



Shivasharana Philosophy on Emancipation of Women in Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

Women were suffered from secondary and subjugated position since medieval period in India. Though Government has made policies for achieving caste and gender equality, still equality is not achieved. Against this background, it is highlighted that there was caste and gender equality of all people in Karnataka in 12th Century as the people were following Shivasharana philosophy. The Shivasharanas (Philosophers) have written literary verses (Vachanas) to communicate their ideas and they were also practiced the equality among different castes and gender. Even there were Shivasharaneyas (Female Philosophers), who were contributed towards Vachana literature. There were discussions in Anubhava Mantapa related to life experiences, especially related to meditation, devotion, work, Dasoha (serving food), etc. Females were equally treated with male and participating equally in the discussions of Anubhava Mantapa. It shows that the contributions of Shivasharanas for the emancipation of women in 12th century are much appreciated.

KEYWORDS :

Introduction:

In the history of humanity, woman has been as important a factor as man, yet she was always looked down upon as an inferior creature. It is harsh reality that women have been ill-treated in every society for ages. "A woman is deprived of her independent identity and is always considered as the property of man-father, husband or son. She is being looked down as a commodity or slave". She has been kept in subordination and always been treated as inferior to man in rights and privileges¹. In the patriarchal Hindu society, woman is a Shudra².

Many of the reform movements were taken place when we read the history of the world, against religious traditions, social customs, inequality, political systems, blind faiths, unsound beliefs, etc. These movements are led by many thinkers and philosophers from all the religions and castes from all the corners of the world. In the medieval India, the revolutions made by shivasharanas were notable efforts to reform the society. In Karnataka, the contributions of Shivasharanas such as Basaveshwar, Akkamahadevi, Siddharam, Dohara Kakkayya, Allama Prabhu, Aydaki Lakkamma, Molige Marayya, Madivala Machayya, Kumbhar Gundayya, Hadapada Appanna and many more are worth noted in social aspects of life, which highlighted the social equality irrespective of caste, religion or gender.

The philosophers, who were made revolution to highlight equality irrespective caste, religion or gender in Karnataka, were popularly known as 'Shivasharanas' or devotees of Shiva. Further, they expressed their ideas in verses or poetry, called "Vachanas" or 'Vacanas'. The platform on which these shivasharanas were expressed their ideas is popularly known as "Anubhava Mantapa", a platform where anyone (irrespective of their caste, religion or gender) can share their social experiences.

The 12th century was an age which produced a community of saints in Karnataka [though some from far off place also came and joined them]. It was an age when every saint was a spiritual genius striking out on his own and being second to none³. Vachana literature was a by-product of that great revolution. Almost all saints who took lead in the revolution were poets who poured out their souls in Vachanas, a unique literary form in Kannada. The advent of as many as 33 women saints, who were also Vachana writers, at one and the same time, was an unprecedented phenomenon.

Women's Emancipation by Shivasharanas:

The Shivasharanas of the 12th century understood and realized the position of women and provided on equal status and opportunity to them on par with rein in spiritual matters. Their action towards the emancipation of women can be considered as the first such movement systematically launched in the country. The system of family

preached by the Shivasharanas is quite unique, for spirituality is the starting point for any transformation to take place. Therefore the sharanas propounded the concept of equality between men and women first from the spiritual level. According to Shivasharanas the soul does not discriminate as regards gender or sex. Soul basically the same, it is only the body which appears as man and women. According to the Veerashaiva Philosophy of which Basaveshwar was the champion, men and women differ only in physiological level but they are one and the same in metaphysical aspect⁴.

Androgyne vachanas of Basavanna and other Shivasharanas, enabled the women devotees (Shivasharaneyas) to get rid of femaleness which had many negative social connotations. Women acquired new self awareness by the new ideas of equality and participated freely in religious and social activities; The Anubhava Mantapa (hall of spiritual experience) provided the platform. Thus social participation enabled women to be leveled equal to men. It is interesting to note that a prostitute, Sule Sankavve also participated in discussions in Anubhava Mantapa and also written few vachanas. It is highlighted along with their real names the male shivasharanas were generally renamed as 'ayya' or 'anna' means 'owner' or 'brother', for example, Marayya, Basavanna, Gundayya, Machayya, etc. The names of females were attached with words such as 'akka' or 'amma', means 'sister' or 'mother' in Kannada, for example, Mahadeviyakka, Gangamma, Nilamma, Lakkamma, Lingamma, etc. Hence, there was respect for all the Shivasharanas and Shivasharaneyas irrespective of their caste or gender.

The principles of Anubhava Mantapa emphasized the equality of both men and women and also emancipation of woman and are listed as under.

1. No one is high or low either by birth, sex or occupation
2. There is no discrimination between man and man and between man and women
3. Woman has equal rights with man to follow the path of self evolution
4. Women can also take up any Kayaka
5. Inter group marriages and free dining should be encouraged⁵.

The following Vachana of Siddharama's testify to the revolutionary change in the outlook of men and women on woman's ability to save herself:

The woman He himself had created
Adorned His head;
The woman He himself had created
Adorned His lap;

*The woman He himself had created
Adorned Brahma's tongue;
The woman He himself had created
Adorned Narayana's chest.*

Therefore :

*Woman is no woman,
Nor is she a demon,
Woman is verily*

Kapila Siddha Mallikarjuna Himself, look !⁶

As discussed already, there were two basic inequalities in the society, they are caste and gender. Basaveshwar revolted against the rigid deep rooted caste system and declared that no one is superior or inferior either by caste or by sex. He declared that men and women are equal in birth as we observed from his vachana.

*Unless the flow of blood appear,
There is no harbourage
Wherein the embryo may dwell.
The function of the seed is e'er the same.*

*Greed, lust, anger and joy,
All other passions are the same,
Whatever you read or hear, what fruit?
What is the rule to judge a caste?*

*"The embryo needs the seven elements:
It is the same birth out of the same womb;*

*Same the alliance of self and soul;
What, then, the usefulness of caste?"*

*You are a blacksmith if you heat;
A washerman if you beat; A weaver, if you lay the warp;*

*A Brahmin, if you read the Books!
Is anybody in .the word
Delivered through the ear?*

*Therefore, O Kudala Sdngamd Lord,
The well-born is the man who knows
The nature of Divinity!⁷*

As described by Basaveshwar in the above Vachana, human body was formed by seven elements and come from same womb, through the same passage. He states that qualities like, desire anger, joy and passions are same in all beings, therefore, there is no distinction between one another. Further, the human beings are doing their occupations based on their skills and hereditary occupations. Then why there is inequality based on caste and gender in the society. So, Basaveshwar emphasized for caste and gender equality in Veerashaivism. Similarly, according to Shivayogi Siddharama both man and woman are equal as he says:

*All liquid is the same:
Wine is from toddy trees,
Nectar is from flowers.
All human body is the same:
Man and woman continue the race
Man and god continue divinity
O, Kapilasiddhamallikarjun⁸*

These principles indicate that discrimination against women on the basis only of caste and sex is not permitted in the twelfth century itself. Women were provided equal rights along with men for the purpose of evolution of their personalities. Women were permitted to take up any kind of work of their choice and have economic independence. Women were free to many even from other castes.

The Veerashaiva view of man and woman can be best understood by the following vachana of Devara Dasimayya:

*A woman is identified
By her breasts and plaits
And a man, by his beards and moustaches
But the soul, within the two
Is neither woman or man
O Lord Ramanatha⁹*

Devara Dasimayya described that the soul in both men and women is same, but there are only physiological differences between these genders. Hence, the Vachana of Devara Dasimayya shows the equal-

ity of men and women. The Sharanas have also pointed out that woman is not an illusion, but a living being like man in every walk of life. Considering woman as an illusion represents the self aggrandizement of the male which is unfair. According to Veerashaivism, man and woman differ from each other at the psychological level only. At the metaphysical level, they are one and the same i.e. at the level of *Atman*, the pure consciousness.

Like Shivasharanas (Male saints), the Shivasharaneyas, (female saints) like Goggave and Satyakka reject the entire concept of gender. Goggave says in her vachana:

*They call one woman if one has
breasts and a braid;
They call one man if one possesses
moustache and a loin cloth
Is knowledge of these twain
Male or female?
O Nastinatha¹⁰*

Goggave too says that the physiology of the males and females are different. We can't able to differentiate the knowledge of man and woman, they are equal. As stated by Satyakka the wise do not differentiate between the souls dwelling in male and female bodies for souls do transcend gender differences, as the fragrance of a flower and the sweetness of a fruit do. Her Vachana is as under.

*It's not proved that
That person one is female
Who has breasts and plaits of hair.
It's not proved that
That person alone is male
Who has moustache and carries a dagger.
That is the way of the world,
But not that of the wise.
The differentiating feature in fruit is sweetness
Whatever fruit it be.
The differentiating feature in a flower is fragrance,
Whatever be its beauty.
You alone know its secret,
O Sambu Jakesvara !¹¹*

In another Vachana, Jedara Dasimayya rejects both gender and caste as under.

*Did the breath of the mistress
have breasts and long hair?
Or did the master's breath wear the sacred thread?
Did the outcaste, last in line,
hold with his outgoing breath
the stick of his tribe?¹²*

According to Jedar Dasimayya, physiological traits may differ the males and females, but the breathing is air is not different as it is equal and accordingly the persons of all the castes and gender are equal. Basaveshwar was condemned oppression and suppression of women in society. Another Shivasharana, Siddharama upholds nobility of womanhood as he writes:

*Woman is not just a female sex,
Woman is not a demoness even,
Woman is the very embodiment
Of Lord Kapilasiddha Mallikarjuna¹³*

Woman when looked at as an object of mere sexual gratification could be a hurdle for you. But instead of just looking at her pretty pair of eyes and see the external beauty, if you look deep into her eyes and perceive the exalted beauty of the divine Spirit within, she can surely help you in your spiritual pursuits. The everlasting beauty of her inner soul which is the same as yours, would then look more attractive than the fading beauty of her flesh!¹³ The Vachana of Siddharama described that woman is not only a female sex, but she is embodiment of lord Shiva. Such is the noble status given to women by Shivasharanas in their Vachanas.

Thus, looking at these examples of Shivasharaneyas (women philo-

ophers in Sharana movement), their attainments and experiences on the highest level of religious experience, any woman could be proud to be a Shivasharaneyas. But the wisdom of Sharanas does not end here. For, if they have given woman the highest religious rights, so have they expected important religious obligations from her. She is also equally to follow "Lingachara" (rules of Linga-pooja, 'Sadachara', 'Shivachara', 'Ganachara', and 'Brithayachara'. Among these 'acharas', very few religions have expected the function of *religious defence* from women. But Shivasharana movement does it. Thus it is said in the *Prabhulingalile* that women have participated in the worship of 'Shivalinga', 'Dasoha' (serving food), philosophical discussions, missionary work and also worked with equal enthusiasm and courage to defend Veerashaivism.

Conclusion:

To sum up, the ideas of Shivasharanas and Shivasharaneyas emphasized the equality of women and people of all castes. It shows that the Veerashaiva philosophy of Shivasharanas propounded social equality of all castes and gender. The Governments have already passed legislations for achievement of equality and social justice of all castes and women and if the Shivasharana philosophy is adopted in society, there will be society based on equality. Hence, policy makers must have to consider Shivasharana's principles while making policies to achieve social equality.

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