

National Seminar on 'Vakh and Vacana: the Pearls of Wisdom'

4 th- 5 th, March, 2013, IGNCA, New Delhi

A Report

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A national seminar on 'Vakh and Vacana: the Pearls of Wisdom' was organized at the IGNCA on 4 th and 5 th of March, 2013. The seminar was first of its kind, wherein two similar, yet distinct schools of wisdom were brought together at the IGNCA in order to understand, explore and to take the discourse further.

The seminar was inaugurated by Mr. Prabhas Kumar Jha, Additional secretary and Financial Advisor, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India. Mr. V. B. Pyarelal, Joint Secretary, IGNCA welcomed the gathering and expressed his happiness that this was a very specialized seminar and the IGNCA was proud to host it. In his Inaugural address, Mr. Prabhas Kumar Jha recounted the initiation of his interest in the study of Lal-Vakh giving his personal account and paid his tribute to Lal Ded and said that, "she is a universal teacher and a master par excellence." The guest of Honour Dr. Shashi Shekhar Toshkhani in his usual scholarly eloquence talked about the four levels of Lal-Vakh and traced the tradition of these Vakhs in the philosophy of Kashmir Sivaism.

Mahamahopadhyaya Prof. P. S. Filliozat spoke about the tradition of Kannada Vacana and the relevance of this seminar, with special reference to the emergence of mysticism and devotion from 17 th to 19 th century. Dr. (Smt.) Kapila Vatsyayan, founder-member of the IGNCA, stated that personalities like Lal-Ded and Nund Rishi were 'above religious denominations or sects and they spoke a universal language which was *Kalatita* (beyond time).'

The seminar was attended by scholars from Kashmir, Jammu, Pune, Mysore, Pondicherry and Delhi etc., and presented their papers in five academic sessions across two days. In addition, thirty-two observers and other scholars also participated in the deliberations.

Some noteworthy presentations made during the seminar were on 'Language and Musicality of Lal Vakhs' by Dr. Mohmmad Yousuf Mushoor; 'Literary flavor in Vacana including Music and other Arts' by Dr. Manjunath Bhat; 'Lal-Ded: The Mystic of Kashmir' by Prof. M.H. Zaffar; 'Upanisad and Vacana' by H.H. Dr. Shivamurthy Shivacharya Svami Ji, who also demonstrated the *Ganaka vacana*, an interactive software developed by him for Kannada Vacana; 'Lal-Vakh: Aphoristic poetry or Gnostic Code?' by Sh. Shantiveer Kaul; 'Influence of Saivagama on Kannada Vacanasahitya' by Dr. Vasundhara Filliozat , etc.

A whole lot of issues concerning the inter-relatedness and continuity of the two traditions of Vakh and Vacana were explored in interactive session, wherein, Ms. Pushpa Bhakre of Pune made a presentation on 'Kashida' embroidery and outlined similarities between this needle art prevalent in Kashmir and Karnataka, and Sh. Anil Nakhasi demonstrated his animated drawings and images based on the life of Lal-Ded and her Vakh.

Lively discussions took place among, Sh. M. K. Raina, Dr. Shashi Shekhar Toshkhani, Prof. M. L. Pandit, Sh. Virendra Qazi, Sh. P. N. Raina, Dr. Romesh Raina, Sh. Sushil Pandit, Sh. Ajay Bharati, Sh. B. N. Betaab, Sh. Virendra Bangaroo and Dr. Sudhir Lall on various aspects related to the theme of the seminar. Prof. B. N. Kalla reminded the house of the rich heritage of 'word' as enshrined in the classical Sanskrit literature, a point which was well taken by Dr. N. D. Sharma. A suggestion was made by Sh. M. K. Raina that both the traditions should be documented and brought out in a CD form along with the proceedings of this seminar. It also emerged that Lal-Vakh and

Kannada Vacana should be taught at the school and university levels. The session was jointly chaired by Prof. P. S. Filliozat and Sh. Shantiveer Kaul and was moderated by Dr. Sushma Jatoo.

The valedictory session of the seminar was held in the presence of the Member-Secretary, IGNC A Ms. Dipali Khanna which was chaired by Prof. Radha Vallabh Tripathi, Vice-Chancellor of the Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi and H.H. Dr. Shivamurthy Shivacharya Svami Ji was the guest of honour on this occasion. Dr. Sushma Jatoo presented a detailed report of the seminar, stating the gist of the papers and deliberations along with suggestions received and way forward. Ms. Dipali Khanna in her special remarks expressed her happiness that this seminar was held under the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the IGNC A and she said, "The present seminar has brought together two geographically different yet philosophically similar traditions and I am sure through the deliberations for these two days, newer vistas of inter-traditional studies will emerge." In his special address, H.H. Dr. Shivmurthy Shivacharya Svami Ji congratulated the IGNC A for having conceived of holding a National level seminar on the theme and expressed his happiness to have been a part of it. He also offered that the next Seminar of this series be held at his Ashram campus at Sirigire, Karnataka. Prof. Radha Vallabh Tripathi, in his Presidential address, stated that it was really a matter of great pleasure that such a thought-provoking national level seminar had been held at the IGNC A. He referred to the first-ever recorded manuscript of Sanskrit translation of Lal-Vakh of Kashmir by Bhaskara in medieval period, which was his initiation to the study of Lal-Vakh. He further stated that the IGNC A should take it up for re-edition and translation, which will be a great service to the study and understanding of tradition of Lal-Vakh. He also congratulated the IGNC A for holding the seminar. The session concluded with a vote of thanks presented by Dr. Sudhir Lall.

During the two day national seminar, music recitals, renderings and dances based on both the traditions were also held in the evenings, which were presented by professional singers and dancers of Kashmir and Karnataka. On the evening of the first day, noted Kashmiri singer Ms. Sushma Kalla sung the Lal-Vakh in Kashmiri followed by Vacana recitation/singing in Hindustani style by celebrated singer Ms. Neela Kodli. On the next evening, the first performance titled 'the spiritual journey of Lal-Ded' was presented by Ms. Anjali Kaul, who, through the rhythmic movements based on singing of Lal-Vakhs by Ms. Sushma Kalla, depicted the said theme. This programme was followed by Bharatanatyam performance on Vacana by an accomplished danseuse Dr. Vasundhara Doraswami and her troupe, based on Dr. R. N. Shrilata's singing of the Vacana in Carnatic style.

This national seminar was conceptualised and executed by Dr. Vasundhara Filliozat of Mysore and Dr. Sushma Jatoo of the IGNCA.