga is the ultimate reality he ties it around his arm or neck or head. This conception of God does not transform him spiritually. Allama Prabhu says

Does one’s hunger vanish
If he ties a packet of food around his stomach? Does one become a devotee If he wears a Liṅga on his person? This means that one should establish Liṅga not on one's person but in his mind, intellect, etc. as well.

The Sanskrit term bhakta means one who is divided or separated, meaning that bhakta is one who is divided or separated from Paraśiva. Actually he is not separated from Paraśiva, but because of the inbuilt ignorance (marevu) he thinks that he is independent individual entity. It is logically impossible for him or anybody to be separated Paraśiva because that would imply the absurdity that there is a place where there is no Paraśiva. The devotee is always in Paraśiva as his part (aṅga) without knowing that he is in Paraśiva.

The term bhkati means not only separation but also devotion. Devotion is the response a devotee shows to God for being created and placing the whole world at his disposal. A cursory look at the history of Indian Bhakti literature reveals that devotion (which is the devotee's response to God) is of two kinds. Devotion of one kind gets expressed in some cases in emotional outbursts. The devotee as a result of this is totally lost in ecstasy and may begin to sing and dance unmindful of the external world. The devotion of the other kind is the result of wisdom. A person having arrived at the conclusion that there is God, that he expresses himself in infinite ways, that he is omnipotent and omniscient, that he is the inner
controller of everything (sarvāntaryāmi) and that he shows agreeable response to the devotional call of the devotees, decides to express his devotion in an intellectual way. The devotion of the latter type is the characteristic feature of Vīraśaivism. The foundational concept this devotion is that man (aṅga) in his original nature is a part of Paraśiva and he should regain that fellowship even when he is alive.

The devotion which the vacanākāras recommend as an effective means to oneness with Paraśiva has six layers or stages (sthala).

The characteristic feature of the first stage of devotion is the blind faith which the devotee badly needs to develop. The devotee in this stage does not doubt his beliefs or does not go in search of justification for all that he believes or does in the name of devotion. Instead, he simply believes all that is imparted to him by his guru and does accordingly. Many a time when we reap the consequences of such actions based on faith we realize that what we did is right. Moreover, the guru himself has realized the result only after a similar practice.

The aspirant in the first stage has already realized the ubiquity of misery and the worthlessness of the worldly pleasures. As a result of this realization he has turned to spirituality but this is not enough. Having been initiated by the guru he decides to have faith in certain doctrines and have faith in guru, Liṅga and
In addition, he should become aware of the defects which are impediments in his spiritual career. This is necessary because unless he overcomes them he cannot become a mystic.

Perhaps the desire to overcome these defects is incomparably stronger in Basavanna than anybody.

My actions go one way,
Another way my speech!
Look, Lord, there is no trace
Of purity in me!
Where action fitting to the word is found ...

Basavaṇṇa is aware that he does not have steady mind because it jumps from object to object like a monkey which jumps from branch to branch. He is also aware that though he has pledged to go along the spiritual path in preference to the worldly life he has been distracted by innumerable evil desires and evil thoughts. Though to others he is a great man he alone knows the evil desires and thoughts which torment him repeatedly and which do not allow him to concentrate his mind on the Liṅga-worship. He is also aware that he is unable to overcome these deterrents in spite of his best efforts and that divine grace is required in this matter.

(2). MAHEŚA-STHALA :- The devotee in the second stage is called maheśa. He is not only aware of the defects but also determines to overcome them by his steadfast will and self-effort. The awareness of the impediments in his spiritual path must be so...
intense that he should feel ashamed of them. His sense of shame or repentance should lead to a firm determination not to commit them again. The leading example is, again, Basavaṇṇa. The latter says:

Myriads without ends are my sins
And if Thy patience there is no count!
By Thy feet I swear I will not err again ...

It is this determination or steadfastness that is the characteristic feature of a Maheśa. The devotion of this stage is called nīṣṭhā (naiṣṭhika) bhakti (steadfast devotion). The nīṣṭhā-bhakti expresses itself in many ways, which can be classified into two groups. In the first group there are determinations regarding what can be called technical acts. He is determined (1) not to worship God in the temple including sthāvara-liṅga,(2) not to worship minor gods like Indra, Agni, etc and (3) nor to worship inanimate objects. Basavaṇṇa makes fun of the worshippers of inanimate objects in the following words:

Look you, the pot is god, the winnowing fan
Is god, the stone upon the roadside too!
The comb is god, the bowstring too!
The jar a god, the pippet too!
So many gods! There is no space
To put your foot! The only God
Is Lord Kūḍala Saṅgama!
While these are negative determinations, the positive determinations of a *Maheśa* is to worship *iṣṭaṅgas* offered by his guru and that alone.

This is the general recommendation of all vacanakāras including Basavaṇṇa, Cennabasavaṇṇa, Allama Prabhu, Akka Mahādevi, etc. At the outset this looks like fanaticism. But the point, which they like to drive home is that the worship of other gods or inanimate objects amounts to implicit rejection of the belief that God is consciousness and is unmanifestly present in man. The aspirant had promised to have faith in this doctrine at the time of initiation and the worship of other gods and inanimate objects amounts to breach of this promise.

I have seen shoulders branded
After Viṣṇu worship;
I have seen nakedness,
After Jina worship;
I have seen men barking like dogs,
After Mailāra worship;
I have seen them called
Devotees of God
After the worship of
Our Kūḍala Saṅga's śaraṇas50

Moreover such a belief is the foundation of the Vīraśaivas’ spiritual endeavour. The other technical acts which the *maheśa* has to unfailingly practise in his daily life is showing reverence to
In the second group moral determinations are included.

The śaraṇa must have the constancy to say

'I will not have another's wealth';

The śaraṇa must have the constancy to say

'I will not have another's wife';

The śaraṇa must have the constancy to say

'I will not have another god';

The śaraṇa must have the constancy to say,

'The Līṅga and jaṅgama are one';

The śaraṇa must have the constancy to say,

'Prasāda is the truth'

Lord Kūḍala Saṅgama disdains

Such men as have no constancy

The point of such moral determinations is that the devotee

should not recede spiritually but only proceed. He can hope to

proceed only if he has firm faith in what he believes and does.

A faithless action leads nowhere. Cennabasavaṇṇa asks "what is

the use of showing for a long time the devotion without loyalty?"

The degree of loyalty is tested at trying moments.

However much be said,

I will not lose my courage, Lord;

Even though my bones lie bare,

My nerves are torn,

My guts fall out,

I will not lose my courage, Lord.

Even though my head is torn and though
My headless trunk drop down to earth,
My tongue will go on saying “Lord,
O, Kūḍala saṅga, I bow to Thee!”53

Basavaṇṇa says that a loss of faith at the time of misery only means that we show our devotion when it is convenient to us and give it up when it is inconvenient. But why should we decide not to give up our faith? The answer is that by firm conviction to overcome the evil habits and to develop moral and spiritual habits we should become eligible for mystic experience. According to Tōṇṭada Siddhaliṅga Śivayogi,

...What shall I say of those
Who have not rent the sensual veil,
Who have not turned the nerves
Of passions, nor controlled
The tremor of the inner powers;
Nor torn up by the roots
The motor organs turning them to ash;
Nor annihilated miserable lust,
And yet make claim to loyalty to Liṅga!...54

The steadfast loyalty in religious and moral discipline leads to the destruction of the natural bodily limitations, ignorance of the mind and to knowledge. In support of this claim we can quote a vacana from Śaṅmukha Svāmi:

Loyalty destroys the body’s (evil) nature;
Loyalty destroys the ignorance of the mind;
Loyalty shows the way to knowledge ...55.
The vows and pledges are the rudimentary type of steadfast loyalty. Now it becomes clear why the devotee who practises steadfast loyalty to Liṅga should be called maheśa. Īśa or maheśa always means ‘lord’ and the devotee is maheśa because he is the lord of his senses. Without a firm control over his own senses, a devotee cannot spiritually progress.

(3) PRASĀDI-STHALA :- Those aspirants in the preliminary stage who want to show devotion and loyalty to iṣṭaliṅga tie it around their neck or arm, worship it which includes the sprinkling of water, waving of lamp, burning of incense sticks, and, offering food. The food that is offered at the end of the worship is technically called ‘padārtha’, ‘dravya’ or ‘arpita’ and the same food after the offer becomes prasāda (holy food). The Vīraśaivas believe that one who consumes prasāda or holy food himself becomes holy.

This is an elementary conception of prasāda. Those who want to spiritually progress have a higher conception, according to which, prasāda is not a holy food which is consumed after worship which is done thrice a day, but whatever food whenever consumed must be treated as prasāda. Food that is consumed without offering to Puruṣāvi is no less than poison.

The concept of prasāda in Vīraśaivism is notably different from traditional Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. (1) According to traditional Hinduism and Christianity, only the appointed priest, not others, should serve prasāda. Those who want prasāda should
necessarily go to the places of worship in order to get it. According to Vīraśaivism, on the contrary, anybody who worships īśṭaliṅga at any place possible, can make his own prasāda and offer it to others and in order to obtain it one need not go to special places of worship; and in order to give it one need not be a priest. (2) In temples prasāda usually means specially prepared food; for example, the sweet laddus prepared in the Tirupati temple. But for a Vīraśaiva any food, including the ordinary food, which one consumes daily can be converted into prasāda.

Here a problem crops up: how can food offered to Liṅga become prasāda? How can a devotee who eats it become holy or pure? Here the devotee may argue that he is offering food, not to īśṭaliṅga, a physical object, but to Paraśiva who is immanent in it. But this is not a satisfactory answer because the food that is supposed to make its eater holy has not undergone any change such that the eater becomes holy. If the devotee who eats it becomes holy and eligible for liberation, then Vīraśaivism can be said to offer the easiest way to liberation. If this is true then one need not toil in spiritual discipline for the attainment of liberation.

They say 'what one gets back is prasāda and
What remains is prasāda'; but
Can a cat not eat what is returned and
What remains? ...
Asks Prabhudeva\(^{57}\). What he means is that if a prasādi (eater of prasāda) becomes eligible for liberation then a cat which eats prasāda must also likewise be eligible for liberation.

Vacanakāras were well aware of this objection. In fact, they derided those who eat prasāda to satisfy their hunger or their desire to eat special food in the name of prasāda, those who offered food to Liṅga mechanically and those who offered food prepared out of stolen goods.

‘We offer to Liṅga, we offer to Liṅga’
They claim. But we understand this not.
Can Liṅga who is ever satisfied have hunger?
Oh, God, they impose their hunger on Liṅga
Exhibit their offerings to Liṅga who cannot eat\(^58\)

Then what, according to the vacanakāras, is prasāda?

Prasāda, according to them, is not merely food but all things that we experience by means of senses. Allama Prabhu says:

As long as there are different forms of śakti
Associated with the soul, one must not take
Anything until offered to Liṅga \(...\)^{59}

On this matter Cennabasavaṇṇa is still more clear. He says:

We must offer to Liṅga the light of the rising sun;
We must offer to Liṅga the darkness of the sunset;
We must offer to Liṅga the wind that moves about in space;
Whatever is the object, we must offer to Liṅga \(...\)^{60}

If we have to offer things in this manner it is neither possible nor necessary to take the offerings to the place where Liṅga is.
Because by the time the devotee realizes that everything is a prasāda of Paraśiva he has also realized that Paraśiva is everywhere. So, he offers them wherever they are even before contacting them by senses. Therefore, Cennebasavaṇṇa says:

We must offer things before they touch the person;
We must offer things before they touch the mind;
We must offer things before they touch the ears;
We must offer things before they touch the skin,
... the eyes, ... the tongue ... and the nose
If one is a Prasādi of Kūḍala Cennasaṅgayya⁶¹.

He further says:

The things seen by the eyes must not be offered to Liṅga;
The things heard by the ears must not be offered to Liṅga;
The things touched by the nose must not be offered to Liṅga; ...

Similarly, the things touched by the tongue and the hands must not be offered to Liṅga⁶².

The noteworthy point is not what the devotee receives as prasāda but what he offers. If the devotee offers things which he has seen, smelt, or touched, it means that he has already enjoyed them and things which are enjoyed are not worthy of offering to Liṅga. This means one must offer things before he enjoys them, just as he should offer to food to Liṅga before he enjoys it. This further means that he must not have any desire for the things
which he offers. Cennabasavaṇṇa adds that one who without desire offers form, taste, smell, touch, sound offers them rightly.

If you know, O, Kūḍala Cennasaṅgayya, that
I without desire or illusion offer form,
Taste, smell and sound,
My offerings become Prasāda to me⁶³.

This vacana and similar many vacanas implicitly teach not only that we must enjoy taste, smell, etc only after offering them to Paraśiva but also that we must control our desire to enjoy them at least till they are offered to Paraśiva. This self-control leads one to develop selflessness. Such a man himself purifies his senses.

If a man frees his eyes of its defects,
Frees his ears of its evil sounds,
Frees his nose of its evil smells and
Offers them to Liṅga he is liṅga-prasādi ...⁶⁴

A still higher form of offer is the offering of one's own sense and motor organs and the inner organs which control them. When Akka Mahādevi says

The body's grace is mine, mine is the mind;
The grace of soul is mine, and of the will ...⁶⁵

What she means is that the sense of offering must not be restricted to physical objects and must be extended to the devotee's whole personality. Because if the devotee offers everything except his individuality his offering is not worth the name. So one who
offers himself is a real prasādi. The path leading to Śiva is possible for him only. The one who has offered everything to Paraśiva has made himself empty. Such an empty place which is a pure place is fit for the establishment of Liṅga. One who establishes Liṅga in his personality is prāṇaliṅgi.

Prasādi-sthala is a stage of spiritual education in which the aspirant learns that everything is a gift (prasāda) of Paraśiva and, therefore, nothing can be rightly said to be his. In other words, the concept of prasāda teaches the aspirant the art of selflessness. The aspirant is called ‘avadhāna-bhakti’ which implies that the aspirant should develop alertness (avadhāna), i.e., must be careful while treating everything as prasāda. Avadhāna also means attention, which is required for meditation. Thus Prasādi-sthala is a training in meditation also. It should be noted that one cannot meditate unless one is unselfish.

(4) PRĀNALIṅGI-STHALA :- Prāṇaliṅgi is one whose entire personality is occupied by Liṅga. Just as prāṇa is present in every part of a living body so also Liṅga is present wherever there is prāṇa. Since in the previous stage (prasādi-sthala) the devotee has offered everything to Paraśiva there is nothing in him which he calls his own. To say that one has offered everything to Paraśiva is also to say that Paraśiva has occupied every part of the devotee. This is possible not when the devotee believes so, but when he realizes it in his deep meditation which leads to the mystic
experience (anubhāva). Therefore, the bhakti of prāṇaliṅgi is called anubhāva-bhakti. Since Paraśiva has wholly occupied the devotee, the devotee’s inner organs, sense organs, motor organs, etc are those of Paraśiva. In this sense a prāṇaliṅgi is also a sarvāṅga-liṅgi (one whose all parts are permeated by Liṅga).

The term prāṇaliṅgi means one who has established Liṅga all over his body. The devotee now knows that it is Paraśiva who enjoys by means of his (the devotee’s) sense organs, etc.

This truth in which he had belief as a devotee of the primary stage has now become the content of his direct experience. He knew that Paraśiva exists everywhere including himself. But now he has realized this by means of mystic experience. He has lost his ego as a result of the mystic experience. Consequently, he is unable to make distinction between himself and the world and between himself and God. This is put by Allama Prabhu in the following manner: Since the difference between the soul and the non-soul is wiped out, knowledge (self-consciousness) and words are also lost.

Since the prāṇaliṅgi has lost his individuality the question of who enjoys the objects of sense does not arise. The devotee in the prasādi-sthala was consciously and deliberately offering things to Paraśiva but in the Prāṇaliṅgi-sthala he offers them unconsciously; because, Paraśiva is believed to stand at the gate of every sense and motor organ such that the devotee cannot enjoy anything.
unless it is first enjoyed by Paraśiva. Therefore, there is no necessity of offering anything to Paraśiva.

(5) ŚARĀṆA-STHĀLA :- An intense form of prāṇaliṅgi-sthāla is śaraṇa-sthāla. Śaraṇa is one who has totally surrendered himself to Paraśiva and one who enjoys frequently the mystic experience. Total and unconditional surrender is the essential feature of this sthāla. The surrender is so intense and so total that the devotee thinks that he has surrendered his sense organs, motor organs, etc. to Paraśiva. All his karmas have either fructified or burnt in the previous stages. Therefore, he feels unsullied ānanda or ānanda-bhakti which is the name of the devotion of this stage of spiritual progress. According to Allama Prabhu the aspirant of this stage has only ānanda (bliss) and there is no necessity of any ritual act like worship, offering, alertness, etc. because whatever he does results in blissful experience. In fact, the śaraṇa regards all his limbs, senses, mind, etc and their activities as those of Paraśiva. Once such a feeling is established in the devotee he also regards himself as a being without freedom. Again Allama Prabhu says:

The gross body is made of five elements;
The subtle body of mind, intellect, will and ego;
The causal body of knowledge of the heart;
Being captured by spirit,
The gross, the subtle and the causal have no freedom ...

The gross body is made of five elements;
The subtle body of mind, intellect, will and ego;
The causal body of knowledge of the heart;
Being captured by spirit,
The gross, the subtle and the causal have no freedom ...
The bliss (ānanda) which the śarāṇa enjoys does not come from sense contact, nor does it resemble it. Therefore, it is not temporary but eternal. In fact, it does not have external source at all but is the very original characteristic of a free soul.

The vaknākārās often describe the bhakti of the śarāṇa-stage as ‘śarāṇa-sati-liṅga-pati-bhāva’. That is, the mystic regards himself the wife of Paraśiva. This description is apt for two reasons: (a) Just as a woman feels happy in the company of her husband and forgets everything else, so also the śarāṇa in his fellowship with Paraśiva feels intense bliss and forgets everything else including his own personal happiness. (b) Just as a loving and devoted wife is ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of her husband so also the śarāṇa for the sake of God is ready to sacrifice everything – his pleasures, his own senses, his own motor organs, etc., – in fact, his whole personality. If the wife did not have love for her husband she would not have made such sacrifices. Similarly, if the śarāṇa did not have intense love for God, he would not have made total and unconditional surrender.

The simile of husband and wife relationship must not lead us to the misconception that the devotee and God are different individuals like husband and wife. The bliss is mystical bliss and is the result of mystical union, which has left deep impression on the mystic, the impression that he is not separate from Paraśiva and
the idea of separation is a mistake. In order that we should not mistake so, Cennabasavaṇṇa warns:

Having sacrificed gold, woman and land,  
Having shaven the head . . .  
Having overcome the duality of devotee,  
The wife, and Liṅga, the husband,  
One must be in the greatest bliss ...\textsuperscript{69}

The āśaraṇa-sthala reflects an important metaphysical doctrine of Viśvaśaivism, namely, that the individual self has borrowed its sense organs, motor organs, the internal organs, etc which are the different forms of Paraśiva’s śakti. It is just on the part of the soul to be grateful to Paraśiva the lender and to return them at appropriate time. It is to be noted that we should return these different forms of śakti in a very pure form just as they were pure when they were leant by Paraśiva. In one of his vacanas Cennabasavaṇṇa says:

O, Śiva, I don’t enter Śivapura  
Without repaying your debt;  
I will repay earth to earth,  
Water to water;  
The loan of fire is repaid to fire;  
The air is returned to air and space to space ...\textsuperscript{70}

This implies that the best way for the āśaraṇa to surrender himself to Paraśiva is to return all that is gifted to him. Self-surrender is a means to selflessness. One who thinks that
sense, etc. are learnt by Paraśiva can become unselfish and become eligible for union with him.

(6) AIKYA-STHALA :- Psychologists of mysticism have recognized three important stages in mystic experiences. In the first the mystic develops concentration of mind (avadhāna), becomes unaware of the external world and experiences brilliant light. In this stage he enjoys great bliss and has an indistinct awareness of himself. In the second stage he experiences a steady expansion of his soul or the merging of his soul in the universal soul. This is compared by the vacanakāras to light merging in light, river merging in the ocean, union of husband and wife, consumption of camphor by fire, etc. But in the third and final stage the mystic having merged in the infinite universal soul loses his self-awareness as well as awareness of God. Now, referring to the sthalas we can say that the prāṇāṅgi-sthala is characterised by the first stage, the śaraṇā-sthala by the second stage and the aikya-sthala by the third stage.

[This distinction is rather logical than psychological or temporal. Once the union of the soul with the universal soul takes place, the individual loses his awareness of the external world, self-awareness and awareness of the union. He is not in a position to say which is temporally or psychologically earlier and which is later. But after he returns to the waking state he is able to make a logical distinction between the different states involved in his
mystic experience.) Allama Prabhu reports what happened in the mystic union in one of his vacanas:

Neither I exist, nor you,
Nor that which says nothing exits;
Guhesvara is simply a void!

What Allama Prabhu wants to say is that the soul which merges in the infinite soul is unaware of everything. We can explain this with the analogy of deep sleep: just as a person who is in deep sleep cannot say 'I am in deep sleep', nor 'I am not aware of anything' so also, the individual soul in its mystic state cannot say 'I am one with God' nor 'I am neither aware of God nor of myself'. When Allama Prabhu says 'Neither I exist nor you' what he means is that in the absence of self-awareness which is a prerequisite for the consciousness of an object there cannot be an awareness of God, or anything. It must be noted that the loss of self-awareness which is an essential feature of mystic experience is expressed after the mystic experience in the form of egolessness.

Once Paraśiva occupies the entire personality of the devotee, the latter becomes egoless and whatever he does is thought as being done by Paraśiva. For expressing this idea Prabhudeva has adduced the analogy of merging of the hail stone in water and the consumption of camphor by fire:

(The union is) like the hugging of a hailstone statue by water,
Like the camphor lifting the veil of fire ...
This means that though for all practical purpose we see the mystic as existing in the world of sense objects he himself does not distinguish himself either from the world or from Paraśiva. In other words, only one exists, that is, Paraśiva.

The doctrine that only Paraśiva exists and not the mystic, is supported by the thought and behaviour of the mystic himself. The mystic who experiences the last stage is convinced that his entire personality is penetrated by Paraśiva, that he is controlled and guided by Paraśiva and that he has no freedom because he has lost his individuality and in its place only Šiva exists.

The attainment of loss of self-awareness and loss of external awareness is not the highest goal of Vīraśaivism, nor is it the meaning of aikya-sthala. One who is in the aikya-sthala has realized because of repeated mystic experience that he and Paraśiva are one. But if one claims ‘I am one with Paraśiva’ it is a false claim, because one who has really experienced inextricable union with Paraśiva cannot refer to himself as ‘I’ (an individual separated from the whole).

Then, does this mean that the devotee of aikya-sthala knows Paraśiva? In spite of repeated mystic experience the śarūnyā cannot know God. Here the meaning of ‘knowledge’ must be made clear. Normally we know a limited physical object or its idea. But since Paraśiva is neither physical nor limited we cannot know him. We
can know Liṅga the physical object, but not Liṅga the infinite God. This is clarified by Allama Prabhu as follows:

I want to know you by intellect but
What comes to the intellect is only symbol;
The symbol is perishable;
What is intellect? It is only what the mind distinguishes;
If you get known by such an intellect
You are not God ...\(^7_{11}\)

Moreover the way of knowing an object is entirely different form knowing God. We know God not in our ordinary experience, but only in mystic experience and we know God not as an object but by merging in God or be coming one with God. In one of Akka Mahādevi’s vacanas it is said:

After my body became
Thyself, whom could I serve?
After my mind became
Thyself, whom could I invoke?
After my breath became
Thyself, whom could I worship, pray?
After my consciousness was lost in Thee,
Whom could I know?
Being Thyself in Thee,
O Cenna Mallikārjuna, Lord,
Through Thee have I forgotten Thee!\(^7_{14}\)
REFERENCE:
( p stands for page and v for vacana )


3. Ibid, v 784

4. Ibid, v 756

5. Mallapur, B. V.[ed]: *Samagra-vacana-samputa, vol 3* (Dept of Kannada and Culture, Govt. of Karnataka, Bangalore, 1993), v 798

6. Ibid, v 22


8. Dr. Kalaburgi, M. M. [ed]: *Samagra-vacana-samputa, vol 1* (Dept of Kannada and Culture, Govt. of Karnataka, Bangalore, 1993), v 70


12. Menezes and Angadi (trs): *Vacanas of Basavanṇa*, v 743


15. Menezes and Angadi (trs): *Vacanas of Basavaṇṇa*, v 786


17. Mallapur, B. V. [ed]: *Samagra-vacana-samputa*, vol 2 (Dept of Kannada and Culture, Govt. of Karnataka, Bangalore, 1993), v 1028


19. Ibid., v 856

20. Ibid, v 651

21. Ibid., v 652.

22. Ibid, v 433; also see Dr. Kalaburgi, M. M. [ed]: *Samagra-vacana-samputa*, vol 1, v 396,


27. Ibid., v 194, 195, 196.


30. Ibid., v 210.


34. Ibid., vv 262, 263, 264 etc.

35. Ibid., vv 264, 278, 287 etc.


38. Ibid, v 247.


40. Ibid, v 790.


43. Ibid., v 945.

44. Ibid., v 993.


47. Ibid., vv 32, 33.

48. Ibid., v 322.

49. Ibid., v 561.

50. Ibid., v 568 see also Mallapur, B. V. [ed]: Samagra-vacana-sampuṭa, vol 3, v 146.


53. Menezes and Angadi (trs): Vacanas of Basavaṇṇa, v 691.
54. Menezes and Angadi (trs): *Essence of Sat-sthala*, v 266.


57. Mallapur, B. V. [ed]: *Samagra-vacana-sampuṭa, vol 2*, v 1028


64. *Ibid.*, v 305.


