

Quest for Egalitarian Socio-spiritual Order: Lingayats and Their Practices

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Abstract

The Lingayat movement led by Basava, Allama, Mahadevi and many others in Karnataka in the twelfth century stands as one of the important movements that challenged, protested and, to a major extent, succeeded in unseating the social supremacy of the upper strata of the society. However, this tradition of egalitarian ideals is waning away from the followers of the Lingayat movement. It is observed that the superficial practices among the many followers of this movement do not have philosophical sanctity. These practices make the followers of the Lingayat movement almost a prototype of Hindu orthodoxy and question their claims of being different. Contradictions and confusion, in the understanding of the community's ideals by the followers, may put the community in a sort of cultural crisis. The state of practice of ideals among the followers could be understood in terms of their assertions of caste and sub-caste identity; the demand for a separate religious identity on the basis of unique cultural beliefs; and confusing and contradictory political orientations.

Keywords

Caste, Lingayat, Karnataka, *math*, reservation, Veerashaiva

Introduction

Protest and dissent against social evils and social supremacy has been there in India for centuries. From the time of Buddha to contemporary Dalit movements, commitment of social evils and assertion of supremacy on the part of upper strata of the society have been challenged and opposed. With such social history of India, the Lingayat movement led by Basava, Allama, Mahadevi and many other social reformers in Karnataka in the twelfth century stands as one of the important movements that challenged, protested and, to a major extent, succeeded in destabilizing the social supremacy of the so-called upper strata of the society. It contributed 'liberal social values through its magnificent literature and philosophy' (Venugopal, 2004, p. 145). It believed in egalitarian ideals and 'aimed at establishing a society devoid of caste or class' (Bali, 2008, p. 238). Moreover, because of its radical aspirations, it is even termed as 'a kind of Eastern Protestantism' (Venugopal, 1990, p. S82).

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Egalitarian aspiration could be observed in the non-Vedic communities such as Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs since their emergence in the Indian social space. However, departure from such aspiration gained momentum as these communities tried to become independent religious communities or sects. As it happened with other spiritual movements in India, the tradition of egalitarian ideal is waning away from the followers of the Lingayat movement. The community which claims that it adheres to egalitarian ideals of Basava has shown limited examples of practice in its recent past and present existence. The movement started with protest against social evils of the time such as rigid caste system, idol worship, untouchability, and so on, but ‘succumbed to the same evils it has decried’ (Oommen, 1990, p. 61). It ‘underwent a process of institutionalization leading to the emergence of a codified ideology, hierarchical organization and religious bureaucracy which inevitably led to a compromising and reconciliatory rather than an opposing attitude towards Hindu orthodoxy, thereby eroding its vitality and ending up as a sect’ (Oommen, 1990, p. 61).

Adherents of the Lingayat movement and its philosophy are variously called as Veerashaivas, Lingayats, Lingavants (Bali, 2008, p. 233) and Veerashaiva Lingayats, but today they are commonly known as Lingayats. Except in Udupi and Mangalore, Lingayats are found in all districts of Karnataka. They are also found in some districts of Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Apart from cultural institutions such as *maths* and religious places, and family relationship, it is the Veerashaiva Mahasabha¹ that binds them together as a community having a common cultural identity.

How the Lingayat community is drifting away from its egalitarian ideals to conservative practices can be understood by raising certain pertinent questions. The present article makes an effort to understand how the community has forsaken the ideals, which it once followed. One of the important questions that needs to be understood about the community is as follows: to what extent has it been making an effort to realize the ideal of casteless society? Other issues that need to be addressed are as follows: the community’s demand for a separate religious identity and how the political belief of the followers is not in tandem with their spiritual beliefs. These issues are different from each other; nevertheless, they are the issues that help to understand how the community is moving towards conservative practice. An understanding of all these issues can help in knowing the dynamics of change in the community in the recent past and present.

Caste Consciousness and Certain Deviations in the Community

The very reason for the Lingayat movement to come to the fore was social beliefs and practices, which denied human dignity and respect to many in the society (Siddalingaiah, 2012, pp. 1–24). Followers of this movement ‘rejected a hierarchy of occupational groups based on birth and substituted a more egalitarian social structure’ (Michael, 1982, p. 606). However, the present situation in the community is contrary to these rejections of such beliefs and practices (Darga, 2018, p. 109).

The presence of various sub-castes, which developed in the community, makes it almost a prototype of Hindu religion (Darga, 2017, pp. 24–25). There are priestly castes, trading castes, agricultural and other occupational castes. Assertion of the caste identity has increased in the community to a high level, in the sense that each caste group of the community is looking forward to their own socio-economic development and participation in the political process by organizing themselves around separate caste associations. Many caste groups of the community have established their own caste associations. Sub-caste associations of the community are not so active in states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, but they are quite active in Karnataka and Maharashtra. Various subgroups such as Banajiga, Panchamasali, and so on are actively involved in this process. Interestingly, Lingayat seers are invited for the functions and programmes organized by these caste associations. Seers do not hesitate to attend such programmes, and in one such function of the Lingayat Banajiga community held in recent

past, Shivamurthy Swamiji of Chitradurg *math* made a contradictory statement: ‘Highlighting the need to follow Basavanna’s ideals, he called upon the community to unite for their overall betterment’ (*The Hindu*, 2012). Such calls put the very ideal of casteless society of Basava in the doldrums. It could be difficult to follow the ideals of Basava if material interests become the dominant concern for the community. There is a possibility of the ideals becoming unimportant in the process of community welfare. It might also pave the way for sectarianism or subgroup consciousness, as it already exists among many.

It is observed that ‘the castes that exist within Lingayatism are not *hierarchically* arranged, as in the Hindu orthodoxy, but are *competitively* related to each other. This means that a particular caste can improve its prospects and move far ahead of the other castes’ (Venugopal, 1990, p. S82). There is full scope for all subgroups of the community to improve their prospects in many spheres, and many subgroups have in fact achieved progress. Today, castes like Sadus, Adi Banajigas, Raddis have risen in their social status. Reasons for this may be their progress in politics, education and, to a certain extent, economic condition. However, this cannot be said about other small caste groups like Hugaris, Hadapads and among others. Although the presence of caste system in the community does not have any textual sanctity, its dynamics is similar to the way it is being practised in Hindu orthodoxy.

Social relationship, especially marriage, is one of the important indicators in analysing change and continuity in any given community. Beliefs and practices among followers of the community pertaining to marriage have not changed significantly, that is, there is no conscious effort to support or encourage inter-caste marriages among the community members. Even now, many followers of the community go according to their sub-castes in selecting the groom or bride. Of course, there are cases of inter-caste marriages among them, but such cases are rare and do not in any way suggest strong influence of the Lingayat philosophy on the community with respect to marriage.

There is no philosophical backing for the belief in auspicious days or zodiac match (based on horoscopes) for a marriage relationship in the community. However, all these have appeared in the community, and such practices are followed by many including the educated class of the community. This is another area wherein barring few exceptions, the seers of the Lingayat *maths* have failed to orient the community appropriately. Nevertheless, the work done by some seers in protesting against practices which are deviations of the humanistic and rationalistic basis of the Lingayat movement and philosophy is worth noting here. Such remarkable work carried out by the seers of Nidumamidi, Gadag and Chitradurg *maths* is appreciated by many progressive Lingayats and non-Lingayats.

Until recently, there was a common practice among the Lingayats to name their children as per the Lingayat tradition. Common names among Lingayats used to be Basavaraj, Sharanabasava, Kumaraswamy, Mallikarjun, Mahantesh, Siddharama, Mahadevi, Neela, and so on or other non-scriptural and non-Brahminical Hindu names such as Prakash, Vijay, Ajay, and so on. In recent years, one can see the use of Hindu scriptural and Brahminic names such as Raghvendra, Venkatesh, Radha, and so on. Certain rituals which are common in the Hindu community such as *Satyanarayan Puja* are followed by Lingayats. Such practices are not followed by every family but have become popular recently like many others. It can be argued that these are influences of the larger Hindu society, and occur naturally, but this puts the uniqueness of the community to question.

The community is not only moving closer towards certain practices of orthodox Hinduism but is also trying to deviate from the radical ideals of the Lingayat movement (Chandrashekhara, 2017, p. 33). Recent studies (Boratti, 2010) on the Lingayat philosophy and its followers have pointed out how the community elite in the past were ‘agitated whenever Basava was portrayed as a champion of the downtrodden and an anti-*varna* crusader’ (Boratti, 2010, p. 183). In the period of the early twentieth century, some Lingayat scholars and leaders favoured the community’s claim for upward mobility rather than ‘accepting lower

castes/classes into the social domain of the community' (Boratti, 2010, p. 184). The deviant practices that have been taking place in the community with respect to its philosophy have not been free from criticism and have met with radical opposition from groups within and outside the community.

The cultural institution, which has been very vocal in articulating the philosophy of the Lingayat movement, is the Viswa Kalyan Mission of *Mate*² Mahadevi. Mate Mahadevi has been spearheading the new radical Lingayat movement by being determined and constant at work. She relies on the mode of lectures and utilizes her institution's own monthly magazine³ to spread the radical message of Basava. However, the new radical institution headed by Mate Mahadevi is not free from problems. It has not yet received wide acceptance by the community as a historical institution like the Lingayat *maths*. It has a substantial following of radicals and is more attractive to the philosophically conscious, educated Lingayat and non-Lingayat castes. In fact, her efforts can be considered as democratic experiments in spirituality. They are acts of spiritual democracy because, for the first time in the history of modern Lingayat society, a woman is leading and guiding the movement for the realization of the spiritual message of Basava.

Again, the uneasy response to her efforts on the part of community shows that the community as an entity is not ready to enlarge the scope for spiritual democracy by allowing women to be part of the religious bureaucracy of the community. Here, one needs to recall the early period of the Lingayat movement in which many women actively participated and contributed philosophically. 'Gender equality and the creation of sacred space for and by women was an essential feature of Virasaivite ideology' (Ramaswamy, 1996, p. 190).

The other issue that has made many sub-castes in the community to be particular about their castes is the issue of reservation. Almost all subgroups within the community are demanding reservation in employment and admission on the basis of their socio-economic backwardness. In fact, many subgroups of the community have already got reservation in employment as per state reservation policy in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.⁴

There was a demand for reservation for the community in Andhra Pradesh. Various community associations demanded inclusion of the community in the list of backward classes (Andhra Pradesh Commission for Backward Classes, 2009). The community has been recognized as other backward class (OBC) in Kerala⁵ and Tamil Nadu (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2008). Many subgroups of the community have been included in the Central OBC list.⁶ The tendency of the community to demand reservation leads one to inquire to what extent the spiritual sphere of the community has succeeded in eliminating caste consciousness among the members and how it has contributed to the process of removing caste discrimination between the different groups within the community.

Extending reservation to non-Brahmin castes has a long history in Karnataka. The Mysore princely state initiated the practice of providing representation to backward classes in public services (Pinto, 1994, p. 2270). After Independence, when the attempt was made to extend the reservation benefits to the OBCs, the High Court had to intervene in 1958 and quash 'reservation based on a single indicator of caste' (Pinto, 1994, p. 2270). The state government had to set up a committee 'to suggest criteria for backwardness' (Pinto, 1994, p. 2270). For this purpose, the Nagan Gowda Committee was set up in 1960. Criteria evolved by the committee to decide the backwardness of any community included the social position of the community in society, educational backwardness of the community and community's representation in government service (Pinto, 1994, p. 2270). The committee had 'classified the entire Lingayat community as socially forward' (Hebsur, 1981, p. 18). On the basis of this criteria, Lingayats were excluded from the reservation benefits (Pinto, 1994, p. 2270). However, the government had to yield to the representation of the community leaders and classify them as backward (Hebsur, 1981, p. 18). But the Lingayat community and issue of reservation again came to the fore when the Backward

Commission headed by L. G. Havanur submitted its report. Devraj Urs constituted the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission in 1972 under the chairmanship of L. G. Havanur (Hebsur, 1981, p. 19). The Commission submitted its report in 1975 and it was approved by the government in 1977. This Commission had excluded majority of Lingayats from the reserved category (Patil, 2002, p. 384).

There was widespread opposition to Havanur Committee report (Patil, 2002, p. 195). It has even been observed that the move of the Government was to divide the community because few subgroups 'could get reservation if they could give an affidavit as Hindu caste' (Patil, 2002, p. 384). There are certain subsections among the *Lingayats* which have parallel occupational groups in the Hindu community like *Ganiga* (oil business), *Nekar* (weavers), *Shimpi* (tailors) and so on (Patil, 2002, p. 384). The response of the community against the government is difficult to discern. Was the community really interested in empowering marginal groups within the community or was it unhappy that the only few subgroups in the community could avail benefits? These are doubts that one can express about the community on this issue. If the Lingayat community had been really concerned about the other marginal groups in its fold, it should have evolved the strategies on its own and/or with the help of the state. 'The exclusion of Lingayats from the backward classes list was deeply resented by them especially as their political rivals were included in the list' (Srinivas & Panini, 1984, p. 71). The other dominant community, Vokkaligas, was recommended for reservation by the Havanur Commission (Patil, 2002, p. 386). The Lingayat community finally got the backward tag when Ramakrishna Hegde became Chief Minister of the state.

A comprehensive social and educational survey was conducted in Karnataka in April 2015 across the state by the state government. The focus of this exercise was mainly to gather information about the social, economic, educational and political conditions of all residents of the state, but questions about the respondent's caste and sub-caste were also included in the questionnaire (Sayeed, 2015). The Akhila Bharat Veerashaiva Mahasabha, the All India organization of Lingayats, opposed the caste census.

One needs to compare the fight of the Lingayat community for reservation in the 1960s and 1970s with their stand on the social and educational survey conducted by the Karnataka government. On one hand, the community demanded that it should be included as a backward community, and on the other, it opposed caste census, which intended to survey the backwardness of communities in the state. The reason for opposing this census was that it would divide society on caste lines. It seems that the community leaders are not interested in knowing the status of their own people who belong to the marginal groups within the community. A government that wants to extend benefits to any community has to have information about the community's social, economic and political status. This can be known only if there is a data source to make the case for a community which comes under marginality. The Lingayat community's opposition to the census simply conveys the message that it wants to hide the facts of who are more marginal in the community and why they have remained marginal.

Some observations can be made on Lingayats' agitation for reservation. First, it admits that there are social divisions in their community. Second, caste consciousness is increasing among the Lingayats. It is increasing in the form of Lingayats as a community or sub-castes within the community. When it comes to showing cultural identity, it attempts to show that it is single entity, but on the question of seeking reservation, it shows its social divisions on the basis of social and economic backwardness.

Lingayat as a community has played an important role in the socio-economic and political development of Karnataka. A number of businessmen, educationists, media personalities, administrators and politicians from the community have made significant contributions to the society. It is argued that under the impact of modernization, the community has excelled in different spheres of life, and it has been explaining the philosophy and practices of its religion in the light of modern rationality (Patil, 2002, p. 82).

However, some apprehensions can be expressed about the process of modernization in the community. The modernization process as understood of the community cannot be considered as inclusive.

Modernization of some communities has happened by not taking into account other subgroups within the community. Even in the process of electoral democracy dominant subgroups within the community have benefited more than the other marginal groups. A look at the political positions occupied by the community substantiates this argument. Of six leaders from the community who became chief ministers of Karnataka, none of them were from smaller subgroups. All of them were from dominant subgroups within the community. The case is the same with the representation in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha. In each of the last four Lok Sabha elections, 6–8 candidates from the community were elected to the Lok Sabha from Karnataka. Among these representatives, only one or two are from other smaller groups of the community in each of the elections. As far as the Vidhan Sabha is concerned, the situation is similar. In general, Lingayats have won 41–49 seats in each of the last four Assembly elections in Karnataka. In each of the last four assembly elections, not even five elected candidates were from minor groups of the community. If the process of industrialization and development of business activity among the community is taken into consideration, again it is the dominant groups who have excelled. Some prominent representative names of the community in industry and business are as follows: Kalyani, Sankeshwar, Kheni, B. G. Patil, Bellad and Kore. All these families are from dominant subgroups of the community.

There is also a rise of revivalism among Lingayats. This revivalism could be witnessed in their demand for a ‘ban on books that are considered to be critical or derogatory’ (Vasavi, 2001, p. 128) of Basava. Rashtriya Basava Dal (RBD), a socio-religious organization, was involved in opposing and banning books, which took either a critical or different understanding from the mainstream stance on Basava and Lingayat literature. Ironically, the organization is closely associated with Vishwa Kalyan Mission of Mate Mahadevi indulged in such activities. Such activities make community organizations no less than right-wing organizations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) which occasionally make news for acts of questioning anything that they feel is an insult to Hindu religion and community sentiments.

A look at the developments in society over the last 30 years in Karnataka show that many communities have started making their presence felt in different spheres of life. Their articulation and assertion have posed a challenge to dominant communities including the Lingayats. Revivalism on the part of Lingayats in recent years is not a sign of their move towards social radicalism, rather it is an anxiety of their diminishing influence (Vasavi, 2001, pp. 129–130).

The Lingayat community has a well-organized network of *maths* (Srinivasmurthy, 2017, p. 156). *Maths* are a part and parcel of the Lingayat spiritual life. ‘The math culture among the Lingayats is as old as the community itself. Every four or five villages is served by a math’ (Madhav, 2012). There has been an effort on the part of some seers of the community to directly support the aspirations of certain communities (both Lingayat and non-Lingayat), which are excluded from the community’s religious institutions, for having their own spiritual institution and head. Many examples of creation of new spiritual complexes for hitherto excluded communities can be given. Communities such as Madivals, Hadpads, Medars, Madars and Lambanis have established their religious institutions (*maths*) having their own community member as seer of the *math*. All these communities have been guided and supported by Shivamurthy Murugha Swamiji, Murugarajendra *Math*, Chitradurg, in having religious institutions of their own community. All these communities have *maths* around the Murugarajendra *Math* (Srinivasraju, 2007). Philosophically, all these *maths* follow the Lingayat philosophy. One marked change in the practices of these recently established *maths* is that the seers for the *maths* are appointed from their own community, whereas for the majority of Lingayat *maths*, seers come from the priestly caste, that is, Janagama, which is traditionally considered as the highest in Lingayat social hierarchy.

Whether the effort of creating separate *maths* for marginal communities should be considered as spiritual exclusion or inclusion is a debatable issue. Such effort becomes inclusive in the sense that it

encompasses people who are excluded or alienated from the spiritual sphere. It can also be an exclusion in the sense that this effort makes people to realize spirituality only through their own separate institutions and not through the mainstream spiritual institutions or institutions with cultural and historical legacy that has been accepted or treated as inheritance of the mainstream. Such efforts of including the communities in spiritual sphere can be considered as unique (Srinivasraju, 2007), but with the entry of politics, the very purpose can move towards politicization of the caste. Consequently, caste remains as the marker for good or bad purposes, given the nature of Indian society and politics. This poses a challenge to the Lingayat community because one of the major concerns of its philosophy is preventing caste discrimination and moving towards a casteless society, but the very presence of separate *maths* for backward communities is contradictory to its ideals.

The rivalry among Lingayat subgroups is another factor in their increased consciousness of caste. Open rivalry between different sub groups of the community could be seen during the elections and power-sharing, especially during the period of allocation of ministerial berths in the Karnataka state ministry. Demand for any political position in the state is made by the Lingayats not only as a single entity but also as subgroups. Certain subgroups always express their grievance that they are neglected as far as power distribution in the state is concerned. Such internal rivalry cannot be seen in the community in states like Andhra and Telangana, but in Maharashtra, the Karnataka Lingayat pattern of internal rivalry continues to exist to a certain extent.

Demand for Recognition as an Independent Religion and Minority

The demand for the community to be recognized as separate religion is another issue that has been fiercely debated for a long time. The Lingayat community ‘considers itself as an autonomous socio-religious community’ (Patil, 2007, p. 666). There are views and arguments, both for and against on the merit of the community being a different religious entity.⁷ There is no active debate and discussion on the question of minority status for the community from the states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. It is only the communities from Karnataka and, to a certain extent, Maharashtra that have been in the forefront with regard to this issue.

The question that needs to be addressed here is that why is the community keen on getting recognized as a separate religious entity? Is this a demand to get recognition for their cultural uniqueness or is this a demand made with the intention of seeking certain gains from the state? The call that Lingayats are not Hindus had been given to members of the community ‘when the late J. B. Mallaradhy and the late I. M. Magdum had headed the State Veerashaiva Mahasabha’ (Jayaram, 2000). Though the demand for recognition as a separate religion has been there for a long time, it was very active in the year 2000. The Veerashaiva Mahasabha of the community had ‘decided to step up its campaign to treat the Veershaivism as a separate religious entity and include it in the census enumeration proposed in 2001’ (*The Hindu*, 2000). The efforts made by the community leaders during this time did not yield any result.

The issue came to the fore again during the last census in 2011. This time ‘the proponents for delinking Veershaiva from Hinduism exhorted their community members to opt for the ‘Other’ in the column for religion during enumeration’ (Ataulla, 2013). This effort kept the issue alive to a major extent. Again in 2013, the All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha started ‘lobbying at the centre to seek ‘religious minority’ status for Lingayats by seeking a separate identity from Hinduism’ (Ataulla, 2013). Earlier efforts lay more emphasis on separate identity, but this time the demand for minority status was also specifically made. There are differing responses on the question of recognition. Cultural institutions of the Lingayats, especially *maths*, are not unanimous, and the issue is not supported by all the *maths*. Scholars too are not of the same opinion on this question. Nevertheless, the question here is that of the intent of the demand.

One of the community leaders, associated with the All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha, said that the community would be considered for benefits on par with minority communities, if it gets recognition as a separate religion (*The Hindu*, 2013). Such responses raise doubts regarding the demand for separate identity. If the concern is only about unique cultural identity, it could be continued with the demand for recognition as an independent religion. But adding another demand that it should be considered as minority conveys a different meaning. It could be understood as a demand for certain other benefits from the state. There are certain problems in the demand for separate identity because, as it is already mentioned, many subgroups of the community are demanding reservation. Social and economic backwardness has been given as the reason for this. Such demand clearly shows that the community believes in and practises caste discrimination. These beliefs and practices do not help the community in its claim for a separate identity because the identity is being demanded on the basis of the community's cultural uniqueness. The belief in caste identity and discrimination associated with it are not part of the Lingayat philosophy. Therefore, the community's demand may not be taken seriously. The issue of separate religious identity for Lingayats came to the fore again in 2017 and received huge support. This time the Karnataka government in a notification in March 2018 'recommended that Lingayats and Veerashaiva–Lingayats who follow the principles of Basava be recognised as a separate religious group' (Sayeed, 2018). This new demand was made on the basis of uniqueness of the Lingayat philosophy as propagated by Basava and his colleagues and by delinking Veerashaiva tradition.⁸

If at all in future, the community succeeds in getting the religious minority status it would get all the rights that are given to minorities in the Constitution. However, this could be a serious problem in the sense that a minority tag for the community might become a shield to cover the internal inequality within the community, as far as representation of subgroups in the educational institutions run by the community is concerned. It is a known fact that in many educational institutions run by the community, there is less representation from the many subgroups. Many educational institutions are under the control of some subgroups in which there is less scope for other subgroups to join as employees or as members of the management.

Some of the prominent educational associations run by the community are Karnataka Lingayat Education Society (KLE), Sharanabasaveshwar Vidya Vardhak Sangha (SVVS), Bijapur Lingayat Development Education Association (BLDEA), Bapuji Educational Association (BEA), Hyderabad Karnataka Education Society (HKES), Sree Siddaganga Education Society (SSES), Tumkur, Veerashaiva Vidhyavardhaka Sangha (VVS), Bellary, and Basaveshwar Vidya Vardhak Sangha, Bagalkot. Most of these educational associations run professional colleges, schools and hostels. Apart from these major educational associations, many more smaller educational associations in *taluka* or semi-urban areas are run by the community.

There is no doubt about the important role played by the religious and educational institutions of the community in the development of education in many regions of Karnataka, but a minority tag for the community would only help few selected subgroups who run the educational institutions. It may not help the subgroups which do not have any say in the matters of educational and cultural institutions like *maths*. The option left with many subgroups, which are socially and economically backward, is to demand for reservation in public employment. This demand the subgroups may have to consider under the umbrella of the larger Lingayat identity. Earlier, some subgroups, which are socially backward within minority communities in India, such as Muslim and Sikh have been given reservation. However, such recognition of social backwardness of certain subgroups would clearly show that the Lingayat community is not so serious about its egalitarian cultural philosophy.

Political Orientation and Cultural Beliefs

Political orientation of the Lingayat community in the first decades of India's Independence was towards the Congress Party and its ideals, at least in political sense. Leaders like S. Nijalingappa, B. D. Jatti and Veerendra Patil were among many who had prominently occupied the leadership space of the community in state politics. There was no major threat to their leadership both within and outside the community for many years. In the early decades of statehood, the Congress Party relied upon the Lingayat and Vokkaliga communities (Manor, 1977, p. 1867). It was observed that 'the period between 1956 and the early 1970s can be seen as an era of Lingayat raj (with Vokkaliga support) in which the dominant groups had rather smooth sailing' (Manor, 1977, p. 1867).

Domination of the Lingayat community in state politics received a major challenge when Devraj Urs came to the fore. It was Urs who challenged the political domination of eminent leaders and their communities in state politics. The empowerment process initiated by Urs of the socio-economically and politically marginalized communities was a kind of message to Lingayat leaders. It was a message to them because what these leaders and their community were supposed to follow, that is, their social philosophy in including marginalized communities, was not sufficiently reflected in their political vision and goals. The egalitarian philosophy of the Lingayats of including backward sections of the society was in fact received greater boost when socially backward leader Urs occupied the political space of the state. The efforts of Urs proved that he was politically closer towards the Lingayat philosophy in empowering the backward sections than the Lingayat leaders.

The decade of the 1980s became a starting point for the Lingayat community to move towards other political parties. Leaders from the community such as S. R. Bommai, J. H. Patel and others joined Janata Parivar, whereas Veerendra Patil and others remained in the Congress. The other major change in this period that was notable in the Lingayats' political orientation was that of their open support to the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Leaders like B. S. Yeddyurappa had become prominent in the state BJP and from this period onwards he, along with other leaders such as B. Shivappa and Basavaraj Patil Sedam, tried to gain considerable support from the community for the BJP.

Removal of Veerendra Patil from the Chief Minister's position in the beginning of the 1990s further made the community to move towards other political alternatives in the state. It was during former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's tenure that Patil was removed as Chief Minister due to his ill health and pressure from the rivals in the Congress Party. The Congress lost the community's goodwill after the removal of Patil (*The Times of India*, 2010). His 'ouster evoked sympathy from the community cutting across party lines and the message sent across was that Lingayats were being sidelined' (*The Times of India*, 2010).

After Veerendra Patil's departure, Ramakrishna Hegde filled the leadership vacuum that was felt in the community. Hegde was encouraged by the prominent Lingayat leader Nijalingappa in the 1960s. This credential made him 'an "honorary" Lingayat' (Gould, 1999, p. 198), and he managed this throughout his political career (Gould, 1999, p. 198). There is another factor which made the Lingayat community accept Hegde's leadership. He had political rivalry with Deve Gowda, the leader belonging to the Vokkaliga community which politically competed with the Lingayats in Karnataka. In the mid-1990s, the Lingayats gained political prominence again when J. H. Patel became the Chief Minister of the state.

When J. H. Patel was in chief ministerial position, he was well known more for his personal lifestyle than his vision on social change and social inclusiveness. After the Janata Parivar's rule in the mid-1990s political power in the state went to other communities. This was the period in which the community felt deprived of political power. Fierce mobilization by the Lingayat leaders in BJP like Yeddyurappa made

the Lingayat community to move towards the BJP. In the late 1990s, another political formation, Lok Shakti Party, led by Ramakrishna Hegde came to the scene in Karnataka (Shastri, 2011, p. 105). Its emergence was due to the difference between Ramakrishna Hegde and Deve Gowda in Janata Dal. Temporarily, Lok Shakti became a forum for many Lingayats, but its departure from the scene made them flock to the BJP.

By the late-1990s, the BJP had almost become a party widely supported by the Lingayat community. In one sense, the community became a major agency through which the BJP succeeded in expanding its base in the areas where its presence was acutely marginal in the political landscape.

Lingayats rallied behind the BJP for multiple reasons. The Congress, over the years, had not been able to groom Lingayat leaders of stature. The JDS was perceived as a Vokkaliga-dominated party. Lingayats, who had historically provided many chief ministers, saw in Yeddyurappa a chance to regain their primacy in Karnataka politics. (Rajeev Gowda, 2011)

Maths play a crucial role in Karnataka politics. Although Lingayat *maths* resisted the spread of Hindutva, ‘the need for state patronage and cordial relations with the party in power exerts a contrary pull on them, which is why some Veerashaiva pontiffs have been less outspoken than others against the politics of the Sangh Parivar’ (Menon, 2004).

If one examines the present changes in the politics of the state, the credit goes to Devraj Urs and not to any other leader from the dominant communities, either Lingayats or Vokkaligas. It is true that these communities produced a few visionary leaders, but in the matter of social and political empowerment of the socially marginalized, they were not leaders to be recognized as harbingers of change. Siddaramaiah, a prominent leader of the Karnataka, can be considered as being influenced by the strategy of political mobilization as employed by Devraj Urs. Siddaramaiah is influenced by the leadership style of Urs and has emerged successful in realizing the strategy of Urs in mobilizing the backward classes in the state. When Siddaramaiah was a member of the Janata Dal, he was not encouraged by any leaders belonging to any dominant community of the party. In fact, he had tough experiences with both Deve Gowda and J. H. Patel.

Maharashtra is another state in which, in some districts, Lingayats play a significant role in state politics. ‘On an average, around six or seven Lingayat members are elected in the Legislative Assembly of Maharashtra. Most of them are elected from Lingayat–dominant districts of the southern part. Until 1990, the Lingayat leaders were mostly loyal to the Congress party’ (Deshpande, 2011, p. 314). As parties like BJP, Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party of Sharad Pawar gained popularity as active political players in Maharashtra politics, it affected the community’s choice of political affiliation. Today, there are leaders in these parties from the community.

The community does not have any imprint on state politics in Tamil Nadu and Kerala since their presence is very minor. It might be a case that politically they go according to the moods and swings of the politics of their respective states. There is no evidence to prove if they are politically oriented to any ideology. In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the community has a minute political presence but has enough strength to articulate its problems. The concentrated presence of the community in some districts bordering Karnataka in both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh has enabled its leaders to get elected for the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies.

The community leaders who are there in BJP and Shiv Sena do not feel guilty of not respecting their community’s philosophy. In fact, there are cases of some leaders from the community saying that Veerashaiva Lingayat community is part of Hinduism (*The Hindu*, 2015). This shift in orientation to differing political ideologies raises several questions on the identity of the Lingayat community. Is Lingayat community more for political power than for genuinely preserving their culture and philosophy? Is their shifting political orientation or ideologies due to an ignorance of their identity as a different

community in the philosophical sense? The community's political orientation after Independence shows that the community is more for power than identity. It did not take the required efforts to make its social philosophy relevant, which could be done by practising the ideals at the political level and subsequently accommodating various interests of the communities which are comparatively marginal within and outside the community. Except a few seers and *maths* of the community, the majority remained neutral and sometimes apathetic to the questions of social change and progress. In fact, some pontiffs went to the extent of interfering in political issues that the community faced. This selective interference on their part proves that they too, as spokespersons of the spiritual or philosophical aspects of the community, did not maintain their exceptionality by disassociating themselves from conservative or socially regressive actions of the community. Their interference reinforces the fact that the community is more interested in political survival than in a unique cultural existence.

Conclusion

Developments that have taken place in the community after Independence, such as the demand for reservation, the demand for recognition for separate identity and the shifting political orientations, show that the commitment to ideals is almost waning in the Lingayat community. The demand for reservation on the basis of social backwardness puts the community's demand for separate identity in dilemma. The recognition as a minority community puts the question of internal equality in further doubt. Finally, the community's role in politics has not been channelized towards change at the societal level as expected from the community as a unique cultural entity. The political beliefs of the community are not in tandem with its cultural ideals. Such varied developments put the community in some sort of cultural crisis.

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Notes

1. Veershaiva Mahasabha is the nodal organization of the community, which came into existence in 1904.
2. In Kannada, *Mate* means mother. She is revered as mother by the followers.
3. *Kalyana Kirana* is a monthly magazine in Kannada of Vishwa Kalyan Mission Charitable Trust, Bengaluru.
4. Subgroups such as Ganiga, Hadpad, Kumbhar, and so on are included in the OBC list of Maharashtra, see List of Castes in OBC of Maharashtra, available at <http://www.msobcfcd.gov.in/htmldocs/Caste.htm>; the Lingayat community has been included in Andhra Pradesh state list of backward classes, see Government Order Ms. No. 22, dated 28 February 2009, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh. The same is followed in Telangana after its bifurcation from Andhra Pradesh, see Government Order Ms. No. 16, dated

11 March 2015, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of Telangana, Available at <http://goir.telangana.gov.in/reports.aspx>

5. Veerashaivas (Yogis, Yogeaswara, Pooanadaram/Maalpandaram, Jangam and Pandaram) are included in Kerala state list of OBCs, see Kerala state list of backward classes, Available at http://www.kscbc.kerala.gov.in/images/stories/obc_list.pdf and <http://www.kscbc.kerala.gov.in/>
6. Subgroups such as Ganiga, Malagar, Simpy, Hugar, and so on are included in Central List of OBCs, see National Commission for Backward Classes, Central List of OBCs, State: Karnataka, Available at http://www.ncbc.nic.in/User_Panel/GazetteResolution.aspx?Value=mPICjsL1aLsThxqt53NPf0ggPwu7BzPqgy3u3lupJmQLsT8%2fmJBlhiG%2fb0Het9uX, http://www.ncbc.nic.in/User_Panel/CentralListStateView.aspx
7. See Mahadevappa (2017). This is one of the works which recognize the Lingayat community as a religious community independent of Vedic influence. The base for the arguments of this work is the literature produced by the saints of Lingayat movement of twelfth century. Also see Chidanandmurty (2014). In this work, the author makes an effort to prove that Lingayats are Hindus.
8. To understand the difference between Lingayat and Veerashaiva, their respective philosophies and how Veerashaivism became part of Lingayat community, see Katkar and Girimallavar (2017). This edited book contains specific chapters on these issues written by scholars like M. M. Kalaburgi, Ramjan Darga and so on.

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