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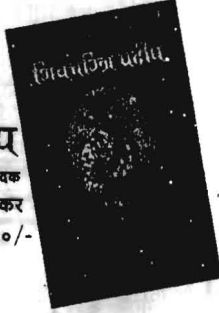
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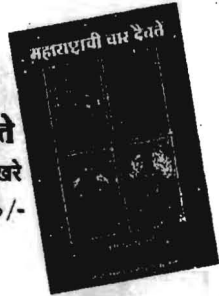
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## Women in Shivasharanas Literature

Dr. Nalini Avinash Waghmare

**Introduction :** To establish a new society free from the irrational notion of discrimination on the basis of caste, class, and sex in the mid dense darkness of 12th century a beacon of divine light dawned upon Karnataka in India in the form of Basaveshwara and Shivasharanas.

The 12<sup>th</sup> century in Karnataka witnessed a great socio-religious movement of Shivasharanas, when Bijjala II, the ruler of Kalachuri dynasty was ruling Basavakalyan as capital, this movement was most outstanding and revolutionary in the socio-religious and political history of India. Shivasharanas like Basaveshwara, Allamaprabhu, Siddharama, Channabasavanna, Akkamahadevi, Muktayakka, Devara Dasimayya, Nuliya Chandayya, and others waged a war against existing socio-religious evils of the society, and political despotism of the king Bijjala II, which completely spoiled the society.

The society was disorganized and degenerated one. The society was at its lowest ebb and failed to meet the needs of the common people. The society was characterized by social schemes, political upheavals, religious atrocities and economic inequalities. However, the situation in general was degrading and miserable to women. They were denied of basic needs and opportunities for education. The civil customs like child marriage, sati, and Devadasi were in vogue. A dreadful combination of all these factors made women voiceless and gave them a powerless existence.

The timely emergence of Shivasharanas on the scene is described as follows, "Hindu society in spite of all its high cultural traditions and spiritual splendors has failed miserably to meet the needs and aspirations of the common people. It was at this hour of need Shivasharanas appeared on the scene."<sup>1</sup>

"The rise of Shivasharanas was in response to the challenges posed by the political, religious, economic, spiritual and social conditions of the time. Indeed, Shivasharanas rose to the occasion

to share in a new era of liberty, equality and fraternity. Shivasharanas emergence on the scene, along with Shaivism, struck at the very roots of Brahmanical traditional challenging its religious and political order. Shaivism emerged as a great movement against the irrational, illogical and inhuman practices pursued, preached and practiced by the orthodoxy. The social and religious conditions that existed in the country, at that time, cried out for the souls like Basavanna, Allama, Siddharama and other Sharanas, so it has been remarked that Shivasharanas had come to the world in order to propagate and establish Shivacharya against Varanacharya."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed Shivasharanas emerged as divine messengers to spread the message of liberty, equality and compassion. They emerged to reconstruct the society on the basis of moral and spiritual foundations. Therefore "such great personalities blossom in the true mankind of once in thousand years and unite the essence of divine fragrance."<sup>3</sup> "They were born with the sole aim to build a welfare society, Kalyanarajya a kingdom of God in this humanity and divine this moral existence through spiritual values."<sup>4</sup>

During the 12th century Basaveshwara and other Shivasharanas made an attempt for the emancipation of women, Basaveshwara condemned the suppression of women and the excluding of women by all activities. Basaveshwara wanted to establish a society, based upon the democratic principles like, liberty, equality and fraternity. He wanted to give more and more opportunities to women to come out of family bondages and equal position on par with men. Women should participate in religious and spiritual spheres on equal footing. Exploitation and discrimination of women on the basis of sex was strongly condemned by Basaveshwara.

According to Shivasharanas, "men and women differ only in physiological level and but they are one and the same in metaphysical aspects."<sup>5</sup>

The following Vacana by well-known Vacanakara, Devara Dasimayya shows that about equality of men and women.

If there see breast and long hair coming  
 They call it woman,  
 If beard and whiskers  
 They call it man:  
 But, look, the self that hovers  
 In between is neither man nor woman  
 It can be seen, it can be heard.  
 Is like one and hundred angas  
 Hidden in one, O Ramanatha?<sup>6</sup>

According to Dasimayya the differences between man and woman as only outward: the soul has nothing to do with one's physiological appearance: the soul cannot be described as male or female. His argument is that, when the soul is neither male nor female, the distinctions cannot be made.

Allamaprabhu, the another Shivasharana of Virashaiva movement was also of the opinion that, women is not an illusion, she is also a living being like that of man in every existence of nature to consider women as an illusion is nothing but having inferior feelings about women and their self superiority feelings. It is nothing but the feeling the self aggrandizement of the male it is also unjust to blame women as an illusion and path to sin. That is why he exalted spiritual soul, who presided over Anubhavamantapa observes the following Vacana:

"They say that, women is an enticement  
 No, no she is not so  
 They say that, money is an enticement  
 No, no, it is not do  
 They say (hat landed property is an enticement  
 No, no it is not so,  
 The real enticement is the insatiable  
 Appetite of mind  
 Lord Guheshwara"

Therefore, Basaveshwara and other Shivasharanas also condemned the concept of women as an illusion instead of this, they expressed that, women is not illusion and even not responsible

for the downfall of man or path to hell. So, women, money and property are not temptations But the main reason for the temptation is man's uncontrolled inner desires. Thus, Allamaprabhu said that, man die of woman, wealth and landed property. Every man gives more importance to three things than any other in his life. The main reason for these nothing but his lust to possess them.

Basaveshwara expounded his concept of equality out of his own experience. He was essentially a humanist and fought for humanity. According to him, 'The spirit within the body knows neither difference of male and female nor that of master or servant,'<sup>8</sup>

Basaveshwara thus despised discriminations based on caste and sex. He said vehemently that the status of an individual should never be judged by birth or sex or profession hut by merit, knowledge, conduct and discipline. Basaveshwara raised his voice against the Brahmanical beliefs and practices. He condemned mercilessly idolatry and ritual sacrifices. He revived and reformed Virashaivism from some unhealthy practices prevalent then and proclaimed that the right of salvation was not the monopoly of any caste or sex. He declared that by worshipping, 'Linga' devoutly one could become 'Linga' itself.<sup>9</sup> The religious teachings of Basaveshwara exerted a magic spell on hundreds and thousands of people and they voluntarily came into the fold of Virashaivism. Basaveshwara accorded religious equality on woman. Woman was entitled to undergo the process of "Linga Diksha" on par with man<sup>10</sup> She was allowed to wear and worship 'Linga' even during her course period. Basaveshwara despised woman's susceptibility to pollution. He declared that the "Linga" worshipper has no religious taboos.<sup>11</sup> He insisted that one ought to worship 'Linga' by oneself. No one can have a deputy in this regard. In one of Vacana Basaveshwara says that:

Indulging in love, eating one's food is that  
 ever done by deputy!  
 Oneself one ought to do  
 All Linga's rites and ceremonies:

It's never done by deputy ... How can they know Thee, Lord, Doing it for mere formality?<sup>12</sup>

Basaveshwara did not discriminate the woman worshipper of 'Linga' against the man worshipper of 'Linga'. In fact Basaveshwara declared that he would look upon the worshipper of "Linga" as "Linga" itself.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that Basaveshwara was for 'companion family' system becomes quite clear when one peruses his Vacanas. Both husband and wife must hold in common the beliefs and practices if family harmony is to be maintained. Basaveshwara mentioned that both husband and wife should be clean like the inside and outside of a pot. Otherwise, their married life would be like washing of the arrack pot only from outside:

Husband, a devotee of Shivalinga Wife, a devotee, of Mari, Masani Husband takes offerings, made to god Wife takes arrack and flesh  
The devotion of those whose containers  
And the food are not clean.  
It is like washing the arrack pot  
From the outside, Kudala Sangamadeva.<sup>14</sup>

Mutual understanding between husband and wife is essential. Mutual guidance is also inevitable. Neelalocane, Aidakki Lakkamma and Mahadeviyamma guided their husbands when they erred in practicing principles.<sup>15</sup> Woman therefore, should not be treated as a sub-ordinate and a slave of man.

Basaveshwara and other Shivasharanas agreed that, woman is not responsible for the downfall of man or path to hell. They why should women be excluded by enjoying equal rights and status on par with man. When both man and woman are considered equal then only man enjoying and attaining salvation and woman is kept away by these. To attain these spiritual rituals woman in no way is inferior to man. Therefore Shivasharanas provided ample opportunities to women to secure equality and enjoy all her rights along with man without any distinctions or discrimination.

At the same time, another well-known Vacanakara of the 12th century, Sonnalige Siddharama, upheld the superiority of womanhood, he also opposed the inferior views of men toward the women community. He agreed that, woman in no way inferior to man. He upheld the nobility and greatness of womanhood. He expressed his views by this following Vacana:

"Women is not just a female sex Women is not a demoners even Women is the very embodiment of God  
Kapila Siddha Mallikarjuna"<sup>16</sup>

The "free atmosphere" created by Basaveshwara enabled many a woman folk to possess "self-knowledge" and to give expressions to their experiences in the form of Vacanas. The Vacanas of Akkamahadevi, of Mukhtayakka, of Neelalocane, of Molige Mahadeviyamma, of Amugi Rayamma and the like stand testimony to the fact. The Sunyasampadane give us the information of these five women will make apparent their three basically distinct responses-militant rejection, reluctant independence, and accommodation-to the tension between social expectation and the call to spiritual perfection.<sup>17</sup>

Akkamahadevi, the great Shivasharane of the 12th century of Basaveshwara time. She contributed a lot to the womanhood. She was married to king Kaushika. But she did not consider him as husband and herself as wife of him. She rather tried to open the eyes of him, because he was lust for her beauty and passion. But, she not liked his misbehaviour and she throws away all her clothes at him and walks to the streets quite nude. Then, the king repented and cursed himself for having stretched his sinful hands on to her spiritual heights.

She makes an appeal and gives warnings to such man, who had that lust, temptation to tease or harass woman. She appears to be the first and the most courageous woman of the spiritual world of womanhood, centuries ago.

The Vacanas reflect the experience of going beyond the physiological considerations such as one's sex. Being a male or

female is not just an anatomical fact. It is a state of mind which goes along with the levels of achievements and maturity of the devotee. The following Vacana of Akkamahadevi amply depicts this:

As long as woman; then  
A man defiles her;  
As long as man is man,  
A woman defiles him.  
When the mind's taint is gone, is there, good sir  
Room for the body's taint?  
The entire world is mad  
Because of this adventitious taint.  
Look you, good sir:  
Called Cenna Mallikarjuna, my Lord,  
The whole world is a wife.<sup>18</sup>

In short the contempt and fear, which determined the attitude of the Dharma Shastras towards woman, is nearly absent in the Vacana.

Ayadakki Marayya was another important Shivasharana, who contributed his little service to the upliftment or betterment of women. He gave full liberty and equality to his wife, Ayadakki Lakkamma. She was an intellectual woman than Marayya. Sometimes Marayya was guided by his wife. She soundly berated her husband for his neglect of his duty:

Go Marayya, my master  
Go quickly and work faster:  
Having purified your will.  
From the 'Saranas' trashbin,  
Bring the rice you've gleaned  
Surely it must be given  
To our Lord of the Linga's pleasure<sup>19</sup>

Marayya gave response to her advice and followed her opinion. When he forgotten his duty, then she alerted him to attend his duty properly without fail. Then he never neglected her advice as a woman's voice. But, in turn, he agreed her advice, very

politely. This couple was an ideal example to the future generation. He never dominated her as female or inferior to him.

Channabasavanna, another Shivasharana also expressed and the admonished not to desire other women. His Vacanas are characterized by a specific approach. He is very prone to systematizing. The following Vacana on conduct and knowledge is a fine example:

Awareness within, action without;  
Emerging whole, out of this duality  
The Sarana is without defilement  
Of body or of mind

His senses have merged with Kudalachenasangaiah.<sup>20</sup>

The new circumstances in Kalyana required a new vision on the relation of men and women. Basaveshwara struck at the very roots of caste based on vocation by elevating every vocation to the status of 'Kayaka' even if it is agriculture or any other manual work:

When devotees come to me  
With God on them, and if I ask  
What is their profession,  
May Thy curse and Thy Pioneers' curse Be  
upon me and my head, my head!  
O Kudala Sangama Lord,  
May Thy Queen's curse blast me  
If I should seek to know  
What sect they be!<sup>21</sup>

Basaveshwara treated all Kayaka equally and respected all 'Kayakavantas' men and women, in Basaveshwara society, were allowed to take up any Kayaka of their choice Haralayya the cobbler, Machayya the washerman, Appanna the barber, Somavve the pounder. Remamma the dealer of mirror, Remamavve the spinner, Lakamma the rice-gleaner, and a host of other Sharanas and Sharanes of different Kayakas sat side by side with Basaveshwara, the premier of Kalachuri Bijjala, in the "Anubhva Mantapa" (Academy of Experience) and participated in

deliberations indiscriminately.

Basaveshwara liberated woman from her social chains. Woman was allowed to participate in religious deliberations and social activities. Akkamahadevi, Muktakka, Neelalocane and a host of other Sharanas participated freely in the deliberations of "Anubhava Mantapa" founded by Basaveshwara -irrespective of age, caste Kayaka and spiritual height; women got free entrance into "Anubhava Mantapa."<sup>22</sup> From "Sunya sampadane"<sup>23</sup> (Dialogues of sharanas) it becomes crystal clear that some Sharanes excelled Sharanas in reaching spiritual heights and in deliberations.

The efforts made by Basaveshwara and other Shivasharanas for the emancipation of women was a remarkable one. As the saying unity is strength. Basaveshwara could achieve his goal one could achieve his goal one could made dream come true only with the support of his colleagues or other Shivasharanas. He alone was not responsible for this great effort; his efforts became true, when he was encouraged by many Shivasharanas.

With the support of Shivasharanas Basaveshwara, launched and got meritorious results in this attempt. This reveals that's, even mountain like task could be reached only with a firm, steady and will, pure in action, pure at heart, sincere in thought, practicing what is preached, they reached their expected goal only with the help of hard working, honest, dedication towards work, concentration, these won the main mile stones of their efforts. Shivasharanas had all that abilities. Therefore they will be worshipped god as father or role models to the future generations. Thus they reached estimated goals.

Like Basaveshwara many other Shivasharanas also contributed their service to the emancipation of women. Their main aim was the advancement and betterment of womanhood. The other Shivasharanas who contributed their service were Devara Dasimayya, Allamaprabhu, Siddharama, Chennabasavanna, Moligaya Marayya, Aydakki Marayya, Dabarakkavva Madhuvavva, Haralavva etc.

Shivasharanas were the galaxy of top ranging members of Anubhavamantapa. They also pleaded for the equality of women along with man in respective fields, irrespective of class, creed, religion, race, colour, sex etc. They gave as much as possible opportunities to women to come forward and prove their talents in all fields. Many women wrote Vacanas. The twelfth century Vacana literature was enriched by more than thirty-five women writers.

In the Basaveshwara era alone women grew up on the basis of equality with men religiously, spiritually, socially, economically and educationally. During the revolution of Kalyana also they fought on equal footing with men. They also participated in were they as Gurus, Jangamas and religious heads of monasteries. They also granted Diksha Neelambike, Akkamahadevi, Gangambike, Satyakka, Lingamma, Muktayakka, Rayamma, Danamma, Masanamma, Akkamma etc. belonged to different profession and class. But they become the pillars on which the super structure of Virashaiva religion and literature could stand. This is no mean an achievement.

#### Conclusion:

From ancient times women have been treated as weaker sections and discriminated on various grounds. They have been prohibited to participate in various social, economic, political and some times religious activities as a result the status of women has not improved even today. Basaveshwara and Shivasharanas believed in giving equal status to women and argued that the men should encourage women to become strong. In the present world women are humiliated and physically assaulted like dowry deaths, suicides, rape and harassments etc. these problems are increasing in the society due to illiteracy, ignorance and discrimination made against women. Basaveshwara and Shivasharanas preaching's a solution to these problems even today. He advocated that women should be made strong and independent. Only then her status will improve. The attitude of men towards women and realization of social and moral responsibility towards women is given in

Basaveshwara and Shivasharanas literature, which is very necessary in the present world. Basaveshwara and Shivasharanas had heralded an age of honour, economic and social equality for women. Because of them till today also many Virashaiva women equally participated in many fields.

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