



Emancipation Of Women In 12th Century By Shivasharanas In Karnataka: Vachana Literature Analysis

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Abstract:

In 21st century, the gender inequality and caste-based inequality are major issues faced by Indian society. In 12th century, the Shivasharana movement led by Basaveshwar in Karnataka has made efforts to bring up gender equality and caste-based equality through their Vachanas and even everyone irrespective of their caste and gender were allowed to participate in Anubhava Mantapa and express their views on various socio-religious issues. According to Shivasharanas and Shivasharaneyas, both the genders are equal and all the occupations are also equal and holy. As such, all the castes based on occupations are equal in society. In this article, the ideas of some of the Shivasharanas expressed through their Vachanas are analyzed and discussed. Their ideas were also against social evils such as violence against women, Sati practice, etc. and they encouraged Widows' remarriage. In this way, emancipation of women and equality-based society were messages spread by Shivasharana movement.

Introduction:

Before 12th century, the discrimination and lack of freedom were prime problems faced by women. Widows were separated from mainstream of the society. There were child marriages and veil (purdah) system, which were restricted the freedom of women. Sati practice was inhumane practice from which women were suffering after death of their husbands. The society was divided into various sects, castes and social groups and few of the castes were declared as untouchable and they are socially discriminated.

Realizing these problems of lower castes and women, the Basavanna or Basaveshwar has led revolution popularly known as Shivasharana movement to solve the socio-religious problems of women and lower castes in Karnataka. Shivasharanas (Lingayat Male Philosophers) and Shivasharaneyas (Lingayat Female Philosophers) were joined the movement and spread their messages through Vachanas (Literary Verses). The Vachanas were in Kannada language and understandable by others easily. In AnubhavaMantapa, while sharing the experiences and thoughts of all the activists of the movement, Basaveshwar asked, what is the sex of the soul? He attached importance to the principle of Kayaka, in

which every man and women are engaged and their active participation in spiritual discourses and deliberations at AnubhavaMantapa. On this basis, he undertook the mission of elevating the womanhood by the introduction of the ceremony of Linga Diksha, thereby giving them equal opportunity in religious and spiritual activities along with men (Shintri, 1967).

The occupations, castes and both men and women were also given higher respect as their occupations and respect were added to their names so as to prove that, all occupations and castes based on occupations were equal and even men and women are equal in society. The occupation of the Shivasharanas and Shivasharaneyas were highlighted with their names as the main principle of Shivasharana movement was 'Work is Worship' (Kayakave Kailasa). As such, the Shivasharanas were popularly known with their family occupations with their names. Further, as each and every Shivasharanas were respected and their names are attached with "Ayya" or 'Deva', which means 'Sir' and names of Shivasharaneyas were prefixed or suffixed with 'Akka' or 'Avve' means Sister or mother. It shows that there is mutual and equal respect among all Shivasharanas in society. Well known Shivasharanas and Shivasharaneyas are Basavanna, Akka Mahadevi, Allama Prabhu, MadivalaMachideva (washerman), DhorKakkayya (tanner), HadapadaAppanna (barber), SamagaraHaralayya (cobbler), Madara Chennayya (tanner), AydakkiMarayya&Lakkamma (rice-grain gatherers), Kumbar Gundayya (Potter), JedaraDasimayya and Duggale, KurubaraGollaleshwar (shepherd), Sule Sankavve (Prostitute), MoligeMarayya (faggot-gatherer), NuliyaChandayya (rope maker), Madara Chennayya (scavenger), Bhandari Santayya (Curator of Manuscript Library), Bokkasada Sangappa (treasurer), PakadaBhimayya (cook), Vaidya Sanganna (Ayurvedic doctor), MedaraKetayya (basket maker), DhakkeyaBommanna (drummer), TurugahiRamappa(cowherd), SunkadaBankanna (toll-keeper), OkkaluMuddayya (farmer), TalavaraKamideva (village watchman), GanadaKannappa (Oilman), Suji KayakadaRamitande (tattooer), Bachi KayakadaBasappa (carpenter), SattigeKayakadaRamitande (umbrella holder), KannadikayakadaAmmidevayya (Mirror maker), KadirukayakadaRemmavve (Spinner), SimpeganadaSankaradasimayya (tailor), Akkasaliganada Kinnari Bommappa (Goldsmith), Sainika Jodharamadanna (soldier), MalaharakayakadaChikkadevayya (mender of junk), KottanadaRemmavve (paddy pounder), etc. Further, no occupation was higher or no occupation was lower in society. Of course, many of the Vachanas were highlighted the caste-based equality and gender equality in society. A few of the selected Vachanas of Shivasharanas pertaining to women's emancipation are discussed as under.

Emancipation of Women by Shivasharanas:

When the castes of the Shivasharanas were explored, it is noted that 72 percent of the Shivasharanas were Shudras and also the untouchables (Vijaya Ramaswamy, 1996). During those days, shudras and untouchables were suppressed in the society. But Veerashaivism propounded equality of all castes and genders. In this respect, ShivasharaneLingamma, belonged to a low caste, most probably an untouchable, says(Bhoosanurmata and Menezes, 1969):

*I was born in the lowest
But grew up among the highest.
I held on to the feet of good Sharanas.
I saw Guru, Linga and Jangama.
I saw Padodaka and Prasada
By holding on to their feet.
On beholding these persons
The darkness looming before my eyes dissolved.
As soon as the darkness looming
before my eyes dissolved,
I became happy, revelling in
The auspicious glorious light,
O Appanna Priya Chennabasavanna !*

The following Vachana of Siddharama's testify to the revolutionary change in the outlook of men and women on woman's ability to save herself (Mallapura, 1970):

*The woman He himself had created
Adorned His head;
The woman He himself had created
Adorned His lap;
The woman He himself had created
Adorned Brahma's tongue;
The woman He himself had created
Adorned Narayana's chest.
Therefore :
Woman is no woman,
Nor is she a demon,
Woman is verily
Kapila Siddha Mallikarjuna Himself, look !*

As discussed already, there were two basic inequalities in the society, they are caste and gender. Basaveshwar revolted against the rigid deep rooted caste system and declared that no one is superior or inferior either by caste or by sex. He declared that men and women are equal in birth as we observed from his vachana.

*Unless the flow of blood appear,
There is no harbourage
Wherein the embryo may dwell.
The function of the seed is e'er the same.
Greed, lust, anger and joy,
All other passions are the same,
Whatever you read or hear, what fruit?
What is the rule to judge a caste?
"The embryo needs the seven elements:
It is the same birth out of the same womb;
Same the alliance of self and soul;
What, then, the usefulness of caste?"
You are a blacksmith if you heat;
A washerman if you beat; A weaver, if you lay the warp;
A Brahmin, if you read the Books!
Is anybody in .the word
Delivered through the ear?'
Therefore, O KudalaSdngamd Lord,*

*The well-born is the man who knows
The nature of Divinity! (Naikar, 2005)*

As described by Basaveshwar in the above Vachana, human body was formed by seven elements and come from same womb, through the same passage. He states that qualities like, desire anger, joy and passions are same in all beings, therefore, there is no distinction between one another. Further, the human beings are doing their occupations based on their skills and hereditary occupations. Then why there is inequality based on caste and gender in the society. So, Basaveshwar emphasized for caste and gender equality in Veerashaivism. Similarly, according to ShivayogiSiddharama both man and woman are equal as he says (Vidyashankar, 2007):

*All liquid is the same:
Wine is from toddy trees,
Nectar is from flowers.
All human body is the same:
Man and woman continue the race
Man and god continue divinity
O, Kapilasiddhamallikarjun*

These principles indicate that discrimination against women on the basis only of caste and sex is not permitted in the twelfth century itself. Women were provided equal rights along with men for the purpose of evolution of their personalities. Women were permitted to take up any kind of work of their choice and have economic independence. Women were free to many even from other castes.

The Sharanas not only proclaimed but actually demonstrated that there was no room for gender inequality in spiritual matter. The Veerashaiva view of man and woman can be best understood by the following vachana of Devara Dasimayya (Javali, 1967):

*A women is identified
By her breasts and plaits
And a man, by his beards and moustaches
But the soul, within the two
Is neither women or man
O Lord Ramanatha*

Devara Dasimayya described that the soul in both men and women is same, but there are only physiological differences between these genders. Hence, the Vachana of Devara Dasimayya shows the equality of men and women. The Sharanas have also pointed out that woman is not an illusion, but a living being like man in every walk of life. Considering woman as an illusion represents the self aggrandizement of the male which is unfair. According to Veerashaivism, man and woman differ from each other at the psychological level only. At the metaphysical level, they are one and the same i.e. at the level of *Atman*, the pure consciousness.

The souls have no gender discrimination to which bodies are subjected, is the first primeval *mantra* proclaimed by Shivasharanas. Man had forgotten the indivisible nature of souls, since he mistook physical differences between man and woman for the essential characteristics of souls. Shivasharanas abolished the difference between man and woman by recognizing the cognate nature and common features of souls housed in both male and female bodies. Following Vachana reveals the same (Shintri, 1994)

*Birth everywhere is in the same way.
In blood and uterus and foetus.
Mind, breath, life are held
With the eight-fold cage of the body.
It's woman if one develops
The breasts and grows long hair. "
It's man if he grows moustache ?
But the soul is neither male nor female.
If one makes any attempt
To know why this is so,
It's beyond the ken of even the Srtis,
Said AmbigaraChoudayya*

Like Shivasharanas (Male saints), the Shivasharaneyas, (female saints) like Goggavve and Satyakka reject the entire concept of gender. Goggavve says in her vachana (Hiremath, 1968):

*They call one woman if one has
breasts and a braid;
They call one man if one possesses
moustache and a loin cloth
Is knowledge of these twain
Male or female?
O Nastinatha*

Goggavve too says that the physiology of the males and females are different. We can't able to differentiate the knowledge of man and woman, they are equal. As stated by Satyakka stated the wise do not differentiate between the souls dwelling in male and female bodies for souls do transcend gender differences, as the fragrance of a flower and the sweetness of a fruit do. Her Vachana is as under (Rajur, 1970).

*It's not proved that
That person one is female
Who has breasts and plaits of hair.
It's not proved that
That person alone is male
Who has moustache and carries a dagger.
That is the way of the world,
But not that of the wise.
The differentiating feature in fruit is sweetness
Whatever fruit it be.
The differentiating feature in a flower is fragrance,
Whatever be its beauty.
You alone know its secret,
O Sambu Jakkessvara !*

In another Vachana, JedaraDasimayya rejects both gender and caste as under (Ramanujan, 1973).

*Did the breath of the mistress
have breasts and long hair?
Or did the master's breath wear the sacred thread?
Did the outcaste, last in line,
hold with his outgoing breath
the stick of his tribe?*

According to Jedar Dasimayya, physiological traits may differ the males and females, but the breathing is air is not different as it is equal and accordingly the persons of all the castes and gender are equal. Basaveshwar was condemned oppression and suppression of women in society. His Vachana gave a picture that the respect he was given to women (Zvelebil, 1984):

*To give me birth, Maya (enticement) bore me — as mother.
To delight me, Maya was born — as my daughter,
To embrace me, Maya shared my bed — as my wife.
So many different ways she has, Maya,
to worry and trouble me;
Not in my power to unhinge this Maya;
And you
are amused,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers*

Above stated Vachana described the metaphorical view that is illusion is equated with the many facets of woman but never with father, son or husband. In this vachana, Basaveshwar highlighted multidimensional role of women in the life of man. Another Shivasharana, Siddharama upholds nobility of womanhood as he writes (Vijaya Ramaswamy, 1996):

*Woman is not just a female sex,
Woman is not a demoness even,
Woman is the very embodiment
Of Lord Kapilasiddha Mallikarjuna*

Woman when looked at as an object of mere sexual gratification could be a hurdle for you. But instead of just looking at her pretty pair of eyes and see the external beauty, if you look deep into her eyes and perceive the exalted beauty of the divine Spirit within, she can surely help you in your spiritual pursuits. The everlasting beauty of her inner soul which is the same as yours, would then look more attractive than the fading beauty of her flesh! (Sri ShivamurthyShivacharyaMahaswamiji (2004).The Vachana of Siddharama described that woman is not only a female sex, but she is embodiment of lord Shiva. Such is the noble status given to women by Shivasharanas in their Vachanas.

Another misconception which strangled woman was that she was congenitally impure because of menstruation course. In the Vedic order of society, woman was ranked lowest and deemed a Shudra. So a woman, like a Sudra, was deprived of the benefits of studying the Vedic lore, debarred from all religious observances and condemned to live a secluded life. The taint of impurity lay thick on her. Once again, Shivasharanas redefined impurity as they had done Maya before. Basaveshwar says (Kalburgi, 1980):

*The foetal seed cannot be implanted in the womb
except after menstrual flow...
The embryo is formed of the seven elements :
It has the same birth in the same womb;
The alliance of self and soul is ever the same*

Basavesvara says on the significance of menstrual flow in the creation of a human being. Hence, menstruation course was not to be treated as an agent of impurity. Moreover, Shivasharanas argued that impurity is not a matter of physical pollution, for it is a mental taint. The company of Linga served as a means of eradicating the taint of menstruation. So Saranas asked : ‘Is there room for impurity where Linga dwells ?’ ‘If a woman becomes a devotee, she need not fear the taint of menstrual flow’. ‘When mental impurity is shed, is there any room for physical impurity?’ Thus, arguing against the evil practice of keeping woman outside the houses of religious observances, they restored to her the lost position of respect in her house and society.

Conclusion:

In 12th century, Shivasharanas and Shivasharaneyas were spread message of caste and gender equality and also practiced the same in family and society. Even the evil practices such as Sati was condemned by the Shivasharanas. Widows’ remarriage was promoted by Shivasharanas. Women were encouraged in AnubhavaMantapa to express their ideas. Shivasharanas believed that though biological body of male and females are different, their souls are same and their knowledge is same. Many of the Shivasharaneyas were equally participating in outside work (occupations) of their husbands. Hence, it shows that the Shivasharanas were true social reformers who upheld the status of women in 12th century.

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