

Women status in 12th century in north Karnataka; A sociological study



Social Science

KEYWORDS :

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ABSTRACT

Though Hindu laws were unfavourable for women by subjugating their status, the philosophers like Shivasharanas in Karnataka at the early 12th Century have made revolution to emancipate women. They have expressed their ideas on different aspects of life through Vachanas. Even Shivasharanas were given equal rights to women by providing them active participation in Anubhava Mantapa. As such, women were also free to express their opinions on different social problems and life in Anubhava Mantapa. In this way, Vachanas of Shivasharanas were emphasized equality of women.

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.

Hindu laws and customs were extremely unfavourable to women, and were treated as very inferior to man. Manu, the law giver said "Day and Night woman be held by their protectors in status of subjugation" and that the 'woman is under the subjection of her father when a child, when married under that of her husband, after her husband under her sons and if she has no sons then to her agnate relations, because there is no woman whatsoever who is fit to be independent'. Manu further says "women love their beds and ornaments, and have loose desires, they have bad temper, are frail, irresolute and never straight. They should always be kept under subjection and control".

Inequality of caste and gender were the main problems in the society. That is, many of the castes were treated as untouchable and are alienated from forward castes. Further, the females were deprived from equality in education, religious aspects, social aspects, economic aspects, etc. Many of the social reform movements were organized by many philosophers against women's subjugation in society. Of these philosophers, Shivasharanas (Philosophers of Veerashaivism) of 12th Century in Karnataka were born to reform the society by fighting against the inequality, untouchability, social discrimination based on caste and gender. The philosophy laid down by Shivasharanas is known as Veerashaivism. Basaveshwar was founder of Veerashaivism along with other Shivasharanas as his followers. The Shivasharanas were gave equal status to women and there were also female shivasharaneyas. They expressed their philosophical and social ideas in Vachana (poem) literature in pure and easy Kannada language so that common people can understand at large. They conveyed messages on different aspects of life through Vachanas and there were even female Shivasharanas, who have also written Vachanas. 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 !³*

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!⁴*

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, Kapilasiddhamallikarjun⁵*

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 women is identified
By her breasts and plait
And a man, by his beards and moustaches
But the soul, within the two
Is neither women or man
O Lord Ramanatha⁶*

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 equality 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.

The souls have no gender discrimination to which bodies are subjected, is the first primeval *mantra* proclaimed by Shivasharanas. Man had forgotten the indivisible nature of souls, since he mistook physical differences between man and woman for the essential characteristics of souls. Shivasharanas abolished the difference between man and woman by recognizing the cognate nature and common features of souls housed in both male and female bodies.

*Birth everywhere is in the same way.
In blood and uterus and foetus.
Mind, breath, life are held
With the eight-fold cage of the body.
It's woman if one develops
The breasts and grows long hair. "
It's man if he grows moustache ?
But the soul is neither male nor female.
If one makes any attempt
To know why this is so,
It's beyond the ken of even the Srtis,
Said Ambigara Choudayya⁷*

Like Shivasharanas (Male saints), the Shivasharaneyas, (female saints) like Goggavve and Satyakka reject the entire concept of gender. Goggavve 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 Nastinatha⁸*

Goggavve 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 stated 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 plait 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 Jakkesvara⁹*

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?¹⁰*

Conclusion:

To conclude, women were treated equal by all Shivasharanas in Karnataka in 12th Century. Anubhava Mantapa was platform to discuss and express their ideas on different aspects and experiences in their real life. The social problems were also solved by Shivasharanas in this platform. The women were given equal opportunities to express their opinions and participate in the discussions in Anubhava Mantapa. In this way, the Shivasharanas pulled down the restrictions that were imposed on women and extended the scope of their freedom beyond the four walls of her house to social, religious and spiritual worlds. Women were made to realize their potential - both physical and spiritual, and to enjoy equal opportunities with men. Shivasharanas have made untiring efforts by putting all their energy for building a society of equals where both men and women could participate in spiritual and religions spheres on equal footing. Through their vachanas they not only increased awareness, but also they emphasized the equality of women by their acts. Even the women engaged in lower occupations such as prostitution, were also getting respect in the society.

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