

James Aerthayil

*Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore*

## VIRASAIVISM - A SAIVITE REVOLUTION IN KARNATAKA

Virasaivism is a strong and flourishing religious tradition in the Saivite sect within Hinduism with an antiquity of Hinduism itself. It was Basava who gave a definite shape to this tradition in the 12th century in Karnataka. The aim of this essay is to give a short and comprehensive account of Virasaivism with a view to shed some light on the multi-faceted development of popular Hinduism.

### 1. The historical roots

Virasaivism has its roots in Saivism which has the special characteristic feature of worshiping God Siva in the symbol of *linga*. The origin of this worship is from pre-historic times. The findings at Mohanjadaro and Harappa show that the cult of Siva and the worship of *linga* existed as early as Indus Valley civilization, which is considered to be pre-Aryan, around 3000 BC.<sup>1</sup> Siva was often worshipped and represented in the form of *linga* (Phallus) and his female counterpart *Sakti*, in the form of *yoni* (female reproductive organ). This close association of the mother-goddess and Siva in the form of *linga* and *yoni* has given the basis for the later theologies of Saivism and Saktism. The mother goddess, the principle of fecundity and generation, has transformed herself in Saktism into reality, in Brahmanism into Durga-kali, in philosophy into *maya*, the cause of the existence of the world, and in *Samkhya* system into the doctrine of *purusha* and *prakrti*. The close affinity of Siva and the mother goddess in the form of *linga* and *yoni* further symbolized the unification of all polarities. The whole doctrine of *linga* later gets a spiritual transcendence and becomes symbolic of the union of man and God in bliss (*ananda*).

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1. John Marshall (ed.), *Mohanjadaro and Indus Civilization*, (London : Arthur Probsthain 1931, p. 52-56; A.D. Pusalkar, "The Indus Valley Civilization," in *The History and the Culture of the Indian People* (ed.), R.C. Majumdar (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1951, Vol. I, p, 186-89).

The four *vedas* and the twenty-eight *agamas* (sacred tradition) and the *Tantras* are the canonical writings of the Saivites. These are believed to be revelations from the supreme Lord Siva. The Vedas with different gods and diverse practices meet the needs of souls in the initial stages. The *Saiva-agamas*<sup>2</sup> with Siva as the only God, are meant for those who are in an advanced spiritual stage. The *tantras* give us transcendental knowledge that liberates us from the pain of existence in history.<sup>3</sup> It is not, however, easy to determine the age of composition of *agamas* and *tantras*. Saivite cult existed already in vedic period. Its influence on Brahmanism is seen in the Upanishads. Mahabharata mentions certain modes of agamic worship.<sup>4</sup> From these we may safely conclude that the *agamas* and *tantras* were composed during the early centuries of christian era. This does not mean that the ideas contained in these books belong to this period, but it only means that Saivism took a definite shape and got established as a separate religious sect with *agamas* and *tantras*.

## 2. Schools of Saivism

Saivism gave rise to many schools of philosophy, the important among them are: 1) Pasupata of Gujarath, 2) Saiva Siddhanta of Tamilnadu, 3) Sivadvaita of Kashmir and 4) Virasaivism of Karnataka.<sup>5</sup>

i) The earliest sect of Saivism known to us is the Pasupata sect. First reference to this sect are found in the great epic *Mahabharata* (c. 400–300 BC). In the Dronaparvam of Mahabharata Siva is described as an abnormal and insane character. He is pictured as one moving into the Devadaru forest with red-eyes, body full of ashes and fire in hands. While moving in the forest, he danced, sang and made amorous gestures.<sup>6</sup> Then

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2. cfr. A.V. Paranjoti, *Saivasidhanta* (London: Luzac & Co Ltd. 1951, p. 15–18). An agama consists of four *kandas* (sections). *Jnanakanda* is related to the knowledge of God, *Yogakanda* concerns itself with concentration on an object, *kriyakanda* enumerates the different works connected with (Siva-bhakti) devotion to Siva, and *Karya-kanda* explains the details of worship.
  3. A. Motilal Pandit, *Saivism a Religio-philosophical History* (New Delhi: Theological Research and Communication Institute, 1987, p. 11).
  4. *Mahabharata*, XII, 18, 31; E.W. Hopkins, *The Great Epic of India* (New York: Charles Scribners & Sons 1901), p. 88).
  5. Gujarath, Tamilnadu, Kashmir and Karnataka are four out of 24 states of the Indian union.
  6. *Mahabharata*, Dronaparvam, ch. 80.

the great book advises that the proper observance of this Pasupata religion will produce great merit.<sup>7</sup> During the early centuries of Christian era, Pasupatism got established and became prevalent in the northwestern parts of India, being patronised by the rulers of that period, as is evidenced by the discovery of coins. Believing in austerities and ascetical practices, a Pasupata is expected to smear his body with ashes, to live in solitary places, to clothe his body with one single garment. The eating of meat is not prohibited. He must be initiated into the secrets of Pasupatism through a guru. The guru is considered to be much superior to the scriptures. After the initiation, the disciple must live under the trees, in forests, in temples; through begging, he should procure his food; he must take daily bath, smear his body with ashes and repeat the Sivamantra or the name of Siva; he has to wear rudraska beads, carry a staff and bowl in his hands; has to observe all the *yamas* and *niyamas*, that is, ethical and yogic disciplines. These practices are said to result in internal purification and thereby lead the aspirant to liberation.<sup>8</sup>

The five main doctrinal elements forming the credal basis of Pasupatism are: 1) *Karana*, 2) *Karya*, 3) *Yoga*, 4) *Vidhi*, 5) *Dukhanta*. *Karana* is the cause of everything and this cause is god, known as *pati*. His creation, *karya* (effect) is the world and soul (pasu - bounded soul). *Yoga* is a method of discipline which relates the soul to God through the faculty of understanding. The *Vidhi* is concerned with the practice of religious rituals and rites. All these lead the soul to the final stage of *dukhanta* or cessation of pain or liberation.<sup>9</sup>

## ii) *Saiva-Siddhanta*

Saiva Siddhanta is mainly the religion of Tamil people and therefore also spoken as Tamil Saivism. The earliest reference to Tamil Saivism is found in the grammatical work Tolkappiyam of 3rd c. B.C. Its historical origin can be traced from 6th c. A. D. onwards. The main sources of Saiva Siddhanta consist of the following collective works: 1) The *Nanmari* 2) The twelve Tirumurai 3) The Vedas 4) The 28 Saivagamas 5) The 14 Meykanda sastras. These books deal with all subjects, especially with the philosophy and religion of Tamil Saivism. Tamil Saivism as presented by these sources is fundamentally a religion of *bhakti* (devotion),

7. also cf. *Mahabharata*, Santiparvam.

8. Motilal Pandit, *op. cit.*, pp. 56, 58, 60.

9. Cfr. M.R. Sakhare (transl. & ed). *Linga-dharanachandrika of Nandikeswara*, (Belgaum : Mahavir Press, 1942, p. 347 ff.).

which gave rise to beautiful Tamil poetry. It is through these devotional songs that Tamil Saivism was popularized and propagated by its saints.

Saiva Siddhanta, as a system of philosophical thought, is both realistic and pluralistic in its approach to reality. It accepts the reality as triad, namely God, soul and the world. They exist independently in relation to their mutual dependence. It is because of the mutual dependence and relatedness that all the three entities own their distinct nature. Liberation is achieved through one's own action and through the grace of Siva. When one achieves the state of *Karmasamyā*, equilibrium of action, the grace of Siva descends upon the soul and leads it to liberation. One can dispose oneself to receive the grace of Siva through, 1) *Karyamarga*, a path of service. It consists mainly in participating in all the religious events in the temple and in placing oneself at the disposal of Siva to serve in the temple, 2) *Kriyamarga* performance of rituals in the temple or at home: This path frees one from egoism and leads to *samipyā* or closeness to Siva, which brings about liberation 3) *Yogamarga*, a path leading a soul to union with Siva: Through yogic practices the disciple attains *sarupyā* or similarity with Siva, and 4) *Jnanamarga*, a transcendental path: Here one transcends all the materiality and concentrates on the *atmalinga* (linga in the heart). One becomes intensely aware of the presence of God within and forgets himself and the world, seeing and experiencing nothing but Siva everywhere.<sup>10</sup>

### iii) *Kashmere Saivism*

This is an independent school of saivism with its own ethos and orientation, developed in the Kashmir valley between 8th and 12th century A.D. It is also known as *Trika Sastra* because of its acceptance of many trinites (*trikas*), such as the trinity of scriptures (3 *agamas*, ie., 16 *Saivagamas*, 18 *Rudragamas*, 64 *Bhairavagamas* and 3 *tantras* ie., *Namakatantra*, *Siddhatantra* and *Malinitantra*), the trinity of reality (Siva, Sakti, divine power, and Nara, human being), and the transcendental triad in *Paramasiva* (ie., *prakasha* – luminosity, *vimarsa* – dynamism and *Samarasya* – bliss or delight in the union of *prakasa* and *vimarsa*). With its vast variety of religious literature and philosophical thoughts, Kasmere Saivism is a systematic religion with a large following. We shall give here only the main sixfold religious discipline or method aimed at spiritual growth:

10. For details of Motilal Pandit, *op. cit.*, p. 71–101.

- 1) *Vamadeva* discipline: It consists of certain obligatory vedic rituals and observance of the four stages of life or ashramas.
- 2) The method of *Sivachara*, the formal worship of and devotion to Siva. By practising the way of devotion, one may experience a close intimacy with Siva.
- 3) Tantric method of *Vamachara*: It consists of a complex type of worship of the mother goddess, involving the use of liquor, meat, fish, women and bodily postures. This exercise is said to result simultaneously both in physical enjoyment and spiritual liberation.
- 4) The Tantric path of *dakshinachara* consisting of sakti worship developed under Brahmanical influence.
- 5) *Kulachara*, Sakti worship with all the practices of *Vamachara*. This method accepts both physical enjoyment and spiritual development resulting in the attainment of supernatural powers. This method is regarded as superior to all other methods. Besides *Kundaliniyoga* is also practiced to experience the bliss of Siva-sakti union.
- 6) The Siva yoga in which knowledge, devotion and ritual play an equal part.

The real spiritual knowledge (*paurusha jnana*) is attained when one transcends the sense of duality. This is attained through the study of monistic Saiva philosophy and through the experience of *Paramsiva*. Devotion is love and attachment to Siva, expressed in ritual practices, which in turn procures the grace of Siva for the devotee. This yoga brings with it the serene bliss of self-awareness and liberation.<sup>11</sup>

#### iv) *Virasaivism*

As we have noted above, from the cult of Siva which prevailed in pre-vedic and vedic times, many sects of Saivism came into being in several parts of India. Virasaivism, also known as the Lingayat religion, is one such sect that flourished in South India. Apart from the three schools of *Advaita*, *Vishistadvaita* and *Dvaita*, there arose and flourished in the 12th century A. D. in the state of Karnataka in South India, the dynamic movement of Virasaivism under the leadership of Basaveswara, which produced profound effects on society and on the religious thoughts

11. Cfr. A. *Lingadharana Chandrika*, p. 329 ff. ; also M. Pandit, *op. cit.*, p. 133-185.

and practices of the period. The tenets and philosophical content came to be known as *Saktivisistadvaita*.<sup>12</sup> This system has been influenced in its thought and practices by other Saiva sects mentioned above. Yet as a separate religious sect, Virasaivism has the following distinctive features:

- a. The highest importance was attached to devotion to Siva.
- b. Women are given equal status in religious worship in as much as they were ordained to *deeksha* (initiation) and the wearing of the *linga*.
- c. The rigidity of the *varnashramadharma* (caste system) was very much loosened amongst the followers of Virasaiva faith.
- d. Attempts were made to uplift the Harijans (low caste people) by giving them equal status in worship and religious practices. Vegetarian food and ban on intoxicants were emphasized.
- e. The dignity of labour is emphasized with the motto "*kayakave kailasa*," work is heaven.
- f. Religious literature in the regional language Kannada was developed and propagated.<sup>13</sup>

With these distinctive marks and revolutionary concepts, Lingayatism spread through out Karnataka and surrounding states, taking a leading part in the political, educational and cultural uplift of the state. It favoured an enterprising spirit among its followers by introducing a liberating ethos.<sup>14</sup> This is why today it has a following of about 13 million people in Karnataka.

### 3. Meaning of Virasaiva and Lingayat

It is difficult to give a correct interpretation of the compound term *Virasaiva*, as there is no unanimity among the scholars regarding its meaning. The Sanskrit word *vira* means brave and *Saiva* means the follower of Siva. A *Virasaiva* is, therefore, a brave or virile follower of Siva. This explanation stems from the fact that in the beginning the

12. R.R. Diwakar, *Karnataka through Ages* (Bangalore : Government of Mysore, 1968) p. 444.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 447-48.

14. M.S.A. Rao, "Religion and economic development" in *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. XVIII, no. 1, (Delhi : Delhi school of Economics, 1968) pp. 11-12 as quoted in A.J. Kariyil, *Church and Society in Kerala* (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Pune 1986) p. 25.

followers of this sect were very rigid and inflexible in their understanding and exposition of their religious tenets and doctrines. Sometimes they were also militant crusaders against *brahmanism* and social evils. Because of this militancy and revolt they were called *Virasaivas*.<sup>15</sup>

A *Virasaiva* may be understood as a staunch Saivite, since *vira* literally means a hero or champion who is full of zeal for Siva and his cause.<sup>16</sup> According to other interpretations *vi* means the knowledge that the individual soul and Siva are identical. The followers of Saivism who find delight in such knowledge are *Virasaivas*. Again, *vi* is interpreted as doubt, delusion and *ra* as without. Virasaivism, therefore, is a faith and philosophy free from doubt and false perception.<sup>17</sup> At the time of initiation the instruction given to the disciple is: "Resolve to keep the *linga* as if it were your very life. Do not part with it, so long as you live." It shows that a disciple should have firm faith and deep attachment to God Siva in the form of the *linga* throughout his life. Such a disciple is a *Virasaiva*. Now, this interpretation brings us to the second important term Lingayat.

Lingayat is a popular designation for *Virasaiva* in English which comes from an equivalent Kannada word *lingavanta* meaning the one who wears the *linga*. Literally *linga* means a sign or a mark of gender in grammar. Hence many interpret *linga* as phallus or male generative organ. The *Virasaiva* founders do not accept this interpretation. For them *linga* is Siva, the symbol of the *parabrahma* of the Upanishads, the cosmic principle which is the source of the universe, the visible symbol of the invisible consciousness, *chaitanya*, existing internally in the beings.<sup>18</sup> A *lingayat* is therefore one who wears a *linga*, a symbol of Siva and worships it so that he can gradually become united with it.

#### 4. Founders and Scriptures

The religious tradition is that *vira-saivism* was founded by five sages (*acharyas*) (Revana, Marula, Ekorama, Panditaradhya, and Visvesvara) regarded as the mythical founders of five monasteries in different

15. Motilal Pandit, *Saivism* . . . p. 103.

16. N.C. Sargant, *The Lingayats*, (Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1963) p. 1.

17. R.R. Diwakar, *Karnataka Through Ages*, p. 592.

18. S.C. Nandimath, *A Hand book of Virasaivism*, (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), p. 68 & 159; N.C. Sargant, *The Lingayats*, p. 13.

parts of India. Historically it took a definite shape in 12th c. A.D. at Kalyana in northern Karnataka. Basava, the chief minister of King Bijala of Kalyana, was the champion and the main spring of the movement.<sup>19</sup> Basava having received a mandate from Siva to establish the true religion, sent out preachers to proclaim the true faith and the equality of all men and women. His aim was not to oppose any religious or philosophical system, but to show the people the existing social and religious evils in the society and if possible to remove them. He established at Kalyana the *Anubhavamantapa* the assembly of religious experience, which attracted the attention of many religious minded people of all walks of life from all over the country. Basava the politician, the revolutionary, the mystic and the philosopher convinced the common people at large of the true faith in such a way that during his life time and within few years after his death, Virasaivism spread all over Karnataka and neighbouring states.

The new born religion accepted all the sacred books of other Saivite sects. But its own specific teachings were popularized mainly through the *Vachana literature* of Basava, Allamma Prabhu and Chennabasava and a host of others. The *Vachana* is a saying or utterance composed in popular language with a peculiar charm to convey the soul-stirring ideas in simple style, but appropriately and vigorously. Through their *vachanas* the authors have created a unique feature in the Kannada language unsurpassed in its history.

The primary aim of the *vachana* writers were to show to the people the existing social and religious evils in the society and to propagate universal brotherhood. Siva is the only Supreme Lord and all men are equal. Siva is to be adored in the form of *linga*, obtained from the *guru* at the time of initiation. The ultimate aim of human life is union with Siva. These ideas resulting from the religious conferences and debates at *anubhava mantapa* were broadcast by the *jangamas* or travelling missionaries. The word *vachana* means, a speech, declaration, message or putting religious utterances into mass circulation.<sup>20</sup>

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19. A commemorative volume on the occasion of the eight centenary celebrations of Basava was published under the title *Sri Basavesvara* (ed) S.S. Wodeyar, (Bangalore: Government of Mysore, 1967). This volume contains authoritative studies on the personality and teaching of Basavesvara.
20. cfr. S.C. Nandimath, *A Handbook of Virasaivism*, p. 11 & N.C. Sargant, *The Lingayats*, p. 15-17; Channaveera Kanavi, "Basavanana's *vachanas* as literature" in *Sri Basavesvara* (ed.) S.S. Wodeyar, pp. 437-457; cf. K.R. Basavaraj, *History and Culture of Karnataka*, (Dharwar: Chalukya Publications, 1984) pp. 568-573.



## 5. The Spiritual Pilgrimage

The goal of spiritual pilgrimage in Virasaivism is *linganga samarasya* (harmony of *anga*-soul with *linga*, God) i.e. union between the soul and the eternal reality, the *Paramasiva*. To reach and to be united to this ultimate reality, Virasaivism recommends the philosophy of *shatsthalas* (six stages), the *ashtavaranas* (eight coverings) and the *panchācharas* (five rules of religious conduct). These are the special features of Virasaivism that make it a separate religion. The Lingayat do not perform any *yajna* (sacrifice), they are also against all kinds of *vedic* and sacerdotal rites and traditions. These three are therefore their important spiritual programme:

### i) *Panchacharas*

The five rules of conduct are *sadachara*, *ganachara*, *brutyachara*, *sivachara*, and *lingachara*. *Sadachara* consists in religious and ethical discipline. It is not merely one's own personal good conduct, but the good conduct of the family and community too. *Ganachara* is loyalty to the community of Siva-worshippers and the worshipping of God at sacred places. It is the community's right and duty to protect the honour of Siva and not allowing Siva to be spoken ill of. *Brutyachara* means the attitude of a servant which every Virasaiva must exhibit. In his conduct he must be like a servant and rid himself of all self importance. *Sivachara* means to devote one's body and soul to the service of *guru*, *linga* and *jangama* (monk). They are symbols and representatives of Siva, demanding love and respect from every faithful. Love and respect to them are actually worship of Siva. *Lingachara* consists mainly in wearing the *īṣṭalinga* (favourite *linga*) round the neck and worshipping it. After the initiation, a lingayat is not supposed to have any other God than Siva, who should be worshipped in the form of *linga*. He should do his daily duties not for personal benefits, but for Siva dedicating the fruit of every action to him.<sup>21</sup>

### ii) *Ashtavaranas*

*Ashtavaranas* are coverings, aids, or support to faith, which are eight in number. These aids protect the faithful from the effects of *maya*, if they are performed daily and regularly. They are:

21. Cf. Motilal Pandit, *Saivism* p. 126 N.C. Sargant, *The Lingayats*, p. 11-12, M.R. Sakhre, *Lingadharana-Chandrika*, p. 491-514.

a) *Guru*

*Guru* is the one who initiates the novice into *Virasaiva* faith. He is considered to be Siva in human form. He is superior to the father and mother, since it is he who is the cause of the spiritual birth, which is far more important than the birth of a corporeal body. He is considered to be worthy of more reverence than is due to Siva, the supreme, because it is he who leads the soul to unity with Siva.<sup>22</sup> The *Guru* is the embodiment of all wisdom and his functions are three-fold, of initiating, the *diksha guru*, of training, the *siksha guru*, and of leading the disciple to the final goal, the *moksha guru*. One person can undertake all these functions and so the reverence given to him will be unique.

b) *The Linga*

*Linga* is an emblem of the supreme god, Siva. It is not an image of Siva, it is Siva himself. He is infused into the *linga* by the guru through his spiritual power and is given to the disciple for worship at the time of initiation. The disciple should wear it all the time, without ever removing it from his body. The removal amounts to a separation between God and man, equivalent to spiritual death.

c) *The Jangama*

Though the Sanskrit word *jangama* means a movable object. In Virasaivism this is generally applied to a person of a religious order, who is an itinerant missionary, preaching religion and morality. He has no permanent home or abode. He is free from worldly attachments, from bodily cravings and from restrictions. He is equal to *guru* and *linga* and therefore commands also equal respect and reverence. His main function is propagation of the religious faith and of establishing people in it.

d) *The Padodaka*

*Padodaka* is the water from the feet of the *guru*, in which his feet are washed and hence it is holy water. Virasaivism believes in the holiness and purity of its *gurus* and *jangamas*, whose touch makes every object holy. The disciple should use only those objects that are touched and sanctified by the *guru*. It indicates the close spiritual relationship between the two.

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22. S.C. Nandimath, *A Handbook* p. 33.

e) *The Prasada*

*Prasada* means an object given by the *guru* to indicate his favour towards others. This is a symbol of communion between the two. Usually *prasada* is an edible object such as cooked food, fruits etc. The Virasaivas offer food to their *guru* and he in turn give it back or a portion of it, as a sign of his favour. This food given by the *guru* with his blessings as *prasada* is now a consecrated food, made holy by his touch. This is considered to be a powerful means to show the equality of all men and women and the common brotherhood in religion.

f) *The Vibhuti*

*Vibhuti* is 'sacred ash.' Ash is sacred in all schools of Saivism because Siva is pictured in the *puranas* as one fond of besmearing his body with ashes. Virasaivas prepare the ashes in a holy ceremony with dried cowdung and vegetable ingredients, and smear the body with sacred ashes, which purifies their body and soul.

g) *The Rudraksha*

*Rudraksha* is also common to all the *saiva* sects and all *saivas* wear it on their neck in the form of a garland. It is also used as beads for counting during prayers. These beads are believed to be originated from the eyes of Siva and hence are called *rudraksha*, the eyes of Siva.

h) *The Mantra*

The sacred *mantra* in Saivism is a sacred formula consisting of five syllables, *Nama Sivaya*, salutation to Siva. This is known as *panchakshara mahamantra* the great *mantra* of five letters. The sacred syllable "om" may be added to the *sivamantra* to make its recital solemn. The Virasaivas do not accept any other *mantra* except the *sivamantra*, though other schools of Saivism accept other subordinate *mantras* such as *gayatri*.<sup>23</sup>

iii) *The Shatsthalas*

The most important doctrine of the Virasaivas is that of the *sthala*. Literally it means place or ground. The ultimate reality or God is spoken of as *sthala*. "Sthala is the Brahman the source of all, *sthala* is that from which the whole universe has emerged, by which it is supported, and in

23. Cf. S.C. Nandimath, *A Handbook of Virasaivism*, p. 31-39; Motilal Pandit, *Saivism* p. 126; M.R. Sakhare, *Lingadharanachandrika*, p. 514-546.

which it is submerged."<sup>24</sup> The Absolute as *sthala* is pure being, consciousness and bliss. The universe is nothing but the manifestation of the *sthala* or *siva*, through the medium of his *sakti* or power. In manifesting himself, Siva appears as *linga* (God) and *anga* (individual soul). Now the individual soul *anga* must gradually approach the *linga* by stages to be united with him. This gradual movement or journey of the *anga* towards the *linga* is the philosophy behind *shatsthalas*.

*Sthala* is step or stage or halting place for the soul on its spiritual journey. Virasaivism proposes six such stages which the soul must climb to achieve the realization. They are *bhakta*, *maheswara*, *prasadi*, *pranalingi*, *sarana* and *aikya*.<sup>25</sup>

#### a) *Bhakta sthala*

The *bhakta sthala* begins when a person starts inquiring about himself and his relationship with God. Here he is a *bhakta* or devotee of Siva whom he sees as a personal God. The conception of the personality of God vanishes when the individual soul mounts the first step. But at this stage he must worship Siva in the form of *linga* with deep devotion and with the help of his *guru*.

#### b) *Maheswara sthala*

In this second stage the pilgrim is steady in his worship of the *linga* and his mind is now enriched and enlightened by the continued worship with intense devotion. He can now concentrate better and is very much free from worldly temptations. His rituals, practices and prayers become spontaneous and he finds joy in performing them. *Padodaka* (water received from *guru*) is generally associated with this stage. Sipping of this holy water at this stage purifies his mind as well as reminds him that he should follow the path of his *guru*, paying *linga* his undivided attention.

#### c) *The Prasadi sthala*

The third step is *prasadi sthala*. As already mentioned above, *prasada* is grace or favour, or an object given by the *guru* to indicate his favour

24. S.C. Nandimath, *A Handbook*, p. 98.

25. Cf. S.S. Basavanal (ed). *Basavannavara Vachanagalu* (sayings of Brother Basava) (Dharwar : Sahitaya Samithi, 1962), p. 82.

towards his disciple. The *prasadi* is one who receives the grace and he is in the third stage in the spiritual journey.

In this stage, the devotee receives everything, whatever he eats or enjoys, as coming from the hands of Siva in the form of a *prasada*. As he realizes this, he surrenders himself totally, his body and soul, to Siva, experiencing profound changes in him through the reception of graces.

d) *The Pranalingi sthala*

*Prana* is life and *lingi* is a person who possesses *linga* or wears it on his body. *Pranalingi* is one who has life in the *linga* or Siva. In the earlier three stages the duality between *anga* and *linga* was very clear, whereas from *pranalingi* stage onwards distinction gradually disappears. Here the devotee gets a foretaste of the oneness with the *linga*.<sup>26</sup> At this stage the devotee repeats with love the *panchakshara mahamantra*, *Nama Sivaya* with intense concentration and thus already feels his identity with the *linga*.

e) *The Sarana sthala*

The fifth stage is the *sarana sthala* where the union between the *linga* and *anga* is actualized. This is the stage of total surrender and enlightenment which is symbolically expressed through the use of *vijhuti* on the forehead. This ritual also shows that the devotee has burnt all his bodily desires and bonds of *karma* and is now free from even his own existence. Three salient features of the *sarana* stage may be observed from Basava's experience as shown in his *vachanas*: 1) A sublime union with Siva, 2) Freedom from *karma* 3) Irreversibility from the *sarana* stage.<sup>27</sup> The *sarana* however will be still active in the world. But all his actions are directed by the essential oneness he experiences at the very core of his existence. A *sarana* does not utter prayers or go to holy places with the expectation of receiving some kind of reward. The place where he goes becomes a holy place. Whatever he does, becomes worship.

f) *The Aikya sthala*

The final stage of the spiritual pilgrimage is the *aikya sthala*. Aikya

26. M Samartha, *The Compassionate Basava, an Evaluative study of a medieval Saint-reformer of Karnataka, India*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, Hartford, 1972) p. 113.

27. M. Samartha, *The Compassionate Basava*, p. 117.

means union or oneness. In this sixth, stage there is complete union and identification between the individual soul and Siva.<sup>28</sup>

The *samarasya* (union) between the *linga* and *anga* is realized. In the *aikya sthala* all differences vanish and the *sarana* become one with the *linga*. This is a stage which is difficult to explain. The experiences here are ineffable. This is the real mystical stage.

The *ashtavarana* that is associated with this stage is the *rudraksha*. With *rudraksha* around his neck, the devotee looks at everything with the eyes of *Siva*. Now he realizes that he himself, the creatures of the nature and other human beings, are all one great *linga*, the *mahalinga*. Duality disappears and perfect *aikya* is realized in this last stage which is also called *sunya sampadane*, attainment of void.<sup>29</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The internal coherence and the organizational hold of a religion on its followers becomes all the more strong and long endeavouring to the degree of the clarity of the formulation of its doctrines and to the extent of concrete daily practices it insists upon. In Virasaivism, Siva is to be worshipped as the Supreme Lord, and that too in the form of the symbol *linga*. The five rules of conduct, eight coverings or aids or support to faith and the spiritual journey through the six stages give a definite shape to the spiritual path proposed by Virasaivism. The aid called *rudraksha* is a very practical symbolization of a universal spiritual truth that a devotee has to see everything with the eyes of Siva and constantly present himself before him. Although the central religious practice of Virasaivism, namely the wearing of the *linga* on the person of the devotee, is very much confined to the sect itself, the use of *rudraksha* has gone beyond its boundaries, giving a spiritual insight to all religious-minded people.

28. N.C. Sargant, *The Lingayats*, p. 9.

29. M.R. Sakhare, *Lingadharana Chandrika*, p. 546ff., S.C. Nandimath, *A Handbook*, p. 98ff.