

P R E F A C E

In this M. Phil Dissertation an attempt has been made to present an account of the history of Virshaiva Lingayats in Maharashtra. The most outstanding event in the cultural and religious history of South India, in the 12th Century was the revival of Vira-Saivism. The Vira-Saivas are also known by their more popular designation 'Lingayat'.

As regards the founder of this system scholars have expressed divergent views. According to the view Basava was the founder of the sect, while others believe that the real leader of the sect was Ekantada Ramayya. Basava, however, popularised the Vira-Saiva faith and gave it a new appearance by his novel doctrines of socio-religious reformation. Basaveshwar was a saint, a statesman and an ardent social reformer in the twelfth century.

Basava started a reform movement marked by its revolt against the caste system and the supremacy of the Brahmin, maintaining that all people are born equal and die equal. Basaveshwar was himself a Brahmin, but was up against the privileged classes based on birth. The rigid caste system and the untouchability prevailing in the society were undoubtedly the worst evils at that time.

Being a Brahmana by birth, Basava denied the superiority of the Brahmanas and tried heart and soul for abolishing caste - distinction.

Basava had no faith in the supremacy of the Brahmanas and Brahmanical sacrifices. He did not believe in sacrifices, penance and other austerities in the name of discipline. The lowering of woman as a class from the high position marked its degradation in no less conspicuous manner. Basava made an attempt to change this disparity of sex. Thus the diksha ceremony which takes the place of Upanayana is performed in the case of girls also and the woman too, have to wear the Linga, like men. The advocacy of widow - marriage, in the society was also another - important social reformation of Basava. Basava maintains that marriage is voluntary, the consent of the bride before marriage is necessary and child marriage is considered wrong. Divorce is allowed. Widows are treated with respect and they are permitted to marry again. Women are not considered polluted and untouchable during the days of monthly sickness.

Another remarkable contribution of Basava for the upliftment of the people of contemporary society was the imposition of the dignity of human labour. He is probably the first thinker in Indian history who preached the -

dignity of labour. He advised his followers to work hard for the satisfaction of the God Kudala Sangama.

Thus in a sense Basava may be regarded as one of the pioneers in the field of social development and moral and ethical upliftment of the people. His progressive outlook and scientific approach kept him alive to the sufferers and destitutes.

Kalyan was the seat of Basaveshwar's teaching. Anubhav Mantap was organised by Basaveshwar to teach and to spread the tenets of Virshaivism in Kalyan. During the life time of Basaveshwar many people flocked at Kalyan to listen the teaching of this great master. After the death of Basaveshwar his followers came to Southern Maharashtra especially, Solapur, Sangli, Kolhapur to spread their religion. Therefore, these areas became the stronghold of Lingayat religions since 12th century onwards.

Basaveswar's disciples were called as Shivshernas. Many Shivshernas left Kalyan and entered into adjoining area of Maharashtra and founded many Mathas for continuing the mission of Basaveshwar. Later on these Mathas transferred into centres of cultural, religious, educational activities

of Virshaivas. Now a days some matha like Siddgiri Matha, Chittradurga Matha, Palsidha Matha, Siddrameshwar Matha, are running boardings and educational institutions, in addition to their usual religious work.

For the first time an attempt has been made to take the survey of these mathas and their contribution to the development of cultural life of the Maharashtra. Like Mathas many important persons belonging to this religion like Shri. S. B. Sankanwade, Shri. Rattanappa Kumbhar, Shri. Nilkantrao Kalyani and many others are rendering yeomen services for this religion. Here, I also took the opportunity to give in brief their lifework and achievements.

Therefore, an attempt has been made to enumerate and explain the history of Virshaiv religion in Maharashtra making extensive use of the original documents like - Basaveshwar's Vachanas, records of various Mathas and other contemporary literature. In addition to this we have also used (so) many secondary sources. I have interviewed some of the social workers belonging to this religion who gave useful information regarding the Virshaiv religion and its - development in Maharashtra.

In course of preparing this work I have received help and co-operation from many and I deem it my duty to express my deep gratitude to all of them. I must express my gratefulness and gratitude to Dr. B. R. Kamble, - Professor and Head, Department of History, Shivaji University, Kolhapur, for his encouragement, suggestion and co-operation.

I must express my deep sense of gratitude to my Research Guide Dr. B. D. Khane, who guided me at every step of this work until its completion. Without his guidance and help this M. Phil Thesis would have been absolutely impossible. I acknowledge my indebtedness to him.

I must also mention debt to Padmashree Shri. D. B. Ratnappa Kumbhar for his encouragement. I am thankful to Principal M. D. Deshpande, Night College of Arts and Commerce, Kolhapur for his inspiration and encouragement. I must also thank the Librarians of Shivaji University and Night College Kolhapur and Shri. S. B. Sankanwade, Editor of 'Dnyanprasad' for the Library facilities that they provided to me from time to time.

My thanks are also due to Prof. R. G. Patkar, Shri. Annappa K. Karadage, Shri. R. A. Awati, Kum.S.B. Kadagave, Sou. Rajshri Awati and my wife Sou. Pushpa Karadage for their heartly co-operation. I am personally responsible for the opinions expressed and the erros if any in this thesis.

KOLHAPUR

1/8/1986.

(A. K. KARADAGE)