



A Sociological perspective on Basaveshwara's role in Indian social change

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Abstract

Basaveshwara, known as Basavanna, was a Lingayat saint, poet, social reformer, and logician who addressed the societal issues of his time. He stood against inequalities rooted in caste, class, and gender. He championed the dignity of labor, monotheism, and non-violence while promoting and embodying the principles of equality. His recognition of women's strength and rights was one of his many contributions to the revitalization of contemporary culture-bound society. Basavanna was a pivotal force behind the establishment of Anubhava Mantapa, a forum for spiritual dialogue and experience. Therefore, a deeper exploration of the Mantapa's functioning should provide us with a clearer understanding of Basavanna's perspective on femininity. In spiritual matters, women were not regarded as inferior to men. Consequently, women's contributions to spiritual experiences were not only warmly welcomed but also greatly appreciated and promoted. Basavanna was a distinguished humanist who advocated for a new way of living where divine experience was central to life, and caste, gender, and social distinctions were deemed irrelevant.

Keywords: Social change, caste, social motion, gender, epoch maker, veerashaivism, vachanas, mysticism, lingayat, saint

Introduction

From a sociological perspective, the lasting influence of Basaveshwara's reformative efforts in India centered on a bold challenge to established social hierarchies. His main focus was the oppressive caste system, a deeply rooted framework that strictly governed an individual's social position and opportunities based on their birth. Basaveshwara aimed to break down these artificial divisions, advocating for a community where value was assessed by character and deeds rather than lineage. He promoted the liberation and empowerment of women, actively encouraging their equal involvement in all facets of life. This idea was revolutionary in a society where women's roles were predominantly limited to domestic duties. Basaveshwara imagined a society with gender equality, which stood in stark contrast to the existing norms.

At the heart of his reformist vision was the creation of the Anubhava Mantapa. This was not just a structure, but a lively public forum. It functioned as a venue for open discussions and shared spiritual experiences. Individuals from all socio-economic backgrounds, regardless of their caste or profession, could come together and participate in meaningful conversations. This exchange of ideas and viewpoints was revolutionary. Basaveshwara skillfully utilized Vachana literature to disseminate his transformative ideas. These were concise, poetic verses, easily understood and profoundly impactful. Through these Vachanas, he expressed his aspiration for a more just and equitable society. He championed the dignity of work, asserting that all honest labor possessed intrinsic value. This marked a notable shift from traditional hierarchies that frequently looked down upon manual labor. His philosophy advocated for a rational and humanistic way of living. This lifestyle was deeply anchored in spirituality, yet free from ritualistic constraints. It highlighted inner purity, ethical behavior, and compassion. Brotherhood was a fundamental principle. He nurtured a sense of universal brotherhood, rising above the divisions created by caste and creed. His teachings inspired

a life led by reason, empathy, and a deep connection to the divine, all while honoring the inherent worth of every individual.

Objectives of the study

- To comprehend the impact of social reform.
- To learn about Anubhava Mantapa.
- To explore the Hisveerashaiva movement.
- To examine the concepts of women's empowerment.

Methodology

This analytical research paper scrutinises the multifaceted philosophy of the social reformer Basaveshwara. To achieve this in-depth analysis, it draws exclusively upon existing scholarly resources. The 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's teachings and historical context. The paper's primary objective is to dissect and interpret the core tenets of his thought. By examining these varied scholarly contributions, the research aims to present a comprehensive understanding of his influential ideas. This approach ensures a rigorous and evidence-based exploration of his profound social and spiritual contributions. The synthesis of this secondary material allows for a critical evaluation of his lasting legacy.

Life History

- He was born in 1130 in Basavana Bagewadi, located in the Bijapur District of Karnataka.
- Basavanna was a statesman, philosopher, poet, and Lingayat saint from India during the twelfth century, known for his role in the Shiva-focused Bhakti movement and as a Hindu Shaivite social reformer.
- He was active during the reigns of both dynasties, but his influence peaked during the rule of King Bijjala II in Karnataka, India.

4. He married Sharane Neelganaga, who was the daughter of his maternal uncle, and took on the role of an accountant in King Bijjala's palace. He later became the Finance Minister and subsequently the Prime Minister in the King's court.
5. The *Basavaraj Devara Ragale*, written by the Kannada poet Harihara around 1180, is the earliest known account of the life of this social reformer and is significant because the author was a contemporary of the protagonist.
6. Basavanna promoted social awareness through his poetry, known as *Vachanaas*. He opposed gender and social discrimination, superstitions, and rituals, while introducing *Ishtalinga*, an image of the Shiva Linga, to everyone regardless of their birth, serving as a constant reminder of one's devotion to Shiva.
7. He established the *Anubhava Mantapa*, or the 'hall of spiritual experience,' which included figures like *Allamaprabhu* and *Akka Mahadevi* as part of this assembly.
8. The *Anubhava Mantapa* was founded as a religious and socio-spiritual academy. Basavanna was raised in a family that valued Shaivism. As a leader, he developed and inspired a new devotional movement called *Virashaivas*, which refers to passionate and heroic worshippers of Shiva.
9. This movement was rooted in the ongoing Tamil *Bhakti* movement, particularly the traditions of the *Shaiva Nayanars* from the seventh to the eleventh century.
10. Basava advocated for a form of devotional worship that rejected temple rituals led by Brahmins, replacing them with personalized direct worship of Shiva through practices such as the use of personally worn icons and symbols.

Literary Works of Basaveshwara

- a. Numerous works are attributed to Basavanna, which are respected within the Lingayat community in the society.
- b. Those consist of numerous *Vachana* along with the *Shat-sthala-vachana* (discourses of the six ranges of salvation), *Kala-Jnana-Vachana* means forecasts of the future, *Mantra-gopya*, *Ghatna Chakra-vachana* and *Raja-yoga-vachana*.

Basaveshwara as a social reformer

He became a logician and a social reformer who fought against the social issues of his time, which included the caste system and Hindu religious practices. His ideas and teachings transcended all barriers, addressing global and timeless concerns. Basavanna emerged as a prominent humanist who advocated for a new way of living where divine experience was essential to life, and divisions based on caste, gender, and social status were deemed irrelevant. He waged a battle against all forms of affliction, from socio-economic biases and untouchability to gender inequality. Basavanna encouraged devotional worship that rejected Brahmin-led temple rituals in favor of a more personal and direct worship of Shiva.

Basaveshwara build Anubhava Mantapa

Basavanna become a firm believer in caste-loose society where each person had an equal opportunity to thrive. Basavanna became a staunch advocate for a society free from caste distinctions, where every individual had an equal opportunity to thrive. To

promote this noble vision, he established the *Anubhava Mantapa*, a Lingayata academy comprising mystics, saints, and philosophers that functioned as a forum for clarifying thoughts on fundamental human values and ethics. The *Anubhava Mantapa*, which was presided over by another renowned spiritual figure, *Allama Prabhu*, included a diverse array of *Sharanas*-individuals from lower social strata-as its members. Basavanna actively participated in the *Anubhava Mantapa* alongside other distinguished individuals such as *Akkamahadevi* and *Allama Prabhu*. As a leader of the *Veerashaiva* movement, Basavanna was a vocal social reformer. Known as Basavanna, he was a Lingayat saint, poet, social reformer, and logician who challenged the societal issues of his time, standing against inequalities rooted in caste, class, and gender. He championed the dignity of labor, monotheism, and non-violence while promoting and embodying the principles of equality. His recognition of women's uniqueness and rights was among his many contributions to the revitalization of contemporary culture-bound society. His beliefs and teachings transcend all boundaries, addressing universal and timeless issues. Basavanna was a driving force behind the creation of the *Anubhava Mantapa*, a space for spiritual dialogue and experience.

Basaveshwara, known as Basavanna, was a Lingayat saint, poet, social reformer, and philosopher who fought against the societal challenges of his era, rising up against inequalities based on caste, class, and gender. He underscored the dignity of labor, monotheism, and non-violence while advocating for and practicing the values of equality. His acknowledgment of women's distinctiveness and rights was one of his many contributions to the renewal of modern tradition-bound society. His thoughts and teachings transcend all limits, addressing both global and eternal themes. Basavanna played a pivotal role in founding the *Anubhava Mantapa*, a forum for religious discussion and experiential learning. Consequently, a detailed analysis of the *Mantapa's* functioning should offer us a clearer understanding of Basavanna's perspective on femininity. In spiritual matters, women were not deemed inferior to men. Thus, the contributions of women to religious experiences were not only warmly welcomed but also highly esteemed and encouraged. *Anubhava Mantapa* was a Lingayata institution comprising mystics, saints, and philosophers, serving as a platform for clarifying doubts regarding shared human values and ethics. The *Anubhava Mantapa*, overseen by the renowned spiritual figure *Allama Prabhu*, included numerous *Sharanas*-individuals from lower social classes—as participants. Basavanna participated in the *Anubhava Mantapa* alongside other notable figures such as *Akkamahadevi* and *Allama Prabhu*.

Veerashaiva - Movement

Basavanna was a vocal advocate for social reform. He emerged as the leader of the *Veerashaiva* movement. He established a cult that remains widely acknowledged today. The traditional priestly class was dismantled. The vernacular language was selected as the means to convey the ultimate truth to the populace. It granted women a prominent position in both religious and social spheres. It offered a singular realization ideal applicable to all, regardless of wealth. Basaveshwara, known as Basavanna, was a Lingayat saint, poet, social reformer, and philosopher who challenged the societal issues of his time, opposing

inequalities rooted in caste, class, and gender. He championed the dignity of labor, monotheism, and non-violence while promoting and embodying the principles of equality. His recognition of women's distinctiveness and rights was among his numerous contributions to the revitalization of a contemporary society bound by tradition. His philosophy and teachings transcend all limitations, addressing both global and timeless issues.

Basavanna played a pivotal role in founding AnubhavaMantapa, a platform for religious dialogue and experience. His significant contributions to humanity are truly noteworthy. Among his many achievements, his recognition of women's individuality and rights stands out as a vital aspect of revitalizing a tradition-bound society. It is undeniable that the position of women within a society serves as a key measure of that society's cultural development.

Basavanna views on women empowerment

As the status of women improves in a progressive society, their subjugation diminishes. The ideal society envisioned by Basavanna and the Sharanas in the 12th century marked a significant advancement toward women's freedom, and one can better appreciate their groundbreaking contributions by examining the condition of women during that era. There is reason to believe that women enjoyed equal rights with men in the early Vedic period. In every respect, wives and husbands were regarded as equals, sharing all religious and social responsibilities equally. Women played an active role in the intellectual and spiritual life of the community. Several hymns in the Rigveda were composed by women.

Among the composers of hymns are Vivavara, Apal, Lopamudra, Ghosa, Indrāni, and Sachi. From references in the Dharma Shashtras, it can be inferred that women maintained a degree of independence and respect well after the Vedic era. However, this period was brief. Shortly thereafter, the troubling era of women's subjugation seems to have commenced. Manus expresses some favorable views about women, stating that where women are respected, the Gods are pleased; conversely, where they are not honored, no sacred rites yield benefits. Yet, many of his comments about women tend to overshadow the positive ones. He perceives them as morally questionable beings. In this world, women are seen as temptresses to men; thus, the wise remain cautious in the presence of women. Such sentiments are prevalent. Manus claims that a woman is never truly self-reliant. Her father protects her in childhood, her husband in adulthood, and her son in her old age. They are prohibited from praying, performing penances, undertaking pilgrimages, reciting Vedic Mantras, or worshipping the Gods! As we will explore later, this unjust treatment of women—the refusal to acknowledge her as a human being—was one of the many ancient and harsh traditions of Hinduism that Basavanna opposed. A religion founded on such principles could hardly endure. Buddhism and Jainism emerged as a response to the corrupt teachings of Brahmanism that emphasized class divisions. Her redemption seemed to be on the horizon, but it was not fully realized.

Basavanna was born into a twelfth-century society characterized by deep-rooted superstitions and beliefs, similar to the traditional post-Vedic culture. In this society, women were often regarded as property and treated like cattle. Basavanna took on the mission of liberating women

from these societal constraints and ensuring they could lead lives of dignity. He played a pivotal role in the creation of AnubhavaMantapa, a forum for religious dialogue and experiential learning, primarily driven by his vision, with support from AllamaPrabhu and Chennabasava. Therefore, a detailed analysis of the Mantapa's functioning can shed light on Basavanna's perspective on femininity. Women constituted a significant part of the Mantapa's community. The presence of numerous women-saints engaging in theological discussions at AnubhavaMantapa reflects his respectful view of women. Basavanna inspired them to flourish and evolve, as evidenced by their well-rounded personalities and their capacity for independent thought and action. A woman thrives best when supported by her parents or husband. Basavanna heralded a new era for women, one defined by respect, economic parity, and social equity. The gentle breeze of change allowed many women to realize their full potential. Ayadakkilakkamma wisely advised her husband to return with just enough rice for one day, no more! Sharanas disapproves of avarice. It is believed that hundreds of women-saints existed, yet we currently possess only thirty vachanas. Akkamahadevi stood out in every aspect. Basavanna, Allama Prabhu, Chennabasava, Siddharamayya, and Madivalayya all held her in high regard.

A woman who has faced nothing but angry glares and sarcastic remarks from society arrives at Basavanna's residence in Kalyana, where she is welcomed with divine respect and kindness. This gesture reflects both his humility and his recognition of Akkamahadevi's greatness. By honoring her, he also honors womanhood. Notably, he is the one who introduces her to Allamaprabhu. Akkamahadevi is celebrated as the Saint of Saints. Basavanna, along with others, joins in the chorus of admiration for her, as Akkamahadevi, the esteemed woman saint poet, is believed to have transcended material and worldly pleasures, rising above the realm of spirituality. Women were held in the highest regard. Numerous reformers have endeavored to secure women's social, economic, and political rights. However, none have fought as fiercely to guarantee equal rights in the religious sphere.

Basavanna is the sole figure who has proclaimed that women, just like men, have the right to religious initiation and salvation. Sociologists often trace the origins of the women's emancipation movement back to Raja Ram Mohan Roy. There is no denying that Raja Ram Mohan Roy significantly advanced the cause of women in contemporary society. It is important to note that Basavanna's efforts towards women's emancipation were particularly extraordinary in the 12th century, establishing him as a true pillar of religion. He not only anticipated but also embodied and practiced the principles of the Hindu Code Bill, which was envisioned by another eminent social reformer and humanist, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. In 2015, India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, inaugurated the Basavanna statue along the banks of the Thames in Lambeth, London. Basavanna is also recognized as the first Kannadiga to have a commemorative coin minted in his honor, celebrating his social reforms. He is affectionately referred to as Bhakti Bhandari or Jagjyothi Basaveshwara (which translates to the Treasurer of Devotion) (Lord Basava). Basava Jayanthi is celebrated annually to honor the birth of Vishwaguru Basaveshwara, also known as Lord Basavanna.

Conclusion

Basavanna is seen as a significant savior and divine entity who was born to address social inequalities. His progressive ideals were largely rejected by many in the upper caste. Nevertheless, Basavanna chose to dismantle the old, inflexible chains of blind traditions rooted in outdated religious beliefs. He was resolute in his mission to reform society, acting as a visionary and a catalyst for change; for him, nothing held greater importance than social reformation and transformation.

He faced the challenge of opposition and non-cooperation from his own upper-caste community, putting his life at risk. Nevertheless, Basavanna remained resolute in his vision for societal reform, prioritizing social reformation and transformation above all else. He is celebrated as a significant savior and divine figure, born to address social inequalities. His progressive ideals were largely rejected by the majority of upper-caste individuals. However, Basavanna chose to dismantle the outdated and rigid shackles of blind traditions and religious beliefs.

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