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BASAVANNA'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract:

Basaveshwara, also known as Basavanna, was a saint poet, social reformer and philosopher who fought against societal problems of the day, rose up against inequalities based on caste, class, and gender. He emphasized the dignity of labour, monotheism, and nonviolence while advocating and practicing the values of equality. His acknowledgement of women's uniqueness and rights was one of his many contributions to the regeneration of contemporary tradition-bound society. His thought and teachings go beyond all boundaries, addressing the global and eternal. Basavanna was a renowned humanist who argued for a new way of life in which divine experience was central to life and caste, gender, and social differences were irrelevant. In every way, the wife and husband were considered equals, and they shared equally in all religious and social responsibilities. Basavanna was a driving influence behind the establishment of AnubhavaMantapa, a religious discussion and experience forum. As a result, a closer examination of the Mantapa's operation should provide us with a clearer picture of Basavanna's attitude toward femininity. In spiritual things, women were not considered inferior to males. As a result, women's contributions to religious experience were not only warmly embraced, but also greatly valued and promoted.

Key Words: Social Transformation, Epoch Maker, Veerashaivism, Social Movement, Vachanas, Mysticism, Saint Poet, Reformation, Progressive Attitude.

Introduction:

The twelfth-century Virasaiva or Lingayat movement, which altered Karnatak society and culture, is barely mentioned in the major works on Indian history and literature. Max Weber made little mention of the Lingayat movement in his study of Indian religions, owing to the fact that the religion's primary textual sources were in Kannada. Basavanna (also known as Lord Basaveshwara) was a saint-poet, statesman, charismatic leader, and social reformer who lived from 1106 to 1167. He lived during the KalyaniChalukya/Kalachuri dynasty's reign. He was active during both dynasties' reigns, although his power peaked during King Bijjala II's reign in Karnataka, India.

Basavanna, the founder of the Lingayat sect and a 12th-century philosopher and social reformer, was born in Karnataka's BasavannaBagewadi town, which is 20 kilometres from Hungundtaluk. He was born in Kudalasangama and married to Gangambika, the daughter of the Prime Minister of Bijjala (one of the great Chalukya emperors). Vachana, such as the Shat-sthala-vachana, Kalajana-vachana, Mantra-gopya, Ghatachakra-vachana, and Raja-yoga-vachana, are among the works attributed to Basavanna. Basavanna believed that all humans were created as equal, regardless of caste, and that all sorts of manual labour were equally valuable.

Basavanna, together with a group of other devotees, rose up against inequalities based on caste, class, and gender. He emphasized the dignity of labour, monotheism, and nonviolence while advocating and practicing the values of equality. Thousands of lyrics (vachanas) in Kannada, the people's language, were written by members of this movement. Basavanna is no doubt one of the vachana tradition's best poets. Social reform, the exposition and establishment of a code of conduct and a system of doctrines, and spiritual self-illumination are all goals of these devotional poetry, which are both contextual and universal.

Shiva is worshipped by the Lingayats / Veerashaivas, a politically powerful community in Karnataka. The Lingayats are followers of Basavanna, a 12th-century saint and philosopher who rejected traditional worship and the Vedas' primacy. The community's Veerashaivacult also worships Shiva statues and follows other Hindu traditions. The Lingayats consider the Veerashaivas to be Hindus since they follow Hindu practices, whereas the Veerashaivas believe that the community was founded by Shiva and that Basavanna was one of its saints.

Role and influence of Basavanna as a Social Reformer:

Basavanna was a philosopher and a social reformer who battled against the social problems of the day, such as the caste system and Hindu religious practices. His thought and teachings went beyond all boundaries, addressing the global and eternal. Basavanna was a renowned humanist who argued for a new way of life in which divine experience was central to life and caste, gender, and social divisions were irrelevant. He fought battle on all maladies, from socio-economic prejudices and untouchability to gender discrimination. Basavanna promoted devotional worship, which rejected Brahmin-led temple worship and procedures in favour of personalised direct worship of Shiva through techniques such as individually worn icons and symbols such as a miniature linga. Basavanna used his poetry, known as Vachanas, to raise social consciousness.

Anubhava Mantapa:

Basavanna was a firm believer in caste-free society where everyone had an equal chance to grow. To carry out the noble purpose, he established AnubhavaMantapa, a Lingayata academy of mystics, saints, and philosophers that served as a doubt clearing house for ideas on common human values and ethics. The AnubhavaMantapa, which was presided over by another famous spiritual, AllamaPrabhu, included a large number of Sharanas — persons from the lower social strata — as participants. Basavanna took part in the AnubhavaMantapa alongside other great people such as Akkamahadevi and AllamaPrabhu.

Veerashaiva - Movement:

Basavanna was an outspoken social reformer. He rose to become the Veerashaiva movement's leader. He founded a cult that is still widely recognised today. The old priestly class was abolished. The vernacular was chosen as the vehicle for instilling the supreme truth in the masses. It accorded women a significant role in religious and social life. It provided a single realisation ideal for everyone, rich or poor.

Women Empowerment:

Basavanna and his invaluable contributions to humanity are highly remarkable. His acknowledgement of women's uniqueness and rights was one of his many contributions to the regeneration of contemporary tradition-bound society. There is no denying that a woman's status in a society is a crucial indicator of that society's cultural level. As woman's status improves in a progressive society, her subjugation decreases. The ideal society envisioned by Basavanna and the Sharanas in the 12th century was a big step toward women's freedom, and one will be in a better position to assess their epoch-making contribution if one looks at the condition of women at that time.

There is a reason to think that women had equal rights to males in the early Vedic period. In every way, the wife and husband were considered equals, and they shared equally in all religious and social responsibilities. Women were actively involved in the community's intellectual and spiritual life. Women penned several of the hymns in the Rigveda. Among the hymn composers named are Vivavara, Apal, Lopamudra, Ghosa, Indrāni, and Sachi. From allusions in Dharma Shashtras, it may be deduced that, women continued to enjoy independence and respect long beyond the Vedic period. However, it is only for a short time.

Soon after, the dark phase of women's enslavement appears to have begun. Manu has a few nice things to say about women. He decrees that where women are honoured, the Gods are delighted; nevertheless, where they are not honoured, no sacred ceremony brings rewards. But some of the remarks he makes about them almost exceed the positive ones. He considers them to be morally deplorable beings. In this world, it is in the nature of women to entice men; as a result, the wise are never vulnerable in the company of females. Such verses abound.

Manu asserts that, a woman is never capable of self-sufficiency. Her father shields her as a child, her husband as an adult, and her son during old age. They are not allowed to offer prayers, perform penances, go to pilgrimages, recite Vedic Mantras, or worship Gods! As we will see later, this illegal treatment of women - the unwillingness to recognize her the status of a human being - was one of the many old and cruel customs of Hinduism against which Basavanna fought. A religion like this could hardly last long. Buddhism and Jainism were born out of a reaction to the degenerate Brahmanism's preaching of class divisions. Her salvation appeared to be on the horizon, but it wasn't complete.

Basavanna was born into a twelfth-century civilization that was ripe with blind beliefs and faiths, much like the conventional post-Vedic society. Women were treated as slaves and cattles in this civilization. Basavanna was tasked with freeing women from their conventional shackles and providing them with a dignified existence. Basavanna was a driving influence behind the establishment of AnubhavaMantapa, a religious discussion and experience forum. It was mostly fostered by him, with assistance from AllamaPrabhu and Chennabasava. As a result, a closer examination of the Mantapa's operation should provide us with a clearer picture of Basavanna's attitude toward femininity. Women made up a sizable portion of the Mantapa's membership.

Lingayatism opened its doors to men and women of all castes and creeds by inventing the 'LingaDeeksha' rite. In spiritual things, women were not considered inferior to males. As a result, women's contributions to religious experience were not only warmly embraced, but also greatly valued and promoted. One of the most wonderful chapters in the ShunyaSamdane is the dialogue between Akkamahadevi and AllamaPrabhu.

There are sevenvachanas in which Basavanna discusses how women should be seen. The main point that Basavanna drives home to his followers in all of these vachanas is that desiring another man's wife is a sin, and looking upon a woman other than as a sister or mother is a deadlier sin. As a result, he establishes a code of conduct for his followers.

He was a mystic with unrivalled practical knowledge of the universe above everything else. He believed that practicing was preferable to persuading or preaching. In his treatment of his wife, Nilambike, and a large number of women-saints who participated in the theological discourses at AnubhavaMantapa, one can see evidence of his respectable attitude of women. Some of these female saints were married, while others were single. Basavanna, who was happily married himself, never stated that having a wife was an impediment to spiritual attainment. Nilambike appears to have had a lot of freedom. They were undoubtedly close followers of their husband, always at his side, assisting him in the performance of his political and religious responsibilities. At the same time, they took part in the AnubhavaMantapa's talks on their women and authored their own vachanas. His sister, Nagalambike, is thought to have been close to him as well.

An occurrence in Basavanna's latter days sheds lot of light on the status they had gained as a result of his influence. Basavanna resolves to leave Kalyana permanently after becoming disillusioned with the state of affairs. He set out towards Sangama, where he planned to merge with Linga. Perhaps he didn't think it was proper for him to leave them behind. As a result, he dispatches HadapadaAppanna to take his wives back to Sangama. When Nilambike receives the message, she wonders why Basavanna has requested her to travel to Sangama. Isn't it possible that she could find redemption in Kalyana itself? Linga is present, but she is also present here. And Basavanna is constantly on her mind. She starts off with her thoughts, but she never meets Basavanna. Just as she arrives at Tangadagi, she receives the tragic news of her husband's death, and she merges with Linga.

Nagalambike, on the other hand, is said to have joined the Sharanas' army to battle Bijjala and his followers, who were committing crimes in the name of religion. She is said to have died in a struggle. Basavanna had motivated them to grow and develop, as seen by their fully developed personalities, their ability to think and act independently. When a woman is encouraged by her parents or husband, she is at her best. Basavanna had ushered a new era for women, one marked by honour, economic equality, and social equality. Many more women grew to their full potential as a result of the gentle wind of change that blew.

Ayadakkilakkamma had the foresight to tell her husband to return and bring only enough rice for them both for one day, not more! Sharanas does not approve of greed. Hundreds of women-saints are thought to have existed. Unfortunately, we only have thirty vachanas at the present. Akkamahadevi is the one who excelled in everything. Basavanna, Allama Prabhu, Chennabasava, Siddharamayya, and Madivalayya all expressed their admiration for her. She renounced her home in search of spiritual salvation. Then there were several roads that led to Kalyana. As a result, she moved in that direction. She had to overcome a number of obstacles along the road. It was weird and unfathomable to think of a woman expressing herself and moving out without protection in the pursuit of spirituality.

Women were considered as inferior beings and were not allowed to enjoy freedom. She has brilliantly described the obstacles she had on her journey. When she was thirsty, she had to go to wells and ponds. When she was tired, she had to go to old temples to rest. A woman who has been treated by only furious stares and sarcastic comments from society arrives at Basavanna's house in Kalyana to be greeted with divine respect and kindness! Basavanna is said to have been regarded as her spiritual Father. On the other side, Basavanna regards her as his mother. He writes that she was younger than him in age, yet she was superior to him in her quest for spiritual redemption. It expresses both his humility and his acknowledgement of Akkamahadevi's excellence. He has also honoured womanhood by honouring her.

It's worth noting that he's the one who introduces her to Allama Prabhu. Then follows a spiritual dialogue in which Akkamahadevi is put to the test by Allama and other Sharanas. And Akkamahadevi is crowned as the Saint of Saints. Basavanna, like others, participates in the chorus of appreciation for her:

Akkamahadevi the great women saint poet who had renounced materialistic and worldly pleasures was supposed to have travelled above the line of spirituality submerging spirituality herself with divine confesses that:

I overcame the destruction of body through Linga.

I overcame the destruction of mind through knowledge.

I overcame the destruction of life through mystic experience.

Look, sir, at the ash mark I wear,

Having burnt Kama who dazzles

Your eyes through youthful charm.

Lo, if Cennamallikarjuna, having killed Kama,

Let him live in mind,

I erased him from my mind! (Yaravintelimath 87)

Women were treated with the utmost respect. There have been many reformers who have tried to ensure women's social, economic, and political rights. But none, on the other hand, fought to ensure equal rights in the area of religion.

Basavanna is the only one who has declared that women, like men, are entitled to religious initiation and redemption. Sociologists frequently link the history of the women's emancipation movement back to Raja Ram Mohan Roy. There is no doubt that Raja Ram Mohan Roy made a huge contribution to the cause of women in the modern era. It is to be remembered that Basavanna's emancipation of women was more remarkable way back in 12th century, but a veritable pillar of religion. He not only foresaw, but also lived and practiced the Hindu Code Bill's spirit, envisioned by another great social reformer and humanist Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

In 2015, India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, unveiled the Basavanna statue on the banks of the Thames in Lambeth, London. Basavanna is also the first Kannadiga to have a commemorative coin produced in his honour in the celebration of his social reforms. He is also known as Bhakti Bhandari or Jagjyothi Basaveswara (literally, the Treasurer of Devotion) (Lord Basava).

Basava Jayanthi is observed every year to commemorate the birth of Vishwaguru Basaveshwara, also known as Lord Basavanna. The festival is celebrated with great zeal by members of the Lingayat community in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. People exchange greetings, meet one another, and remember Lord Basavanna by reciting his teachings and vachanas on this day. The festival's goal is to spread the message of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (universal brotherhood). His message was encapsulated in Vachanas, which establishes a new perspective on God and life.

Conclusion:

Basavanna propagated an ethical and educational system that was both simple and lofty. Basavanna's yeoman service and contribution to the cause of social reforms such as caste eradication, women empowerment, equal rights for men and women, inter caste marriages, concept of democratic, religious and social equality needs to be pondered over, Basavanna was a reformer of genuine concern for the those marginalized people who were crushed under the callous attitude of rigid, age old, outdated customs, beliefs and rituals which had bound the common people of his time (i.e. 12th century) into the shackles of tradition ridden society under the garb of religious, societal restrictions. Which were toiling the lives of many.

He had to cross the path of opposition and non co-operation of his own fellow people of upper castes and was targeted to risk his own life. But Basavanna was firm in reforming the society as a visionary and as epoch maker for him nothing was more important than the social reformation and social transformation he had aimed for. Basavanna is regarded as a great savior and divine

figure who took birth to set the inequalities. With his highly progressive ideals which were not welcome by majority of upper caste people. But Basavanna decided to break the oldrigid shackles of the blind traditions of outdated religious beliefs.

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