

PREFACE

This M.Phil Dissertation is an outcome of my urge to understand the history of Virasaiva Movement launched by Basava, the founder of that movement in twelfth century in the lower Deccan. Basava's Movement marked an epoch in the Deccan which had right from the days of Satavahanas to his own time remained under the deep influence of the powerful penetrating force of Brahmanism. Basava, who emerged in the background of newly started Bhakti movement used Saivism altering its form to suit to his revolutionary ideas that aimed at transforming the prevailing socio-religious and economic system into a kind of egalitarian system. Basava's unique personality becomes further illuminating as he being born in a Brahmin community, revolted against some of the basic tenets of Brahmanism and succeeded in forming a new society of Virasaivites.

A Brahmin, revolting against Brahminism is a rare phenomenon in Indian history. The Brahmin was advantageously placed under the Brahminical system of Varanashrama as he stood on the top of social hierarchy and therefore, he always struggled to justify the social inequality with the help of Sastras and ceremonies. It is to the credit of Basava who neither advocated the sanctity of Sastras such as Vedas, Smritis etc. nor did he believe in the efficacy of the

Brahmanical ceremonies. He preached for social equality by condemning the caste and all religious ideas that justified the caste. Like Buddha and Mahavira he too advocated against Brahmanical sacrifices. In sacrifice Dana to the Brahmanas and killing of the animals were the main features. Therefore, Brahmins for centuries together pleaded the case in support of sacrificial culture. In spite of opposition to it from time to time in the ancient past sacrificial religion remained a dominant force in society. By killing animals in the sacrifice no body could attain moksha was Basava's right view.

Basava, therefore, advocated that worshipping God Kudala Sangama the deity at the confluence of rivers Malaprabha and Krishna should be worshipped by wearing the Isthalinga which he considered as a symbol representing God Sangamanatha. In his view one need not go God Sangama even to worship him. Remembering and concentrating on him is enough for his religious attainment. Here Basava is somewhat nearer to prevailing traits of Bhakti movement. He made his religion open to all irrespective of caste and creed and preached all those who came to him. His was not an esoteric religion like Brahminism which was confined to Ashramas and the Traivaranikas. He also created his own band of workers called Siva-saranas who were nothing but the social workers preaching his religious ideals to all those who wished to

know it.

Basava also took care to see that his religion was preached in the language of the people. He strictly warned his followers to avoid using Sanskrit and therefore, the literature of Virasaivism was composed not in Sanskrit but in Kannada language.

Basava and his contemporary disciples laid stress on the dignity of labour, on the equality of men and women on the efficacy of purity of soul and body and on preaching the religion in the language (not in Sanskrit) of the people. They produced a body of literature called Vachana literature written in simple poetic prose in the language (Kannada) of the people. This Vachana literature embodies the thought contents of the social and religious philosophy as preached by Basava. Most of these Vachanas were written by Basava's devotees who met in the hall of experience and debated on the thought-content of each Vachana. Therefore, regarding the authenticity of some of the Vachanas as evidences of Basava's genuine teaching has been controversial by some of the modern scholars who wrote on the Vachanas.

Our main sources of studies here have been the Vachanas attributed to Basava as his sayings and these Vachanas number nearly a thousand. Some of the Vachanas seem to be the work

of his disciples and regarded as interpolation by some scholars. However, it is agreed that the most of the Vachanas are the words of Basavanna himself. The tone, the manner, the language and the content of the Vachanas reveal that they represent to a great extent in a sense the views of the master. Therefore, the problem of chronology of the Vachanas has not been considered as serious one in this M.Phil dissertation. Even if there is an interpolatory part in the Vachana that does not seriously damage the theme explaining the doctrine of Basavanna. Therefore, the Vachanas have been used as main sources for studying the ideas and movement of Virasaivism under the leadership of Basavanna in this dissertation.

While preparing this M.Phil. Dissertation I received help and inspiration from my teachers and well wishing friends from time to time. Dr. B.R. Kamble, Professor and Head, Department of History, Shivaji University helped me in getting this Dissertation prepared especially improving it in its analytical part. I thank him sincerely.

There is a vast body of literature produced by Vachankaras and an equal amount of literature on them. It should have been hardly possible for me to digest all this, had I not received help from several scholars who have specialised and who have been specialising in this field of study. I acknowledge their services with gratitude.

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