



Shivasharana Movement and Veerashaivism in Karnataka

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT *As there was hierarchy based Hindu caste system in India, many of the castes were treated as lower and also were deprived from all types of equality. During 12th century, many of the reform movements were taken place at different parts and Shivasharana movement was one of such movement which is based on work, worship and equality among all castes and gender. The followers of Shivasharana movement were called as Veerashaivas. The paper analyzed the historical background to Veerashaivism in Karnataka.*

Introduction:

In Hinduism, the origin of the four class Varna division—the Shudra, Vaishya, Kshyatriya and Brahmana during Vedic period revealed that, starting with Rig Vedic society “which was basically tribal in character” there was a gradual break up of Aryan society into classes starting from 1100 BC in particular¹. The taking of slaves obtained enhanced meaning with the completion of the transformation of Vedic society from pastoralism to agriculture by the beginning of the sixth century BC. In this process, starting from 1800 BC to 600 BC, there was a great intermixing of the Aryan people with the various Indian Dravidian tribes.

Religion is the ideological expression of a society which has been divided along class lines. During Satavahana rule, Jainism, Buddhism and Vedic religions were introduced to Karnataka. It was after the end of Kadamba rule that the distinct trend of Shaivite Brahmanism began to take shape in Karnataka. During this period Tamil Nadu witnessed the rise of Nayanar Shaivism which concluded in the early eighth century with the death of Shankaracharya. In the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries Karnataka saw the rise of several heterodox schools of Bhakti Shaivism, of which the Kalamukha, Kapalika, Pashupata and Pancharatra schools were better known. Of these, Kalamukha Shaivism was however the most prominent, which, after an initial period of contradiction with Shankaracharya's Advaita Bhakti Shaivism, incorporated his precepts. The third phase in Karnataka was marked by the replacement of Kalamukha Shaivism by Veerashaivism from the eleventh century onwards. This transformation preceded the rise of Basavanna and his movement of the Shivasharanas by more than a century.

Nandi writes: “In origin and nature, the Kalamukhas were closely related to the earlier Nayanars of Tamil Nadu. The two sects although widely separated by time and space, marked two distinct phases of the Saivite movement of South India. Both the sects were organized on the basis of Saivite temple worship and monastic preaching of Saivite doctrines; both were founded by groups of brahmanas, both showed their dislike for Smarta orthodoxy and Jain heterodoxy and both accepted Bhakti as the ideological foundation of their particular systems. But whereas the chief appeal of the Nayanar Bhakti missions consisted in mobilising support for professional godmen who were trying to band up as monastic fraternities within the framework of caste organisation, the Kalamukhas and Pasupatas

were the first to develop non-caste fraternal associations. The two Saivite sects were also far more effective in expanding monastic landholdings and in facilitating greater subordination of the essential surplus-producing classes”².

Towards the end of the eleventh century, certain Kalamukha centres began to branch into what they called as Shaivism with a veera rasa or Veerashaivism. In terms of ideology, Virashaivism had little difference with Kalamukha Bhakti Shaivism. Marking this change RN Nandi writes: “The task of reorganizing the Saivite priesthood and cult, undertaken by the nayanars and the Kalamukhas was continued by the Veerashaivas who originated from the powerful priestly orders of the Kalamukhas operating in different districts of north western Karnataka, particularly Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwar and Shimoga. The emergence of Veerashaivas [under the leadership of Ekanta Rama, a Kalamukha Brahmana, around [1160-1200 AD] marked the rise of Jangama priesthood which succeeded to the office and authority of the earlier Kalamukha priests and monks; it also coincided with the private worship of phallic emblems of Siva, which largely replaced widespread public worship of images in the Kalamukha temples”³. As stated by Saki, Veerashaivism was nothing but the expression of a militant Kalamukha Shaivism⁴.

There was the political nature of the contradiction between the artisans and the service castes on the one hand with the orthodox Brahmana lords on the other. Nandi remarked, “The effects of wage payments in minted money on the mobility of artisanal labour were however much more pronounced than those on constructional labour or field labour. This would perhaps explain the fact that despite increasing enslavement of agricultural artisanal labour by fief-holders, Brahmana fief holders and temple devadana holders, there were attempts to escape to emerging towns where wage payments in money had picked up from the close of the eleventh century...To a limited extent the emerging money market appears to have liberalised the conditions of bond-service or at least shattered the immobility of artisans.... Group migration of artisanal workers to nearby towns also seems to have started during the eleventh-twelfth century... In some cases the temple institutions tried to prevent such migration and force the workers to render mandatory service to the temple concerned”⁵.

The contradiction between the merchants on the one hand

and the agrahara landlords on the other was also ripening. The accumulation of liquid capital in the hands of increasingly vocal strata of the merchant class and the assertion of this new found status by their management of towns and markets threw a serious challenge to Brahmana landlords. The landlords with whom power was vested imposed all kinds of taxes and tolls on this rising mercantile class. From all this it is evident that there was a seething discontent in the masses. They targeted feudalism as they were drawn into the crisis. The Shivasharana movement led by Basavanna was the result of this anti-feudal groundswell, the rebellion of Kalyana being its victorious pyrrhic culmination.

The connection between economic exploitation and socio-ritual oppression by the ruling class-Brahmin coalition, leading to a socio-religious protest movement like Veerashaivism, is historically and logically tenable. It has been rightly pointed out that 'the Lingayat religious movement was born in the context of a divided and exploitative society in order to challenge it in the name of equality, individual freedom and communitarian commitment'⁶.

Basavanna or Basaveshwar led the Shivasharana movement in Karnataka. Basavanna's father was the mahajana or *gramanimani* of the Bagewadi Kalamukha Matha in Bijapur district. The mahajana was a hereditary post. To be the mahajana of a Matha was to be like an uncrowned king-satrap of the property and wealth of the matha. In fact some mahajanas of the period were far wealthier than the kings of the time. Such mahajanas often served as *rajagurus* to the kings. The class of mahajanas thus represented the acme of feudalism during that period. In 1162, after Bijjala took Kalyan and became the king of entire Chalukyan territory, Basavanna's political career, tied as it was to that of Bijjala's, also rose. He became the *bhandari* or treasurer of the entire kingdom.

Basavanna's anti-Brahmin views and empathy for the various oppressed castes developed here. Of great influence were Dasimaiah's vachanas. Among the various Vachanakaras Jedara Dasimaiah, Madivala Machaiah and Ambigara Chowdaiah who had forceful anti-Brahmin views expressed a strong influence on Basavanna. It was at Kudala Sangama which was a growing commercial centre attracting a regular stream of harassed artisans, service castes, merchants and disgruntled Brahmanas that provided Basavanna an opportunity to study their lives more closely and comprehend the widespread social resentment towards Brahmin orthodoxy.

Shivasharana Movement:

In the twelfth century, Karnataka witnessed a renaissance remarkable for its religious fervor, social sanity and literary grace. The leader of this renaissance was, in fact, Basavanna (Basaveshwar), who in collaboration with his contemporary Veerashaiva saints, released the pent-up spiritual forces and led the masses out of the morass of superstition and ignorance into the moral, grandeur of the divine life. Basavanna founded a socio-spiritual institution named Anubhava Mantapa, through which he brought a marvelous change in the religious, social and economic conditions of the society. Allamaprabhu, who was the first president of the Anubhava Mantapa, often guided its deliberations, pointing out the path and piloting the aspirants to their destination. The Veerashaiva saints were all mystics. Allam Prabhu was a mystic par excellence. Mysticism is, in fact, the perennial philosophy, a philosophy that is immemorial and universal, for it maintains a metaphysics which recog-

nizes a Divine Reality, substantial to the world of things-corporeal and incorporeal, a psychology that finds in the soul something similar to or identical with Divine Reality, an ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent ground. The perennial philosophy involves the study of Reality at the bottom, with practice and morality at the top, with a consideration of metaphysical truth and at the focal with reconciliation of thought and action⁷.

In the medieval India, the revolutions made by shivasharanas were notable efforts to reform the society. The contributions of Shivasharanas such as Basaveshwar, Akkamahadevi, Siddharam, Dohara Kakkayya, Allama Prabhu, Aydakki Lakkamma, Molige Marayya, Madiwala 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 Anubhava Mantapa was a platform to discuss the socio-religious and political views of philosophers, both male and females. It is highlighted that there were equal rights of expression for both men and women of all religions and castes in participation and discussion in Anubhava Mantapa.

Anubhava Mantapa enabled people of different castes to develop a sense of brotherhood. The members of this Mantapa used to call one another as brother and sister. For example, Basaveshwara was called by others as Anna Basavanna and Akka Mahadevi, one of the noted lady members of the Mantapa as Akka Mahadevi. Similar respect and regard were shown by one saint to another. In this way the Anubhava Mantapa played a significant role in the establishment of equality among people of different castes, religions, languages and place of birth.

The Anubhava Mantapa was a regular institution. The deliberations that took place in it were a sort of symposium, where people from all walks of life and belonging all castes and creeds participated in it, on institution which has no parallel in the spiritual history of mankind. Social equality was a theme for pious or learned talk, and men and women of all castes were admitted to the discussions of the Anubhava Mantapa, nobody bothered to challenge the new ideas⁸.

Concluding Remarks:

Before 12th century, Indian society was practicing rigid Hindu caste system with caste hierarchy. As such, the lower castes were discriminated and treated not equal with higher castes like Brahmins. During such period, many of the reform movements were started by philosophers and in Karnataka, Shivasharana movement was played significant role to bring equality among all castes and gender. As such, people of all castes and women were treated equal in society and they were also enjoyed all types of freedom. The followers of Shivasharanas were popularly become Veerashaiva and the philosophy propounded by Shivasharanas was called as Veerashaiva philosophy, which is based on equality of all people.

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