

Basaveshwara's Thoughts on Social Equality and Social Justice

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Abstract

Basaveshwara- a great personality whose teachings and thoughts; practiced and preached have been a source of great experiment from times. My paper introduces such great thoughts of his which are cornered in today's era. He spoke in terms of Social equality, Caste and Class equality, Occupational equality, Religious equality, Equality of Sex and so on which act as the highlighted elements in today's social philosophy. His Vachanas acted as a catalyst for social change. It's a must to understand and follow such vachanas even today to have peace overall. Basaveshwara's identification of occupational equality today should flow in all the streams of life so as to upgrade the society and the Nation. His "Kayaka" theory insists on the honest discharge of occupational responsibilities.

We all need to learn a lot of lessons from Basavanna's literature; we need to rethink about the imbalanced social equalities and the social justice which has created numerous problems in today's society. We all need to follow his theories of Equality and need to treat all people as equal, give respect to each and every living being so as

to justify him and also dream of a better and a developed nation or a world.

Key Words:

Preached, Vachanas , Kayaka, occupational equality, social philosophy

Introduction:

Shri Basaveshwara (also known as Basavanna) stands out as one of the most outstanding personalities in our religious history inspiring millions of people from 800 years - till today. He, as an independent original thinker shows a very high order of life which has influenced and moulded many lives. He was a 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. An architect of a new classless and casteless society based on equality and social justice. I would like to recollect some of his social preaching's and his high thoughts which impart the truth of life. I through this article of mine, take the responsibility of introducing such great

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thoughts of his which are cornered in today's era.

His teachings and socio-religious thoughts which he practiced and preached have been a source of great experiment in history which upheld his views from decades. He is well known as a socio-religious reformer, a champion of social equality, an advocate of "Kayaka" and a prime leader of "Virashaiva Movement" who spoke in terms of Social equality, Caste and Class equality, Occupational equality, Religious equality, Equality of Sex and so on which acted as a major message of Basavanna --the highlighted elements we find in today's social philosophy.

Basavanna strove hard to bring about reformation in Hinduism into which social evils had crept. The social and cultural conflicts of the Indian society including the Karnataka state of ancient days were stimulating a new foment within the Hindu society. There was a wide-spread disparity among people. Differences such as higher Varna -lower Varna, higher caste-lower caste, man-woman, dignified higher occupation and ignorable lower occupation and other differences had damaged the growth of social unity and solidarity. The caste system had divided the Hindu Society into different hostile segments and exploitation of the lower castes by the higher ones was the order of the day.

Social Equality which was prevalent in India during the Vedic times had disappeared giving way to inequality. Self oriented thinking was the supreme and Society oriented thinking was relegated to the background.

The prevalence of wide spread social disparity had disturbed the mind of Basaveshwara and so he carried an untiring struggle against the social inequality which intended to bring about a peaceful revolution that would change the minds of the people to accept his message of social equality.

"All should be treated as equals. All should be pure and devoted to God. Everyone should work".

Liberal views such as these took shape in the mind of Basavanna even in his childhood. He revolted against Vedic Brahmanism which he believed was one of the factors adding to the existing social disparity and so he made up his mind to minimize the same.

He preferred a peaceful method of persuasion, a non violent method to achieve his goal of establishing a society based on social equality. It was indeed God's grace; Basavanna put forth his mission for the formation of a new society, through "**Anubhava Mantapa**"- a spiritual parliament at Kalyana.

He was a practical minded man yet liberal and democratic in his approach so also he adopted the democratic method of meeting together for discussing and for laying down the path of social reconstruction and reformation and later the outcome of the discussions were recorded in the form of "**Vachanas**" in Kannada language. These Vachanas contain ideas about spiritual, social, ethical and economic issues or subjects. They contain the essence of Virashaiva thought including the thoughts of Basavanna.

The **Vachanas** contain lofty ideals relating to man's individual as well as social life. They are respected more for the social and moral values than for their literary value. He used the Vachanas to point out the deficiencies of the society and wanted to correct them. Through his constructive approach he defined the good life as a sure way to God.

His Vachanas acted as a catalyst for social change. It's a must to understand and follow such vachanas

Some of his Vachanas are:

*“The rich Will make temples for Shiva
what shall I, a poor man, do?
My legs are pillars,
the body the shrine,
the head the cupola of gold,
Listen, O! Lord:
Standing things shall fall,
that which moves shall stay”*

(Basavanna says here that the “Rich and pious people build temples to proclaim the glory of God but I being poor is unable to do so, he dedicates his own legs to be the pillars of the temple, his body as the temple, the head as the golden pinnacle comparing himself to be the temple of thine with no ruins, than of brick and mortar tumbling down in decay”)

His another vachana says:

Do not say “who is he”, “who is he” and “who is he”?

Say that he is ours, he is ours, and he is ours,

Say that he is the son of Thy own house, O Kudalasangamadeva.

Which means (Do not say who is he ? who is he ? need to treat all human beings as sons and daughters of God's home; we need to welcome them just like our brothers and sisters since we all are children of GOD).

These Vachanas speak about the economic equality wherein he says the people are socially and economically equal. He taught his followers not to be enamored of wealth instead asked them to love the poor and to serve them.

Basavanna declared that poverty was not a sin and that the poor man is no where inferior to anyone.

Basavanna showed social equality in many other dimensions such as

Equality of Caste:

He believed that all human beings are equal by Birth; no one is noble or ignorable but equal. He criticized the existing Caste-ridden society which divided people into mutually hostile groups. He says even God would not like the social or caste discriminations that we practice in his name. He completely disagrees to the caste system which is written in Vedas, Shastras and Agamas. These all are not to be used for practical lives which separate people based on their birth. So says his Vachana:

*“I shall sheathe the
Vedas, fetter the Shastras,
Put Tarka in tongs,
deface the Agamas.*

*Lookfather, most
generous
Kudalasangamadeva,
I am a son of Madar
Chennayy's family".*

Basaveshwara also stressed on -----
Occupational Equality-“Kayaka”

He says there is no occupation which is high or low, it only matters individual choice and not a hereditary caste-rule. Such divisions if exist are unjust and also is of a great social fraud.

He says **“Kayakave Kailasa”** means **“Work is Worship”**

The importance of dignity of labour in life is neither superior nor inferior and all the jobs are equally respected. Kayaka is a spirit of dedication to lord shiva which has to be undertaken in a moral and a just way. It itself involves a moral commitment. It is free and open to anyone and so Kayaka is heaven or “Kailasa”.

“Kayaka” theory insists on the honest discharge of occupational responsibilities.

He imbibed the “Kayaka” theory. The principles of Kayaka were practiced in daily life by all the members of “Anubhav Mantapa”, which became a platform ; bringing people together of different castes and professions on a single social strata. He had a strong belief that occupations only denote particular type of work to be carried on and should not be taken as a criterion for dividing people into higher and lower standards.

Basaveshwara’s identification of occupational equality today should flow in all the streams of life so as to upgrade the society and also our Nation.

Basaveshwara is also regarded as the Man of principle of--
-- Equality of Sex.

The status of Indian women had declined as they were considered socially inferior to men and all their activities were restricted to their homes. During the time women were considered as “maya” or illusion incarnate and so were considered to be the root of all the evil which was a stigma to women in general.

Basaveshwara with his followers protested against the injustice and declared that women should be equal to men. She should have the right to good education, the right to express themselves freely, the right to participate in public discussions and above all the right to take up spiritual practices. He encouraged women to pursue various occupations and to earn for their own families as men did.

Conclusion:

Basavanna preached equality not in an authoritarian way but in a humble way. His theory of equality never remained at an imaginary level instead became a living and a practicing philosophy. People take pride in praising the philosophy and principles of Basaveshwara but seldom follow them. Unfortunately during his lifetime Basaveshwara was hounded for preaching the principles of equality and for his efforts

to establish a casteless society. It was only after his death that society recognized the contributions of Basaveshwara.

We all need to learn lot of lessons from Basavanna's Vachana literature; we need to rethink about the social inequalities and the social injustice which has created numerous problems in today's society. We all need to follow the Basaveshwara's theories of Equality and need to treat all people as equal and to give respect to each and every living being so as to justify social equality and

social justices for a better and developed nation or a world.

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