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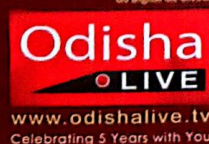### on
### Indian Cultural Heritage:
### Past, Present & Future

18-20 March 2017
Bhubaneswar, Odisha (India)

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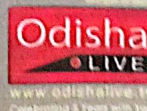
# Harmony in society: a Lingayat and Buddhist Philosophical Perspective

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**Abstract :** Buddhism and Lingayat or Virashaivism have flourished in India and both religions are initiated by two great social and religious personas of ancient times. Buddhism, which was established by the Buddha, marched towards becoming a world religion. This is a fascinating matter that, their philosophy about the society and the social harmony, human rights, freedom etc., agree to a great extent. The Buddha and the Basaveshwara were presented comprehensive religious freedom, equality without any discrimination as men or women in all social matters and more significantly, they presented a simple religion and Philosophy that can be followed by anyone, including illiterate. By these groundbreaking religious steps they bring an inordinate transformation to our society. This paper mainly focuses on the Buddha and the Basaveshwara's teachings and their philosophy to create a harmonious society. It will also try to analyze the practicality of their philosophy in present scenario. Predominantly this paper will discuss on the cast system, equality, human rights, religious freedom and rituals, coherence in religions and other aspects of Indian society in the background of creating a harmonious society in the light of Lingayat and Buddhist philosophy.

Keywords: Buddhism, Lingayat, Harmony, Philosophy, Religion, Society, Cast system, Ethics.

## 1. Introduction

World religions were always taught us about harmony not only with human beings, but also with the nature. To accomplish the basic objectives of all human beings in the society the comprehensive human aim needed to be understood. The religions always guided us about factual understanding of every individual, prosperity in the family, trust and fearlessness in society and pleasant co-existence with nature. Society may change over the years. To build a harmonious society and to resource the basic aspirations of all human beings in the society, the religions are framed an appropriate human goal. In this regard, Buddhism and Virashaivism have great impact on our Indian society.

Both Buddhism and Lingayat or Virashaivism have flourished in India and both religions are initiated by two great social and religious personas of ancient times. Buddhism, whichwas established by the Buddha, marched towards becoming a world religion. The Lingayat movement originated by the *Basaveshwara* or *Basavanna* brings a great socio-religious reforms in Southern India, specifically in Karnataka. They both have nearly 2000 years of difference in the timeline of history. This is a fascinating matter that, their philosophy about the society and the social harmony, human rights, freedom etc., agree to a great extent. They both rigorously opposed the caste based *Varnashrama* System, blind faiths, untouchability and all other evil practices existed of their time. The *Buddha* and the *Basaveshwara* were presented comprehensive religious freedom, equality without any discrimination as men or women in all social matters and more significantly, they presented a simple religion and Philosophy that can be followed by anyone, including illiterate. By these groundbreaking religious steps they bring an inordinate transformation to our society.

## 2. Buddhist perspective

Buddhism is a religion of morality, humanity, compassion and equality. From the beginning, is upholding peace and harmony in society. The Buddha was born and initiated his unique religion at the time of social chaos, political unrest and religious inequality in India. The Buddha was grew up in Indian traditions and social conditions. He knew every flaw and problems of contemporary society. By his unique teachings, and simple religion he left an unforgettable impression of Indian culture and heritage. His teachings have universal significance and contemporary of every generation.

**2.1 Religious Harmony:** Religions and faiths are eternal and indissoluble parts of our Indian society. This is the land of thousands of beliefs and traditions, which

were followed by the people. Nevertheless, the coherence between these traditions has played a major role in social harmony and welfare. But it is also well known from the history that, the turbulence and conflict between various religions caused a great damage and disorder in society.

The Buddha never spoke judgmentally of other religions. He always insisted his admirers to avoid debates and conflicts with followers of other traditions. He explains his idea on faiths in *Brhmajala Sutta* –

'If anyone were to find fault or abuse me or the Doctrine or the Noble Order, do not, monks, for that matter, be offended, displeased, or ruffled. If by any means you become offended or disturbed, it will be to your own harm. On the other hand, whenever people hurl abuse and criticize, you should pause and think whether what they say contains some truth or whether what they say is just slander and falsity. Likewise, monks, if someone were to praise and glorify me, the Doctrine, or the Noble Order, you should not for that matter, feel particularly elated or pleased. If you do so, it will be to your own harm. On the contrary, in such an event you should pause and examine the truth of the matter. You should find out whether what they say is actually to be found in us and whether they are correct.'[1]

The Buddhist literature does point out the general direction of social thinking, and to that extent they are suggestive for our own times. The Buddha's teachings were clear and he tells his admirers not to accept someone's statements as authority, he says, even his sentences should also be examined and if it appears as true, then only one could follow. Buddha explains – 'You must accept my words after examining them and not merely out of regard for me.' The Buddha advocated his followers not to believe in miracles and marvels. He told his followers not to embrace theories, which could not be proved by realistic reflections.

## 1.2 Nonviolence, Morality and Equality:
The Buddha's life is an impeccable example of moral and ethical living. He himself led his followers in the path of prajna or wisdom and Karuna or compassion. He rigorously condemned violence by all means, including the yajnic sacrifice. According to him – 'Victory breeds hatred; the conquered live in sorrow.'[2] The Buddhist literature gives several instances of Buddha's love about non-violence. He said, war results in a venomous circle of hatred and domination. 'Never in this world can hatred be conquered by hatred. It can be conquered only

by non-hatred'[3]. Buddhism is strongly related with non-violence and harmony. These features have been intensely exemplified in its literature. For Buddhism, the ultimate liberty is to attain complete relief from the root causes of all misery. They are the greed, hatred and delusion. These are the root causes of individual sorrow and also for all social evils.

'By protecting oneself (e.g., morally), one protects others; by protecting others, one protects oneself.'[4]

Thus, the Buddha advocates his followers to forward in the path of morality, non-violence. He opposed Vedic Varnashrama system, which was also a major cause of inequality in the society. According to him, every human being is equal. No one cannot divide humanity in the name of caste and creed.

## 3. Lingayat Perspective

The Lingayat or Virashaivism has originated from one of the great social reformer of 12th century A.D, Basavanna or Basaveshwara.As Buddhism, this religion was also started against the inequality, caste system and untouchability of Vedic religion.Basavanna's social and religious reforms are based on the revolutionary concept of 'Ishtalinga'. He tried to establish a casteless and classless society purely based on spirituality and to uplift humanity to the highest state of divinity.

**3.1 Extinction of Casteism:**Basavanna declares that all human beings are children of one and only ultimate reality or God. Basavanna has objected the caste system very vigorously and in order to eliminate that, he has initiated a lot of reforms in society. He opposed social inequities and the domination of an intellectual aristocracy. Basavanna's main objective was to establish a well-organized society containing the idea of a common Divinity, a common religious status, a common code of behavior and a common social status.[5] He knew only by these reforms, the society will be harmonious and peaceful.

**3.2 Concepts of Kayaka and Dasoha:**The uniqueness of the Lingayat religious movement is, it is not only a religious crusade, but also an economic, social and literary movement. The Basavanna was a prime minister of Kalyana state. Obviously his economic views reflected in his religion. He treats wealth as a demonic power, the inappropriate use of money will destroy the goodness in human beings. So the proper management of wealth is the key toa prosperous society towards harmony. Thus the Basavanna introduced two unique

conceptions of Kayaka and Dasoha. 'Work' is the simple literary meaning of Kayaka, however Basavanna expounded it in another way. In this life everyone should work, everyone has to undertake some profession for a livelihood. In that profession should do with dedication, honesty and sincerity. He advocated that, 'work is worship' and declares, 'if one is busy with Kayaka, he can forget seeing his Guru or even he can forget the worship of Linga too'. The money, which was earned by Kayaka doesn't entirely belong to a particular individual. One should spend some part of it to Dasoha. Dasoha means 'offering'. One should earn his own livelihood and also spent for feeding poor men and to Jangamas[6] in society. Even the Jangamas were not exempted from Kayaka and they weren't considered as parasites. Basavanna explained, 'though a Jangama, ultimate salvation can be only through performance of work'. The money, which earned by *'Sathya-shuddha-Kayaka'* (Honorably and dedicatedly done work) is only eligible for Dasoha. Basavanna's this system implicates a well-knit system of both production and distribution and it also avoids the accretion of wealth in a few individuals in society.

This conception of occupations is completely an innovative and sacred one. It is not only essential for well-being in this worldly life, but also equally so for ultimate liberation. This socialite view of Basavanna is completely based on spiritualism. According to Kayaka theory, every profession is equal and it has nothing to do with caste whatsoever. In Kalyana from Prime Minister to the tanner, tailor, treasure, barber cobbler were having equal status. He also remarkably condemns bribe and corruption.

## 4. Present Scenario and Harmonious Society

Today Indian society has come through a lot of changes. Particularly in the past century our society has undergone a more fundamental transformation. We have been facing diversified and more complicating social issues. The society has been witnessing an extreme extent of alterations in its structure. Numerous different and obscuring evils have been generated and once again to overcome these problems, the teachings of the Buddha and the Basavanna are the need of the hour. The virtuous society will concern itself primarily with the material and social conditions for individual development, and only secondarily with material creation. Buddha Says:

'He who has understanding and great wisdom does not think of harming himself or another, nor of harming both alike. He rather thinks of his own welfare, of that of others, of that of both, and of the welfare of the whole world. In that way one shows understanding and great wisdom.'[7]

Both Buddhism and Lingayatism are the great peace-establishing force in the world. In modern Indian society, social action in its perplexing forms, is seen both as the distinctive way of discharging the sorrow and increasing human welfare. In the meanwhile, as a thoughtful model of service, of self-sacrifice, by humanists of all religions. We live in such a phase in which we have numerous provoking problems surrounding us. We suffer from solitude apprehension and a lack of confidences. How can we feel secure in a society, where very little seems to be safe and sound? How can we attain awareness, which may bring liberty and amity? How can we find out the strength and courage inside us? It is the religion which points to the best way for our rising from gloom, obliviousness, wisdom, and morality.

Some other important questions frequently raised these days are, what is the way to measure the accomplishment of a society? It shouldn't be in economic terms. How we can assess the success of the society. We will be looking at whether people generally have an enlarged sense of cheerfulness, accomplishment, fulfillment, whether people are growing in general human qualities, in moral and in creative issues? How we are going to measure the ethnic and spiritual development of the society? We need to put forward an unconventional image of development and that is evolving in human values, in spirituality and in morality.

Modern Indian great social thinker's like Mahatma Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar saw the religion as the best, even the only way to bring about something like an ideal society – a 'new society'. They believed that, a pure democratic religion can build a society in terms of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The essence of all religious practice involves changing human nature.

Both Buddhism and Lingayatism are the religions of humanity, kindness and equality. They strive to promote peace and harmony among people. Both religions encourage the development of human thought, human virtue and humanity. They have demonstrated us to be ready to oppose inequality and teaches us to leave behind the borders of caste and creed. They teach us to

feed the starved, cherish the sick, lift the broken and love even our foes.

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**Notes:**

1 Brahmajala Sutta, Dhiga Nikaya

2 Jayam veram pasavati Dukkham seti Parajito. (Dhammapada, Sukhavagga – 5)

3 Na hi Verena Verani Samntida Kudachana. Averena ca Sammanti. (Ibid, Yamakavaggo – 5)

4 Samyutta Nikaya – 47

5 Basaveshwara Vachana Samputa, (Ed) M.M. Kalaburgi, Govt. of Karnataka, Vol – I

6 Sannyasins or saints of Lingayatism are called as Jangama.

7 Anguttara Nikaya (Gradual Sayings) Fours, No. 186

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