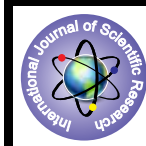


## Socio-Religious Reform Movements in South India



### History

**KEYWORDS :** Hearing loss, PTA, Impedance audiometry, Age related hearing loss.

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### ABSTRACT

*Due to caste based hierarchy in society and Brahmins' domination, many of the reform movements were taken place in south India during 8th to 12th century. The main philosophies behind these movements were gender and caste based equality and unique worship to single god. These movements emphasized social equality and humanity.*

### Introduction:

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.

### Social Reform Movements in South India:

The Nayanar movement came into existence in a milieu which had been dominated by Jainism. It therefore adapted certain forms which were till then characteristic of the Jainas. The 64 Nayanars or preceptors of the Shaiva sect was one instance. In this it was only competing with the 24 Tirthankaras which Jainism had institutionalised. From Vidya Dehejia's appendix we learn that of the 64 Nayanars 16 belonged to the sixth century AD, 10 to the seventh century, 23 are placed as belonging to both the seventh and eighth centuries, 14 to the eighth century and one to the ninth century<sup>1</sup>. It is evident by this that the Shaivite Bhakti Nayanar school was strongest in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries.

In a bid to broaden its social base, competing as it was, with Jainism, in this respect, the Nayanar movement attempted to give the impression that it was not confined to achieve merely the well-being of the Brahmanas. Thus of the 64 Nayanars there was a potter, a hunter, a cowherd, a washerman, a fisherman, a weaver, a bard minstrel, a physician, a toddy tapper and even an Untouchable. Despite the presence of 11 such members of the low castes, the chunk of Nayanars was drawn from the ruling classes and castes; 18 of whom were Brahmanas, 7 were kings, 4 were feudatories, another 4 were military chiefs, 6 were Vaishyas and 13 were from the landlord Vellala caste. Castes of 4 of the Nayanars remains unstated while 3 were women<sup>2</sup>. This variety hardly speaks of a loosening of chaturvarna by this Bhakti Shaivite movement. Chaturvarna always remained its bedrock. The non-Brahmana elements only reflect the spread of Brahmana influence and the winning over to its fold of members particularly from the ruling classes; the fact remaining throughout the Nayanar movement that Bhakti Shaivism always upheld the superiority and sanctity of the Brahmana.

The spread of Bhakti Shaivism to Karnataka starting from the seventh century onwards and more forcefully during the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries is sometimes wrongly attributed to Shankaracharya's establishment of the four cardinal Shaivite mathas, Sringeri in Chickmagalur's Malnad being one among them. It is quite possible that Shankara's visit to Sringeri could have as well been a later concoction since there is no definite evidence contemporaneous of his time<sup>3</sup>.

The Kalamukhas, Pashupata, Kapalika and Pancharatra sects of shaivism were derived from esoteric Tantra that was practiced by the Shudras. Kalamukha itself means the blackening of one's face with ash from burnt corpses and Kapalika signifies the skull inverted to serve as a drinking bowl. The adoption of such cults by Brahmanas could have been the result of the fall from grace of the urban Brahmanas, a period of crisis and unsure mode of life immediately after the fall of the shudra holding mode of production which brought them closer to the Shudra populace and their esoteric cults. In fact RN Nandi is of the opinion that it was during this interregnum that several non-Vedic and at times even anti-Vedic disciplines were also created by these heterodox Shaivite Brahmanas such as ayurveda (medicine), jotishya (astrology), bhashavaidya (philosophy), smritishastra (law) and hethushastra (logic)<sup>4</sup>. Further, he says that the fallen state of the Brahmanas earned them the disreputed appellation of *Brahmanachandalas* by their relatively better off brethren of the towns, the Devalakas<sup>5</sup>. The Kalamukhas were followers of Lakulisa, a Gujarati Brahmana of the third and fourth centuries AD who had a special hatred for the Jainas and who systematised Pashupata doctrines.

While the philosophy of Advaita with its highly abstract and incomprehensible intricacies meant little for the non-Brahmana sections, they were drawn by the Nayanars and the Kalamukhas because of their preaching of Bhakti. The direction of Bhakti spiritualism was clearly intended towards inducing the peasants, artisans and service castes to provide labour services and goods free of cost to the feudal classes. Some sources also suggest that the peasants and artisans had to provide the holy men even though they might themselves languish in utter poverty. It was with the extension of the Bhakti idea to the realms of statecraft and war that the long and the feudatories could ensure the unstinting loyalty of their retainers and could enthrall the body of peasant soldiers with the preparedness of ensuring the sacrifice of not their labour and its products alone, but also of their very lives.

To sum up, 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<sup>21</sup>.

While discussing the nature of early Jainism Ram Bhushan Prasad Singh writes that in the: "...earliest phase of their history, the Jainas and Buddhists launched a systematic campaign against the cult of ritual and sacrifice as destructive of all morals, and laid great stress on the purification of soul for the attainment of nirvana or salvation. They denied the authority of god over human actions. Unlike the Hindus, they did not accept god as the creator and destroyer of the universe. Contrary to the popular view, they held that every soul possesses the virtues of paramatma or god and attains this status as soon as it frees itself from worldly bondage. Naturally the early Jainas did not practice image worship, which finds no place in the Jaina canonical literature. The early Digambara texts from Karnataka do not furnish authentic information on this point, and the description of their mulgunas and uttaragunas meant for lay worshippers do not refer to image worship"<sup>7</sup>.

Towards the end of the eleventh century, certain Kalamukha centres began to branch into what they called as Shaivism with a vira rasa or Virashaivism. In terms of ideology, Virashaivism had little difference with Kalamukha Bhakti Shaivism. Marking this change RN Nandi writes: "The task of reorganising the Saivite priesthood and cult, undertaken by the nayanars and the Kalamukhas was continued by the Virasaivas 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 Virasaivas [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"<sup>23</sup>. As stated by Saki, Veerashaivism was nothing but the expression of a militant Kalamukha Shaivism<sup>24</sup>.

During the period, in Tamil Nadu, there were the Alvars, were like the Nayanars, forerunners of the Srivaishnavite faith. Alvar in Tamil means one that delves deep. A total of 12 Alvars starting from the seventh to the ninth century were the main body of saints whose emotional songs were compiled to form the Nalayira Prabandham or four thousand verses, and is treated as the foundation of the Srivaishnavite hagiography. Of the 12 Alvars, eight were Brahmanas, 2 were Shudras, one was a Kshatriya and another Untouchable. But like in the case of the Nayanars this diverse composition, despite the monopoly of the Brahmanas, did not mean any flexing of the caste system.

The Vaishnavite Bhakti tradition of the Alvars was no different in all its essentials from the Shaivite Bhakti move-

ment of the Nayanars of Tamil Nadu or the Kalamukha Bhakti sect of Karnataka. It was a multi-headed response of the Brahmana caste to identical necessities of the feudal mode of production arising at the same point of time in history.

The rise of Virashaivism particularly in the central and northern parts of Karnataka, led to the unleashing of the vira rasa and similar elimination of the Jainas of the region. David Lorenzen writes: "In about AD 1160, a debate cum miracle contest between the Wasaiva leader Ekanata Ramayya and the Jainas at Ablur in Dharwar district, Mysore, ended with the defeat of the latter. When the losers refused to abide by a previous agreement to set up a Siva idol in place of their Jina, Ekanata Ramayya marched on their temple, defeated its defenders and demolished all its buildings"<sup>10</sup>.

The caste system, feigned Aryan origins, a cloistered Sanskrit, disregard for Kannada, a religion that shared little in common with the popular forms of folk religion and above all, a growing class disparity with the Brahmanas wallowing in luxury amidst temple dance and music were what characterised the Brahmanas. Despite the Bhakti ideology that brought a section of the masses to it, the Brahmanas faced increasing isolation. The anger of the oppressed masses was visible during the attacks on the Jaina institutions in the eleventh-twelfth centuries.

At the end of the early feudal period, Brahmanical religion was moving towards greater sophistication, greater interaction and developing from local religio-cultural traditions. Shaivism and Vaishnavism from being two Brahmanical sects were attempting, by this assimilatory process, the creation of a unified all-pervasive ideology of religious control and mystification. Brahmanism, despite its caste barrier was absorbing and gradually converting itself into a more encompassing Hindu religion. As a consequence, the popular religious cults, being idealist expressions at a primitive level of existence and inspiring faith in the people became mere adjuncts to Brahmanical religion. Once hierarchically syncretised they began to lose their independence and came to be bound by the ruling feudal ideology, just as the peasantry was bound to the feudal lord. A religious cult whether popular or Brahmanical operated from different class viewpoints but merged into a common idealistic ideology of a society that was divided by classes<sup>11</sup>.

The prevailing socio-economic structure in early medieval Karnataka was dominated by the Brahmin-owned lands called the *brahmadeyas*. The *brahmadeya* necessarily had to have a large non-Brahmanical population which sustained it, composed of cultivators (since the Brahmins would not touch the plough), craftsmen and menials. These groups faced the prospect of dual exploitation both by the Brahmin landlords and by the state in the form of oppressive taxes<sup>12</sup>.

The domination of the Brahmins in society logically implies the dominance of the patriarchal structure, a situation where the Vedic Brahmanical structure determines the ascriptive and prescriptive roles of women and the lower castes. Thus the lower castes and women, who were in fact so crucial to the successful working of the economy, became marginalized in so far as their status within society was concerned.

to the beginning of markets and trade, many of the products and services were generated and also there is a new class of artisans in the society. Generally, lands were

owned by forward castes, especially emperors, ruling class and Brahmins. A new dimension to the contradiction between the artisan and the landlord had emerged. The artisan also, like the sharecropper, was a servile class. He had to supply free services and goods to the agraharas (Mathas or holy places of Brahmins) and landlords. Good deals of artisans also were sharecroppers. However, the development of a market and the increasing requirement of artisanal products left him with no time to attend to his piece of land. Further with the opening up of santhes (trade fairs) the artisan began to sell his goods and they assumed the form of commodities. By the twelfth century there emerged a growing class of artisans who had dissociated completely from agriculture and made their living purely by the sale of commodities. Thus in economic terms the artisan was not serving the landlord anymore. But the landlords on their part imposed various conditions on the artisan, trying to subject him to the old forms of servile labour. The market generated the desire for commodity production in the artisan. However, this freedom which commodity production ushered in, of its own volition in the artisan class, was obstructed by the landlords.

This was then 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 devedana 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"<sup>13</sup>.

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 antifeudal groundswell, the rebellion of Kalyana being its victorious pyrrhic culmination.

The connection between economic exploitation and socio-religious oppression by the ruling class-Brahmin coalition, leading to a socio-religious protest movement like Virasaivism, 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'<sup>14</sup>.

It is highlighted that the major socio-religious movement, which was based on equality and social justice during 12th century in Karnataka was Shivasharana movement led by

Basavanna or Basaveshwar. 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. Allama Prabhu, 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. Allama 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 recognizes 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 action<sup>15</sup>. 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.

Shivasharanas stressed the need for providing equal opportunity to both men and women and put this creed into practice. The women saints of the day proved the fact that they were in no way inferior to men in intelligence and soundness of judgement. Women were given equal opportunities to participate in the discoursed field in the Anubhava Mantapa. They enjoyed equal status with men in that Mantapa. The tale and intelligence of many of the women members was demonstrated as well as appreciated. They also wrote their own Vachanas. Hence, they were provided with an equal opportunity which helped their personalities to blossom, prompted their capacity to think and act on their own.

Enormous Vachana literature was created as a result of discussions held at Anubhava Mantapa. The study of Vachana literature reveals that these discussions' were based on rationalism, realism and scientific outlook. Allama Prabhu, a unique emperor of spiritual domain presided over these deliberations and Channabasaveshwara, the apostle of divine knowledge was the key figure to conduct these activities. Basaveshwara, of course was the very soul of Anubhava Mantapa. Shivasharanas who were perusing the path of spirituality through various Kayakas were taking part in these activities of Anubhava Mantapa. Activities of Anubhava Mantapa were conducted in Maha Mane, meaning great house i.e., the resident of Sri. Basaveshwara. Though this is fact, yet some people in the past questioned the very existence of such institution. There is no substance in this argument as there are clear evidence in the Vachans of Shivasharanas to prove the existence of Anubhava Mantapa<sup>16</sup>.

#### Concluding Remarks:

As discussed above, though there were many movements

taken place in south India from 8th century to 12th century, all of them were based on faith. Surprisingly, all of these movements were emphasized devotion and worship to main deities and emphasized social equality irrespective of different sections and castes in society. Hence, it can be summarized that all these social reform movements were emphasized humanity.

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