

GREAT REFORMIST MAHATMA BASAVESHWARA

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 20th February 2026 Accepted: 01st March 2026 Published: 07th March 2026	Indian society especially Hindu community has been suffering from caste based discrimination from thousands of years. It was planned by Brahmins to keep their supremacy. Caste system was emerged from Varn system. Varn system was raised from later Vedic era, but its first mention was in the Purushsukt which is last part of the Rig-Veda. Nature of Caste system was like Pyramid. Brahmins was upper side and untouchables or Shudra were lower side, although they were much more numerous than Brahmins. Brahmins had so many privileges, they had right to get benefit of every aspect of the society. They could be Solders, Businessmen, Farmers, Priests and Teachers but the Shudra and the women didn't have right to take education even they couldn't wonder in the society freely.

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1. INTRODUCTION

So many movements and philosophies arose to counter the caste based discrimination and supremacy of Brahmins, such as Charvak (Lokayat), Jainism, Buddhism, Veershaivism, Warkari etc. there were parallel ideologies and movements existed to reform the society and counter the supremacy of Brahmins. Those are known as 'reformist movements'. Mahatma Basweshwar and his equality based philosophy and his struggle for it was one of the notable movements in 12 century.

Basavanna was by birth progressive activist. he revolted against all the social evils of the traditionalistic society. Basavanna wants to create welfare society in which everyone would be treated equally. Everyone would have equal rights. No discrimination will be there. We often talk about the Human Rights in this 21st century, but these 'Human Rights', were being enjoyed by Sharanas (citizens of welfare society) during 12th century itself, because of Basavanna's revolution, through which they expressed their revolutionary and reformist ideology in very simple Kannada language.

Early Life

"Basavanna was born about 1131 AD. In the town of Bagavedi in Bijapur district Karnataka. His father's name was Madaras and mother Madalmbike at Brahmin family. He was named Basava, a Kannada form of Sanskrit Vrishabha in honor of Nandi and the local Shaivism. As a religious tradition, he was initiated with the holy thread 'janivara', in Upanayana at the early age of eight years. Basava revolted against this tradition, cut threw his janivara, left home and went to Kudalasangam." Basaveshwara is also known as Basavanna, a Veershaiv-Lingayat saint, he was greatest spiritual leader, poet, social reformer and logician who fought towards societal problems, he rose voice against the caste based inequalities.

Education:-

"Basavanna lived ten years with his Guru at Kudal-Sangama. He studied the Vedas and the Purana. He observed and become disappointed to see ill-culture in the name of God and felt pity for the illiterate innocent non- Brahmins being exploited in the name of God.

Appointed as Accountant:-

"After completed education he went to Kalyana, where the Kalchuri King Bijjala was ruling. Basava's highly intellectual personality saw Bijjala and appointed him as Karanika (Accountant) in the initial stage in the court of king and later he became the prime minister of Kalyan Kingdom, after proving his administrative ability".¹

While working at the court of the king, "Basavanna looked around the socio-economic status of the then society, where most of the static, superstitious and anti-social elements were ruling. There was much gap between haves and have-nots and rich people were harassing and sex discrimination made the lives of women very pathetic. Basavanna revolted against all these evils and he himself started practicing the socialistic norms to bring about drastic change in the society. He scripted his practical experiences in a novel form of literature called – Vachana."²

Basava as an Emancipator of Women:-

The condition of women in the 12th century was pathetic. She didn't have rights to take education and live freely in social, Political and religious field. Child Marriage was accepted overall the society, she didn't have right to choose life partner, Polygamy was common and prestigious practice. Society didn't allow recognition of women's individuality and their rights. Basava was first Social reformer in Medieval India who tried to empower the women, "The emancipation of women with Basava was not merely a social reform but an article of faith. It was Basava who liberated women from the traditional fetters and gave them a honourable existence. He was the driving force behind the founding of Anubhava Mantapa, the forum for religious discussions and experiences. The Anubhava Mantapa had many women as its members. By introducing the ceremony of 'Linga Diksha', Veershaivism threw open its door to Men and women alike, of all castes and creeds. Women were regarded as in no way inferior to men in spiritual matters. The contributions in religious experience from women were highly appreciated and encouraged. There are several vachanas where Basava makes reference to how woman is to be looked upon. The main point which Basava drives home to his followers is that to look upon a woman not otherwise as sister or mother is a sin. Thus, he lays down a code of conduct for his followers"³.

Scholar women had equal rights to men, they could join the Anubhava Mantapa, Akkamahadevi, Nagamma were members of Anubhava Mantapa. they could live as per their convenience, no special rules

and conditions were imposed over them, Every women was called Akka or Amma means sister or Mother in the Anubhava Mantapa.

Basava and Democracy:-

"Basava was a free thinker and denounced the Varnasrama Dharma in a number of ways. Under his inspiring leadership, hundreds of saints took part in the movement which was democratic in spirit and form. The spirit of the Lingayat movement was democratic in the sense that people of all castes and calling had a role in the shaping of society and religion. The discussions and discourses, the dialogues and debates were conducted in the religious academy called Anubhava Mantapa of Kalyana. Women saints took active part in the discussions and dialogues at the religious academy.

The Veerashaiva movement was based on the uplift and equality of the masses by abolishing the class system from society based on Varnasrama. Basava fought for the rights of the common man. Basava did not divide society into the classes of intellectuals and the mass of manual workers. Basava's Anubhava Mantapa was composed of scholars and philosophers hailing from the rank and file of the populace. Basava envisaged a religion and a social order in which there would be no barriers of caste or creed, no distinction between the rich and the poor. Thus we find that the teachings of Basava are imbued with democratic ideals".

Basava's Spiritualism

"Before the birth of Basava, Indian society was a victim of lifeless traditions. Plunged in deep darkness, it was unable to shape its own future. The degeneration of society moved him and he felt that only a religion that could bring about the integration of thought and action could save mankind. Basavaboldly declared that happiness could come only through the practice of Sarava Dharma with its profound social orientation. The reasons why Basava chose the path of mysticism and spiritualism were unique. He found religious-minded men of his times advocating dogmas and traditions for the realisation of God. The society was hopelessly divided into castes and communities. The path of knowledge and the 'path of action' taught by early Indian scriptures for winning the grace of God were difficult ones for the ordinary man to tread. To him, the proper method of attaining divine knowledge was to cultivate the condition of mind in which the unity of soul and God was immediately felt. He, therefore, rebelled against the traditional modes of religious practices and tried his best to organise a religious society which could experience the pleasures of divine bliss unhindered by other useless considerations. In short, he came to the conclusion that the practice of intense devotion to Siva, the Supreme God, was the surest and indeed the only way of establishing that Godhead. Basava deepened Hinduism on its religious side and made the path of devotion highly popular. He was not only an unequalled devotee of Siva but also a staunch advocate of the path of devotion"⁴

Basava's Perspective on Dignity of Labour

"The concept of Kayaka represents a remarkable contribution of Basava to practical philosophy. it means an occupation, a profession, a vocation, labour, work, duty or any employment undertaken as means of self-realisation. Kayaka enjoins that everyone must do one's duty. Bodily or manual labour is inevitable in some form or other. The underlying principle of Kayaka is that man should not live an ideal life but be an earning member of the society. It is opposed to the idea of meditation in a forest, renunciation, beggary and dependence on others for a living. Kayaka cuts at the root of the traditional varna or caste order of society. It is a new outlook towards man and his labour and towards life and divinity. It embodies the principles of dignity of man and dignity of labour. Kayaka is a spiritual view of labour and not merely a materialistic one. According to Kayaka, man has to sublimate his physical labour into a spiritual pursuit. The mercenary motive is sublimated into spiritual motive. Carlye says "Work is Worship" and a Sarana says "Work is Heaven". The Kannada saying is "Kayakave Kailasa". Every labour is looked upon by Sarana with high honour, dignity and spiritual significance. Kayaka discourages amassing wealth or hoarding money. Kayaka is a duty by which each one has to maintain oneself, and render its proceeds to the welfare of the society as a whole. The Kayaka view of life is in conformity with the modern democratic principles of equality, justice, liberty and fraternity which are laid down in the Preamble to the Constitution of India".⁵

Reformist Mahatma Basveshwar:-

From ancient period reformist and conservative philosophies were exist in India. These both ideologies were contrasting each other, Basveshwar always preferred equality based Humanism. In his

'Vachans' he advocated and spread values of Humanism.

“वेदाना बासनात गुंडाळून अडगळीत टाकतो
शास्त्रांच्या पायाला साखळी घालतो
तर्काच्या पाठीवर वार ओढतो
आगमाचे नाक कापतो”⁶

In above Vachana, Basveshawara condemned the purity and superiority of Veda, rejected the important of the scripts. He also invalided logic based knowledge and Excellency of 'Aagam' Literature.

“माझे वडील ढोर कक्कया
आजोबा माझे चलय्या झाल्याने मी वाचलो
भक्तीचे सद्गुण जाणले श्रवचय्यापासून
कुडळसंगमदेवा”⁷

Basveshwar was born in Brahmin family but he didn't like to recognize himself as Brahmin. He didn't like caste system, he condemned caste based discrimination, he advocates equality based humanity, in this Vachana he said his father is Kakkayya and father-in-Law is Channayya both were belong from schedule Caste.

“महारवाड्याची वा शिवालायाची
जमीन असे का वेगळी?
शोचाचे व आचमनाचे पाणी
असे का शुची अशुची
आपले आपण जनालेल्याची जात असे एक
षडदर्शन मुक्तीस फळ लाभो समान
कुडळसंगमदेवा जुज जे जाणती
तयांची पातळी असे असामान्य”⁸

In this Vachana, Basaveshwara advocated equality. He said, Nature gives us everything equally, it doesn't discriminate among the human being on the base of Caste, Gender, Race, colour, Creed and Religion. Then he asked, “Is land of Temple of God Shiva and House of Mahar different” he also asked ‘is there any difference between drinking water and waste water’? by asking these kinds of question Basaveshwara opposed caste based discrimination.

“लोखंड तापविणारा झाला लोहार
धुनी धुणारा झाला पारिट
वस्त्र विणणारा झाला विणकर
वेदशास्त्र वाचणारा झाला ब्राह्मण
कानातून जन्माला का कोणी या जगात
जो तुला जाणतो, तोच एक कुलवंत
हे कुडळसंगमेश”⁹

In this Vachana, Basaveshwara tried to explain, how caste system was arisen. He said, Who heats iron become a blacksmith, Who washes clothes becomes a weaver, Who reads the Vedas becomes a Brahmin, Is there anyone in the world, born from the ear? Who know you (God), he is real noble. Kudalsangmeshwara

CONCLUSTION:-

From Ancient period majority people of Indian society were suffering from inhumanity despotism of Brahmanism and its Pyramid style, inequality based, caste structure, therefore Non Brahman Movement took place in India in 19th Century. Mahatma Jotiba Phule is became a father of this movement later it was led by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Modern reform movement has historical background. From ancient period there was parallel system in India, in which conservative and progressive ideologies were exist and they were mutually opposed. Jainism and Buddhism led reformist movement in Ancient period against Brahminical System. So new ideas and structure arose but due to Shankaracharya Hinduism revived in 7th century, once again, Caste based and Gender based discrimination took place in the society. M. Basveshwara led the reformist movement in 12th century and a new equality based movement was introduced, this movement helped to Common people of backward classes and women to aware about their rights and prepared them to fight to achieve its. Therefore this movement later known as 'Veershaiv-Lingayt Movement'

Basaveshwara condemned Caste based inequality and superiority of Brahmins. He introduced or revived equality based social structure which was mostly influenced by Buddhism. He wanted to establish classless, casteless and equality based new society in 12th century. He offered everyone to be Lingayt by accepting his philosophy. He established Anubhava Mantapa to provide stage for intellectuals to discuss and be progressive. He believed in democratic system in which everyone have right to express their view and have right to be part of the administration.

Basava tried to give equal rights to women, he empowered the women, he tried to eradicate evil religious and social practices which were indicate the inferior status of the women. He gave entry and equal status to the women in the Anubhava Mantapa. Women were called sister and mother there; he provided equal rights in social and economic field. Widow Remarriages were approved. Right to Education is given, inter-caste marriages were promoted.

Basava was first reformist who emphasized to work hard, no one allowed live without hard work. He insisted everyone to work hard to improve living standard. Person may he is priest, intellectual, Noble, farmer or marginalized should do hard work. For it he told theory of 'Kayakave Kailasa', it means, hard work is God, worship the work, by it one can meet to the God, by this theory Basava protected the 'dignity of Labour'.

Basava spend his whole life and energy to uplift the marginalized people and women and establish new society in India but due to strong oppose by conservative society he could not achieve his goal, he scarify his live, but his followers like Channabasveshwar, Shidharameshwar did it.

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