

THE CONTRIBUTION OF BASAVESHWARA IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN 12th CENTURY IN KARNATAKA

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 20th February 2026 Accepted: 01st March 2026 Published: 07th March 2026	Basaveshwara (1131–1167), popularly known as Basavanna, was a prominent philosopher, poet, statesman, and social reformer of 12th century Karnataka who played a transformative role in reshaping the socio-religious structure of medieval society. This paper examines his contribution to social development with special reference to caste reform, women's empowerment, dignity of labour, and democratic spiritual practices. In a period marked by rigid caste hierarchy, untouchability, gender discrimination, and ritualistic dominance, Basaveshwara initiated a powerful reform movement through the Lingayat (Veerashaiva) tradition. He rejected birth-based inequality and priestly mediation, advocating spiritual democracy through the worship of Ishtalinga and the principle of direct devotion to God. The establishment of the Anubhava Mantapa at Kalyani marked a significant milestone in participatory spiritual discourse, where individuals from all castes and genders engaged in open dialogue. His concepts of Kayaka (dignity of labour) and Dasoha (sharing of wealth) laid the foundation for economic ethics and social responsibility. Through his Vachana literature in Kannada, he communicated egalitarian ideals to the common people, thereby promoting social awakening and cultural transformation. The study, based on secondary sources and historical-descriptive methodology, highlights Basaveshwara's enduring legacy as a pioneer of social revolution and democratic thought in Karnataka.

Plagiarism Check Report:

Date of Report: March 01, 2026

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How to Cite: Patil, S. S., & Nangare, M. R. (2025). THE CONTRIBUTION OF BASAVESHWARA IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN 12th CENTURY IN KARNATAKA. *IIP: World Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IIPWJHSS)*, 2(I), 390–394.

INTRODUCTION

Shree Basaveshwara (1131–1167), popularly known as Shree Basavanna, was a respected philosopher, poet and social reformer in the Shiva-centric Bhakti movement. His influence was prominent in 12th century. Through his poignant poetry, Basavanna conveyed the message of equality through words, rejecting caste discrimination, superstition and rituals.

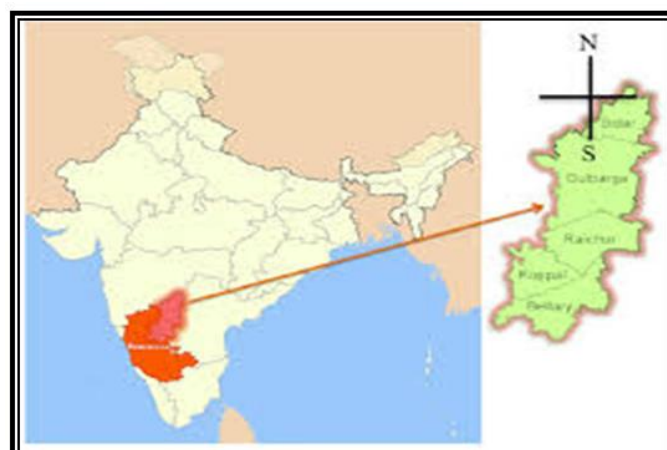
Basavanna introduced the Ishtalinga, the female form of Shiva, as his symbol. He emphasized the inner devotional cause of all individuals, by sacrificing their social status to their own. Shree Basaveshwara was a pioneer of egalitarian social revolution, who fought against caste discrimination, untouchability and superstition and founded the Lingayat religion in the kingdom of Bijja, a region of the Kalyan Chalukya and Kalachuri dynasties. He embodied the message of equality in common language through his Vachan Sahitya, gave equal rights to women and laid the foundation of democratic ideas by establishing the Anubhav Mantip. The movement launched by Mahatma Basaveshwara in the social tumultuous conditions of Karnataka in the 12th century is considered an important social revolution in Indian history. He fought against caste system, superstition, Karma Kand and gender inequality on an ideological and practical level. In the 12th century society, the Brahminical system, strict caste system, untouchability and restrictions on women were dominant. The laborers were of great importance. In such a situation, Basaveshwara founded a movement for social transformation by promoting the idea of equality and dignity of labor. Therefore, it is necessary to study the contribution of Saint Basaveshwara to social development in the 12th century.

STUDY REGION:

The study region Karnataka state lies in the Southern part of India between 1135 N to 1830 N latitudes and between 745 East to 7835 East longitudes. The total geographical area of the state is 191791 sq.km. which accounts 5.83 percent of the total geographical area of India. In terms of area it is 8th largest state and in population 9th largest in the country. The state extends North-South about 750 km and East-West about 400 km. As per the 2011 census the total population of the state is 6.11 crore.

The Karnataka state has been divided into four revenue divisions (Bengaluru, Mysuru, Belagavi and Kalaburgi), 52 sub-divisions, 30 districts, 177 taluks, 747 hoblies (revenue circles) for administrative purpose. As per the 2011 census the state has 29340 villages, 220 statutory towns and 127 census.

TOWNS



OBJECTIVE:

The main objectives of this paper are as following.

1. To study the role of Shree Basaveshwara in Social Development
2. To study the contribution of Shree Basaveshwara in women's empowerment

DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY:

The study was conducted to find the role of Shree Basaveshwara in Social Development in the Karnataka state of India. For the purpose of the study, investigation is built upon a foundation of carefully selected secondary data. This data has been gathered from a diverse range of reputable sources. These include established books, peer-reviewed research articles, and significant academic publications. Each source was chosen for its direct relevance to Basaveshwara teachings and historical context.

I have scientifically adopted descriptive method, narrative and historical method.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SHREE BASAVESHWARA IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Basaveshwara (also known as Basavanna) was a great social reformer, philosopher, and statesman of 12th century Karnataka. He played a crucial role in transforming the social, religious, and economic structure of medieval Karnataka during the rule of the Kalyani. The following was the main contribution of Shree Basaveshwara in Social Development

ESTABLISHMENT OF ANUBHAVA MANTAPA

One of Basaveshwara's most important contributions was the establishment of the Anubhava Mantapa at Kalyani (present-day Basavakalyan). It functioned as a spiritual parliament where saints, scholars, men, and women from various castes gathered to discuss religious philosophy, ethics, and social reforms. Unlike traditional religious institutions that were dominated by upper castes, the Anubhava Mantapa allowed free expression and equal participation. It encouraged debate, critical thinking, and collective decision-making. Because of its open and participatory nature, it is often regarded as one of the earliest examples of a democratic spiritual assembly in the world.

ETHICAL AND LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Basaveshwara expressed his teachings through simple yet powerful vachanas written in Kannada. These vachanas conveyed messages of equality, devotion, moral conduct, and social justice in a language that common people could understand. By using the vernacular language instead of Sanskrit, he made spiritual knowledge accessible to the masses. His literary contributions not only enriched Kannada literature but also served as a tool for social awakening. Through ethical teachings such as truthfulness, non-violence, compassion, and simple living, he laid the foundation for a morally responsible and socially just society.

SHRI BASAVESHWARA AS A SOCIAL REFORMER

Basaveshwara was an advocate of strict monotheism. He was against Vedic priest craft as well as Agamic temple craft. He supported neither the naturalism. Naturalism is the worship of the power of nature

as beings. The social and Cultural conflicts which had been going on in India from ancient days were stimulating a new ferment within the Hindu society. At the time of Basava there were apologists of caste and priest craft, just as they are even now, who had been giving a new interpretation to the old religious practices and forms of thought, but Basava with a courageous frankness acknowledged the prevailing evils of the Hindu society and suggested ways and means of a new orientation.

ABOLITION OF THE CASTE SYSTEM AND A NEW DEFINITION OF LABOUR

Basveshwara expressed a clear suspicion of the doctrine of reincarnation and the caste-based standards of the Brahmanical system of thought. The very idea that some groups were socially 'privileged' or 'untouchable' was repugnant to him.

1. Professional equality He argued that a blacksmith, a carpenter or a carpenter are different only in profession, but are all equal in nature
2. Kailash, work is heaven He rejected the path of the throne and called it 'work', that is, productive labour was given the title of 'religion'
3. According to the theory of the tax collector, this world is the tax collector of God

If a person (a person) lies here, it will also be a lie in the next world. That is, living righteously and well in this world is true devotion.

POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVOLUTION

Basveshwar was not only a philosopher, but he was the Prime Minister (Mahamantri) in the reign of the Kalchuris of Kalani. He used his power not for personal gain, but for social change. He established the world's first democratic system called 'Anubhavamintap', where everyone from the king to the working class had the right to sit on the same level and share their ideas.

THE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Mahatma Basaveshwara's inner self was beating against inequality from his childhood. Despite being the son of Madiraj and Madalambika, he was the first to oppose the regressive traditions of his own family. The first major social uprising in his life was the 'Upanayana' (Munja) ritual that he rejected. "I do not want the ritual that my sister and the majority of the society do not have the right to," was his childhood motto, which testified to the great egalitarianism in him in the future.

The Valingayats (Virashaivas) advocated a better place for women in society. Basaveshwara broke the unscriptural and degrading stereotypes built around women.

Ideological leadership He gave women a place as a 'resort' and gave them the freedom to become religious devotees

Widow marriage at a time when the life of widows was hellish, Basaveshwara took a bold social step by encouraging widow marriage

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION:

The study concludes that Basaveshwara was not merely a religious leader but a visionary social reformer who initiated a comprehensive movement for social transformation in 12th century Karnataka.

By challenging caste discrimination, opposing untouchability, rejecting ritualism, and promoting equality, he laid the foundation for a more just and inclusive society. His establishment of the Anubhava Mantapa reflected early democratic ideals, while his emphasis on Kayaka and Dasoha redefined the social and economic value of labour and wealth. His progressive stance on women's rights and participation significantly contributed to gender equality during a highly patriarchal era. Through Vachana literature, he ensured that reformist ideas reached the masses in a simple and accessible language. Therefore, Basaveshwara's movement can be regarded as one of the earliest organized social revolutions in Indian history, whose principles of equality, dignity, and social justice continue to influence the socio-cultural fabric of Karnataka and beyond.

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