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Basava Samithi had arranged a state level Vachana Sahitya Sammelana in collaboration with Akhila Karnataka Vachana Sahitya Parishat, Mysore from 17 to 19, Aug. 2013. from left Dr. S. Vidyashankar, Sri H.S. Doreswamy, Sri Aravind Jatti, Sri Ramjan Darga, Dr. D. Javaregowda, Dr. C.P. Krishna kumar, H.H. Sri Shivarudra Swamiji, H.H. Sri Nijagunanda Swamiji.



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Basaveshwara and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Views on Eradicating the Untouchability

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No two Socio-religious revolutionary leaders in Indian social history converge in their thoughts and actions as eminently as do Basava of the 12th century Karnataka and Bheemrao Ambedkar of 20th century India. Basava and Ambedkar, though born in diverse environs, with differing backgrounds and are separated by over 800 years-Basava was born in 1132 A.D. in a Brahmin family, the highest stratum in the social hierarchy—spearheaded in their respective times, massive revolutionary movements to change a profoundly iniquitous social order based on the pernicious caste system which had spawned, untouchability, pervasive status differentials, women, promoted sacerdotal oligarchy. Here is an attempt to recollect and reclaim the efforts of Basava and Ambedkar to liquidate such an unjust, immoral system and install a society founded on egalitarian values.¹

There is wide gap between Basava and Ambedkar in respect of their time, reasoning, culture and value, one can notice similarities between the two in respect of their views and objectives. Nothing but humanitarian concern seems to be the main cause of these striking similarities.²

Basava launched a socio-religious revolution and Ambedkar put forth a socio-political revolution. But their



intention was very much the same. They both tended to remove the caste system which threatened to rule the destiny of people in the country.³ Basava and Ambedkar proclaim loudly and clearly that the religion that fosters casteism and untouchability is no religion at all.

Basaveshwara was a great prophet, socio-economic, religious reformer. He was also a great saint, revolutionary and great human being.⁴

So Basava left behind a band of Sharana community which followed the principles of equality, liberty, brotherhood, emancipation of woman, work or Kayaka, Dasoha and the Vacanas which give everyone a new life who they go through these precious Vacanas. Basaveshwara revolted against the caste and in the following Vacana he said:

"On the same earth stands
The outcaste's hovel
And the deity's temple!
Whether for ritual or for rinsing
Is not the water, same?
To one who knows himself,
All castes coalesce as one,
Even as salvation's sixfold path
Leads but to the same end.
He that knows Thee verily
Knows THEE but as ONE
My Lord Kudalasanagama.⁵

This clearly indicates that Basaveshwara strongly condemned caste system. There were persons like Markandeya, Mandodari, Agastya, Durvasa, and Kasyapa who were untouchables, but by their good work they became great persons. Following vacana makes it very clear:

Vyasa is a fisherman's son,
Markandeya of an outcaste born,
Mandodari, the daughter of a frog!
O, look not for caste; in caste,
What were you in the past?
Indeed, Agastya was a boatman,

Durvasa, a maker of shoes,
Kasyapa, a blacksmith
The sage, Kaundinya by name,
Was, as three worlds know,
A barber...mark ye all, the words
What matters one is low-born?
Only a Shivabhakta is high-born!⁶

In Anubhva Mantapa "It was the laboratory of Basava's own preachings. He taught equality and so the Mantapa was open to all without distinctions. Old and young, rich and poor, men and women, high and low, king and servants were all there equal."⁷

In the Anubhava Mantapa which he had established as a democratic forum of divine and intellectual discussion as a process of finding solutions to the social problems, he had accepted as fundamental among other things, following principles for the eradication of untouchability:

1. All men are equal.
2. No man is high or low either by birth, sex or occupation.
3. Each one should follow a profession of his own choice.
4. All Kayakas (works) are honourable professions No Kayaka is either low or high.
5. Varnas (or castes) and Ashramas (or stages) are to be discarded.
6. Inter group marriages and free dining should be encouraged.
7. Untouchability has no place in the society.
8. All men have equal right to participate in spiritual discussions, to acquire spiritual knowledge and to follow the same path of self evolution.⁸

Basava proclaimed that the Brahmin and untouchable are one.⁹

I pronounce that all thy children are equals
Be they Brahmins or Holeyas
All are same, same, be they
Brahmins or Holeyas,
Who are unclean in thought and
Deed, this is what my conscience believes

Basaveshwara introduced Sharana Siddhantha and many people joined his movement because of simplicity, personality of Basava influenced them and preachings were in native or common language Kannada. Basava uplifted the outcasts by giving them equal status in worship and religious practices, emphasizing the vegetarian food and banning the intoxicants. So many



downtrodden people joined not only the movement but wrote the Vacanas. The question of high or low becomes irrelevant after one becomes Shivabhakta, adoring Linga, Jangama and Prasada. With the coming of Shiva, a transformation takes place. Dasiputra or Veshya Putra becomes guru Swaroopi or Shivaswaroopi, impure becomes Shivalaya or Shiva Mandir. For where there is Linga there is Kailasa the abode of God.¹⁰ For this transformation a Shivabhakta adopt the justice and love. Many Vacanas of Basaveshwara focus on eradicate the untouchability. Few Vacanas numbers are¹¹ 138, 319, 342, 346, 337, 347, 348, 350, 351, 352, 417, 575, 582, 589, 594, 600, 656, 731, 769, and 897.

Basaveshwara called untouchables as his kith and kin; he wanted to establish a casteless society. In many of his Vacanas Basaveshwara talks of a casteless society, in which, people live happily with one another without considering caste, creed and sex.

Dr. B.R.Ambedkar was the multidimensional rebellious leader of a socially suppressed minority, a defiant protestant in religion and dissenter in politics before and after freedom, a great constitution maker and militant minister,



a profound scholar and public speaker, a jurist, a Buddhist but above all fighter for human liberation on the social, economic and political fronts.¹²

He was a great Indian with a world stature and having been a 'Mahar' boy by birth and poor in youth, exposed the exploitative system with the wider perspective of an internationalist. This Mahar-Manu will be remembered as

long as the Indian Constitution lasts, revered by all lovers of social justice.¹³

The evil of untouchability¹⁴ has been under constant attack by Hindu reformers throughout the dark centuries of Indian social history. Dr. Ambedkar decided to dedicate his life to the cause of the untouchables. It became his life's mission. As he wished to annihilate Caste in order to achieve equality of social status for his community, he vehemently protested against the social, political and economic segregation practiced by the high caste Hindu society against the Untouchables.

"Annihilation of untouchability is my birthright. Untouchability has ruined the untouchables, the Hindus and ultimately the nation as a whole.¹⁵ Varnas are four, whereas castes are numerous one over the other. Caste can exist only by disintegrated a group. The genius of caste is to divide and to disintegrate. It is also the curse of caste"¹⁶, as observed Dr. Ambedkar long ago.

"Untouchability will vanish only when the whole of the Hindu social order, particularly the Caste system will be dissolved. Is this possible? Every institution is sustained



by some sort of a sanction. There are three kinds of sanction, which supply life-force to an institution. They are legal, social and religious. The vitality of the institution depends upon the nature of the sanction. What is the nature of the sanction behind the caste system? Unfortunately, the sanction behind the caste system is the religious sanction, for the caste as a new form of the Varna system derives its sanction from the Vedas which form the sacred book of the Hindu religion and which are infallible. I say unfortunately because anything which has a religious sanction becomes by virtue of it sacred and eternal. To the Hindu, Caste is sacred and caste is eternal. Is caste cannot vanish what hope is her for untouchability to disappear?"¹⁷

Dr. Ambedkar offered his well-planned scheme of socio-political-economic reforms relating to the problems of untouchability. His approach was more practical. His stand was that the surest way for the elevation of depressed classes lay in higher education, higher employment and better ways of earning and living. Once they became well placed in the scheme of social life, they would become respectable and once they became respectable, the religious outlook of the orthodox was sure to undergo change and if this did not happen it could do no injury to their material interests.¹⁸

Dr. Ambedkar listed the tyrannies and oppression practised by the Hindus against the untouchables. He supported his accusations by citing newspapers reports from different parts of the country.¹⁹

Dr. Ambedkar observed – "Untouchability is worse than slavery because it carries no such security as to livelihood as the latter does. No one is responsible for the feeding, nursing and clothing of the untouchable. From this point of view, untouchability is not only worse than slavery but is positively cruel as compared to slavery"²⁰ Dr. Ambedkar

demanding that these slavery and untouchability evils must be abolished with the help of law.

Dr. Ambedkar was a renowned scholar. His books on the problems of the Depressed Classes are of permanent value. They are a heritage which will continue to blaze the trail of the present and future generations although Babasaheb is no more now. In this category are placed his books 1) Buddha and His Dhamma (1957); 2) Who were the Shudra, How they came to be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society? (1946); 3) who were the untouchables and why they became untouchables (1948); 4) What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables (1945); 5) States and Minorities (1947); 6) Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of untouchables; 7) Annihilation of Caste (1935); and 8) Castes in India; Their Genesis, Mechanism and Development.²¹

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was instrumental in providing reservation, for backward communities, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, in services, Central as well as State Legislatures. The relevant provisions in the Constitution are included under the Articles: 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, 25, 29, 35, 41, 124, 164, 244A, 275, 330, 332, 333, 334, 335, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 371A, 371B, 371C.²²

Article 17 abolishes 'untouchability and forbids its practice in any form. The enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability is to be an offence punishable in accordance with law. In exercise of the power conferred by Article 35, Parliament enacted the untouchability (offence) Act, 1955, which was later on amended in 1976, in order to make the law more stringent to remove untouchability from society.²³

Dr. Ambedkar had aroused and awakened the Depressed Classes against social injustice and instilled in them the spirit of self-reform, self-emancipation, self-reliance, self-respect and self-confidence. He tried to free

their minds from the inferiority complex these people had because of their belief that they belonged to the lowest strata of the Hindu society, and which was inculcated in their mind by custom and usage, sanctioned by religion.²⁴

It is the responsibility of the new generation of enlightened men and women especially of those who belong to the weaker sections of our society to carry forward the mission or movement of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar with renewed vigour, determination and enthusiasm. In fact, they have to erase in free-democratic India the man-made barriers carved in the name of Varna, Caste, Slavery, Untouchability, Gender discrimination, inferior social status of women and so on. The young generation has to adopt a pragmatic mind of learning and giving each and every member of Indian society his due share of equality and opportunity. What we need today is one single creed of religious thoughts and one universal language of the heart. In other words Dr. Ambedkar aroused the conscience of man to be man as no society can find its fulfillment without blossoming the spirit of man, especially the younger generation.²⁵

Conclusion: Both Basava and Ambedkar wholly subscribe to the theory that the endogamous character of caste, a direct fall out of the Shastric tradition, had to be assaulted out of existence and inter-caste marriage and inter-dining must become common place occurrences. Basava, a determined practitioner of what he preached, launched a veritable social revolution when he conducted inter-caste marriage between an untouchable boy and a Brahmin girl. If such marriages had continued the social history of India would have been different. Ambedkar was of the firm view that "the real remedy for breaking caste is inter-caste marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of caste" Ambedkar rekindled the importance of Basava's act in the 20th century by marrying a Brahmin woman.

The problem of untouchability cannot be solved by force but by law. The remedy also does not so much lie in improving the laws as in changing the very attitude of the people towards untouchables. Such change of hearts of the people was attempted by both Basava and Ambedkar in their times.

Ambedkar's strategies to remove the evils of untouchability stand quite relevant even today. He asked untouchables to fight for their self-elevation, self help and self-respect. He appealed to them to organize, educate and fight for justice.

Revival of Basaveshwara's thoughts is necessary among other things, to inculcate in the minds of Indian people required zeal and zest to achieve the goals of establishment of a secular, socialist, democratic society as envisaged under Indian Constitution. "What is relevance of Basava's message of Humanism" and what more Ambedkar could have done for the betterment of the society"? These are questions in themselves. It is because of Basava emerged as a universal soul to save all living beings from the scourge of the discriminations made on the basis of caste, class, occupation and sex. And Ambedkar stood as stout personnel to fight for the rights of the common man in social, economic and political prospective.

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Foot Notes

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4. To know the life sketch of Basaveshwara the historical data is drawn from three sources; the poetic biography of Basavanna entitled Basavaraja Devara Ragale by the reputed medieval Kannada poet Harihara ; the biography in the Puranic form entitled Basava Purana from the Telugu writer Palkurki Somanatha; and finally , Basavanna's own Vacanas.
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11. For more detail see H.Deveerappa (ed), Vacanas of Basavanna, Anna Balaga, Sirigere, 1968, pp.197-225
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