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Basaveshwara



Basava was an Indian philosopher, statesman and a social reformer from what is now Karnataka, India. Basava fought against the practice of the caste system, which discriminated against people based on their birth, and other rituals in Hinduism. He spread social awareness through his poetry, popularly known as Vachanaas. Basavanna used Ishtalinga, an image of the ?iva Li?ga , to eradicate untouchability, to establish equality among all human beings and as a means to attain spiritual enlightenment. These were rational and progressive social thoughts in the twelfth century.

Basaveshwara is undoubtedly one of the pioneer's of Indian Democracy. He created a model Parliament called the "Anubhava Mantapa," which not only gave equal proportion to men and women, but also had representatives from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The carvings of the model Parliament can be found across many temples in south India. He was a man ahead of his time, who believed that conflict should be resolved through debate and not violence. He advocated mercy towards both humans and animals.

Classical Hindu theologians interpret the Vachanaas as the essence of Vedic knowledge while attempting to explain the social revolution Basava was ushering in. Basava, unlike Gautama Buddha, did not preach people the intricate aspects of spirituality; rather, he taught people how to live happily in a rational social order which later came to be known as the Sharana movement.

Basavanna (Basaveshwara) is called "Vishwaguru" because he is believed by his followers to have been the first ever to know the practicality of transcending to Godliness and demonstrating the technique of becoming God through around 800 Sharanas. Basavanna spread the concept of the path of becoming God through four levels of divinity that exists in one's own body- Unmanifest Chaitanya (Guru), Manifest Chaitanya-Shakti (Linga), Consciousness of the manifest chaitanya-shakti in Prana (Jangama), and the Individual consciousness (Jeevatma/Mind). Basavanna taught Sharanas, the technique of transcending the mind with one's own prana through a process of Ishtalinga, Pranalinga and Bhavalinga saadhana and that anybody in the world, irrespective of caste, creed, merit, nationality, etc., can transcend and become God by being in union with prana.

He himself declared that he is playing only the elder brother's role and that is how the name Basavanna came to be. He is popularly called Bhakti Bhandari (Champion of Devotion) or "Kranti Yogi". The key aspect of his preaching is a monotheistic concept of God. Basava originated a literary revolution through his literary creation called Vachana Sahitya in Kannada Language which are derived from the Upanishads and Vedanta. He was the Prime Minister of the Southern Kalachuri Empire in South India. Many great yogis and mystics of his time joined his movement, enriching it with the essence of divine experience in the form of Vachanas.

Early life

It is believed that Lord Basava was born into a Shaiva Brahmin family, residing in a small town, Basavana Bagewadi in Bijapur district of northern Karnataka state, India in 1134 AD. Basava is said to have grown up in an orthodox Hindu religious household and rejected many practices in Vedic society based on some of the religious scriptures called Agamas, Shastras, and Puranas in Sanskrit language.

He left Bagewadi and spent the next twelve years studying Sangameshwara, the then-Shaivite school of learning at Kudala sangama. There, he conversed with scholars and developed his spiritual and religious views in association with his societal understanding. Játavéda Muni, also known as Eeshánya Guru, was his guru. Basavanna created Ishtalinga. He was driven by his realisation; in one of his Vachanas he says Arrive Guru, which means one's own awareness is his/her teacher. Many contemporary Vachanakaras (people who have scripted Vachanas) have described him as Swayankrita Sahaja, which means "self-made".

Religious Developments

Basavanna used Ishtalinga (image/linga of God in one's body) to eradicate untouchability, established equality among all human beings and a means to attain spiritual enlightenment. Ishtalinga is very much

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different from Sthavaralinga and Charalinga. Ishtalinga is the universal symbol of God. Sthavaralinga represents Shiva in Dhyana Mudra. Charalinga is a miniaturized form of Sthavaralinga.

Guru Basavanna started his career as an accountant at Mangalaveda in the court of Kalachuri king Bijjala, a feudal vassal of the Kalyani Chalukya. When Bijjala acquired the power at Basavakalyana, by overpowering Tailapa IV (the grandson of Vikramaditya VI, the great Chalukya king), Basavanna also went to Kalyana. With his honesty, hard work and visionary mission, Basava rose to the position of Prime Minister in the court of king Bijjala, who ruled from 1162-1167 at Kalyana (presently renamed Basavakalyana). There, he established the Anubhava Mantapa, a spiritual parliament, which attracted many saints from throughout India. He believed in the principle Káyakavé Kailása (Work puts you on the path to heaven, Work is Heaven). It was at this time that the Vachanas, simple and easy-to-understand poetic writings which contained essential teachings, were written.

Fight against caste system

Basava created much controversy by actively ignoring the societal rules associated with the caste system, which he wished to abolish. By allowing untouchables to have lunch at his residence and praising the historic marriage of a Brahmin woman and an untouchable man, Basava caused orthodox members of King Bijjala's court to go to the king with such stories, some true and some false. Bijjala, afraid of a possible uprising in orthodox society, ordered the newly married couple to be harshly punished. Before punishing the couple, Bijjala asked Basava to agree with the caste system but Basava strongly opposed it and said both Haralayya and Madhuvaras were Lingayats and the rules of the caste system were not applicable to them.

Bijjala did not agree with Basavanna's ideas, and asked Basavanna to be silent and accept the punishment of the couple or leave Kalyana. The "Being punished" (Danda-gonda) Basavanna left Kalyana with a heavy heart and marched towards Kudala Sangama. He left Kalyana in 1196 A.D. of Rakshasa nama samvatsara, phalguna masada 12th day for Kudala Sangama and en route to Kudala sangama, he preached to the people about humanity, morality, honesty, simplicity, and the dignity of labour, equality among all human beings, human rights, etc. Being a perfect yogi, he released the bonds of the body and soul and took nirvana (Lingaikya).

Philosophy

Basava said that the roots of social life are embedded not in the cream of the society but in the scum of the society. It is his witty saying that the cow does not give milk to him who sits on its back, but it gives milk to him who squats at its feet. With his wide sympathy, he admitted high and low alike into his fold. Basava believed that man becomes great not by his birth but by his conduct in society. This means faith in the dignity of man and the belief that a common man is as good a part of society as a man of status.

He proclaimed that all members of the state are laborers: some may be intellectual laborers and others may be manual laborers. He placed practice before precept and his own life was of rigid rectitude. Basava brought home to his countrymen the lesson of self-purification. He tried to raise the moral level of public life, and he insisted that the same rules of conduct applied to the administrators as to the individual members of society. He also taught the dignity of manual labour by insisting on work as worship. Every kind of manual labour, which was looked down upon by people of high caste, should be looked upon with love and reverence he argued. Thus arts and crafts flourished, and a new foundation was laid down in the history of the economics of the land.

The movement initiated by Basava through Anubhava Mantapa became the basis of a sect of love and faith. It gave rise to a system of ethics and education at once simple and exalted. It sought to inspire ideals of social and religious freedom, such as no previous faith of India had done. In the medieval age, which was characterized by inter-communal jealousy; it helped to shed a ray of light and faith on the homes and hearts of people.

The movement gave a literature of considerable value in the vernacular language of the country, the literature which attained the dignity of a classical tongue. Its aim was the elimination of the barriers of caste and to remove untouchability, raising the untouchable to the equal of the high born. The sanctity of family relations and the improvement in the status of womanhood were striven for while at the same time the importance of rites and rituals, of fasts and pilgrimages was reduced. It encouraged learning and contemplation of God by means of love and faith. The movement tended, in many ways, to raise the nation generally to a higher level of capacity both in thought and action.