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India has seen many mystics and witnessed miracles from several of them. Some of them are still worshiped today and their miracles are recounted as confirmation for instilling devotion. Helavanakatte Giriyaamma is a clear icon of the Haridasa movement. She was a great mystic who is still very famous among the Vaishnava community, especially in the Karnataka region. She was born in 1752 in Rannebennur, Haveri district, Karnataka.

**KEYWORDS :** Helavanakatte Giriyaamma, mystics and witnessed miracles.**INTRODUCTION:**

The very background of her birth is a testimony to her innate qualities and extraordinary personality. She was born by the grace of Lord Venkateshwara of Tirupati to Bhimmappa Jois and Tungamma after her parents performed great austerities towards the Lord in Tirupati. The begetting of a Vaishnava child of a high order requires austerities and is possible only by the grace of Sri Hari. Giriyaamma cultivated a deep devotion towards Lord Ranganath Swamy, the Helavanakatte temple deity, from a very early age. Giriyaamma lost her parents at a young age and was brought up by her uncle. According to the custom of the time, she was married at the tender age of 12 to Timmapparasa of Malebennur. However, she was no ordinary woman. She had no interest in worldly affairs or the family ties that an institution like marriage must instill. She politely requested her in-laws to arrange a second marriage for her husband and, with everyone's consent, respectfully left her married life to embrace a solitary life devoted to her deepest passion, her devotion to Lord Ranganath Swamy. She is believed to have composed around 3000 Hari kirtans with the ankita nama of Helavanakatte Ranga during her lifetime. She is believed to have performed many miracles during her lifetime.

Here is a brief description of one such miracle. Once the King of Punganuru lost his sight and offered sincere prayers to Lord Venkateshwar in Tirupati. Pleased with his devotion, the Lord appeared in his dreams and urged him to give him the sight of one eye and restore his sight to the other by His devotee Helavankatte Giriyaamma. The king obeyed the Lord's command and wish and asked Giriyaamma for help. Giriyaamma made collyrium (anjana in Sanskrit/kadige in Kannada) for his eyes from a lamp she lit before her deity on the leaf of an ashvatta tree. The king put an eyelid over his eye and his sight was restored.

There are several other accounts of her miracles. For example, it is believed that all the children she petted and played with grew up strong, healthy and lived long lives. People would flock to her for her healing powers. However, she was ostracized by the community, especially by some temple authorities, because she was childless and unmarried. Once during Sri Sumateendra Teertha, the then Pontiff of Mantralaya Matha visited Helavanakatte. Giriyaamma went for his darshan and extended her hands to take the Mantrakshate. Despite the objections of the members of the institute, Sri Sumateendra Teertha Swamiji gracefully offered her mantrakshate while looking at her palm and exclaiming that it was 'chakrapani'. She had the marks of the Sudarshana Divine Chakra on her palm. Yashoda approached her and asked her to show him Ranga. Giriyaamma drew a rangoli and placed the idol of Venugopala gifted to her by Sri Gopaladasa. As she began to sing a melodious hymn in praise of the Lord, the Lord began to dance to the tune of the song and manifested from the idol. Giriyaamma took the little child in her waist and placed Him in front of Sri Sumateendra Teertha Swamiji. He was overwhelmed with joy and wept when he saw the Lord before him.

The story of Giriyaamma is also a clear example of the tolerant and broad view of the Sanatana Dharma society. In stark contrast to the popular argument of Sanatana Dharma's staunch opponents that it promotes misogyny, this story demonstrates the special respect given to women in society. It proves that Sanatana Dharma accepts the view that God's love and moksha sadhana are not reserved for men only. That is why India has seen so many women mystics like Giriyaamma, Meera Bhai, Alvar etc.

In a similar way, the story also disproves another popular belief of opponents of Sanatana Dharma that it is an oppressive regime designed to take advantage of minorities and underprivileged members of society. Sanatana Dharma gives recognition to all members of society. Giriyaamma is a clear example of a visible minority and a disadvantaged person in many ways. She was an orphaned single woman who came from humble backgrounds with no significant social standing to speak of. Additionally, she was ostracized by society for being childless, a social stigma at the time. And yet she received blessings from prominent seers of the Madhwa institutes including Sri Sumateendra Teertha and Sri Satyabodha Teertha. She even received an idol of Venugopala from Sri Gopaladasa as a gift. Need we say more?

For spiritual seekers and ardent followers of Acharya Madhwa, this story teaches us a number of important lessons. To see the Lord, we must develop a special pair of eyes; we need divine vision. Our physical eye can be very deceiving. We tend to look for God in the purest of places, expecting to see Him in His four-armed divine form. We tend to expect devotees to have certain phenomena that we are familiar with. He is most often in the form of a Brahmin man with very visible Vaishnava markings. But through this process, we fail to see the Divine and His actions, which many times are right under our noses. Who would have thought that a beautiful flower like the lotus, which is so dear to the Lord, could grow and bloom in a swampy place full of mud? Looking at a thorny jackfruit, who would imagine that the flesh inside is so sweet? We focus too much on the outer shell of things and fail to recognize the core inside. But the wise with detached senses will not be deceived by the eyes. They are able to see the truth through their special vision. Sumateendra Teerthara and Satyabodhara were thus able to "see".

### As Sri Krishna says in Sri Bhagavad Gita,

utkrāmantaṁ sthitaṁ vāpi bhuñjānaṁ vā guṇānvitam |  
vimūḍhā nānupaśhyanti paśhyanti jñāna-chakṣuṣhaḥ  
-Purushottama Yoga, Panchadashodhyaya

So should diligent seekers abandon the rules and etiquettes of the scriptures? Definitely not! But these are preparatory procedures that often require many lifetimes to train our senses for the final exam. The final test is burning love for God, detachment from worldly objects that our senses desire, and perfect knowledge of the Divine! Final exam can be a surprise test for jeeva. It can come anytime, anywhere, and often under seemingly unlikely conditions. And this happened to many devotees like Purandaradasa, Valmiki etc. Who would have thought that an atheist could turn into a great mystic Purandaradasa? Who would have thought that a dacoit could become Valmiki? Prarabdha can make even an exalted personality like Akasha Raja slip in his Brahmin life in a previous birth.

Does this mean that all dacoits are to be worshipped, or that all thorny fruits have sweet flesh inside? No. But the possibility of Valmiki emerging from the band of dacoits remains. There is a possibility

that a devotee like Prahalada will emerge from the asura clan. There is a possibility that Meera Bai will emerge from the woman. There is Kanakadasa potential in the cowherd.

This shows the universality of God's love. It is available to all who seek it. It is available even to those who are ostracized by society.

And what is interesting are the common elements shared by the devotees. Be it Giriyamma or Kanakadasa of Dasakooty or Sri Sripadarajaru, Sri Raghavendra Teertha, Sri Satyabodha Teertha of Vyasakooty, they shared three things in common regardless of their journey. All showed unwavering devotion to Lord Sri Hari, were placed in the knowledge of the Divine and His activities, and all remained unattached to worldly things. These three things would appear to be the fruits of sadhana or the actual fruits of the jeeva's sartakatva. Everything else was just a means to an end, it seems.

As Acharya Madhwa says in the Dwadasha stotra, "...antya kale vishesathaha".

Only the wise can judge the real value of a jiva and that too when it is mature. For all of us yet to develop such a vision, the lesson here is to remain humble, respect one and all, recognize the Divine and His actions, and find refuge in Him. If we are sincere, He will certainly appear to us and manifest His glory, just as He did for Giriyamma and many other devotees.

Everyone's journey must be different. We can observe that we do not have free will in choosing a path or destination. The only free will we can seem to exercise is to surrender to the will of the Divine, knowing that we are eternally dependent on our Lord for our existence; eternally dependent on Him for our journey here and there.

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