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MOVEMENT FOR WOMENS' RIGHTS IN THE 12TH CENTURY CE.- ROLE OF BASAVESHWARA AND ANUBHAVA MANTAPA.



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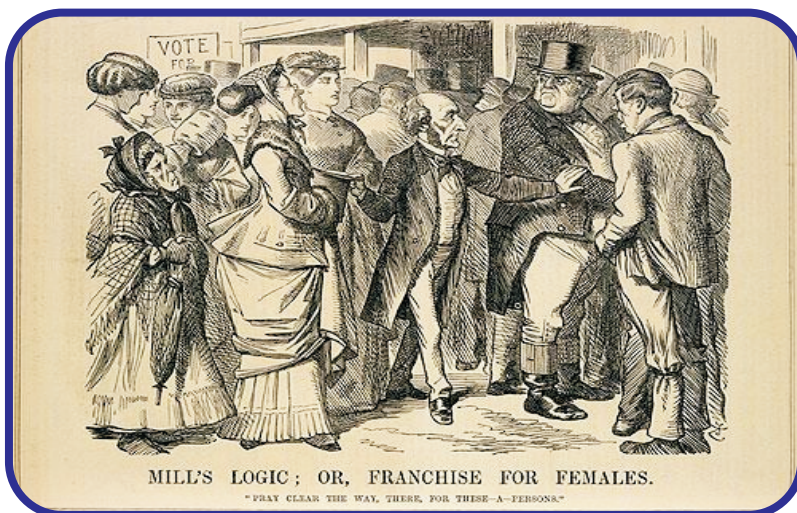
ABSTRACT

Women are given only a secondary role to play especially in the Indian society. Right from the birth discrimination between a boy and a girl is found in almost every household. Basaveshwara was probably the first after Buddha to recognize and realize the individuality and rights of women and he launched a social revolution for their emancipation.

KEYWORDS :Life Satisfaction , labour force , environment.

INTRODUCTION

Basava also known as Bhakti Bhandari Basavanna, Basaveshwara (1134-1196 C.E) fought against the practice of the caste system, which discriminated against people based on their birth, and other rituals in Hinduism. Basaveshwara is undoubtedly one of the pioneer's of Indian Democracy. He created a model Parliament called the "Anubhava Mantapa," which not only gave equal proportion to men and women, but also had representatives from different socio-economic



backgrounds.¹

Basaveshwara was the first ever to know the practicality of transcending to Godliness and demonstrating the technique of becoming God through four levels of divinity that exists in one's own body-Unmanifest Chaitanya (Guru), Manifest Chaitanya-Shakti (Linga), consciousness of the manifest chaitanya shakti in Prana (Jangama) and the Individual consciousness (Jeevatma/Mind). The key aspect of his preaching is a monotheistic concept of God.²

Basaveshwara originated a literary revolution through his literary creation called Vachana Sahitya in Kannada Language which is derived from the Upanishads and Vedanta. Many great yogis and

mystics of his time joined his movement, enriching it with the essence of divine experience in the form of Vachanas.³

Life of Basaveswara.

It is believed that Lord Basaveswara was born in a Shaiva Brahmin family residing in a small town Bagewadi (now Basavana Bagewadi) in Bijapur district of Karnataka state in 1134 CE.⁴ His father was Madarasa, Mahajana or gramani of the Bagewadi Kalamukha Matha in Bijapur district. He is said to have grown up in an orthodox Hindu religious household and rejected many Vedic practices based on some of the religious scriptures like Agamas, Shastras, and Puranas in Sanskrit language. After the death of his father, he left Bagewadi and spent the next twelve years studying at Sangameshwara temple, the then Shaivite school of learning at Kudala sangama.⁵

A monk residing in the Sangameshwara temple at Kudalasangama, Játavéda Muni was his guru, who was perhaps the first to recognize the greatness of Basava.⁶ There, he conversed with scholars and Vachanakaras and developed his spiritual and religious views in association with his societal understanding. Among the various Vachanakaras Jedara Dasimaiah, Madivala Machaiah, and Ambigara Chowdaiah (who had a forceful anti-Brahmin views) made a strong influence on Basavanna. It was at Kudala sangama that he developed a strong resentment towards Brahmana orthodoxy.⁷

Basavanna started his career as an accountant at Mangalaveda in the court of Kalachuri king Bijjala, a feudal vassal of the Kalyani Chalukyas. When Bijjala acquired the power at Basavakalyana, by overpowering Tailapa IV, Basavanna also went to Kalyana (present Basavakalyana). With his honesty, hard work and visionary mission, Basava rose to the position of Prime Minister in the court of king Bijjala. He established the Anubhava Mantapa a spiritual parliament, which attracted many saints from throughout India.⁸

The Anubhava Mantapa started functioning systematically, Allammaprabhu, Channa Basavanna, Akka Mahadevi, Moligeya Marayya, Siddharama, Madivala Machayya and host of elder sharanas raised a new wind Veerashaiva faith and Basavanna's philosophy. Kalyana achieved great attainment and fame in Metaphysical world due to the activities of these Sharanas. The Anubhava Mantapa became the epicenter of all religious revolution. Thousands of vachanas were spread throughout the land. Planting of the seeds of revolutionary values went on fearlessly uprooting the traditional weeds.⁹

The movement initiated by Basava through Anubhava Mantapa became the basis of a sect of love and faith. It gave rise to a system of ethics and education at once simple and exalted. It sought to inspire ideals of social and religious freedom. It helped to shed a ray of light and faith on the homes and hearts of people in the medieval age.¹⁰

The reactionists in the court of Bijjala started spreading false rumours against Basavanna and disturbed the faith the king had in him. Several courtier's charged Basavanna of favouring persons of his own faith and charged that the state treasury was misappropriated and complained the king. They raised furor that the state treasury was spent on the daily Dasoha. Unfortunately, Bijjala and traditionalists began to lend ear and began to doubt Basavanna and the sharanas.¹¹

The fear that vachanakaras' revolutionary religion spreading like a hurricane would sweep off their Sanatana dharma had unnerved the reactionists. It was a question of life and death for them. In indignation and consternation that if the sharanas' revolution is allowed to grow there is no survival for themselves, all of them together set out to oppose it and complained to Bijjala.¹² They warned the king of grave consequences and not to allow Basavanna into the Royal court.¹³ The king called a meeting outside the royal court and enquired.¹⁴

The stir created among the people of Kalyana by Basavanna's Socio-religious movement gradually spread to politics as well. The anxiety that it would make a prey of his household began to disturb the mind of the king. The atmosphere at Kalyana raging thus, it must have been inevitable for him to come to a decision. The traditionalists and the king offered Basavanna two hard choices, by being loyal to worldly customs to withdraw his movement and live happily in Kalyana or else resign his post and get out of the capital. Basavanna, chose the latter path i.e., departure from country.¹⁵

Basavanna went out of Kalyana, having lost the king's confidence.¹⁶ In about three months of time of Basavanna's departure, the sharana community was in total confusion and the organization was at shambles. Thus, evidences available from Veerashaiva poems hold strongly that Basavanna departed from Kalyana and attained Aikya with Sangameshwara. In the opinion of scholars, Basavanna attained Aikya in 1167 CE. But the date and month of it are yet accurately determined.¹⁷

It is learnt that some sharanas accompanied Basavanna to Kudalasangama and were with him until his Aikya. But both the wives of Basavanna, Neelambika, Gangambika did not go with him and stayed on at Kalyana. Nelambika, on hearing of Basavanna's departure attained aikya with the Linga at Kalyana itself. Gangambika, engaged herself in Dasoha and went to Ulavi with Channa Basavanna and other sharanas. The sharana organization getting feeble after Basavanna's departure was under great distress. Following Bijjala's murder Rayumurari Sovideva's army chased and subjected them to cruel torture. The sharanas scattered helter skelter led by Channabasavanna, one band fighting for self protection arrived at Ulavi. By this time, many had fallen victim to the king's army. The remaining sharanas reached Ulavi and settled there and attained aikya there itself in the end. Thus, the final curtain fell on the sharan movement. This was another chapter of misfortune in the history of mankind.¹⁸

PHILOSOPHY OF BASAVESHWARA.

Basavanna said that the roots of social life are embedded not in the cream of the society but in the scum of the society.¹⁹ The Anubhava Mantapa established by Basavanna laid down the foundation of social democracy.²⁰ Basavanna believed that man becomes great not by his birth but by his conduct in society. This means faith in the dignity of man and the belief that a common man is as good a part of society as a man of status. He proclaimed that all members of the state are labourers; some may be intellectual labourers and others may be manual labourers. He also taught the dignity of manual labour by insisting on work as worship. Every kind of manual labour, which was looked down upon by people of high caste, should be looked upon with love and reverence he argued.²¹

The Sharanas in the anubhava mantapa had no caste divisions and accepted everyone as equal, Jedara Dasimayya was a weaver, Shankar Dasimayya a tailor, Madivala Machideva a washerman, Myadar Ketayya a basket-maker, Kinnari Bommayya a goldsmith, Vakkalmuddayya a farmer, Hadapada Appanna a barber, Jedar Madanna a soldier, Ganada Kannappa an oilman, Dohar Kakkayya a tanner, Madar Channayya a cobbler and Ambigara Chowdayya a ferryman. There were women followers such as Satyakka, Ramavve, and Somavve with their respective vocations.²²

VIEWS OF THE SHARANAS ABOUT WOMAN.

According to Sharanas the soul does not discriminate as regards gender or sex. Soul is basically the same; it is only the body, which appears as man and women. The Veerashaiva view of man and women can be best understood by the following vachana of Devara Dasimayya an elderly contemporary of Basaveshwara;

If breast and braid appear: they say it's a woman
If beard and moustache appear: they say it's a man
But the soul within; is neither man nor woman, look Ramanatha²³

Allamaprabhu the presiding deity of the Anubhava Mantapa, about the socio-religious aspects of human life evolved by Basaveshwara exalts woman as under;

"They say that woman is an allurements: No, one, she is not so
No no, it is not so, the real allurements is the unstable Appetite of mind
O Lord Guheshwara"²⁴

All Sharanas including Basaveshwara, unanimously shared the view. Siddharama notable Sharana of Basaveshwara's time, upholding the nobility of womanhood proclaimed;

"Woman is not just a female sex, Woman is not a demoness even
Woman is the very embodiment of Good; Kapilasidha Mallikarjuna"²⁵

They accorded not only mother's position to woman, but they also treated woman equal to Goddess Parvathi, The life stories of some of the sharanas (women Sharanas) give a good impression of the position of women in the movement. Highly unconventional women saints like Akkamahadevi not only found prominent place in the movement but also its most accomplished female mystic and poet. Muktayakka was another profound philosopher who could develop her talents in the company of the devotees. A completely new phenomenon was the participation of married women in the movement. Among them Neelamma was the most brilliant and independent thinker, Mahadeviyamma was also a very influential teacher and poet. Both had the advantage of a privileged position in the community, but there were also women devotees of lower background. Low caste women like spinners, rice producers and sweepers were allowed to participate in the discussions and share experiences in the spiritual path. Ayadakki Marayya's wife Lakkamma was one such example who participated in the discourses at Anubhava mantapa.

Promotion of Women's Rights and Anubava Mantapa.

Anubava Mantapa played a significant role in the promotion and protection of human rights. It was Basaveshwara, who rose to the occasion to save humanity from the evils of society by establishing Anubava Mantapa. Anubhava Mantapa was the manifestation of the sublime vision of Basavanna, a centre for propagation of ideas regarding the new society, religion and philosophy.²⁶

Hence, the Anubhava Mantapa was institution established by Basaveshwara to give a new life to society. The formation of Anubhava Mantapa was an outstanding work of Basaveshwara. It was an assemblage of superhumans of the time, common from the length and breadth of India, holding discussions and implementation for the welfare of humanity. Men and women irrespective of caste, colour, creed, rank, position and occupation participated in the deliberations of the Anubhava Mantapa. Anubhava Mantapa played an important role in bringing renaissance and humanism. It may be noted that the Anubhava Mantapa assured all among other things 'dignity of individual', and human rights are part and parcel of human dignity.²⁷

Anubhava Mantapa considered advancement of knowledge as a fundamental right of all persons. It was an august assembly in which discussions were held relating to every aspect of life

covering social, religious, spiritual, economic, philosophical, cultural and literary fields. All issues concerning both social and individual life, right from social reformation through the creation of equal opportunities upto self-realization were discussed. "Basaveshwara and other sharanas of the Anubhava Mantapa accepted the fundamental principles that may be summarized as follows:²⁸

- 1.All men are equal.
- 2.No man is high or low either by birth, sex or occupation.
- 3.There is no discrimination between man and man and between man and woman
- 4.Woman has equal rights with man to follow the path for self-realization.
- 5.Each one should follow a profession of his own choice.
- 6.Women must also take up a Kayak.
- 7.All Kayskas are honorable professions, no Kayaka is either low or high.
- 8.Vamas (castes) and Asramas (Stages) are to be discarded.
- 9.Self development is to be achieved through Kayaka.
- 10.Renunciation and dwelling in the forest are ruled out as cowardly tendencies to escape from life.
- 11.Inter-caste marriages and free dining should be encouraged.
- 12.Untouchability has no place in society.
- 13.Every man is free to think on all spiritual and social subjects.
- 14.Reason and experience are the only guiding lights for free thinking and spiritual advancement.
- 15.The language of people should be the medium for imparting spiritual and secular education.
- 16.All men have equal rights to participate in spiritual discussions to acquire spiritual knowledge and to follow the same path of self-realization."

The above principles indicate that Anubhava Mantapa was established on the principles of liberty and equality, gave adequate opportunities to all and made everyone feel that existence was recognized and that full justice was being done to him. It also makes clear that promoting respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedom was the major concern of Anubhava Mantapa.

The Anubhava Mantapa did not make a distinction between young and old, men and women with regard to knowledge. For example, Channabasavanna who was a young boy of 12 years initiated Siddarama into Virashaivism. Another noted instance is of Akka Mahadevi, who was only 16 years old. The Anubhava Mantapa was able to produce a large number of women writers who wrote vachanas. The sharanas endeavoured to break this traditional image of the woman and helped create a healthy social atmosphere. This indeed is memorable in the context of 12th century Indian history.²⁹

Basaveshwara who pleaded for the equality of women, revered Akka Mahadevi, whose rational and courageous outlook that endeared her to the womenfolk of the present day, is a sublime example of character and devotion, every one bowed before her in reverence of her spiritual attainments. Sattyakka, Muktayakka, Akkanagamma, Neelambike, Gangambike, Moolegamahadevi, were women of sterling character and a remarkable spiritual status. Sometimes they surpassed men in keenness of perception and soundness of argument.³⁰

This clearly reveals the independence the women enjoyed and the equal role and position they had with men in the Anubhava Mantapa. The Anubhava Mantapa established by the sharanas, under the leadership of Basavanna, performed the task of organizing social behaviour into stable patterns and it provided a basis for the integration of society.

CONCLUSIONS

Basavanna also known as Bhakti Bhandari Basavanna, Basaveshwara "Vishwaguru", though grown up in an orthodox Hindu religious household he rejected many practices in Vedic society. He established the Anubhava Mantapa, which attracted many saints from throughout India and sharanas raised a new wind Veerashaiva faith and Basavanna's philosophy. Kalyana achieved great eminence and fame in Metaphysical world due to the activities of these Sharanas. The Anubhava Mantapa became the epicenter of all religious revolution under whose aegis issues concerning to all the aspects of life were discussed frankly and conclusions were drawn.

The movement Basavanna initiated through Anubhava Mantapa became the basis of a sect of love and faith. It sought to inspire ideals of social and religious freedom. Basaveshwara did not start his movement for emancipation of women in a vacuum, it was a movement for human rights. It meant a movement for self respect and dignity. The Anubhava Mantapa established by Basavanna laid down the foundation of social democracy. Basavanna believed that man becomes great not by his birth but by his conduct in society. The Sharanas had no caste divisions and accepted everyone as equal. People belonging to various professions like weaver, washermen, basket-maker, goldsmith, farmer, barber, soldier, oilman, tanner, cobbler, ferryman and other castes participated in the deliberations at Anubhava mantapa without any distinctions.

The movement started by Basaveshwara for emancipation of women was a movement for self respect and dignity. The Vachanas (sayings) of Basaveshwara speak about liberty, equality, fraternity, dignity and respect which the human rights ensure and which ultimately contribute to the common good. Women were given patronage at the Anubhava mantapa among whom Akka Mahadevi received highest praise from Basavanna. There were women followers with their respective vocations. All Sharanas, including Basaveshwara, accorded mother's position to woman, we get evidence of Basaveshwara's broad view of woman in his treatment of his wives, and a good number of sharanas (woman saints) who participated in the religious discussions at Anubhava Mantapa. Married women also took part in the movement. There were also women devotees of lower background.

Thus, one can say Basaveshwara was prophet of individuality and not of domination. He was also thereby upholding the religious freedom and equality of every individual.

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