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Themes and Thinkers

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Exploring the Modern in Medieval: Political Ideas of Basava

—Prakash S. Desai

*E*xploring the political ideas in Indian philosophical texts has been a tradition in academia, both in India and abroad. The search for the 'political' in Indian classical texts whether they are ancient, medieval or modern became important because many of these texts have ideas which are modern in terms of their aspirations. Political ideas such as equality, liberty and justice are understood as modern aspirations of humanity because they have been philosophized and theorized by taking into consideration certain developments that occurred in Europe after the movements like Reformation and Renaissance. 'In the west, the dogmas of religion began to be challenged by rationalist school of thought resulting in the growth of scientific attitude. Social and political ideas were both the cause and effect of these developments.'[1] Developments such as Industrial Revolution, emergence of Capitalism are the main catalysts in paving way for the birth of modern politics in the realm of political philosophy of Europe. India, being a country with no experience of Industrial Revolution or Capitalism, had to experience modern in its medieval period itself. Modern industrialization and capitalism was introduced in India by the colonial powers. This made a huge impact and many modern narratives and ideas were discussed and experimented in the public domain during this period. Without undergoing developments that happened in Europe, Indian society had the experience of modern in its medieval thought process. The medieval thought was original and spontaneous in its reaction and very much intellectual in its content.

The socio-religious movements of medieval India are known for many ideas which are, in many senses, modern in their content. One of the socio-religious movements that responded to social problems of the time was Veerashaiva Lingayat Movement led by Basava (1131–1167 AD) and other likeminded saints. Basava was its leader, but not the sole person in revolutionizing the social sphere in terms of practice and ideas.[2] The Veerashaiva Lingayat Movement in which Basava played a crucial role, came to the social fore due to the social practices which were controlled, guided and nurtured by priestly class. The priestly class made social interaction among the castes

and classes highly restricted[3]. Inter-dinning and inter-marriage were not possible because of the emergence of social rules which the priestly class had religiously maintained in the society. These social practices had made other communities forget their individual and social existence as human beings, who, in fact, deserved all the rights in social space. Social order of the time did not give any scope to equality or economic betterment. 'The outcome of this was the dehumanizing existence which confronted non-Brahmins.'[4]

There is an example of providing space to socially marginalized people in religious sphere in the form of allowing them to enter sacred places, which had been reserved and monopolized by the so-called privileged people of Vedic religion. It was understood as a new philosophical interpretation of Vedic religion. It is the case of religious liberal attitude exhibited by saint Ramanujacharya. However, such liberal attitude did not materialize in the sense that society as a whole did not wholeheartedly start practising the change which was intended to include the marginalized. Such experiences did not make significant differences at societal level. Ramanujacharya became known for 'his intense humanism-compassion, charity and utter contempt for caste superiority.'[5] However, the aspiration of Ramanuja failed in changing the conservative social structure of the society. It did not make any fundamental change in the life of the people with marginalized background in spiritual sphere.

Apart from the efforts in medieval period, serious intellectual and practical efforts was made in colonial India to bring changes in social sphere. The efforts made by Ram Mohan Roy deserved great attention in any discussion on social change in India. In fact, he is well recognized as India's first modern social reformer. Western modernism had made its impact on his thinking, and he responded to local issues spontaneously with the help of modern ideas. The term modernity, 'has been used to include, among other things, a theory of knowledge, a conception of rationality, modern science, political values such as liberalism, individualism, development and other universalizing discourses.'[6] One could see some of these features in Ram Mohan Roy's social philosophy. He heavily relied on both Indian and European texts to bring changes in the society. He did not completely disconnect from the roots of Indian classical texts and at the same time heavily borrowed from western texts in narrating modern ideas such as equality. Basava's experiment with ideas is completely different and unique because he and his colleagues neither made classical texts as their inspiration nor did they rely on an outside philosophical source. Their response was existential and was on the basis of conscience. The focus of the movement led by Basava and his colleagues 'was on practical spirituality, here and now. The world on the whole was seen not as a bane but as a test of one's strengths, as the arena of struggles.'[7]

Basava was neither a product of modernity nor a person who gave importance to classical texts of Indian spirituality in advocating his humanitarian philosophy. Basava 'perceived clearly the futility of all creeds and the

worship of demons and demoness' that dominated the folk's imagination. He was a relentless rationalist in his attack on ignorance and superstition. He was more intensely modern than many modern thinkers in his insistence on rationality as a valuable aid to the spiritual life.'[8] It is argued that 'the ideological system worked out by Basava and his immediate follower's shows that it constitutes a system of ideas in which the individual, his freedom and his rationality are defined within a communitarian and egalitarian context. This ideological structure became the basis of the first major effort in Karnataka to establish a society based on what may be characterized as modernized values.'[9]

There is no compartmentalization between material and spiritual life in the society envisioned by Basava. His was the society in which secular meets religious life and religion meets secular life. He and his colleagues considered and respected the human body as sacred as a temple and work as salvation.[10]

According to Basava, society is dynamic and progressive but not static. The Saranas never disparaged mundane life for the sake of spiritual life. Nor did they consider married life to be in any way inferior to unmarried life. In their scheme of life, secularism is not contrary to spirituality and scientific outlook is not repugnant to spiritual outlook.[11]

The lyrical sayings of saints, who participated in the movement led by Basava, are known as *vachanas*.[12] Through the *vachanas*, they communicated their ideas on various social issues of the time. 'The Sanskrit religious texts are described as *sruti* and *smriti*. *Smrti* is what is remembered, what is memorable; *sruti*, what is heard, what is received. Virasaiva saints called their compositions *vacana*, or 'what is said'. *Vacana*, as an active mode, stands in opposition to both *sruti* and *smriti*: not what is heard, but what is said; not remembered or received, but uttered here and now.'[13]

Basava's ideas are reflected in his *vachanas*. His *vachanas* become socially, economically and politically important because of their relevance to the societies which remain in constant structural disparities in the matters of self-respect, well-being and free political environment. The social movement led by him and others became a social drama which ended as a tragedy because many of the participants had to sacrifice their life. However, this tragedy had great political messages for humanity and human thought process.

Basavanna was the leading, if not the only, actor in this exciting drama. The aspirations and ideals, the tensions and trials of the epoch are echoed in his *vachanas*. He was not just a saint, but also a man of the world. He was sensitive to the subtle nuances of the word and idiom. His world of metaphors is, therefore, all inclusive. Sometimes tranquil, sometimes stormy, but always imbued with deep devotion all the time, his *vachanas* cover the whole gamut of human experience and emotions.[14]

A comparison of Basava's philosophy with early philosophical streams and modern social and political philosophies is required to understand the philosophical position of him.

Before Basavanna, there were great religious philosophies: Buddhism and Jainism, for example. Although both these philosophies preached kindness for all beings, they looked upon the world as suffering or defilement. Thus, an opposition was set up between the good of the flesh and the good of the spirit, an opposition also seen in Vedanta. In the *Kathopanishad*, a clear distinction is made between *preyas*, the material good and *shreyas*, the spiritual good.[15]

Although Jainism and Buddhism emerged as rational philosophies, their worldview was highly idealistic. These spiritual traditions relegated material good to a lower order.[16] Consequently, they 'could lead to individual salvation but could not do anything to improve the world. The attempts by the later school of Buddhism to lay an emphasis on the collective salvation could not do much because these schools spoke an esoteric language far removed from common people.'[17] This was a lacuna in the early spiritual traditions of India in dealing with change in the material world. Modern materialist philosophies tried to change the world but they too had problems in comprehensive understanding of the human life. 'All great philosophies sought to change the self without having to change society. All great materialist philosophies, liberalism and socialism for example, sought to transform society without transforming the self.'[18] The significance of Basava's philosophy lies in understanding, both spiritual as well as material world. His philosophy could be considered as a link or negotiating point between both. If there is a realization in every individual about the connectivity between changes at individual level and societal level, there is no need of worrying about the external world. This is reflected in one of his *vachanas*:

> Why should you try to mend
> The failings of the world?
> Assuage your bodies first,
> Each one of you!
> Assuage your minds, each one!
> Lord Kudala Sangama
> Does not approve
> Those who bemoan
> The neighbour's grief.[19]

Basava's political philosophy is the outcome of the intellectual dialogues he had with *sharanas* and *sharanes*[20] of the movement. It is the outcome of the political dialogue he had with king and other officials of the monarchy in which he was working. This social and political interaction resulted in the emergence of number of political ideas which bear the features of modern political thought but with their own uniqueness and certain differences. The present paper makes an effort to discuss and understand

the political ideas of Basava. Important reflections of Basava on the questions such as democracy, equality, gender equality, liberty and freedom are discussed in this paper.

Before discussing Basava's political ideas, a discussion of his social, spiritual and political background helps in understanding the context of his ontology and epistemology. Basava was born 'in a Brahmin family at Bagewadi, a provincial town of the Chalukya empire.'[21] His father Madarasa and mother Madalambike 'a distinguished and devout Saiva couple of Bagewadi'[22], were ardent followers of Vedic religion.[23] Basava developed an aversion for the Brahminical rites.[24] 'He was very unhappy to see that the only so-called superior class had the right to perform certain rites and not others. Therefore, he left his parents and his relations out of sheer disgust while he was in his teens.'[25] Basava went to Kudala Sangama, a sacred place at the confluence of two rivers, Krishna and Malaprabha. Basava's aversion to negative traditions and beliefs, which his family members were ardently following, did not get support. 'The first soul that gave him the courage of conviction and moral support, was his sister Nagalambe.'[26] She accompanied him to Kudala Sangama.

At Kudala Sangama, he 'had the good fortune of securing as his guide and preceptor, Isanya Guru who was Chief of the township, a divine of deep insight and a well-read scholar.'[27] Here, under the guidance of his guru, Basava 'must have read, studied and meditated upon a number of literary and philosophical works.'[28] His spiritual progress attained great height in this place. He realized that literary and philosophical works were meant for a selected few and thus started his new philosophy in the form of *vachanas*.[29] 'Thus, commenced an evolutionary process of Basava's revolutionary life.'[30]

After his spiritual studies at Kudala Sangama, Basava went to Mangalavede, 'the then capital of Bijjala; the Kalachurya king and feudatory to Taila III, the Chalukyan emperor ruling from Kalayana.'[31] At Mangalavede, he started his administrative career as a clerk. 'Bijjala succeeded in overthrowing and usurping the throne of the emperor by taking advantage of the political unrest in the empire. After becoming an emperor, he elevated Basavanna to the high post of finance minister.'[32] When Basava came to Kalyana, the prevailing social conditions became a social laboratory for testing his philosophy of social and spiritual change through new practices which were existential in nature. Herein, lies the space and scope for finding sociopolitical aspect of his social movement.

Basava's Experiment with Democracy

There are works on democratic practices during Buddha's period. Democratic practices which existed in *janapadas* were understood as a trace of democracy in ancient India. However, these practices could not be continued and Indian society had to come under the grip of non-democratic,

non-secular empires. Certain practices, which can be considered as democratic, received major attention in Bhakti movements which began in the 12th century. One of the Bhakti movements which gave wide scope to modern democratic practices was the social movement led by Basava. 'Buddhism influenced humanity for nearly a thousand years. Since Buddhism failed to develop its positive aspect, Indian society fell back and beat a retreat for a few centuries. The voice of people was curbed. The Manusmriti was revised with so many harsh injunctions; that Hindus were not even allowed to tour the foreign countries.'[33] The tradition of democracy was again revived in the movement of Basava and his colleagues who went against the existing political system and hierarchical society.

An individual has various options of modern political systems to choose from and decide about his or her political life. Humanity has so far witnessed, and to a certain extent, is witnessing even now, various political systems and is being part of them. Totalitarianism, communism, monarchy, theocracy, democracy, etc., are the political systems which received attention in the human history of political life. Out of all these political systems, democracy has been widely accepted by people in many countries of the world. Every individual has the right to enjoy his or her rights in the democratic political systems. However, realizing democratic ideals without being part of democracy is something to be noted as an exception in theorization of democracy. Basava can be counted as an exception in this narrative of democracy.

Basava did not have the experience of being a part of a democratic political system, but he wanted to experiment with democratic ideas in his time under the despotic monarchy. Basava was working as the prime minister under Kalachuri Chalukya King Bijjala. Although Bijjala was a monarch, he was not a person who could go against public morality.[34] He earned a lot of respect from the people for his concern towards them, but he ran his administration according to social norms and prevailing beliefs. This made him go against the vision of Basava. S.S. Marulayya observes that though Basava lived in monarchical political system, he liked democratic socialism, welcomed democracy, and formed humanitarian social democracy.[35] Democracy and socialism are modern political ideas, but their core principles could be seen in the philosophy of Basava. It needs to be noted here that Basava never aspired for any name or fame, power or position. As a minister, he not only served the king efficiently but also served the common people with his intellect and knowledge. This aspiration of Basava is clearly reflected in one of his *vachanas*:

> I do not seek
> The Brahma rank;
> I do not seek
> The Visnu rank;
> I do not seek
> The Rudra rank.

I seek, O Lord,
No other rank!
Give me of Thy grace
The privilege to know the feet
Of Thy true devotees![36]

One of the efforts made by Basava in extending democratic space to articulation of contemporary issues was the establishment of *Anubhava Manatapa*, the institution which became a democratic forum to deliberate on social, economic and spiritual ideas. 'It was also an institution for all seekers of knowledge and truth.'[37] All saints who gathered here 'criticized, questioned, challenged, corrected, confirmed or corroborated each other's views. Their path of devotion was not based on an abject acceptance. Their attack on superstitious practices was uncompromising. First–hand experience alone became the test of spiritual height and human dignity.'[38] This institution of *Anubhava Manatapa* is considered as a reflective practice[39] because of its reflective, analytical and reformative nature. *Anubhava Manatapa* became a forum for deliberation of experiences and implementation of 'great human values such as care for others, equality, freedom and democracy, and participation of women, much before the European Reformation in the 16th century and the Enlightenment in the 18th century.'[40] The deliberative practice started by Basava in *Anubhava Manatapa* is unique in the history of religions in the sense that he 'did not renounce life like Buddha nor did he move from place to place preaching his gospel. He did not write his commentaries like Sankara on old scripts. He was a free thinker and led a host of people to think freely like him.'[41]

Although Basava was serving as a minister to the king, he was not afraid of the king's wrath or displeasure.[42] His efforts for social change were very much in tune with democracy in the sense that he was not scared of authoritarian tendencies of the establishment. He gave very befitting responses to the king and some disgruntled elements within the ruling establishment when they showed their displeasure to his egalitarian activities. One of his *vachanas* clearly shows this:

Does an elephant fear of the goad, O Lord,
Save that he thinks it is a lion's claw?
And should I fear this Bijjala, Lord,
Kudala Sangama?
I only fear Thee, because Thou art
Compassionate to all things that live![43]

Basava's Experiment as a Civil Society and Public Sphere

Civil society and public sphere are two new concepts which received considerable attention in comparatively recent discussions on democracy in

different parts of the world. The theoretical origin of these concepts is traced in western political thinkers such as Hegel, Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Habermas, etc. Associational life in debating and protesting on national and international issues in different parts of the world in recent times is being studied as part of civil society and public sphere. A comparative study[44] on public spheres and civil society shows a strong assumption in recent studies of modernization and globalization 'that the development of a vibrant civil society is a basic component of modernity, above all of democratic modernity.'[45] The discourse of these studies of modernization and globalization 'has been squarely put in the framework of modern Western, especially European, experience. In this discourse, public spheres and civil society were often conflated, and civil society was often conceived as a distinct ontological entity facing another such entity—the sate.'[46] If the idea of a civil society of western experience was put in a non-European experience and analysed, it gives a different picture of civil society and public sphere.

It is stated 'that Indian modernities have emerged out of process of criticism, creativity and struggles through history as in the revolt of Buddha, the rise of Upanishadic spirituality, Bhakti movements in medieval India.'[47] The new understanding of civil society and public sphere guides in locating and analysing the movement led by Basava as a civil society and its sphere as public sphere.[48]

> Trysts with modernities in India have involved a transformative dialogue between reason and tradition, tradition and modernity, and rationality and spirituality which has shaped their paths, contents and visions. These modernities have generated their own public spaces of coming together, dialogues and public deliberations which bear parallels to what we speak of civil society in the modern west.[49]

The socio-religious movement led by Basava as one of the unique Bhakti movements came to the fore as a critique of social practices with its creativity and struggles. Although the movement led by Basava had to have an uneasy relationship with the political establishment of its time, it did not turn it into another entity that needs to be directly engaged. This movement's basic concern was the social and spiritual structure of the society. In this process, when it faced certain questions from the political establishment, they had to be engaged with and had to deal with many issues which are political in nature.

It is pointed out that civil society is not only a space of mediating institutions, but it is also a space of 'mobilization where mobilization refers not only to socio-political mobilizations but also socio-spiritual mobilizations including reflective mobilization of self.'[50] Basava, as a leader of the socio-spiritual movement, mobilized the concerned people against the conservative socio-religious structure. This social mobilization could also be understood as 'political' because it received disapproval from the monarchical political system which supported the very conservative social structure responsible for social exclusion of many.

The importance of communication and literature as analysed facilitates significant scope for making new observations on Basava's movement and literature.[51] 'A Habermasian perspective on civil society helps us understand the key importance of communication, especially communicative action, in the work of civil society. In the history of India we find struggles for people's languages beyond the language of the elites and the pundits.'[52] *Vachanas* of all *sharanas* and *sharanes* are in a language which could be easily understood by the common people. The spirituality and social change that they discussed was made accessible to everyone in the society. They did not employ the language of the elites and restricted language as an agency to communicate messages. Their intellect made intellectualism open to all so that everyone shared the experiences of their life through *vachanas*. Basava and his fellow *sharanas* and *sharanes* 'created a whole literature whose main quality was honest and deep self-exploration.'[53] They 'never wrote anything that they did not deeply and personally experience. This accounts for the fact that in most *vachanas,* the experience and the language connected with the actual profession or occupation of the writer are crystallized. Inward exploration and the anguish of the soul became the very stuff of the literature produced in this period.'[54] The new understanding on public sphere brings out the importance of literature in the creation of public spheres.[55] 'Expression in the field of literature is simultaneously self, mutual and public and helps in the creation of public spheres in societies.'[56] Through their *vachanas,* Basava and his colleagues brought the issues of social inequality and spiritual alienation to the public and created a public sphere that could bring all these issues to public notice. In due course of time, the issues they brought out to the public sphere received attention of the political establishment.

Equality

Rationalism became the basis for Basava in dealing with issues like social equality. The very rationale in Basava's philosophy facilitates to understand the political in his ideas. Basava did not believe in ignorance and superstition. His rationality did not allow these to be connected with spiritual life.[57]

> The philosophy of Basavanna seems close to radical-social materialism. Many of his anxieties were immediate and related to the physical rather than the metaphysical world. His philosophy was constituted of a sharp critique of caste and gender differences, condemnation of idol worship, a rejection of celibacy, asceticism and misogyny as essential elements of male salvation and his strong assertion of gender equality in the spiritual path.[58]

Equality as an idea and human aspiration received enough attention in western political philosophy. Equality has been mainly discussed as responsible in bringing changes in political, social and economic conditions. Spiritual inequality did not get the required attention in the discussion on social

inequality. Modern Indian political philosophy is also not an exception in this regard. Efforts were made to extend equality in social, economic and political sphere. But, spiritual equality did not become an issue to be discussed and debated. It is not found even in the socio-political thought of thinkers like Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda. Some effort was made by Pandita Ramabai but the aspiration was only confined to studying religious literature and not extended to women availing equal religious rights such as following and practicing rites and rituals like men.

Basava's understanding of equality was not just in material sense. It was a social, spiritual and humanitarian ideal. 'Basaweshwara did not start his movement for equality in a vacuum. He was greatly influenced by the social, religious, economic and political conditions prevailing in his time.'[59] Equal access to spirituality and divine was one of the problems that many people in the society had to face. Basava made huge efforts to ensure and realize this spiritual equality. 'Thus man's belief in God becomes the basis of Basava's egalitarianism.'[60] Through one of his *vachanas,* Basava asks the world not to ask the person who he (she) is. Rather, the world should acknowledge the person as son or daughter of the God:

> 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![61]

Basava understood the question of equality on the basis of egalitarian humanism. For him, religion should be the space which ensures kindness, sympathy, equality, to every human being. Such aspiration is expressed in one of his *vachanas*:

> What sort of religion can it be
> Without compassion?
> Compassion needs must be
> Towards all living things;
> Compassion is the root
> Of all religious faiths:
> Lord Kudala Sanga does not care
> For what is not like this.[62]

As a part of their ideology, Basava and other poet saints of the Lingayat Movement criticized the institution of caste. They did so with the intention of creating social equality, which was the need of the time, and because of its absence, majority had to lead a non-human existence. *Vachanas* of Basava and his colleagues are critical about the caste system. Basava denies the notion of higher and lower on the basis of birth:

> Unless the flow of blood appear,
> There is no harbourage

Wherein the embryo may dwell.
The function of the seed is e'er the same.
Greed, lust, anger and joy,
All other passions are the same.
Whatever you read or hear, what fruit?
What is the rule to judge a caste?
'The embryo needs the seven elements;
It is the same birth out of the same womb;
Same the alliance of self and soul:
What, then, the usefulness of caste?'
You are a blacksmith if you heat;
A washer man if you beat;
A weaver, if you lay the warp;
A Brahmin, if you read the books!
Is anybody in the world
Delivered through the ear?
Therefore, O Kudala Sangama Lord,
The well-born is the man who knows
The nature of Divinity! [63]

Basava's message on the hollowness of caste pride is worth mention-ing. He asked his fellow *sharanas* to overcome the problem of showing meaningless superiority of social backgrounds. Leaving aside the 'ego' and remaining humble to realize divinity was the message of Basava:

Unless the pride of caste is gone,
How can one be a Sarana?
Unless the bonds of fate have left,
How can one be a devotee?
Leaving all trace of I and Mine,
One has to be the lowest of the low!
O Kudala Sangama Lord, Thy Saranas are
Like ghee that comes
When milk is mixed with sour and breaks! [64]

There was a practice in the society, and to a certain extent it is contin-ued even today, of denying equal existence to all on the basis of certain prejudices. Practices such as purity and pollution were followed and these practices denied respectful existence to many in the society. Since nature, salvation and truth are one and the same, there should be no scope for prej-udices. The *vachana* of Basava makes humanity overcome such prejudices:

Earth is one and the same
For pariah street
And Shiva temple;
Water is one and the same
For washing shit
And ritual cleaning;
All castes are one
For a man with self-knowledge

> Salvation's fruit is one and the same
> For all six systems;
> Truth is one,
> O master Kudalasangama
> For the one who knows you[65]

As a part of his views on equality, Basava came up with two concepts namely, *Kayaka* and *Dasoha*. *Kayaka* means a way of producing wealth and *Dasoha* means distribution of wealth.[66] Basava's idea of work ethic 'aimed at a socialist and humanistic society'[67] in which all are equal irrespective of any identity which could become a hindrance in its realization. 'Basava advocated towards building an egalitarian community based on the dignity of work, community service and sharing, diligence, thrift, and sobriety.'[68]

Wealth cannot be merely understood as material goods. It has the meaning of producing anything that benefits humanity in material, spiritual and aesthetic sphere. Any work that produces and benefits humanity is *kayaka*. Basava did not undermine any work. Respecting every work produced by any one for the cause of humanity had been one of the objectives of the movement heralded by him. In his movement, people from various work cultures and professions were wholeheartedly welcomed, and many people from lower sections of the society from various professions which were considered as impure, voluntarily and actively participated and contributed both philosophically and as activists.

The important feature of *kayaka* is dignity of labour. Basava was a great advocate of the importance of physical labour. He played a significant role in infusing self-respect and confidence among the socially marginalized sections of the society. Every person who follows a profession for society's benefit has respect and his or her work should receive respect. It does not suggest any caste but merely profession. For Basava all professions are equally important, and there should not be any feeling of superiority or inferiority in performing work of any kind which serves the purpose of well-being and welfare of all. Individual can take up any profession which is creative and does not have a violent origin and that worker should pursue the work as a seeker of truth.[69] An individual should not become a burden for the society, and he or she should never be dependent on others as beggars. Work should not only help an individual who takes it up, but also be there for the welfare of the society.[70]

> Basavanna defined *Kayaka* not merely as labour or work related to the livelihood of the individual: he added to it a crucial social dimension. As a result, *Kayaka* was defined as labour whose fruits should not only go to the individual but, once that is achieved, must be shared by others.[71]

The concept of *kayaka* is sometimes compared with the idea of *Karmayoga*. But, there is huge difference between them. 'On the face of it, *Kayaka* philosophy appears to be similar to *Karmayoga*, preached in the

Bhagavad Gita. However, *Karmayoga* was part of the Varnashrama social order. The philosophy of *Kayaka* was part of an ethos opposed to the caste system.'[72] Basava opposed the practice of imposition of hereditary profession on an individual level and advocated for free choice of profession.[73]

The concept of *dasoha* has a larger meaning of serving and sharing excessive wealth of knowledge, food, and shelter with the needy. Moreover, it is a voluntary act with wholeheartedness. One who does *dasoha* is not supposed to feel proud of his act of serving people, and the person who receives such services is not supposed to feel that he or she is at the mercy of someone. Both server and receiver should feel that they perform it as a voluntary act and need. *Kayaka* 'is not motivated by profit. It is to be done in the spirit of *Dasoha*. The earning from this is to be dedicated to the preacher or *jangama* who in his turn utilizes it for the good of the society. *Kayaka* is a duty by which each one has to maintain oneself, and render its proceeds to the welfare of the society as a whole.'[74] Basava found connection between *Kayaka* and *Dasoha*. The following *vachana* of Basava conveys this:

> Let not, O Lord, my body, mind and wealth
> Slacken in service of Thy Saranas!
> Make Thou my body thrill
> To service; make my mind
> Be charmed by it;
> And, for it, make my wealth to waste.
> Make me to sing and dance, to gaze and love,
> Yearn and rejoice, and be at peace
> Within Thy Saranas' grace,
> O Kudala Sangama Lord ![75]

Basavanna's concepts of *Kayaka* and *Dasoha* have to be compared with Liberal and Marxist theories on the question of equality and class struggle. This comparison is required to understand the concept of equality in broader philosophical framework. No doubt, western political philosophy influenced modern Indian political thinking in bringing about social change. However, the West can also seek input from the East in further enriching ideas, to make socio-political life more meaningful and widely acceptable to all societal sectors and geographical barriers. In Liberalism, especially in its classical version and neo-liberalism, accumulation of wealth or capital is not considered as unethical. Hence, there is always the possibility of the working class or any other socially and economically marginalized class not getting equal opportunity to survive in the society. For Socialism, creation of a classless society by imposing economic discipline is not unethical. However, this economic discipline is not voluntary but an imposed one. Class struggle is envisaged for realizing this arrangement. Such arrangement goes against the democratic spirit. The concepts of *kayaka* and *dasoha* do not suggest either accumulation of wealth or class struggle for the creation of an egalitarian society. They convey that humans need to realize about humanity and work towards creation of an egalitarian society by voluntarily

being active in producing and sharing it. That is why Basava said 'work is heaven'. Humans need to create heaven on earth through work and service. It is rightly observed that *dasoha* and *kayaka* 'are aimed at the reduction of disparities.'[76] To reduce the social and economic disparity in the society of his time, Basava employed these two concepts. They became successful because they were religiously practiced by the followers.

His views on equality among different castes and classes prove that his ideal was a casteless and classless society. He wanted to realize this ideal not by any violent approaches which could be not well accepted by all. He pursued the method of dialogue and discussion with the support of practices followed by him and by his colleagues and supporters. Modern political theories, both liberalism and socialism and their various streams, strived to bring changes at social, economic and political level. Liberalism, in its early stages made major contribution to social change. However, it had to revise its classical economic notion when it received a major contestation from Communism as propounded by Karl Marx. It was because of the philosophical challenge posed by Communism that the liberal thinkers had to think of the idea of a welfare state to accommodate the interests and demands of all sections of the society. The essence of Karl Marx's philosophy is the creation of a classless society. However, Marx advocated class struggle for the realization of this society. Liberals had to revise their understanding of state to counter the philosophical onslaught of communism. Fear of revolution became the main reason for liberalism to propound welfare state. Struggle between classes, which could lead to violence, became method for Marx in realizing his ideal. In case of liberalism, fear made it protect its ideal political vision. Basava did not believe in violence and did not have any fear in realizing casteless and classless society.

The sociology or the political sociology of the Bhakti movement is not free from criticism in a number of Indian sociological writings. There are arguments against Bhakti movements that 'they failed to make a dent on caste hierarchy, for at the village level, the system of production of food grains and other necessities was inextricably bound up with a caste-based division of labour. The moral is that ideological attacks on hierarchy and Brahmanical claims to supremacy failed to create an egalitarian social order since at the local level the production of basic needs was inextricably bound up with jati.'[77] However, uniqueness of Bhakti movements lies in the fact that they laid a foundation for social critique of caste hierarchies and restrictions. This applies to the critique of Basava and other lingayat saint-poets. It is because of their critique of the institution of caste that larger debate took place on the question of caste. It should be noted that Basava, in his lifetime, had to face lots of trouble in pursuing his movement. 'To the members of the upper classes of the society, the practical side of the movement appeared more reprehensible and shocking than its theoretical and doctrinal character. The adverse reactions, therefore, were immediate and widespread, making themselves felt in diverse forms.'[78] Social criticism

by Bhakti movements of the hierarchies and discriminations associated with caste and class has had a huge influence on the Dalit-Bahujan social critique of the caste system in the late 19th century and in 20th century India. This resulted in some hope for the marginalized in the form of constitutional guarantee of equality and justice. To specifically state Basava's contribution, it is because of the tradition of humanism and egalitarianism as propagated by him that, to an extent one could witness the progressive outlook in the societies which experienced his movement.

Gender Equality

Basava cannot be considered as a philosopher who mainly focussed on the question of gender equality. Whatever efforts he made are the result of his larger concern of humanity, the ideal of being equal and on par with everyone in any possible area. 'Basava had heralded an age of honour, economic and social equality for women. The wind of change which softly blew made many more women grow to the full stature they were capable of growing.'[79] The *Anubhava Manatapa* started by Basava along with other *sharanas* became a forum for many *sharanes* to express their views on the social issues of the time. The conversation between Allam Prabhu and Mahadevi is well-quoted as one of the best examples of practice of providing enough space to women in all deliberations on social and spiritual issues.[80] All Shiv *Sharanes* (those who were in the movement) asserted their identity and made their views be seriously received by others. Shiv *Sharanes* 'sought to carve out a sacred and social space for themselves, at least in the formative, radical phase of the movement.'[81]

The status of women in society and in every sphere of life was secondary because of the hardcore patriarchy supported by rulers and religious authorities. Basava brought about philosophical and practical changes in the patriarchal social structure. 'The society which had been half paralyzed in the absence of freedom for women, received from him new life and energy. Basavesvara condemned child marriages and encouraged widow remarriages, and thereby strengthened the social structure and promoted its orderly growth.'[82] His bold ideas and experiments ushered in new era for women in the sense that women could get an opportunity to prove that they were equal in all spheres of life. Intellectually, in fact, *sharanes* like Mahadevi proved better than many others in intellectually understanding the human world.

The efforts for empowerment of women have had the agenda of extending social, economic and political rights to women. If the early waves of feminism in Europe are taken into consideration, the focus was on social, economic and political rights. Social rights, in terms of equal space for women in the field of religion, did not become a major concern. This concern was attended by Basava much earlier to Modern Feminism. 'There are good numbers of reformers who worked for securing social, economic and

political rights for women. None, however, worked to secure equal rights in the field of religion, too.'[83] It is Basava, 'the one and only one who declared that woman is entitled to religious initiation and salvation same as man.'[84] However, the philosophy of Basava did not specifically state about *Jangama* (priestly class) status for women. Women 'were not conceded the *Jangama* status which meant that women could neither conduct priestly ceremonies nor become head of a *Virasaiva* mutt or religious organization.'[85] This was one of the missing aspects in Basava's efforts for gender equality.

Liberty and Freedom

Liberty and freedom are the two ideas on which enough effort has been made by the thinkers from the West and the East. Although, there is larger unanimity on modern understanding of freedom and liberty, what constitutes freedom is differently understood in the philosophies of different period and different parts of the world. 'The term closest to liberty in the Indian tradition is *mukti*; its connotations, however are entirely other-worldly. Understood either as renunciation or as deliverance from the chain of rebirths, the initial understanding of *mukti* did not refer to freedom from social restrictions.'[86] To state more about the foundations of freedom in India:

> There is a general agreement among most classic Hindu theorists that the ultimate goal of human endeavour is *moksa* or liberation—that is, the freeing of the individual from the 'bondage' of earthly existence. But there are three lesser goals of human activity known as *dharma, artha,* and *kama* – duty, wealth, and pleasure. These worldly objectives, if properly pursued, may, it is held, lead one eventually to a state of existence where he may be able to seek *moksa* itself. Indian political thought deals with the problems of *dharma* and *artha* which provide the foundations of political and social institutions, but the solution of these problems is in the broadest sense essentially only a step toward an ultimate *moksa*.[87]

Thinking on freedom and liberty in the 19th century and early 20th century in modern Indian thought deviated from the early understandings. Freedom from social, economic and political restrictions became part of the thought process. But, with some exceptions most of the thinking reflected classical understanding of freedom and liberty indirectly. In this context, Basava's effort is new in the realm of Indian political philosophy because he did not try to rely on classical texts in giving life to these terms. His response was existential and situational. He advocated freedom and liberty for people belonging to all castes and gender. The effort of Basava and other saints paved a way for freedom of expression and liberty to women and other deprived sections in the social sphere.

Basava did not hesitate to support the practice of social freedom. He 'declared that the devotees of God irrespective of the professions they

followed, were all equal, and that they were the truly well-born. And, as equals, they could freely eat with each other and marry into each other's families.'[88] One incident of inter-caste marriage arranged by him 'between the daughter of Madhuvayya, a brahmin, and the son of Haralyya, an untouchable'[89] vindicates the principles that Basava preached. This inter-caste marriage became a controversy because social restrictions were so strong that such acts were unthinkable during that time.

Basava made people be free from certain beliefs about sacred places and salvation. It was a belief in the society that one has to go to temples and visit sacred places to get salvation or liberation of the soul. Regarding such beliefs, Basava observes:

> Those who have money build
> Temples to Siva: what can I build?
> A poor man, Lord, am I !
> My body is the shrine
> Its pillars are my legs,
> The golden pinnacle, my head
> Hear me, Kudala Sanagama Lord,
> There is destruction for what stands,
> But not for that which moves![90]

Basava advocated liberty and freedom not only in terms of rights but also as duties. Modern political philosophies have dealt with the connection between rights and duties but are devoid of the linkage between individual and common good. If individual remains good in his or her acts and thinking, it would lead to common good. Individual purity and accountability in the utilization of other people's or public property is required for common good. An individual being truthful to the words and being tolerant towards others causes social trust in the society. Self-praise makes an individual ignorant of the goodness in others. If every individual internalizes certain duties, there would not arise quarrels among individuals in social, economic and political sphere. Basava recognized that the purpose of religion 'was to lead a better life in this world and not to acquire reward in the other far-off world. He exhorted men and women to live a disciplined life, making the best use of the rare opportunities and privileges conferred upon them by the Creator.'[91] Spiritual life, bound with duties towards humanity, is like the process of secularizing religion. It is secularizing in the sense that, individual tries to strive for common welfare and well-being through duties and disciplines rather than through hollow dogmas and rituals. Searching the secular in religion and religion in the secular was the ontological effort of Basava. According to him, each individual has the right to freedom in social and spiritual sphere. However, this claim of right has duties attached with it. He expressed this notion in his *vachana*:

> Thou shalt not steal nor kill;
> Nor speak a lie;
> Be angry with no one,

> Nor scorn another man;
> Nor glory in thyself;
> Nor others hold to blame...
> This is your inward purity;
> This is your outward purity;
> This is the way to win our Lord
> Kudala Sangama.[92]

Humans should enjoy freedom, but that freedom is not a license to act and behave according to one's whims and fancies. For society to be to peaceful and modest, each person has to follow certain manners in behaviour while dealing with others in the society. Some observations of Basava may look highly moralistic and idealistic, but they were very much in need, given the socio-political environ of his time. There was no respect and dignity for some sections of the society. They were deprived of any respect and dignity in the society. Taking into account the social and economic conditions of this section, and to ensure life with self-respect, he desired, on the part of every individual to follow some manners. Basava conveys the importance of this in the following *vachana*:

> He is a devotee
> Who greets with folded hands
> Each devotee he meets:
> Your gentle speech is worth
> All counting of beads;
> Your gentle speech is worth
> All penances;
> True modesty is worth
> Sadasivas's grace.
> Lord Kudala Sanga spurns those
> Who're not like this.[93]

Conclusion

S.S. Marulayya has rightly described the political philosophy of Basava as a philosophy of the common man.[94] Political ideas of Basava are, in essence, similar to the modern political philosophy that responded to people of different social categories which remained marginal in the different societies in different times. Democracy as means to realize ideal society, and equality, liberty and freedom for all, were the core concerns of Basava. However, the aspiration and practice of Basava did not last long:

> The bold socio-religious experiment begun by Basavanna and his contemporaries to revolutionize life and letters soon led to violence and chaos. To protect themselves from the fury released by the ruling powers, the followers of the movement dispersed or went underground for well over two centuries. It was to re-emerge as a

state-supported community during the reign of Praudadevaraya, the emperor of Vijayanagar. By this time, the movement had changed into a faith striving for co-existence with those oppressive classes which it had once opposed, with little commitment to the oppressed which it had once supported.[95]

Nevertheless, Basava's struggle in terms of questioning the social order which had remained exclusive for many, remains as an inspiration to further drag the struggle for social inclusiveness. The way Dalit-Bahujan thinkers brought out the issues of freedom, self-respect and dignity in the late 19th century and early 20th century, in the times of social colonialism under the rule of political colonial rulers, Basava strived for humanism as basis for life, in pre-modern society, under the rule of medieval monarchy.

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