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SAGE Team: Rajesh Dey, Syed Husain Naqvi, Madhurima Thapa

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Democratic Traditions in Lingayat Movement

Prakash Desai

Democracy as a well-established political system may be modern, but democratic ideals and experiences are quite old. Many societies, especially eastern societies like India, had ideals and experiences that could be recognized and theorized as democratic ideals and practices.

> It is commonly thought that most people in the world have no democratic experience, and that the democratic idea is fundamentally alien to most human cultures. This is what lies behind the catchphrase, 'the western concept of democracy'. On this basis, many scholars have concluded that efforts to establish democratic institutions outside of a few favored regions are doomed to failure.[1]

It was observed in the case of India too when it became a modern democratic republic.[2] According to the observation, India would not succeed as a democracy.

[1] Steven Muhlberger and Phil Paine, 'Democracy's Place in World History', *Journal of World History* 4, no. 1 (1993): 25. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/20078545 (accessed on 17 October 2018).

[2] See Selig S. Harrison, *India: The Most Dangerous Decades* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).

The research on democracy has supported the idea that 'Europeans have a special fitness for democracy (one more aspect of European uniqueness) by emphasizing every quasi-democratic institution or movement in European history while dismissing or ignoring identical experiences outside of Europe'.[3] Such ignorance or dismissal made others to explore the idea of democracy in different regions of the world. Consequently, many new ideas and perspectives have come to the arena of political theory on democracy. The effort to explore democratic ideas and institutions in India's past would help in clearing many generalizations[4] about eastern societies and such effort may enrich the discipline of comparative politics. The present chapter makes an effort to understand democratic experiences in India in its early history and how it was extended in Medieval India's socio-religious movements, especially the Lingayat Movement of the 12th-century South India. It tries to explore the change and continuity in the very debates and discussions on social, economic and political questions in the spiritual past of India.

Democratic Experiments in Pre-Medieval India

The experience of democracy, as it was in Greece, was also present in India.[5] The democratic thoughts produced by ancient Indian texts are witness to it. 'The Vedic polity consisted of three important components: the king, his royal priests and other kingmakers or *rajkartarahas*, the two tribal assemblies *Sabha* or *Samiti* (*Vidatha* also) and the *Jana* or people'.[6] These assemblies exhibited features that are close to certain democratic features.

[3] Muhlberger and Paine, 'Democracy's Place in World History', 25–26.

[4] Benoy Kumar Sarkar, 'Democratic Ideals and Republican Institutions in India', *The American Political Science Review* 12, no. 4 (1918): 606. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/1945832 (accessed on 17 October 2018).

[5] Muhlberger and Paine, 'Democracy's Place in World History', 34–35.

[6] Ashok S. Chousalkar, *Revisiting the Political Thought of Ancient India: Pre-Kautilyan Arthashastra Tradition* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2018), 15.

> Although the early Aryans had the institution of monarchy and it had established itself on firm foundations, it was not absolute but limited in several ways. Certain democratic elements curtailed the absolute power of the king in many ways. These were: 1) the people's voice in choosing their king, 2) the oath that the king had to take at the coronation, and 3) the Assemblies of the people. It was the last institution that played a predominant part in curbing the power of the king.[7]

Regarding the role and responsibilities of the *Vidatha*, it is also observed that the *Vidatha* 'was largely responsible for the performance of religious ceremonies'.[8]

Apart from such political traditions, the social aspect of democracy and the way it is understood now also received some treatment. But in wider theoretical discussions on democracy, only the negative aspects of India's past appear to have been considered. The positive aspects which came in the form of protest movements, which stood for reason and rationality, are not sufficiently taken into consideration.

> The impression of the western observers has been that Indian society historically has been unchanging, and even today it is strongly tradition-bound. Some critics have further alleged that on account of the lack of free thinking and of action-mindedness, the people of India were destined to remain a backward society.[9]

Such criticism may be true to an extent, but it cannot be outrightly stated that India did not have free thinking in its spiritual

[7] Janki Nath Bhat, 'Ancient Indian Democracies', *Civilisations* 4, no. 1 (1954): 51. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/41377595 (accessed on 17 October 2018).

[8] Jagdish Prasad Sharma and H. W. Bailey, 'The Question of the Vidátha in Vedic India', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1/2 (1965): 56. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/25202807 (accessed on 18 January 2020).

[9] G. S. Halappa, 'Sri Basavesvara and Free Thinking', in *Sri Basavesvara: Eighth Centenary Commemoration Volume*, ed. S. S. Wodeyar (Bangalore: Government of Mysore, 1967), 145.

and cultural past. It may be observed that the civilizational legacy of reason and rationality is responsible for India's survival as a democracy.

The ideas of democratic tradition such as reason, dissent and secularism were all part of ancient Indian society. Ambedkar has pointed out one of such ideas. He observed that India

> has seen the conflict between ecclesiastical law and secular law long before Europeans sought to challenge the authority of the Pope. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* lays down the foundation of secular law. In India unfortunately ecclesiastical law triumphed over secular law. In my opinion this was the one of the greatest disasters in the country.[10]

Buddhism as a socio-spiritual movement had contributed to the early experiences of democracy in India. The leadership for this movement came from the ruling classes of that time and was supported by merchants and craftsmen.

> When Brahminical orthodoxy was disputed in ancient India by members of other groups (including merchants and craftsmen), the fact that the protesters were often quite affluent should not distract attention from the fact that, in the context of Brahmin-dominated orthodoxy, they were indeed distinctively underprivileged.[11]

Their exclusion from spiritual sphere made them to question the orthodoxy. As India witnessed changes in sociopolitical and economic spheres, democratic tendencies began to wither. It is observed that the

[10] Quoted in Velcheru Narayana Rao and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Notes on Political Thought in Medieval and Early Modern South India', *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 176. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/20488076 (accessed on 26 July 2018).

[11] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005), 10.

> defeat of the democratic tendency in ancient Indian life was a complicated process, not simply the result of the greater military power available to a successful warlord. There was a revival of hierarchical thinking, and a willingness of the enfranchised members of *ganas* to accept it.[12]

The democratic practices which existed in early India 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 the Bhakti Movement of Medieval India.

Democracy in the Lingayat Movement

One of the Bhakti Movements which gave wide scope to modern democratic practices was the social movement led by Basava in the 12th century. This is popularly known as the Lingayat Movement.

> 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 harsh injunctions so much so that Hindus were not allowed even to tour the foreign countries.[13]

The tradition of democracy again revived in the movement of Basava and his colleagues against the existing political system and hierarchical society. The monarchy which was upholding social order characterized by social hierarchy and discrimination was opposed and was dealt with intellectual and practical alternatives.

[12] Muhlberger and Paine, 'Democracy's Place in World History', 37.

[13] S. M. Hunashal, 'Basavesvara and Democracy', in *Sri Basavesvara: Eighth Centenary Commemoration Volume*, ed. S. S. Wodeyar (Bangalore: Government of Mysore, 1967), 485–486.

Democratic Narrative and Socially Marginalized

The significance of the Bhakti Movements lies in their efforts to democratize the social and spiritual spaces. The space that was dominated by force and manipulated by shrewdness was taken to task by intellectual and existential efforts. 'Movements against caste divisions that have figured repeatedly in Indian history, with varying degrees of success, have made good use of engaging arguments to question orthodox beliefs'.[14] Criticism of the dominant theology and internal criticism of their own ideas made Bhakti Movements to come up with fresh ideas in the realm of Indic thought.

> The Bhakti movement in India, by and large, was marked by the rejection of the existing ritual hierarchy and Brahmanical superiority; the use of the vernacular in preference to Sanskrit (the language of the elite); and the emergence of low-caste, non-literate persons as great spiritual leaders. There was large scale participation of peasantry, artisans, and other lower classes as well as ritually inferior but economically powerful groups such as skilled craftsmen in these devotional movements.[15]

As part of a kind of its political agenda, the literary tradition of the Lingayat Movement emphasized the common speech rather than the language of God.[16] The emphasis on Kannada language rather than the language of God enlarged its social base and, consequently, it became possible for everyone in society, from upper to lower strata, to express their social and philosophical views through their *vachanas*. The lyrical sayings of *Sharanas*

[14] Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, 10.

[15] Vijaya Ramaswamy, 'Rebels—Conformists? Women Saints in Medieval South India', *Anthropos* 1, no. 3 (1992): 133. Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/40462578 (accessed on 31 January 2018).

[16] T. R. Chandrashekhar, 'Vachana Samskruti: Ichina Oluvugalu' (Vachana Culture: Recent Leanings) in *Basavatatva: Samajika Badalavane* (Philosophy of Basava: Social Change), ed. Mahesh Tippashetti (Hampi, Karnataka: Prasaranga, Kannada Vishwavidyalaya, 2014), 105.

and *Sharanes*,[17] who participated in the movement are known as *vachanas*, and they are also referred to as *vacanas*.[18]

One of the efforts made by Basava and his colleagues 'in extending democratic space to articulation of contemporary issues was establishment of *Anubhava Mantapa*, the institution which became a democratic forum to deliberate on social, economic and spiritual ideas'.[19] In this forum, many issues were not only debated but conservative ideas were also rejected. Many *Sharanas* and *Sharanes* from socially marginalized communities participated in the debates on democratic ideals and principles. To name a few, Allama Prabhu, Madar Haralayya, Hadapada Appanna and Ambigara Choudayya set the agenda for discussion on social issues in *Anubhava Mantapa*. Allama Prabhu, the presiding *Sharana* of *Anubhava Manatapa*, came from the drum beaters community, which did not enjoy a good position in the social hierarchy. Many of colleagues or *Sharanas* of Basava were in the forefront in not only articulating spiritual matters but also issues related to human existence. Some of them, such as Haralayya and Maduvarasa, are remembered for making social life an inclusive one by taking an active part in encouraging

[17] *Sharana* means socio-religious reformer/revolutionary in the socio-religious Lingayat Movement in the 12th century. See S. H. Patil, *Community Dominance and Political Modernisation: The Lingayats* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2002), 425. Men socio-religious reformers were referred to as *Sharanas* and women socio-religious reformers were referred to as *Sharanes*.

[18] *Vachanas* of the Lingayat Movement have their own place of importance in Kannada literature in the sense that they democratized the language itself. Language as an agency of communicating social truths beneficial to everyone in the society from the so-called upper to lower was not given much importance in earlier Kannada literary works. In fact, reflecting the conservative thinking had become a routine literary process and was respected and recognized in intellectual circles. *Vachana* literature with its simplicity in projecting the social vision and conveying the inclusive social message made huge impact on later stage wide streams of Kannada literary works.

[19] Prakash Desai, 'Exploring the Modern in Medieval: Political Ideas of Basava', in *Indian Political Thought: Themes and Thinkers*, eds. Himanshu Roy and Mahendra Prasad Singh (New Delhi: Pearson, 2017), 65.

inter-caste marriage. Thus, they made social life democratic and radical by annihilating barriers of caste restrictions imposed by the upper and priestly strata of the society.

Basava, as one of the leaders of the movement, cleared many prejudices which had been held as social truths. Basava 'in his zeal to bring home to those so called low castes who were suffering from extreme inferiority complex that the birth has nothing to do with greatness'[20] did not hesitate to criticize his own birth. He expresses in one of his *vachanas* that he is a son of the couple who were working as servants in the houses of two socially marginalized *Sharanas* belonging to the communities of cobbler and tanner.

> The son of the servant-maid in Cennayya's house,
> The daughter of the maid in Kakkayya's house
> Those two went out to gather dung
> And fell together: I the son
> Born of those two-so witness me
> Lord Kudala Sangama![21]

It seems that the *Sharanas* and *Sharanes* from socially marginalized communities further democratized the Lingayat Movement and its philosophy by critiquing the conservative ideas of some *Sharanas* belonging to the upper strata of the society. 'The cracks in actual experience, which theology tries to cover up, the vachanas open up'.[22] Religious literature does not try to expose actual social practices. Consequently, many social practices which are against humanism have retained their place in different societies. If there is an effort to criticize this tendency, there is a possibility

[20] Sri Shivakumara Shivacharya, 'Introduction', in *Vacanas of Basavanna: A Selection*, ed. H. Deveerappa (Sirigere, Karnataka: Annana Balaga, 1967), 22; Armando Menezes and S. M. Angadi, Vacanas of Basavanna: A Selection, ed. H. Deveerappa (Sirigere, Karnataka: Annana Balaga, 1967).

[21] Menezes and Angadi, *Vacanas of Basavanna*, 113.

[22] H. S. Shivaprakash, *I Keep Vigil of Rudra: The Vachanas* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010), lxiii.

of such act being considered as heresy. Self-critique of the system is one of the exercises that *Sharanas* of the Lingayat Movement followed religiously. Basava, in fact, paved the way for such self-critique and later many of his colleagues went ahead to make it even more fierce in criticizing the actual practices of the society. In one of his *vachanas*, Basava observes:

I bow down to the symbol
When I see it.
But, if there is no conduct
To match the symbol,
I sniff at it.[23]

Sharanas belonging to marginalized communities did not hesitate to pinpoint wrong ideas and beliefs.[24] When their food culture was objected to by the *Sharanas*, including Basava, they responded by questioning how the eater of the flesh of cow, a cobbler, became inferior when cow is an animal which provides nectar to Lord Shiva?[25] The difference is that one consumes milk and the other consumes flesh. The essence of their response must have been the rectification of the beliefs held by others on food culture. When the source for both milk and flesh is the same, how can the consumer of flesh become inferior and the other become superior?

The illogical and pompous life without practice and just with mere utterance of philosophical ideas has been severely condemned by Ambigara Choudayya, a *Sharana* belonging to socially marginalized communities.[26] The practices of priestly class in the Lingayat Movement came under severe criticism by Choudayya.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Shivarudra Kallollikar, 'Basavatatva: Talavargada Drushtiyalli' (The Philosophy of Basava: As Envisioned by the Marginalized) in *Basavatatva: Samajika Badalavane* (Philosophy of Basava: Social Change), ed. Mahesh Tippashetti (Hampi, Karnataka: Prasaranga, Kannada Vishwavidyalaya, 2014), 127.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid, 124–125.

Providing religious initiation as a mere profession as practised by *Jangamas*[27] was not liked by him. For him, they and their profession of religious initiation looked like the practices of Vedic priestly class.[28] The claim of *Jangamas* that they would spiritually empower the marginalized angered Choudayya. The reason for his anger is the practice and belief of *Jangamas* that they are superior as well as their campaign towards preservation of their caste consciousness.[29] In one of his *vachanas*, he suggests punishment for such *Jangamas* who just preach without practice.[30]

The question of social hierarchy in the form of higher and lower caste was given sufficient rational treatment by *Sharanes* through their critique of the myths and prejudices associated with it. Kalavve, one of the *Sharanes*, exposes the myth of high and low status in society on the basis of the food one eats. She observed:

They say—
All those are high born
Who eat sheep, fowl and tiny fish,
They say——
All those are low born
Who eat the cow that rains on Shiva
Sacred milk sanctified five times.
What the Brahmins had eaten adorned the grass
And a dog licked it up and went away
What the cobblers had eaten adorned the grass—
Now Brahmins' ornament.
In other words
Bags are made of cow's hide
For ghee and for water
Senseless Brahmins who drink
Ghee and water from such leather bags
Thinking it sacred

[27] *Jangama* means the preacher, the one who initiates devotees into spirituality.
[28] Kallollikar, 'Basavatatva', 124–125.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

They can't escape
Utmost perdition.
The master of Urilingapeddi
Doesn't approve of such men.[31]

Contemporary sociological works and social anthropologists have come up with critical remarks about Bhakti Movements. For some of them,

> 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.[32]

Here, one needs to evaluate the impact of such movements on the effort of liberation from age-old slavery in the form of discrimination associated with caste. No doubt, they did not succeed in eliminating caste discrimination and continuation of the superiority complex, but they became the agencies of critiquing the very society which somehow managed to continue age-old practices in new incarnations. Apart from this, it needs to be noted that Bhakti Movements had become forums for internal criticism that came from marginalized communities. Their critique dwelt on the same age-old practices knowingly or unknowingly supported by some participants in the Bhakti Movements. Moreover, the labour which was considered as polluting practice received dignity and self-respect. 'Work itself is worship' (*Kayakave Kailasa*)[33] became the philosophy of Bhakti Movements like the Lingayat Movement.

[31] Shivaprakash, *I Keep Vigil of Rudra*, 81.

[32] M. N. Srinivas, 'An Obituary on Caste as a System', *Economic & Political Weekly* 38, no. 5 (2003): 458.

[33] Shivaprakash, *I Keep Vigil of Rudra*, lxv.

The Arguments of Women as Agencies of Democratization

The religious experiences of women in Vedic period were quite egalitarian.

> When examining religious experiences of Hindu women in the first, or Vedic, period, which lasts until the 6th century BC, one notices the distinct pattern of a number of women philosophers, such as Lopamudra, Gargi, Maitreyi, and others, living in an 'egalitarian' society, in which women enjoyed freedom and had access to all religious activities.[34]

But this did not last long. Whatever space was there for religious freedom and creative dialogue was lost. As time passed, women were forced to lead a marginalized life in society.[35]

> In a period roughly corresponding to that in which sati became prevalent, restrictions came into force on *Niyoga* (dead man's brother or next of kin marrying his widow) and on widow remarriage. From around AD 1000 total prohibition of widow remarriage seems to have become quite widespread. Decline in the rights and freedom of widows, fall in educational levels of women as well as greater prevalence of child marriage indicate a substantial reduction in women's status.[36]

Buddhism and Jainism have their own place in the efforts made to understand the space for women in social and religious order.

[34] Chandra Y. Mudaliar, 'Religious Experiences of Hindu Women: A Study of Akka Mahadevi', *Mystics Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (1991): 137. Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/20717064 (accessed on 13 June 2015).

[35] Shamala Dasoga, Basavatatva: Mahile (The Philosophy of Basava: Women), in *Basavatatva: Samajika Badalavane* (Philosophy of Basava: Social Change), ed. Mahesh Tippashetti (Karnataka: Prasaranga, Kannada Vishwavidyalaya, 2014), 133.

[36] Sophie M. Tharakan and Michael Tharakan, 'Status of Women in India: A Historical Perspective', *Social Scientist* 4, no. 4/5, Special Number on Women (1975): 120. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/3516124 (accessed on 8 November 2018).

'Buddhism recognized the individuality and independence of women and their title to salvation in their own right whether married or single'.[37] Like Buddhism, Jainism created a religious space for women but its views on women in their social life came under certain criticism.

> Jainism did admit women to the religious order of nuns. But there were some differences of opinion between Digambaras and Svetambaras, regarding their title to liberation. The former hold the view that they cannot become perfect without getting reborn as men while the latter maintain that they can, in their own right. The Jains maintain that in the monastic life, the nun is inferior to the monk![38]

The next stage of democratic experiences of women began to 'respond intellectually and spiritually to the state of decadence and oppression of the preceding era'.[39] The social order which considered women as inferior was questioned in the next stage. The idea of salvation for women as it was understood and practised by society was challenged. 'Generally, the brahmanical way of treating women's salvation was the surrender of the ego by becoming a self-sacrificing mother, a chaste wife and an obedient daughter. Obviously brahmanical society opposed their presence in the religious field as preachers'.[40] This opposition was challenged and proved as wrong by many women saints of the Bhakti Movement. India witnessed a number of saints and seers who played significant role in articulating feminist views in Bhakti Movements of the Medieval period. These Bhakti Movements have many outstanding women in them. They were considered on par with, and often superior to, men in their devotional and

[37] Sarojini Shintri, 'Basava and Womanhood', in *Sri Basavesvara: Eighth Centenary Commemoration Volume*, ed. S. S. Wodeyar (Bangalore: Government of Mysore, 1967), 152.

[38] Ibid., 153.

[39] Chandra Y. Mudaliar, 'Religious Experiences of Hindu Women', 137.

[40] Anjali Verma, *Women and Society in Early Medieval India: Re-Interpreting Epigraphs* (London: Routledge, 2019), 113.

intellectual pursuits.[41] Many of them questioned the intellect of the prevailing social order and also objected to its continuation among men who claimed to be progressive but remained the same on the question of women in spiritual and other matters. Thus, they paved the way for protests within protest movements if the basic objectives of very protests were not respected and fulfilled.

The period between the 11th century and the 12th century witnessed significant changes in the region of Kalyana ruled by the Chalukyas with respect to the status of women.[42] They not only occupied some important political and religious positions but also participated in philosophical discussions. However, problems such as the Sati system were prevalent, and marriage as a social union was strictly hierarchical.[43] Against such social practices and many others, the Lingayat Movement emerged as a protest movement in the 12th century to articulate views and practise the ideals. One of its objectives was to ensure equal space to women in the society.

The Lingayat Movement was a unique experiment as far as discussion on equal status to the women is concerned.[44] Nearly 60 saints of the Lingayat Movement were women.[45] 'These are not anonymous; they have legends and places associated with them, and many have left behind them bodies of poetry. The most famous of them is Mahadeviyakka'.[46] It was not just Akka Mahadevi who received equal respect for her intellectual and

[41] A. K. Ramanujan, 'Talking to God in the Mother Tongue', *India International Centre Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1992): 55. Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/23004008 (accessed on 19 July 2018).

[42] Indumati P. Patil, 'The Position of Women during 11th and 12th century A.D. (with Special Reference to Chalukyas of Kalyana)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 65 (2004), 126–130. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/44144726 (accessed 1 October 2019).

[43] Ibid.

[44] Vinaya Chaitanya, *Songs for Siva: Vacanas of Akka Mahadevi* (New Delhi: Harper Perennial, 2017), xxiv.

[45] Ramanujan, 'Talking to God in the Mother Tongue', 55.

[46] Ibid.

spiritual strength, there were many women writers of *vachanas* whose intellect was equally respected in the movement. 'Such equality applied not only in the matter of literary creation, which is a specialty, but in all aspects of daily life. Menstruating women, for instance, were not considered "unclean" and could attend worship like all others'.[47] The radicalism can be observed in the writings of both male and female saints of the Lingayat Movement. The significance of women saints of the Lingayat Movement lies in their approach to spiritual and social issues.

> Like Akka Mahadevi, many of the female *vachanakaras* combined divinity and deviance, transcendentalism with powerful social protest and flouting of all conventions, whether social or religious. While the alternate voice of a 'counter culture' can be perceived in both male and female Virasaivites, the impact is much stronger in the case of the women because theirs is a dual defiance: a defiance of the Brahmanical system as well as of the patriarchal structure.[48]

In *vachana* literary tradition, woman is not just a biological component, she is also a social fact.[49] In this tradition, an effort has been made to understand gender relations socially. The concept of gender as philosophized by *Sharanas* and *Sharanes* is unique in the sense that they came with new observations which can be considered as a predecessor to modern arguments on gender. Jedara Dasimayya, one of the early *Vachanakara*,[50] questions the prevailing understanding with regards to a man and a woman. He said:

If they see
breasts and long hair coming
they call it woman,

[47] Chaitanya, *Songs for Siva*, xxiv.

[48] Vijaya Ramaswamy, 'Rebels, Mystics or Housewives? Women in Virasaivism', *India International Centre Quarterly* 23, no. 3/4 (1996): 192. Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/23004619 (accessed on 12 August 2013).

[49] Chandrashekhar, 'Vachana Samskruti', 98.

[50] *Vachanakara* means one who expresses his socio-spiritual ideas through his *vachanas*.

if beard and whiskers
they call it man:
but, look, the self that hovers
in between
is neither man
nor woman
O Ramanatha.[51]

Siddharama, one of the *Sharanas* of the Lingayat Movement, says in his *vachana* that woman is not just a female sex and not a demoness even, but she is the very embodiment of God.[52] *Sharanas* not only tried to understand and make the status of women on par with men but also perceived them as divine beings.

By further extending their debates on the social and spiritual status, *Sharanes* gave radical and intellectual observations. Akka Mahadevi's place in the Lingayat Movement and philosophy is unique. Her views on divinity, marriage and freedom have much impact on the movement in the sense that the other *Sharanas* had to make much effort in questioning and responding to her on these ideas.

> Forced to a rash but courageous course of action, Akka mahadevi renounced her parents, her suitor, her home, and even her clothes and left her village clad only in her long tresses. Asserting that she could never wed any man, much less a Jaina, she revealed that she was already married to none other than the Lord Himself and that she would keep herself only unto Him.[53]

[51] A. K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993), 92.

[52] For English translation of the Vachana, see Vijaya Ramaswamy (1996), *Divinity and Deviance: Women in Virasaivism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), x.

[53] R. Blake Michael, 'Women of the Śūnyasaṃpādane: Housewives and Saints in Vīraśaivism', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, no. 2 (1983): 363. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/601458 (accessed on 11 July 2019).

One of the *vachanas* of Akka Mahadevi is a critique of the marriage and the patriarchy associated with it. The *vachana* is as follows:

To him with no death,
No decay
No form
To the beautiful one
I have given myself O Mother.
To him with no place
No end
No space
No signs
To the beautiful one
I have given myself O Mother.
To him with no clan
No country,
To the peerless
Handsome one
I have given myself O Mother.
For the reason
Channamallikarjuna, the handsome one
Is the man for me.
These wasting, dying men—
Take them away
Throw them into the oven![54]

Seeking individual freedom and making the people of society to mind their own business was well expressed in one of the *vachanas* by her. The representation of the idea of individuality and, at the same time, thinking about community was narrated quite proficiently in the *vachanas* of Akka Mahadevi.

Why do you make me talk?
My hair is loose, my face is sad,
My body is melting.
O brothers, why do you make me talk?
O fathers, I have been through much,

[54] Shivaprakash, *I Keep Vigil of Rudra*, 159.

Becoming has stopped for me,
Crooked ways are no more.
Becoming devoted, I have joined
Channamallikarjuna, jasmine-tender,
And am free of family.[55]

Arguments which do not favour egalitarian gender relationship are also traced in the *vachanas*. The concepts of woman, gold and land are used in discriminatory ways to state the arguments. Such arguments do not make differentiation between these concepts and almost treat women as a material thing that men try to gain and control in the same way they do with gold and land. For the understanding that woman, gold and land are enticements, Allama Prabhu observed in one of his *vachanas* that they are not, and that the real enticement is the insatiable appetite of the mind.[56] However, for him, the mind bothered more than the belief that equates women to a property to be owned.[57] Therefore, it is observed that *Sharanas* of the movement too had certain anxieties and complexities on the question of gender equality or equal space for women in all spheres of life.[58]

Even Basava, who is regarded as intellectual torchbearer of the movement, was not free from certain complexities and it cannot be said that he was completely liberal in this regard.

Committing adultery
Is an immoral act;
So, as she withdrew
To a broken wall
A scorpion stung her.
Hearing her shouts,

[55] Chaitanya, *Songs for Siva*, 128.

[56] For English translation of the Vachana, see Ramaswamy, *Divinity and Deviance*, ix.

[57] Mallika Ghanti, 'Basavatatva Mattu Mahile' (The Philosophy of Basava and Woman) in *Basavatatva: Samajika Badalavane* (Philosophy of Basava: Social Change), ed. Mahesh Tippashetti (Hampi, Karnataka: Prasaranga, Kannada Vishwavidyalaya, 2014), 145.

[58] Ibid., 144–145.

A guardsman robbed.
Her of her dress.
Going home in shame,
Her husband raised
Weals on her back:
Lord Kudala Sangama, the king,
Collected his fine![59]

Such *vachanas* appear sexist[60] because woman is perceived as responsible for deviation in moral order. Here, woman is looked upon as a criminal and the guardsman, the husband and the king are in the position of judges to judge the character of a woman. The way a woman is made responsible for an immoral act, the man is not made responsible and is free from punishment. One deserves punishment, and the other does not. Thus, it is brought to the notice that there is no uniformity in the vision and observations of *Sharanas* on the issues related to gender relation.[61] Often, patriarchal and biased arguments can be observed in their understanding.

The *Kayaka* philosophy of the Lingayat Movement has been religiously followed and philosophized by *Sharanes*. In this regard, several instances can be given. When her husband Marayya was merely chatting without doing his work, *Sharane* Lakkamma reminds and advises him about his work.[62] Thus, for her, work without devotion and devotion without work become meaningless. *Sharanes* such as Molige Mahadevi and Aydakki Lakkamma have made observations on worldly and otherworldly life.[63] They had to dwell on this effort because their husbands were inclined to think more upon the other-worldly life. They wanted to get rid of the worldly life and join *Kailasa* (heaven or abode of Shiva). For these illusions, they responded that there is no duality of death and *Kailasa*. According to them, the belief that

[59] Menezes and Angadi, *Vacanas of Basavanna*, 37.
[60] Chandrashekhar, 'Vachana Samskruti', 100.
[61] Ibid., 95.
[62] Ibid., 96.
[63] Ibid., 97.

one can go to *Kailasa* is an illusion. Mahadevi asserts that one should become Shiva himself than simply desiring that one can see Shiva in *Kailasa* and temples.[64] By considering her husband himself as Shiva, she rejects his desire of meeting Shiva and his abode.

Kayaka and *Dasoha* as Existential Episteme to Democratic Theory

Indian spiritual tradition has given importance to all spheres of life. It significantly deals with pertinent questions on material life. 'Indian materialism has a historical tradition dating much earlier than the rise of Carvaka or Lokayata school'.[65] It could not be developed as a school or system of philosophy, but its beginnings are found quite early in the history.[66]

> Indian religious thought does address this-worldly concerns. Philosophically, the Hindu tradition recognizes that ultimate reality (*Brahman*) is not only transcendent and impersonal, but is, also, immanent (intrinsic) and personal (an *Isvara*). The aim of life for the Hindu is not just *moksa*, or spiritual freedom, but equally *artha*, or material satisfaction. Thus, religion in the Indian tradition has not divorced itself from the secular affairs of society such as economic and political activity.[67]

To what extent these secular and materialistic traditions paved the way for democratic and egalitarian life is a big question

[64] Ibid.

[65] A. K. Sinha, 'Traces of Materialism in Early Vedic Thought: A Study', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 75, no. 1/4 (1994): 235–236. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/41694419 (accessed on 25 October 2019).

[66] Ibid., 236.

[67] Rajeev H. Dehejia and Vivek H. Dehejia, 'Religion and Economic Activity in India: An Historical Perspective', *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 52, no. 2 (1993): 145–146. Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/3487047 (accessed on 20 July 2018).

that needs to be objectively analysed and explored. The answer for this question can be traced in Indic tradition of democratic experiments in Medieval India. What was philosophized was practised in the Indic Bhakti traditions of Medieval India. These traditions were not just mere seekers of liberation for the souls, they also celebrated their culture of work along with spirituality. Thus, they gave new meaning to human life that was to a major extent missing in the form of practice that was preached in our early history.

As a part of the main objective of creating egalitarian social life, Basava came up with two concepts, namely *Kayaka* and *Dasoha*. *Kayaka* means way of producing wealth and *Dasoha* means distribution of wealth.[68] 'Basava advocated toward building an egalitarian community based on the dignity of work, community service and sharing, diligence, thrift, and sobriety.'[69] These two concepts articulated by Basava and his colleagues became successful because they were religiously practised by the followers of the Lingayat Movement in democratizing the process of economic production. They can even be understood as egalitarian ideas and approaches for the genuine practice of democracy in the sense that they can clear the possible social and economic chaos in society which could ultimately affect democratic life.

There is an argument that political democracy would work better if it were accompanied by social and economic democracy.[70] Efforts have been made in this regard at both theoretical and practical

[68] S. S. Marulayya, *Basavannanavara Siddantagalu* (The Philosophical Ideas of Basava; Dharawad: Shree Basaveshwara Peetha, Karnataka University, 2003), 72.

[69] Danesh A. Chekki, *Religion and Social System of the Virasaiva Community* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 59.

[70] Robin Blackburn, 'Economic Democracy: Meaningful, Desirable, Feasible?' *Daedalus* 136, no. 3 (2007): 36. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/20028127 (accessed on 26 October 2019).

levels. Ideas such as welfare state, social control over production and planned economy have been discussed and practised in different countries. However, the very aspiration of human beings to be equal even at a minimum level with everyone in their respective societies in social and economic spheres has not yet become a reality. The resultant inequality from social and economic chaos present in different societies is posing challenges to political democracy that is practised in its different forms such as elections, freedom and participation in decision-making. Spirituality and work that produce anything that is for the benefit of humanity can be a good combination of normative ideas to make democracy successful in its functioning. If the humanity becomes conscious about such ideas, they can be perfect guidelines or can act as alternatives to various ideas of making democracy both social and economic. 'If the theological formulations of the Sharana movement stand for the culture of the head, its devotional and mystical poetry represents the culture of the heart. The culture of the hand is represented by the philosophy of Kayaka'.[71] Thus, the concepts of *Kayaka* and *Dasoha* are indeed existential epistemes to democratic theory.

Conclusion

Democratic experiment of the Lingayat Movement cannot be considered as a complete success, but it laid the foundation for further experiments of a similar nature. It is because of certain firm civilizational democratic roots that democracy as an idea is being debated and discussed continuously in India. Any direct or indirect threat to this civilizational foundation cannot sustain but remain as mere, unwarranted phase in our history of the future. 'The "idea of India" is indeed an open, assimilative, and spacious one, sustaining a plurality of voices, orthodox and dissenting, of

[71] Shivaprakash, *I Keep Vigil of Rudra*, lxv.

many ages, regions, and affiliations.'[72] The Lingayat Movement was witness to debate and criticism among the *Sharanas* and *Sharanes* within the movement. When any arguments without much rationale and reason came to the fore, the same were put to harsh critique and debate in the movement by the *Sharanas* and *Sharanes*. Socially marginal voices succeeded in clearing the doubts of the leaders of the movement who wooed certain conservative lines on the questions of gender equality, social and spiritual space for women and the marginalized.

[72] Jonardon Ganeri, 'Intellectual India: Reason, Identity, Dissent', *New Literary History* 40, no. 2 (2009): 262. Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/27760257 (accessed on 28 October 2018).