



Basaveshwara's Legacy: The Intersection Of Labor Dignity And Democratic Thought

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Abstract : Basaveshwara(also know as Basava,Basavanna) the 12th century mystic by temperament, an idealist by choice, a statesman by profession, a man of letters by taste, a humanist by sympathy and a social reformer by conviction and made revolutionary contributions to the Kalachuri kingdom, by implementing many policies and reforms that were centuries ahead of their time. His visionary leadership laid the foundation for a more egalitarian society, challenging the deeply entrenched social norms of his era. A new form of literature called vachanas was invented as means of expression. Basavanna imagined a self-sufficient society with no discrimination of caste, creed, religion or sex. The concept of Kayaka which was propagated by him cuts the root of traditional caste hierarchy; embodying in itself the principles of the dignity and equality of the human beings as also the dignity of labour. It is in conformity with democratic principles and its objective is equitable distribution of work and also wealth. He was a motivating factor behind the establishment of Anubhava Mantapa, a socio-religious parliament.

Keywords : Dignity of Labour, Sharana, Kayaka, deconstruction, Human Rights, Democratic thought, Vachanas

Introduction :

In the long history of humanity and its development the entire world has been the stage for 'inequality' in every aspect of social, political, economical, educational and cultural life. During the time, one who came on the stage of history of Karnataka in southern part of India in the 12th century is the great socio-religious leader Basaveshwara, who is popular in the heart of people as Basavanna('Anna' means brother in Kannada). He revolted against the distinction based on caste, creed, religion and gender in the society.

Basavas teachings based on equality, liberty and fraternity led to form a new sub-society called the sharana society: a society where all human rights we talk today were assured ; a society where every member lived with dignity ; a society where every member respected the rights of others ; a society where every Kayaka(work)is valued with dignity ; a society where every one irrespective of gender, caste, colour and status were equal to one another!!

Dignity of Labor : The work itself a dignity

Basava's concept of Kayaka stands as a significant contribution to practical philosophy. Broadly understood, Kayaka encompasses any occupation, profession, vocation, or form of labor, and serves as a means of self-realization. Central concept is the idea that everyone should engage in their duties, acknowledging that physical or manual labor is an essential part of life, and no occupation is considered superior and none of the jobs should be discriminated. Kayaka advocates that every individuals to be active, contributing members of society, rejecting the notion of living in isolation, renunciation, or relying on other people for individual sustenance.

Fundamentally, Kayaka represents the conventional caste-based divisions of labor, presenting a revolutionary perspective on work, human dignity, and the nature of life and divinity. It elevates both the dignity of people and the dignity of labor itself, proposing that work should be viewed not just as a material requirement but as a spiritual fulfillment.

During their period, the vachanas delivered some of the most severe critiques of the social, economical, and cultural norms. These verses urged listeners to reevaluate deeply rooted issues based on gender, caste, and class. At the height of the movement, Basavanna and other vachana poets are said to have taught literacy to cobblers, farmers, potters, blacksmiths, cleaners, and other marginalized individuals, emphasizing that the oppressed castes and classes were fundamentally no different from the privileged ones.

Sharanas deconstructed the concept of superiority and inferiority and challenged the domination of Brahminism and religious texts. The poets boldly embraced their professions by incorporating them into their own names, resulting in Vachanakaras like Ambigara Chowdayya (Ambiga=Ferryman) ,Dohara Kakkayya(Dohara=Leather work) and many more.

In early nineteenth century as Thomas Carlyle famously stated, "Work is Worship," similarly, the Sharanas proclaim, "Work is Heaven," encapsulated in the Kannada phrase "Kayakave Kailasa" which suggests that every form of labor is imbued with honor, dignity, and spiritual importance. Kayaka not encourages the accumulation of wealth for their own sake, and advocated for the responsible use of one's earnings for the greater good of society.

This philosophy closely aligns with the modern democratic values of equality, justice, liberty, and fraternity, as outlined in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution, making Kayaka a timeless and relevant approach to labor and life..

Basava opposed the caste system passes through hereditary and pioneered both the freedom to choose their occupation and the labor dignity, because sharanas considered work itself a dignity. One such example is the following Vachana :

Nimbavve's my mother: she lives

By fetching water,

Chennayya, is my father :

He fetches fodder for the royal stable.

You say I have no kin:

Why, my sister cooks at Kanci!

O Kudala Sangama Lord,

Lo, I received out of your hands

The piety my ancestors

Have harvested.

Unfortunately, “Dignity of labour” is something that present society so miraculously lack, but Sharanas enjoyed it way back in 12th century empowering them with self-reliance, self-confidence, and a spirit of freedom and independent thinking.

Basava’s Anubava Mantapa : A Democratic forum ahead of its time

In 12th century, Basavanna also formed a socio-religious parliament called the Anubhava Mantapa. Located in present Basava Kalyana, Bidar it is believed to have included 770 representatives, with over one lakh people participating in its discussions. The representatives engaged directly with the public.

Basavanna fought for the rights of common man. Unlike Plato, Basavanna didn’t wanted to divide the society into the classes of intellectuals and the mass of manual workers.

Basavanna was a progressive thinker who rejected the Varnasrama Dharma, his leadership made numerous saints to take part in the movement, which embraced a democratic spirit in both form and practice. The Lingayat movement embraced inclusivity, allowing individuals from all castes and professions to contribute to societal and religious development. The Anubhava Mantapa in Kalyana (present ‘Basava Kalyana’) served as the center of discussions, discourses, dialogues, and debates, with active participation from women saints as well.

Looking human rights from the ‘recognition of rights’ perspective, it may be fairly said to begin with Magna Carta 1215. But the idea was prevailing in Kalyana already!!

Vachanas : A Source of Democratic thoughts

History evidences that Basava’s ideas, ideals, ideologies in the vachanas had great impact, that led to strong movement and to an establishment of sub society of their own called the ‘ Sharana society’. To this sub society, vachanas became a way of life.

Vachanas or brief poetry is a form of rhythmic writing in Kannada that evolved in the 11th century and flourished in the 12th century. Vachana literally means “that which is said”.

Let them not say, O Lord,

Whose is he, whose, O whose?

Let them say rather, ‘He is ours,

He’s ours, he’s ours!’

O Kudala Sangama Lord, let me be

A son of Thine own house!

In this Basavanna tells his devotees not to discriminate on the basis of high and low, to accept everyone as if the other person is their own. Basavanna believed and advocated that all men are born equal, they are worth the same in dignity.

Be he a son of female slave or be he a son of prostitute,

Once initiated into Shiva's fold,

Considering him as Shiva, Himself

It is deserving to accept the holy water from the feet (padodaka)

And consecrated food (prasada)

Look, those who do not do so

Incur the punishment for committing five heinous sins

God Kudala Sangama.

Slavery and servitude was existing during the times and Basavanna recognized slavery as morally wrong and he used 'Istalinga' as a device to liberate slaves from slavery and servitude finally to achieve equality.

His Vachanas which speaks about Right to life, Right against torture, Right to equal protection of law, Right to privacy, Right to conscience and Religion, Right to free speech, opinion and expression, Right to political participation and public services, Right to education and what not ...!!

Another important theory advocated by Vachanas besides 'Kayaka' is Dasoha. It involves the principle of distributive justice, that individual should share the responsibilities of the society to some extent. Dasoha is not restricted to money or goods sharing. It applies to knowledge and skills. If Kayaka embodies that everyone should earn their living, dasoha prescribes that money earned through kayaka does not entirely belongs to the individual, therefore it should be shared with the society.

To have become a devotee, itself

Is a surrender of piety

To have become a worthy man, itself

Is a Surrender of one's worth!

To have been united is itself

Surrender of one's egohood

Surrender there must be in everything:

The importance of surrender

Lord Kudala Sangama only knows!

The members of sharana society, practiced dasoha in every form, the learned and wise shared their wisdom, the skilled taught the others, and many others shared with the community part of the earnings. Dasoha was performed by all, irrespective of high caste and low caste, irrespective of rich and poor. It may be assumed that concept of dasoha was instrumental in achieving equality.

Conclusion:

Basavanna ensured equality through mechanisms of spirituality, ishtalinga, open community, kayaka and dasoha. He wiped out all the differences that existed and ensured equality to all irrespective of caste, gender, religion, economic and social status. It ensued that large number of people, led a meaningful life and paved way for self-realization.

The study establishes that 'Kayaka' ensured dignity of labour, democratic thoughts through 'Vachanas' and 'dasoha' ensured equitable distribution of wealth. Basavanna was a true humanitarian. He believed and preached the modern principles embodying humanitarianism such as compassion, fraternity and democracy. For Basavanna compassion was not built on faith but it was supported by reason and science. In this sense he was a rationalist too.!!

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