

## *Saddle (Silence) – A Study of Mylaralinga Epic*

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**Abstract:** The article attempts to study the origin and development of the Mylaralinga tradition prevalent in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Goa. It tries to point out how this tradition has silently subdued the other religious traditions and stayed devoid of caste, community and class overtones. It highlights how this tradition accepts the reality of social philosophy, while stressing on folk music forms as the basis of elite music. By looking at certain ways of worship of Mylaralinga, it indicates a possibility of considering Mylaralinga's epic on different grounds. It explains also how the poetry leaves an indelible impression on the audience about the exemplary nature of man's dynamic force and spiritual heroism.

Crouching on a long bow at the time of the fair, the Goravappa exhorts the oracle by uttering the word, *Saddle*, to warn the public to maintain silence. This proclamation is called *Karanika* and it forms the most important part of the fair. It foretells the prospects of the succeeding year with regard to seasonal rain, crop, people and the world. The believers of Mylaralinga believe in their ups and downs in the forthcoming year with utmost faith in interpreting the oracle. Immediately after the soothsayer announces the oracle, thousands of people gathered at the site maintain a pin-drop silence and they believe those words as if they come directly from the mouth of Shiva.

The Mylaralinga's tradition, densely spread over Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Goa, is of special significance. It is a complex tradition devoid of caste, community and class, and it is an uphill task to conjoin and state such a complex and rich tradition in a single definition. The present theoretical pressure is about unified India; there is an adamant attempt to bring under a single authority all the different voices, sections and separated cultural groups. The conciliation of all religions and bringing of amity among all the groups has been continuously taken up as a constructive work. This effort was made on the firm foundation of strong religious belief, but this was not as decisive and serious as the one that was carried out in the twentieth century. Yet it has noiselessly subdued the other religious traditions. The consideration of cultural unity and religious unity

as one and the same is only a mirage. This is a cunning attempt to negate everything and to oppress the different voices. And the study of Mylaralinga's cultural traditions has to be taken up in this framework.

The majority of the shepherd or Kuruba community has adopted Mylara as their divine god of worship. The lengthy epic poetry of Mylara that is embedded in the lives of the worshippers abounds in curiosities. This epic poem, one among the best folk epics of Karnataka, describes the destruction of the villainous Mylara demon, the protecting of righteous people, marriages, mysteries and attempts to draw the attention of devotees towards God, etc.

Many incidents in the epic are mostly symbolic and are of an inquisitive nature. In its thousands of years of history, India has been the birthplace of many races, cultures and religious groups and it has also paved the way for conflicts and downfalls. As and when these paths became worn out, new ones were created and followed; in this way India has become a land of complex cultural activities. The tradition of Mylaralinga is an important part of this culture. The original inhabitants of this region and the Aryans who migrated here had both conflicts and cooperation among them and it resulted in a new culture. Keeping this background in view, it is necessary to study the Karnataka of the Middle Ages to know about the sect of Mylaralinga.

It was Veerabhadra, a Shaivaite, who put an end to the practise of *Yagna* of the Aryans. He encouraged priesthood and attained the rank of a god of worship. Mylaralinga was originally a leader of a Shaiva group. This Mylaralinga tradition continued to flourish as an alternative to the other Shaiva sects of Kapalika, Kalamukha, Lakkulesha and such other mystic groups.

The story of Mylara is an example of the Shaivaite story process. When classical literature and poetry tried to conform to the rules and limitations prescribed by the Sanskrit books, the Shaiva intellectuals for the first time walked out of these limitations and turned their attention towards the new paths. Devotional poets like Harihara concentrated their thoughts around the narrator, devotee and god. And, apart from the three persons involved above, another object gains importance as the fourth — that is this materialistic world. This last object unfolds itself as an intensive motive force in the story: tree, forest, nature and biological changes, for Harihara, are not very important. And, all these are pushed aside in his stream of devotion.

The forest is the prime part of the shepherds' life as described in the beginning of the epic; and there is no life for the shepherds without the forest. Forest, caste, nature, animals, etc., which are inseparable parts of life are interlocked in the life of Mylara. Dualism, which overcomes idealism, is exposed here as truth. Mylara and his tradition appear here as unjoined paths. The story conveys dualities but at the end it solidifies and presents itself as a curious cultural symbol.

According to history, the shepherds are considered as a migrated tribe. When this nomadic tribe established itself in one place, Mylaralinga became a cultural hero. Later, Mylaralinga faced various atrocities from the already

established races of Brahmins and Veerashaivas who were in large numbers. For an oppressive fight against all the forces, Mylaralinga united all the lower caste people of North Karnataka and achieved glory.

Let us turn our attention to the holy places of Mylaralinga and the various names by which he is hailed. Let us study the history and the details of inscriptions about him. We shall also study his relationships with mystic groups, his utterances among folk proverbs, in poetry, stories, local histories, practices, fairs, writings, literature, etc. From all these sources, we learn that Mylaralinga originally came from a shepherd race, and led a nomadic life caring for his sheep. These shepherds later settled down at some places and took to farming along with shepherding. They had to face the wrath of the other tribes who had settled down there before them. Mylaralinga must have resisted the onslaught of the other tribes and given protection to his followers. As a result he became a local god to them; and slowly attained the steps of glory. The influence of the 'Shakta' school of thought might have assisted him. Perhaps, it must have influenced his wife, Malachi who also attained the status of 'Shakta goddess.' Her followers might have taken Mylara in their folds and raised him to higher plane. After embracing the 'Shakta fold', he might have become an incarnation of Bhairavi. In consonance with this new elevation, his vehicle etc. might have been created and his tradition is now noticed in Karnataka, Maharashtra and some parts of Andhra Pradesh and Goa.

While among a class of people, the influence of Mylara was on the increase, people of other religious groups raised their fingers against him and derided him. Gradually, however, the mal propaganda subsided and the devotees of Shaiva accepted him as a divine being.

The Goravas, the staunch devotees of Mylaralinga, today recite the epic of Mylaralinga. The experts are of the opinion that 'Guru' is the root word from which 'Gorava' is derived. In Kittel's dictionary, the meaning is given as 'beggars in the name of Shiva'. In North Karnataka, they are called Gwarappa, Vaggayya, Vaagya and so on and in South Karnataka they are called Gorava, Goggayya and Gadabaddayya. There are differences only in dress and practises between these two groups. The Gorava of North Karnataka has a turban on his head, wears a long rough woollen coat with a few emblems on it and carries a trident and a drum (*damaruga*) in his hands. A few bells will be hanging from his drum. Round his neck is tied a tiger skin bag holding holy turmeric. On the forehead he smears turmeric paste and carries a cane. There is a rough woollen shawl on his arm and on it a long steel chain will be dangling up to his knee.

The Gorava of South Karnataka carries a bell, tiger skin and steel bands around his arms. There is a necklace of cowries round the neck and a shield of cowries across his chest. The shield is surrounded by strings of cowries. A small trident, a cane, a flute and drum are his other adornments. Round the waist he wears a belt of tiger skin and as footwear he puts on wooden slippers made of berry thorns. His headdress is a hat made from the hair of

bear or sometimes simply a hat of coiled hair. The forehead and the exterior of the eyelids will be covered with *vibhuti* or holy ash. There will be a thick paste of vermilion all along the forehead. The face presents a fearsome appearance of red and white colours. There are also female Goravas.

As among the 'Devaraguddas', these Goravas also receive '*diksha*' or holy order from the seniors. This procedure is called *manekattu*. Usually the eldest son in the family is ordained as a *Gorava*. For conferring the '*diksha*', a woollen carpet is spread and the borders are fixed. In the middle, a Kalasa and mirror are placed. The feet of the Gorava are covered with shining metallic powder and a yellow thread called '*Kankana*' is tied round his right wrist. A necklace of cowries is tied round the neck. For ordaining him to the Gorava order, the presence of *dasayya*, *jogayya*, and *jangamayya* is must. A pearl is tied round his neck. Then he must take a pledge in the name of the god for his worship. He must swear that he will not speak ill of his parents, Jogis and Jangamas. If stray cattle are grazing in a field, he shall not drive it away. If a calf is suckling at the udder, he shall not detach it from its mother. He will not wear any footwear. He will not travel in a cart or kill a serpent. Such a Gorava is called Mylaralinga's '*Gudda*'. From that day, he can go to any place of any region to beg. The devotees obtain '*Bhandara*' or sacred turmeric from him and pay him some money when he visits their houses.

The Goravas sing the epic during fairs and boat service. Before beginning and at the end, they offer a coconut, which is broken and offered to god. Then its pieces are given to devotees. The Goravas dramatise the epic to create interest to the listeners, and one can notice the effect of the song, dance and drama when it is recited. The epic is not simply accepted as a bye-product but is considered as a process.

The age-old tradition is followed with a little change here and there; it accepts the reality in the background of social philosophy. It is worth discussing the way the epic is presented and dramatised. This powerful dramatisation is perceived as a non-Brahminical tradition. The social reformers and educators use this dramatic method to convey their ideas. The accessories needed for this method are the geographical and cultural environment around us. For this story process, the psychology of the individuals who gather to listen is studied. The path of idolatry is considered more effective than philosophical social tradition. The understanding of materialistic relationships is more helpful than seeking liberation from worldly affairs. The philosopher here finds the individuality of the poet exceeding the limits of speech, dramatics and acoustics. The poet or the storyteller pulls down the sublime and latent ideas to the silly and worldly process. This is the greatness of devotional poetry; these devotional poets with their manual efforts and daily occurrences try to explain the social realities that confront life. The prosaic writers (*Vachanakararu*) hailing from lower castes have done this work with devotion. The essence of these indigenous epics lies in the discussion type of story-telling and instead of

solo narration, the discussion type is more effective and impressive. As an alternative to disinteresting formal narration, this indigenous presentation has overrun the *vedic* tradition.

When this epic is examined with a critical view, we identify some new features. The artists who sing this epic have made use of more than 150 types of 'laya', 'sollu' and 'raagas-taalas'. The melancholic (*Karunaa Rasa*) emotional tunes adopted here are appropriate. "Khamacha" and "Bheemplas" ragas are prominent here. Among the *taalas* 'Kerava' and 'daadara' are outstanding and the "Bhajan" 'tekas' are also used. These songs are sung to the note of black 3 and 5.

### Example – 1

**Raaga : Khamacha**

**Taala : Kerava**

Mangalenneeri	Deevage <sub>sss</sub>		
Sa Sa Ri Sa Sa	Ga Ga Ma Ga Ri Sa		
Sriya	Meenagundi	Mallayyage	
Pa Pa	Ma Ga Ri Sa Ni	Sa Ri Sa Sa Sa    1	
Mallayyage	Belaguve	Naaruti	Aadarinda
Pa Pa Pa	Da Pa Ma Ma	Ma Pa Ma	Sa Ma Ga Ga
Aettiroo	Idanaa <sub>s</sub>	Mudadinda	
Ga Ga Ga <sub>s</sub>	Ma Ga Ri <sub>s</sub>	Sa Ni Sa Ri Sa	
Malammage	Belaguve	Naruti	Hastadinda
Pa Pa Pa	Da Pa Ma Ma	Ma Pa Ma	Sa Ma Ga Ga
Naanu	Ninage <sub>s</sub>	Belaguvenu	
Ga Ga Ga	Ma Ga Ri Sa	Ni Sa Ri Sa Sa	
Andu	Kumarage	Indu	Mallayyage
Pa Pa Pa	Da Pa Ma Ma	Ma Ma Ma	Pa Ma Ga Ga
Meelgiri	Vasage	Maadevage	
Ga Ga Ga	Ma Ga Ri Sa	Ni Sa Ri Sa Sa.	

### Example – 2

**Raaga : Khamacha**

**Taala : Daadara**

Taayina	Nenadeva	Tandeeena	Nenedeva	
Ga Ga Ga	Ga <sub>s</sub> Ga Ga	Ri <sub>s</sub> Ri Ga	Ris Sa Sa Sa	
Tande	Mallayyana	Padavoo		
Ga Ga	Ga Ga Ga Ri	Ris Ga Pa		
Tande	Mallayyana	Padava	Hididare	
Sa Sa	Ma <sub>s</sub> Ma Ma	Ma Ma Ma	Ma Ma Ma Pa	
Keelida	Varagala	Needuvanu		
Pa Da Da	Pa Ma Pa	Ga Ga Ma Ri Sa		
Keelida	Varagala	Needuva	Deevarige	Saranende
Sa Ri Ri Sa	Sa Ri Ri Sa	Sa Ri Sa	Sa Ri Ri Ga	Ni Sa Sa Ri

Naavu		Saranendevoov
Ga Ga		Ri Sa Sa Sa <sub>s</sub>
Saranendevoov	Naavu	Saranendevoov
Ga Ga Ga Ri Ri Ri	Ri Ri	Ni Ni Ni Sa Ri Ga Ri Sa Sa

**Example – 3****Raaga: Bheemplas****Taala: Kerava**

Gange	Malavva	Ninna	
Sa Sa	Pa Da Da	Pa Pa	
Gandana	Valivudu		
Ma Ma Sa	Ma Ga Ri Sa		
Bandaara	Cheela	Balagaile	
Sa Ri Ri	Saa Ni	Pa Ga Ma Sa	
Baa	Nanna	Maa	Guruve
Pa	Ma Ma	Ga	Ga Ri Sa.

**Example – 4****Raaga: Bheemplas****Taala: Kerava**

Sobana	Aennire		
Sa Sa Sa	Pa Pa Pa		
Sobana	Annire		
Sa Da Ni Da	Pa Pa Pa		
Sobanavenni		Shivaganni	Sobanave
Ma Pa Pa Ma Ga Ri		Ri Sa Ri Ga	Ga Ga Ri Sa.

**Example – 5****Raaga: Bheemplas (Mishra)****Taala: Kaavali.**

Shiva	Kondakara	Kodanu	Rara	Ma
Sa Sa	Ri Ma Ma	Ma Ri Ri	Ga Ri	Sa Ni
Mallayyana	Kondaka	Swami	Namisu	
Ni Ni Sa Sa	Ri Ga Ga Ri	Ri Ma	Ma Ma Ma	
Taanu	Rara	M <sub>ss</sub>	Pallavi	
Ma Ma	Ga Ri	Sa Ni Sa.		

The 'taala' and 'laya' employed here are mainly manipulated in double qualities ('Duguna'). This is the main nature of folk 'laya' and 'daati.' The 'taalas', 'Kerava', 'Daadara' and Bhajan 'tekas' are specially intended for dance patterns for presenting melancholy tunes. In addition to these 'taalas', 'Khamacha' and 'Bheemplas' 'ragas' are quite necessary. More than half of the epic conveys the emotion of melancholy. In order to break the boredom of a single 'laya', the narration of the story includes lullaby (*Jogula*), *Sobane* (Wedding song), ballad (*lavani*), drumbeats, grinding and pounding styles of songs. These multi-directional methods assist in creating interest among the listeners; and it reveals the creative abilities of singers.

While ending the lines and the stages of '*laya*', the singer makes use of vowels and consonants to the best advantage and this is a noteworthy technique. These additions, more than the literature of the song, help in completing the '*taalas*' and '*layas*'. The additions that are employed are '*ni*', '*ba*', '*aa*', '*e*', '*eega*', and '*aaga*'.

### Example

[aa] Sugar added milk  
To god offered  
[aa] Relishingly eaten in the boat squatting  
Come o'master, my master.

Datura [ni] ash  
Wheat ash Mallayya  
The paper ash scattered  
'O' god of gods.

This poetry is studied with the sole purpose of identifying how folk music forms the base of elite music. In other words, elite music is a revised form of folk music. There is a belief that folk music does not conform to '*taala*', '*laya*' or '*raga*', but on scrutiny we can say that this belief is erroneous. We recognise these three qualities when the epic is sung. The storyteller has displayed his creative capacity by singing the songs in a variety of '*taalas*', '*layas*' and '*ragas*'. Established elite music conforms to single '*laya*' but folk music has the freedom to render the song in its own style. The singer adopts the common method while singing the epic and he also tries to retain its various dimensions. This fact is made clear from the unity of '*layas*', the repetition of song, its onward movement and other intricacies.

During recitation, the oracles of Mylaralinga are exhorted heroically at intervals. They dance emotionally while singing and inflict their bodies with sharp thick needles to give a religious touch to the demonstration. This fearsome exhibition leads us to consider Mylaralinga's epic on a different ground. On the study of the epic Mylaralinga, we can notice that the incidents described in the story are linked to the practices that are followed even today during fairs and congregations. The epic is not mere poetry, but a part of fairs and procedures where the incidents are reproduced — in it the age-old history is repeated. Mylaralinga married Komali, a tribal lady; influenced a lady of a noble family of Ranibennur to become his devotee; gave his woollen coat to a dhobi to wash it and converted him to become his follower and such incidents helped him propagate his cult.

In the poetry, we come across the superhuman powers of Mylaralinga and the attempts that are made to deify him. The poetry is complicated and at the end we are made to believe that he is an incarnation of god. All this looks like a puppet show and the puppets appear to be controlled by a divine power.

The poetry leaves an indelible impression about the exemplary nature of man's dynamic force and spiritual heroism.

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