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*Megha Middha, is working as an Assistant Professor of Law in Mody University of Science and Technology, Lakshargarh, Sikar (Rajasthan). She has an experience in the teaching of almost 3 years. She has completed her graduation in BBA LL.B (H) from Amity University, Rajasthan (Gold Medalist) and did her post-graduation (LL.M in Business Laws) from NLSIU, Bengaluru. Currently, she is enrolled in a Ph.D. course in the Department of Law at Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur (Rajasthan). She wishes to excel in academics and research and contribute as much*

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*Mrs.S.Kalpana, presently Assistant professor of Law, VelTech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R & D Institute of Science and Technology, Avadi. Formerly Assistant professor of Law, Vels University in the year 2019 to 2020, Worked as Guest Faculty, Chennai Dr. Ambedkar Law College, Pudupakkam. Published one book. Published 8 Articles in various reputed Law Journals. Conducted 1 Moot court competition and participated in nearly 80 National and International seminars and webinars conducted on various subjects of Law. Did ML in Criminal Law and Criminal Justice Administration. 10 paper presentations in various National and International seminars. Attended more than 10 FDP programs. Ph.D. in Law pursuing.*



## Avinash Kumar



*Avinash Kumar has completed his Ph.D. in International Investment Law from the Dept. of Law & Governance, Central University of South Bihar. His research work is on "International Investment Agreement and State's right to regulate Foreign Investment." He qualified UGC-NET and has been selected for the prestigious ICSSR Doctoral Fellowship. He is an alumnus of the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Formerly he has been elected as Students Union President of Law Centre-1, University of Delhi. Moreover, he completed his LL.M. from the University of Delhi (2014-16), dissertation on "Cross-border Merger & Acquisition"; LL.B. from the University of Delhi (2011-14), and B.A. (Hons.) from Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi. He has also obtained P.G. Diploma in IPR from the Indian Society of International Law, New Delhi. He has qualified UGC - NET examination and has been awarded ICSSR - Doctoral Fellowship. He has published six-plus articles and presented 9 plus papers in national and international seminars/conferences. He participated in several workshops on research methodology and teaching and learning.*

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# **SHRI BASAWESHWARA ON THE IDEOLOGY OF SOCIAL EQUALITY AND JUSTICE**

AUTHORED BY: HARSHITHA G T

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## **ABSTRACT**

From 800 years ago until the present, Shri Basaveshwara stands out as one of the most remarkable figures in our religious history, inspiring millions of people. He exhibits a very high level of life that has shaped and inspired many lives as an independent creative thinker. He was a social reformer by conviction, a mystic by nature, an idealist by choice, a statesman by profession, a man of letters by taste, and a humanist by sympathy.

A brilliant individual, Basaveshwara's beliefs, and ideas—which he practised and preached—have inspired many great experiments throughout history. His important ideas, which are mostly ignored in the modern period, are introduced in this work. He discussed topics such as social equality, caste and class equality, occupational equality, religious equality, gender equality, and others that serve as the focal points of contemporary social philosophy. His Vachanas sparked a societal revolution. His "Kayaka" theory demands that professional obligations be carried out honestly.

The paper puts-forth the ideology of Shri Basaweshwara on social justice and equality and its implementation in the present world which also includes women empowerment.

## **Introduction:**

On Basavanna:

The proper use of philosophy (darshana) is to put an end to pain. The path which leads to the end of suffering is nothing but acquiring 'right knowledge'. Basavanna as one of the well known *Darshanikas* or social reformers of India, raised many important questions about right knowledge and wisdom in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In one of his *Vachanas* (devine songs), Basavanna regards the importance of right knowledge in human life as follows:

*Jnanada baladinda ajnana kedu nodayya*

*Jyotiyabaladinda tamandhada kedu nodayya*

*Satyadabaladinda asatyada kedu nodayya*

*Parushadabaladinda avalohadakedu nodayya*

*Koodala sangana sharanara anubhaavadinda*

*Enna bhavadakedu nodayya.*

## Basavanna

### Meaning:

The power of knowledge drives the ignorance away; appearance of light drives the darkness away; truth drives the untruth away; the touch of the alchemic gem turns away metal into gold; with exposure to devotee's experience and mysticism, the materialism goes away.

Only a way to experience sat-chit-ananda, the true essence of God (truth) is to have an open mindedness, and invite him to enter into our hearts. The first step is to look into ourselves what is already filled in our hearts. An individual is surrounded by the world with materialistic pleasures and with the pattern of materialism. An immediate need is to empty the soul which is filled with worldly pleasures and materialism. The man should experience the power of true knowledge first, which drives away his ignorance. The power of knowledge is just like how light drives away the darkness, and the truth that erases untruth.

The right knowledge is necessary to step out from the 'ignorance' which leads all sorts of misery and sadness. Reading and / or listening to the experiences of mystics and social reformers would help any seeker of the truth.

In the process of gaining knowledge, we seek to examine ourselves and go beyond ourselves, as our normal capacities are limited, we fail; to avoid this problem, there are so many fountains of wisdom and plenitude are available to the mankind, but many people rarely make themselves.

**“Social Equality which was prevalent in India during the Vedic times had disappeared giving way to inequality”**. Self oriented thinking was the supreme and Society oriented thinking was relegated to the background. The prevalence of wide spread social disparity had disturbed the mind of Basaveshwara and so he carried an untiring struggle against the social inequality which intended to bring about a peaceful revolution that would change the minds of the people to accept

his message of social equality.

**“All should be treated as equals. All should be pure and devoted to God. Everyone should work”**. Liberal views such as these took shape in the mind of Basavanna even in his childhood. He revolted against Vedic Brahmanism which he believed was one of the factors adding to the existing social disparity and so he made up his mind to minimize the same.

He preferred a peaceful method of persuasion, a non violent method to achieve his goal of establishing a society based on social equality. It was indeed God's grace; Basavanna put forth his mission for the formation of a new society, through “Anubhava Mantapa”- a spiritual parliament at Kalyana. He was a practical minded man yet liberal and democratic in his approach so also he adopted the democratic method of meeting together for discussing and for laying down the path of social reconstruction and reformation and later the outcome of the discussions were recorded in the form of “Vachanas” in Kannada language. These Vachanas contain ideas about spiritual, social, ethical and economic issues or subjects. They contain the essence of Virashaiva thought including the thoughts of Basavanna.

Basaveshwara also stressed on ----- Occupational Equality-**“Kayaka”** He says there is no occupation which is high or low, it only matters individual choice and not a hereditary caste-rule. Such divisions if exist are unjust and also is of a great social fraud. He says “Kayakave Kailasa” means “Work is Worship” The importance of dignity of labour in life is neither superior nor inferior and all the jobs are equally respected. Kayaka is a spirit of dedication to lord shiva which has to be undertaken in a moral and a just way. It itself involves a moral commitment. It is free and open to anyone and so Kayaka is heaven or “Kailasa”. “Kayaka” theory insists on the honest discharge of occupational responsibilities. He imbibed the “Kayaka” theory. The principles of Kayaka were practiced in daily life by all the members of “Anubhav Mantapa”, which became a platform ; bringing people together of different castes and professions on a single social strata. He had a strong belief that occupations only denote particular type of work to be carried on and should not be taken as a criterion for dividing people into higher and lower standards.

*Lokada donka neeveke tidduviri*

*Nimma nimma tanuva santaisikolli*

*Nimma nimma manava santaisikolli*

*Neremaneya dukkhakke aluvavana mecchena kudadala sangamadeva*

Meaning: "Why do you try to fix the flaws of the world? Mend your own body and find

contentment; Calm your own mind. O Kudalasangamadeva, please the hearts of those who weep for the sorrows of their neighbors."

This vachana by Basavanna conveys a powerful message. It urges individuals to focus on self-improvement and inner peace rather than attempting to correct the imperfections they perceive in the world. The vachana suggests that by nurturing one's own physical and mental well-being, individuals can attain contentment and contribute positively to the world.

Basavanna encourages individuals to cultivate inner tranquility and calm their minds. This implies the importance of self-reflection and introspection to achieve a state of balance and equanimity. By achieving inner peace, individuals are better equipped to handle the challenges and complexities of life.

Basavanna emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility and self-improvement. It implies that justice begins with individuals aligning their own actions and attitudes with fairness and righteousness. The significance of inner peace and harmony as essential aspects of justice. By cultivating a tranquil mind, individuals can approach situations with clarity and make fair and just decisions. It suggests that justice involves recognizing and empathizing with the suffering of others and taking action to alleviate their pain.

The vachana emphasizes the interconnectedness of personal growth, inner harmony, and compassion in the pursuit of justice. It encourages individuals to focus on self-improvement while also extending empathy and support to those who exhibit empathy towards others. By fostering personal well-being and caring for the well-being of others, the vachana promotes a just and harmonious society.

Basavanna believed that justice could only be achieved when every person was treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their caste, gender, or social background. He rejected the hierarchical caste system that perpetuated discrimination and inequality, asserting that social divisions based on birth were inherently unjust. Basavanna advocated for a society where merit and character were the basis of one's worth, rather than their social status.

For Basavanna, justice was not limited to legal and judicial systems; it encompassed all aspects of life. He believed that justice was achieved through moral righteousness, empathy, and compassion. Basavanna stressed the importance of treating others with kindness and

understanding, and he actively worked towards the welfare and well-being of all members of society.

Basavanna's concept of justice also emphasized the importance of personal transformation. He believed that true justice could only be realized through inner spiritual growth and self-realization. Basavanna encouraged individuals to introspect, reflect on their actions, and strive for self-improvement. He believed that justice could not be achieved externally unless one cultivated justice within themselves.

Moreover, Basavanna's concept of justice extended beyond human beings to encompass all living beings. He promoted a sense of ecological justice, advocating for the protection of the environment and the humane treatment of animals. Basavanna recognized the interconnectedness of all life and believed that justice entailed living in harmony with nature.

Basavanna's teachings on justice have had a lasting impact. His philosophy continues to inspire social activists, reformers, and thinkers who strive for a more just and equitable society. Basavanna's concept of justice serves as a reminder that justice is not merely a legal or social construct but a moral and spiritual imperative. It calls upon individuals and society as a whole to actively work towards creating a world where every individual is treated with fairness, compassion, and equality.

*Ivanarava ivanarava ivanarava nendenisadirayya*

*Iva nammava iva nammava iva nammava nendenisayya*

*Koodala sangama deva nimma maha maneya maganendenisayya*

**Do not say “who is he”, “who is he” and “who is he”?**

**Say that he is ours, he is ours, and he is ours,**

**Say that he is the son of Thy own house, O Kudalasangamadeva.**

This vachana reflects a sense of equality and justice in its message. Basavanna emphasizes the importance of recognizing the true identity of an individual, irrespective of external appearances or social status.

In the vachana, the repetition of the phrase "ಇವನಾರವ" (Who is he?) followed by "ಇವನಮ್ಮವ" (He is ours) signifies a shift in perspective. Basavanna challenges the notion of

questioning someone's identity or worth based on external factors and urges a focus on recognizing the inherent worth and equality of every individual.

By stating "ಇವ ನಮ್ಮವ" (He is ours), Basavanna implies that everyone belongs to the same human family and is entitled to equal respect and dignity. This inclusive perspective aligns with the principles of justice, which advocate for fairness, equality, and the recognition of the inherent rights of all individuals.

Furthermore, the vachana addresses Kudalasangamadeva, a divine figure, stating that the individual in question is the son of His own house. This conveys the message that justice is not limited to human interactions but is a divine principle that encompasses all beings.

Overall, this vachana by Basavanna highlights the essence of justice as treating every individual with equality, respect, and inclusivity, transcending social divisions and recognizing the inherent worth of each person. It emphasizes the need to look beyond external identities and perceive the underlying unity of humanity.

**Emancipation of Women:** Basaveshwara wanted to establish a society, based upon the democratic principles like, liberty, equality and fraternity. He wanted to give more and more opportunities to women to come out of family bond ages and equal position on par with men. Women should participate in religious and spiritual spheres on equal footing. Exploitation and discrimination of women on the basis of sex was strongly condemned by Basaveshwara. Basaveshwara expounded his concept of equality out of his own experience. He was essentially a humanist and fought for humanity. According to him, "The spirit within the body knows neither difference of male and female nor that of master or servant." The religious teachings of Basaveshwara exerted a magic spell on hundreds and thousands of people and they voluntarily came into the fold of Virasaivism. Basaveshwara accorded religious equality on woman. Woman was entitled to undergo the process of "Linga Diksha" on par with man. She was allowed to wear and worship 'Linga' even during her course period. Basaveshwara despised woman's susceptibility to pollution. He declared that the "Linga" worshipper has no religious taboos. • e He insisted that one ought to worship 'Linga' by oneself. No one can have a deputy in this regard. Basaveshwara and Shivasharanas had heralded an age of honour, economic and social equality for women. Because of them till today also many Virashaiva women equally participated in many fields.

Basavanna believed that justice could only prevail in a society where women were free from oppression and discrimination. He recognized that the subjugation of women not only denied them their basic rights but also hindered the progress and well-being of the entire community. Basavanna vehemently rejected the idea of women being treated as commodities or objects of control, emphasizing instead their inherent dignity and worth.

One of the key aspects of Basavanna's concept of emancipation was the rejection of the caste-based system prevalent in medieval India. He argued that societal divisions and discrimination based on caste and gender perpetuated injustice. Basavanna envisioned a society where women would have equal access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making power. He believed that the empowerment of women was crucial for the overall development and progress of society.

Basavanna's philosophy was also deeply rooted in spirituality. He emphasized the importance of inner transformation and equality before the divine. Basavanna rejected the notion that women were spiritually inferior or that they should be excluded from religious and spiritual practices. He advocated for equal participation of women in religious rituals and communal gatherings, challenging the prevailing patriarchal norms.

In Basavanna's vision, justice and emancipation were intertwined concepts. He believed that true justice could only be achieved when women were treated as equals in all spheres of life. By challenging social norms, advocating for women's rights, and emphasizing the need for inner transformation, Basavanna's concept of emancipation of women laid the foundation for a more just and egalitarian society.

Today, Basavanna's ideas continue to inspire social activists and feminists who strive for gender equality and justice. His philosophy serves as a reminder that the pursuit of justice cannot be separated from the fight for women's rights and emancipation. Basavanna's legacy stands as a powerful testament to the enduring relevance of his ideas in the ongoing struggle for a just and equitable world.

**Eradication of Untouchability:** During the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Basaveshwara led a religious revolution in order to kill the demon of caste and creed which threatened to rule the destiny of man. Basaveshwara rejected the ritual, tradition, Vedic Brahmanism which exploited the downtrodden

and ill-treated with them. He was an essentially humanistic and fought for humanity. According to Basaveshwara the spirit within the body knows neither the difference of male and female nor that of master and servant. This common humanity implies that all men have an equal right. In the Anubhava Manatapa where without considering high and low participated in the discussions. The very untouchables, whom the high-born had kept at a distance, were provided with equal opportunities to participate in the deliberations of Anubhava Manatapa. It gave an equal status to all persons. Hence it was an outstanding aspect of Basaveshwara's achievements "It was the laboratory of Basaveshwara's own preachings. He taught equality and so the Anubhava Mantapa was open to all without distinctions. Old and young, rich and poor, men and women, high and low king and servants, were all there equal." Basaveshwara proclaimed that those who love all living beings should be treated equally mentioned in one of his Vacana. Based on the above principles Basaveshwara tried to establish equality among all human beings by kindling divinity hidden in them. He regarded divinity as an equalizing factor. He tried to eradicate untouchability by giving freedom of worship to low caste people . Vachana Sahitya: Basaveshwara stands out as one of the most outstanding personalities in the history of India. He was not only a socio-religious and economic philosopher but also a great literary scholar. His period is also called Vachana Yuga, because along with him, other Shivasaranas also wrote Vachanas. Instead of Sanskrit Kannada become a popular mass language of the people. His life and teachings have been a source of inspiration to millions of people in South India for the last nearly Nine hundred years, and influenced and molded their lives and continues to do so even to this day. Basaveshwara rightly chose the people's language, Kannada, to communicate his ideas. He and his associates. expressed their ideas in the unique prose poetry style known as Vachanas (sayings). Literature of this lucid does not exist anywhere else, or in any other language. The devotees expressed their own spiritual and political experiences, to provide solutions to intricate problems in all walks of life. They became the literary medium of the medieval Virasaiva saints. Basaveshwara with the zest of a social reformer and the zeal of a prophet, caught in the net of practical politics, was not a perfect being but a man whose whole life was a struggle towards self-perfection. This struggle is strongly present in his poetry. But above all, there is a very characteristic mixture of harshness and tenderness; of almost rude assertiveness and extreme loving-kindness.

Untouchability was a practice prevalent in medieval India where certain castes were considered impure and relegated to the lowest rung of the social ladder. Basavanna vehemently rejected this discriminatory practice, arguing that it went against the principles of justice and equality. He believed that every individual, regardless of their caste or social background, deserved dignity,

respect, and equal treatment.

Basavanna's philosophy emphasized the importance of recognizing the inherent worth and equality of all human beings. He rejected the notion of untouchability and argued for the eradication of caste-based discrimination. Basavanna believed that justice could only be achieved when every individual had equal access to opportunities, resources, and social participation.

Furthermore, Basavanna's teachings focused on the importance of empathy and compassion. He encouraged people to transcend social divisions and treat others with kindness and understanding. For Basavanna, justice was not just about the absence of discrimination; it also involved actively working towards the welfare and well-being of all members of society, regardless of their caste.

Basavanna's concept of eradicating untouchability in connection with justice challenged the prevailing social order and called for a radical transformation of society. His teachings continue to inspire social activists and reformers who strive to create a more just and egalitarian world. Basavanna's philosophy serves as a reminder that true justice can only be achieved when every individual is treated with dignity, respect, and equality, regardless of their caste or social status.

Today, the fight against untouchability and caste-based discrimination remains an ongoing struggle in India. Basavanna's teachings provide a powerful foundation for challenging and dismantling these oppressive practices, emphasizing the importance of justice, equality, and compassion in creating a more just and inclusive society.

Basavanna's decision challenges the social hierarchy and caste-based discrimination prevalent in his time. In the caste system, untouchables were considered to be at the lowest rung of society and faced severe social exclusion and discrimination. By arranging this marriage, Basavanna demonstrates his commitment to justice by breaking down barriers and advocating for equality among individuals, regardless of their caste or social status.

This decision can be seen as an act of social reform aimed at addressing the injustice of untouchability. Basavanna recognizes the inherent value and dignity of all individuals and rejects the idea that one's caste should determine their worth or restrict their choices. By promoting inter-caste marriages, he challenges the deeply ingrained discriminatory practices and calls for a more just and inclusive society.

Basavanna's decision also reflects his belief in the concept of universal brotherhood, where all individuals are seen as equal and deserving of love, respect, and equal treatment. By facilitating this marriage, he seeks to bridge the gap between different castes and foster social harmony and understanding.

However, it is important to note that Basavanna's decision would have faced resistance and criticism from those who were deeply entrenched in the caste system and upheld its discriminatory practices. His actions might have been seen as a radical departure from social norms and traditions. In analyzing this decision, it is crucial to consider the historical and cultural context in which Basavanna lived. His approach can be seen as a progressive stance towards achieving social justice and equality. By challenging the discriminatory practices of untouchability and advocating for inter-caste marriages, Basavanna aimed to bring about a more just and inclusive society, where every individual is treated with dignity and respect, irrespective of their caste or social background.

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**Anubhava Mantapa:** The spirit of the Lingayat movement was democratic in the sense that people of all castes and callings had access in the shaping of society and religion. The discussion and discourses, the dialogues and debates were conducted in the religious academy called Anubhava Mantapa at Kalyana. Basaveshwara , Allama Parbhu , Chennabasava, Siddharama, Madiwala Machideva, Bacarasa and a host of other saints were discussing the fundamentals of Virasaivism-thus evolving a new faith . Even women saints alike Akkamahadevi, Satyakka, Akka Nagamma, Gangambike, Rani Mahadevi, Sambhavi Devi took part in the deliberations of the religious academy. - The Anubhava Mantapa was democratic in its outlook because it was mainly based on democratic principles in its nature and functioning. It accepted the principle or fact that the individual is rational. Every person has the capacity of taking decisions. In the Anubhava Mantapa, every individual had equal status with others. It was based on the principle that no man or a class or a group should be strong enough to wrong others, and each man can judge for himself as to what is best for him.

The Anubhava Mantapa was a revolutionary concept that challenged the prevailing social norms and caste-based hierarchy. It provided an inclusive space where individuals, regardless of their caste or social status, were welcomed and encouraged to participate actively. This inclusivity and open dialogue were fundamental to the pursuit of justice, as it allowed marginalized voices to be heard and respected.

Basavanna believed that justice could only be achieved when every individual had equal access to knowledge, education, and spiritual growth. The Anubhava Mantapa served as a means to break down barriers and provide a platform for individuals from all walks of life to express themselves freely. This emphasis on inclusivity and equal participation contributed to the promotion of justice and social equality.

Furthermore, the Anubhava Mantapa provided a space for critical discussions on social issues, including gender equality, caste discrimination, and religious practices. Basavanna's teachings challenged traditional power structures and advocated for justice by questioning and dismantling oppressive societal norms. The discussions and debates held within the Anubhava Mantapa fostered a sense of awareness and collective responsibility towards social justice.

The Anubhava Mantapa's impact extended beyond its immediate participants. The ideas and principles discussed within its walls influenced the wider society, fostering a spirit of justice and equality. The institution paved the way for social reform movements that sought to challenge and transform oppressive systems.

Today, the legacy of the Anubhava Mantapa continues to inspire movements and initiatives that strive for justice and equality. Its emphasis on inclusivity, open dialogue, and challenging oppressive norms serves as a reminder that justice can only be achieved through active engagement and the amplification of marginalized voices.

In conclusion, Basavanna's Anubhava Mantapa played a crucial role in promoting justice by providing an inclusive space for dialogue, sharing experiences, and questioning oppressive social norms. Its legacy serves as a reminder of the importance of fostering inclusivity, equality, and critical engagement in the pursuit of justice.

## **Conclusion**