

## Lingayts of Karnataka: A Twelfth Century Social and Religious Reforming Movement in Hinduism

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### Abstract

India is the birth place of many religion and religious movements. Lingayat is one of the religious movements blossomed from Hinduism in Karnataka in 12<sup>th</sup> century. Like the sixteenth-century Protestant revolt against Catholic authority, the Lingayat movement championed the cause of the down-trodden, rebelling against a powerful Brahminical system which promoted social inequality through a caste system that branded a whole class of people as polluted. Going against the way of the times, the Lingayats rejected, Vedic authority, caste hierarchy, a multiplicity of gods, ritualistic (and self-aggrandizing) priest craft, animal sacrifice, karmic bondage, the existence of inner worlds, temple worship and the traditions of ritual purity-pollution. Today Lingayathism is a vibrant faith, particularly strong in its religious homeland of Karnataka, South-Central India.

**KEYWORDS:** Lingayats, Lingayat, Veerashaiva, Virasaiva, Virasaivism, Lingayathism, Basava, Basaveshwara, Casteless Society, inter-marriage, Inter-Dinning, Dignity of Labour, Linga worship, Anunhava Mantapa, Hall of Experience,

### INTRODUCTION

The term 'Lingayat' does not mean to a caste, but it is referring to a casteless society combining of many castes. "The word Lingayat is anglicized from of Lingavant, which is the vernacular term commonly used for any member of the community."<sup>1</sup>N.C Sargant Says, "Lingayat" means 'one who wears the linga' is called Lingayat.<sup>2</sup>Lingayat also called as ViraSaiva, vira literally means a warrior or champion, here used to express the idea of warrior zeal in the case of Siva. They acknowledge only one God Siva, and reject the other two persons of the Hindu Triad. Lingayat is a generalized designation in English, but in Kannada the Lingayats call themselves Sivabhakta, Sivacharya or Vira-Saiva. The Lingayats have been described as a peaceable race of Hindu puritans.

The Lingayat community in Karnataka had its origin in 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D with the birth of Basaveshawara who was a Prime minister of King Bijjala, Chalukyanempire<sup>3</sup>. Lingayathism was at once a rebellious and a reformist movement in Hinduism. It rebelled against orthodox Hinduism with its rigid caste system upholding the inequality of man, and denounced Vedic Brahminical practices such as animal sacrifices and notions of ritual pollution.

<sup>1</sup> E Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India* (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975) 236.

<sup>2</sup> N.C Sargant, *The Lingayats: The Vira-saiva Religion* (Bangalore: Christian Institute for The study of Religion and Society), 1963.

<sup>3</sup> .D. S Moses, *Lingayat people Profile*( Bangalore, K.M.N,1998), 8.

One of the most important features of Lingayats consists in the wearing of personal lingam, the emblem of God Shiva on the body of every member of the faith irrespective of age, sex and status. Lingayathism also promoted personal worship of their choice; even Lingayat women can undertake religious observances independently. A good Lingayat will eat a strict vegetarian diet and abstain from alcohol. At present lingayats are the single largest people group in Karnataka who are economically and politically powerful.

### **1. People of Karnataka**

The people of Karnataka are divided in to 250 caste groups. Brahmins who constitute 4% of the population are in the front position of all political and intellectual movements. They hold important posts in the government and education institutions. Lingayats consist of 15.34%, a powerful community who worship the lord Shiva. Largely lingayats are cultivators and businessmen. People group like Vokkaligas consist of 10.8% are the largest cultivating caste, Kurumbas (6.28%) are shepherds, Bedas (7%) are hunters and Pancalas are artisans. However, there is a dalit groups of 15.2% and Holeyas are said to be the major untouchable community. The Muslims are the remnants of the Mogul invaders and converts from the local population. Karnataka is home of 6.5 million of Muslims. Isolated tribal groups live in the state and they constitute about 1% of the population. Formerly Buddhism and Jainism were widespread in Karnataka in comparison to very few of them at present.

#### **1.1 Settlement of Lingayat**

Lingayat are in important community of India, particularly of western and southern India. They are mainly found in the state of Karnataka, in south India, where they are single largest caste group. Besides Karnataka, there are Lingayats in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh. K.S Singh Says,

Twenty-four Lingayat communities have been studied in six states, mostly in the southern states such as Karnataka (17), Andhra Pradesh (2), Maharashtra (2) Kerala (1), Madhya Pradesh (1) and Tamil Nadu (1). The Lingayat are mainly rural communities (9) and part rural-part urban (15), only four communities (16.7 percent) seem to have migrated to their present habitat. As many as fourteen communities (58.3percent) live in plateau areas, the percentage being on the higher side when compared with 17.3 percent for all communities; eleven communities(45.8 percent for all communities; only two communities live in the costal areas.<sup>4</sup>

In Karnataka, Lingayats are chiefly located in the northern districts. Majority of the Lingayats are staying in Belgaum, Dharwar, Raichur, Bidar, and Gulbarga districts.

### **2. Historical Background of Lingayats**

Lingayathism is a sectarian and anti-Brahmanical movement of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was a heterodox sect which rebelled against the rigid caste system and other practices of Brahmanism. The movement took a definite shape at Kalyana; which is presently in Bidar district of Karnataka.

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<sup>4</sup> K. S Singh, *India's Communitites*, Vol. 4, (New Delhi: Manzar Khan, Oxford University Press, 1998), 1985

## 2.1. Origin of Lingayathism

From the inscriptions available in Karnataka and elsewhere, it is considered that the Basava who lived at about 1160 A.D is the founder of Lingayat religion. It is clear from the available sources that he was the Prime Minister or financial secretary of King named Bijjala who became the ruler of Chalukyan empire in Kalyan from 1157-1167 A.D.<sup>5</sup>

Further more, Jainism lost its hold and as a result animal sacrifice was revived. Revival at those days means renew the dying Hindu religion. Buddhism, Brahmanism and Jainism focussed on the intellectual and the moral side of the Indian society far above the social, moral and religious aspects of the people. A remedy to this social downfall Basava sought for the living element in religion, which led him to construct the same (religion) on the basis of experience and which eventually resulted in the formation of Anubhavamantapa.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1.1. Basava or Basaveswara

A Basaveswara was born in AD 1105 Brahmin family at Bagevadi situated presently in the Bijapur district.<sup>7</sup> Basaveswara soon displayed sign of great distinctness and individuality as he grew. He was a precocious child, highly sensitive and endowed with an independent spirit contemplative turn of mind.

At the age of eight, when he was to be invested with the sacred thread, he refused saying that he was worshipper of Siva and Siva only. The thread ceremony involved him in worshipping Surya or Sun and other traditional customs.<sup>8</sup>

Other account says he refused to wear it.<sup>9</sup> Perceiving it as discrimination against other castes and against women who were not permitted to wear the thread.<sup>10</sup> Over this refusal he left the home and joined KudalaSangama. It was the place where Basava developed his ideas of social reform.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2. Development of Lingayathism

The rapid growth and spread of Lingayathism was due to the teachings of Basava and his followers in vernacular during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Basava himself was a Saiva Brahmin by birth. He rebelled against the Brahmanical orthodoxy and expounded the Virsaiva Philosophy. The teachings of Basava in the AnubhavaMantapa helped the widespread growth of Lingayats.

### 2.2.1. AnunhavaMantapa (Hall of Experience)

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<sup>5</sup> S.R Gungal, *AnubhavaMantapa* (Gulbarga: Department of Library science Gulberga university, 1982), 2

<sup>6</sup> Gungal, *AnubhavaMantapa*, 2

<sup>7</sup> K. R Basavaraja, *Basaveswara: his life, vision and work* (Dharwad: Somesvara Publications, 2001) 65.

<sup>8</sup> N.C Sargant, *TheLingayats*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Sargant, *Lingayat*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Moses, *Lingayat people Profile* ( Bangalore, K.M.N,1998), 9

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 3.

Basava instituted at Kalyan the AnubhavaMantapa which means the hall of religious experience.<sup>12</sup> People from far and near come and settled at Kalyana and participated in the spiritual discourses that were carried on at the AnubhavaMantapa. It is an open hall with pillars in Basava Palace at Kalyana, Bidar district, which was set aside for this assembly of religious experience which Basava used for propagate his teachings. B.D. S Moses says in his book Lingayat profile:

This hall of experience is considered a forerunner of the idea of parliament in its government. A democratic method of discussing spiritual development was used, and a staircase of six steps was built to represent the six steps was built to represent the six-steps of salvation.<sup>13</sup>

Discussion in the AnubhavaMantapa was mainly in Kannada language. The discussion is fully on the theoretical and practical side of Veerasaivism. It gives more stress on spiritual aspect of Religion than on the philosophical aspect of religion<sup>14</sup> It was here the inter caste marriage and inter caste dinning took place. He also promoted the marriage of the widows and prostitutes. Because of the opposition from the traditional society he was banished from Kalyana and returned to KudulaSangama where he died in 1167.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF LINGAYATS

The Lingayats have their own Social Life. We can hardly separate social life from the religious life of the people, because religion plays a dominant role in their society. Lingayat do have community oriented life. The family is an embodiment of culture and religion.

#### 3.1. The Position of Women in Society

During the Rig Vedic times the position of women in society was high as it is said that some of the women like Lopamudra, Visvarara and Ghosha composed hymns including in Rig Veda.<sup>16</sup> But in the post Rig Vedic period the status of women in the society declined. In early time women had no freedom. However in Lingayathism women were treated equally to men.<sup>17</sup> Women were given the liberty of religion to participate in the religious discussions held at AnuphavaMantapa.<sup>18</sup> The Saranas boldly proclaimed that there was no distinction between man and women in the spiritual realm. In lingayathism women also can remarry.<sup>19</sup> Divorce allowed only on unavoidable circumstances.

#### 3.2. Casteless Society

<sup>12</sup> N.C Sargant, *TheLingayats*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Moses, *Lingayats*, 5

<sup>14</sup> Sargant, *Lingayat*, 8

<sup>15</sup> Moses, *Lingayat*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> H.M Shadasivayya, *A Comparative, Study of Two VirasaivaMonastries*, (Mysore: University of Mysore: 1967), 58.

<sup>17</sup> N.C Sargant, *TheLingayats*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> K. Isharwaran, *Religion and Society among the Lingayat of South India*, (Delhi: Vikas, 1983), 117.

<sup>19</sup> *Unreached Mega Peoples of India*, (IMA, and FMC Research Term, 1999), 138.

The Brahmins' selfish exploitation of lower castes has constantly led to the rise of new sects, which were essentially anti-Brahmanic origin.<sup>20</sup> Ligayathism aimed against the supremacy of Brahmin and to abolish all caste distinction.

Basava proclaimed, Man's worth should not be judged by his birth, but by his thoughts and deeds, his conduct and character. Further more, Basava says,

The high born is never born with his cast mark, nor the low born with his trade mark, the broom. The low born might have undertaken service as a means of existence in life's struggle. But if he advances in the right way of living he can become the true born; high born; if he falls from his path, a parish.<sup>21</sup>

The same truth was more clearly expressed by Siddharama one of the leaders says,

What if he read and teaches the Veda? Could he become a Brahmin? What if he is born of the Vedantin blood and seed? Could he become Brahmin? What if he performs eight sacrifices and six karmas? Could he become a Brahmin? He is the Brahmin, O kapilsiddhaMallikarjuna, Who abides in Brahmin, knowing the Veda doctrine- He who knows the Brahma is the Brahmin.<sup>22</sup>

Basava tried to eradicate untouchables by giving freedom of worship to low caste people. Wearing linga was open to all and it was symbol of equality. Although Basava taught against caste discrimination, today Virasaivaitis consider themselves as high caste and discriminates low caste.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.2.1. Inter-Caste Marriage**

Inter-Caste marriages were considered valid by most of Smriti writers.<sup>24</sup> But it was unpopular among the people. During Basava's time, he promoted inter-caste marriages to abolish caste system from the mind of the people. He conducted marriages in anubhavamantapa with high class women with low caste men thinking to irradiate caste system. But it was severely opposed by traditional Hindus.

### **3.2.2. Inter-Dining**

This was another method used by the Basava to eradicate caste system from the mind of people. He was looking forward a casteless society that is the reason he conducted inter-dining in the Anubhavamantapa. There were many people from different caste and class used to participate in the inter-dining.

### **3.3. Dignity of Labour**

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Basava brought a new outlook towards life and labor. Basava lived a married life and followed Kayaka as a minister under King Bijjala. Kayaka

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>21</sup> Basavaraja, 270.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Moses, *Lingayt*,

<sup>24</sup> Basavaraja, *Basaveswara*, 23.

literally means physical labor or work of the body. Kaya means body and Kayaka means work done by the body.<sup>25</sup>

Lingayats believe that each one should be an earning member in the society, that should not be with the motivation of making wealth.<sup>26</sup> He says

External labour does not degrade a man from his social rank, provided it and involve in 'himsa' or cruelty, does not lead him to an immoral path or does not, in any way, affect or obstruct his religious observances.<sup>27</sup>

It is also opposed to the idea of meditation in the forest, running away from the society it is considered as the beggary dependence.

### **3.4. Panchachara (Five ethical social rules of Lingayants)**

Panchachara means five achara or actions. It is strict social and ethical rules of Lingayats that they have to show to others. These five acharas are as important as the Ashtavaranasor five identifying marks.

#### **3.4.1. Lingachara.**

Lingachara believes that God is only one and worshipping him in the form of Ishtainga, wearing and worshipping the obligatory linga.<sup>28</sup>

#### **3.4.2. Sadachara**

It is the path of truth, keeping promises, avoiding lies, and doing one's own work as worship to God. Lingayats believe that each one should be an earning member of society. Work should not be done by the motive of gathering wealth, but for the good of society.<sup>29</sup>

#### **3.4.3. Shivachara**

Shivachara is working for the society without discriminating poor or rich, man and women, class or caste.

#### **3.4.4. Bhrutyachara**

It is form of humility and submission, thinking that he is smallest in the society.<sup>30</sup>

#### **3.4.5. Ganachara**

Ganachara is protecting religion and society, mainly guarding the truth and non-violence.<sup>31</sup>

The primary concern of Basava the founder of Lingayatism was not to establish a new sect or a religion but to create a new society with good values and ideals.

## **4. ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF LINGAYATS**

Lingayats are now generally progressive and active community is drawn from various caste and even religious group. However, it appears that immediately after Basava's death, and particularly at the close of the seventeenth century caste groups were revived

<sup>25</sup> H.M Thippeswamy, *A Discourse of VeeraSavism* (Bombay: Bhrathiyavidya Bhavan,1980), 74

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>27</sup> Sri Basaveswara: *Eight Century Commemoration Volum*,(Bangalore: Government of Mysore, 1967), 74

<sup>28</sup> Achankunju Pappy, John Philip, George Edward, *Bridges across cultures* ( Saiacs: Bangalore, 2003), 55

<sup>29</sup> Moses, *Lingayat*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Pappy, *Bridges across cultures*, 55

<sup>31</sup> Ibid,

and hierarchy reappeared. Even untouchability is reported in a small way.<sup>32</sup> The divisions among the Lingayat existed on the basis of their occupation.<sup>33</sup>

#### **4.1. Business Class (Banajiga)**

Banajiga is a subgroup of the Lingayat; they live in Belgaum, Bellary, Bidar, Bijapur, Chitradurga, Dharwad, Gulbarga, Shimoga and Uttar Kannada districts of Karnataka. The orthodox among them wear three horizontal marks of sacred ash on their forehead.

Traditional and present occupations of the community include trade, business and cultivation. Some of them have recently taken up government service. The Banajiga are members of the Akhil Bharat VeerashaivaMahasabha which is the association for all Lingayats.<sup>34</sup>

#### **4.2. Carpenter (Badigar)**

An occupational group of the Lingayat, they are distributed in the Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwad and Chitradurga districts of Karnataka. In Kannada, the word badiga means carpenter and Badigar derived from the traditional occupation of carpentry.

Badigar Women take part in agricultural operation, collect fuel and bring potable water. They also participate in economic activities and thus contribute to the family income. Presently, the Badigar Lingayat is engaged in cultivation, business, industrial work, government and private service, self-employment and wage-labour. Their traditional caste and village council settle the community disputes, but these councils are fast losing their importance. They are associated with the Akhila Bharat VeerasaivaMahaSabha.

#### **4.3. Dye Thread Makers (Banagar)**

Banagar are distributed in the Belgaum, Bellary, Bijapur, Chitradurga, Dharwad, Gulbarga and Raichur districts of Karnataka. The Kannada term banagara means one who gives color to the thread and traditionally, the Banagar dye threads occupation.<sup>35</sup> Women participate in agricultural activities, animal husbandry, collection of fuel and other economic pursuits.

#### **4.4. Weavers (Devanga)**

Devanga are the followers of Lord Shiva who migrated to the Pandarkawda tehsil of Yavatmal district of Maharashtra about hundred years ago from Andhra Pradesh.<sup>36</sup>

The traditional occupation of the Devanga Lingayat was weaving cloth, specially the kosa silk saree and dhoti. Presently, most of them pursue different occupations such as agriculture, government service and agriculture labour. Their women also participate in agricultural activities.

#### **4.5. Oil Pressers (Ganiga)**

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<sup>32</sup>Singh, *India's Communities*, 1984.

<sup>33</sup> G.M Patil, *A mera Basavannai; Ithihasika Sameeksha (Eternal Basavanna: Historical Research-Kannada)* (Dharwad: Sharada Printing press, 1998), 14.

<sup>34</sup>Singh, *India's Communities*, 1989

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 1988.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid; 1990.

A subgroup of the Lingayat, the Ganiga are distributed in the Belgaum, Bidar, Nijapur, Nellary, Dharwad, Chitradurga, Gulbarga and Raichur districts of Karnataka. The Kannada term aniga means oil presser, and has been derived from the term gana or oil crusher.

Though the traditional occupation of the Ganiga Lingayat is oil pressing, they are also engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, business, trade, service, self-employment and wage-labour. A traditional caste council exists among them, headed by a daivantharu.

#### **4.6. Blacksmiths (Kammara)**

A section of the Telugu Kamsala of Karnataka, they serve the agricultural communities by marking and providing them with necessary implements. They mainly live in the Dharwad, Belgaum, Bellary, Bidar, Gulbarga and Bijapur districts.

The Kammara are traditionally blacksmiths, who still pursue this occupation in many villages. Presently they have ventured into other occupations, such as business, government and private service. A few of them own land and are engaged in cultivation. The Kammara are Lingayat and are associated with the VeerasivaMahasabha.

#### **4.7. Cultivators (Kudu Vokkalinga and Nonaba)**

Kudu Vokkalingas are mainly live in the Dharwad, Bijapur, Bellary and Raichur and Belgaum districts of Karnataka. The majority of the Kudu Vokkalinga own agricultural land and are traditionally cultivators. They are also engaged in business, service, wage-labour and some other vocations. They have a community association which works for the socio-economic uplift of the Kudu Vokkalinga.

Nonaba also as Nolamba, these people of Karnataka claim to be the representatives of the Pallava who conquered the Bana and established the Nolambavadi province. Agriculture is the traditional occupation of the Nonaba. Some of them work as agricultural laborers but their number is reportedly increasing. Their traditional caste council does not exist any more.

#### **4.8. Potters (Kumbara)**

It is a section of the PanchamasaliLingayat; they are also called Panchamsali Kumara. As they are engaged in the profession of the potmaking, they are called KurribarLingayat or LingayatKumbara. Their present occupations include wage-labour, business, pottery, government service and self-employment.

#### **4.9. Basket Makers and Rickshaw-pullers (Sadar)**

Sadar mainly inhabit the Chitradurga, Shimoga, Chikmagalur, Dharwad, Tumkar, Hassan and Mysore districts. The women participate in agriculture, animal husbandry and other economic, social, ritual, political and religious activities. Presently, they engage in rickshaw-pulling, wage-labour, masonry and other vocation.

#### **4.10. Washer man (Agasa)**

Agasa or Madiwala are an occupational group of the Lingayat and are live in the Belgaum, Bijapur and Dharwad districts of Karnataka. Cross-cousin and maternal uncle-niece marriages are prevalent among them. The custom of paying dowry in both cash and kind is common among them. Widowers and divorces of either sex can remarry and sororate is allowed. Currently they are engaged in cultivation and business, though some of them continue their traditional occupation. Their traditional caste and village councils

settle disputes in the villages. They are associated with the AkhilaBhrathaVeerasivaMahaSabha.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4.11. Barbers (Hadapad)

The term hadapad means a bag, and seems to have been borrowed from the Marathi word hasubi, meaning a person who carries a bad containing a pair of scissors, razor and other instruments required for cutting hair and shaving.<sup>38</sup>

Traditionally they are barbers, but some of the hadapad families have land and are engaged in cultivation. They have a community association, the Shri VeerasaivaHadapadaAppannaSevaSamajSangha, which works for their welfare.

### 5. Political Background of Lingayats

Lingayats have very good political influence in Karnataka from 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The founder of Lingayat religion itself was the prime minister to King Bijjala who ruled from 1156 AD to 1166 AD over Kalyana which is situated in the Bidar district in Karnataka.<sup>39</sup> This political influence brought lot of improvement in the social and religious life of the people in Karnataka. But after Basava, when Muslim came in to power Lingayat lost their political influence. Again Lingayat revived their political influence during the time of state organization.<sup>40</sup> G. Shri says,

In Karnataka, before State Recorganization, it was first the Okkaligas and then the Lingaiths who wielded major political influence, but after State Reorganization it became the Lingaiths and then the Okkaligas who were powerful in that order<sup>41</sup>

Lingayats are not only the major people group in Karnataka, but their political and economical influence goes beyond their population percentage.

The Lingayats and Vokkaligas together constitute about 26 percent of the State's population and have dominated State politics since independence in 1956 - they currently represent half of the State's Legislative Assembly and ZillaParishads. The majority of jobs in the State services were held by Lingayats (17 percent), Vokkaligas (13 percent) and Brahmins (12 percent). A random survey of 523 villages in Karnataka found that the two groups continue to hold the bulk of arable land in the villages - the Lingayats held as much as 27 percent and the Vokkaligas held as much as 28 percent<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 1991.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid; 1992

<sup>39</sup> Shri Kumara Swamiji, *Mirror of VeeraShaivism* (Dharwar: Navakalyanamath, 1960), 91

<sup>40</sup> N.C Sargant and Ward, W.E Tomlinson: *A memoir and some paper* (Madras: CLS, 1952) 29.

<sup>41</sup> G. Shiri, *Karnataka Christians and Politics* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1978),17

<sup>42</sup>Ainapur, L. S. *Dynamics of Caste Relations in Rural India*. (Jaipur: Rawat Publications. 1986), 25.

Since 1956-1972 the entire chief ministers from Lingayat. The General election shows Lingayats are most powerful group in state politics.<sup>43</sup> At the present day political parties are more aware about the support of Lingayats to their parties, so the reason they are willing to offer good position in their parties for Lingayats.

### 5.1. Educational Institutions

The Lingayat community has been very active in the field of free education in which most of them done by their local Mattas. Boarding facilities is provided to all.<sup>44</sup> They also have many professional colleges, several factories, industries hospitals in several parts of Karnataka. B.D Emmanuel says,

The Lingayats are Virasaivats or militant saivites, one of the most well organized communities in India. They play dominant role in economic social and political life of Karnataka. They emphasize value such as dignity of labour, liberty, fraternity and freedom from caste. Over 80% of the educational institutions in Karnataka are patronized by the Lingayats. Therefore many association and societies that looks after the educational needs of the people.<sup>45</sup>

## 6. RELIGIOUS CONDITION OF LINGAYATS

The religious faith and philosophic school came in to important through the teaching of Basavesvara is known as lingayathism.”<sup>46</sup>

Shaivism is prevalent among them.<sup>47</sup> Saivism among lingayath is different in certain respects from the other school of Saivism<sup>48</sup>

### 6.1. Concept of God

The striking point of Lingayathism is belief only in one God, without a second, and strongly opposes the polytheism. It rejects the divinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra and they worship only Siva.<sup>49</sup> Basava says:-“ To speak of two Gods is false. Kudalasangama deva is the only God. The *veassays* there are no two Gods”<sup>50</sup>

K.R. Basavaraja narrates about Lingayat understanding of God,

The supreme soul in the form of siva or Linga is the only eternal and real entity. The individual soul is siva coming to the worldly existence under the influence of Avidya or illusion. Avidya is also called Maya. The individual soul can be freed from the influence of Maya by the Jnana, knowledge of the supreme soul and kriya, proffer observance of the prescribed rules. The individual soul can be thus attain Mukti or Liberation and unite with Siva. This union is described as Bayaluor Nirbayaluor the state where existence is non-existent.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Iswaran, Religion and Society, p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.hindu.com/2005/01/11/stories/20/8/05>.

<sup>45</sup> B.D Immanuel, *God's Love for Karnataka: Reaching Karnataka for Christ* (Bangalore: KSM Publication, 1993), 4

<sup>46</sup> Moses, *Lingayat People Profile*, 5

<sup>47</sup> Basavaraja, *Basavesvara*, 137.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>49</sup> Sargant, *Lingayats*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> S.C Nandimath *A handbook of Lingayathism*, ( Delhi: Motilal Benarsidass, 1979), 60.

<sup>51</sup> Basavaraja, *Basaveswara*, 140.

Another interesting thing in the Lingayathism is they encouraged the direct worship to God without the aid of a priest. They believe that the God is the protector and creator of the universe. Lingayathism also believes that all things are not God, although God pervades all. In the final stage is to be apprehended, not comprehended and described. The Lingayat Gurus address the supreme God without a name as he realizes that no name is appropriate to the supreme only bayalu-void or space where there is nothing.<sup>52</sup> They believe everything evolved from God and everything merges again with God. Though Lingayat oppose polytheism and idol worship still polytheism and idol worship are prevails among these people.<sup>53</sup>

### 6.1.1. Concept of Linga

Linga is the final reality of Parabrahman. Kumara Swamiji says, “The concept of Linga as adumbrated by the virashaiva saints or sharanas as they are called, is highly metaphysical, really psychological and purely ethical”<sup>54</sup>

To a Virasaiva Saint, the Linga is the real body of Para Siva and Para Sakti combined, which is not be interpreted as material body, having any form, but as the mass of the highest luster, the joy of excessive bliss, the highest knowledge, the birth place of world, and the unbroken aggregate( Akhanda) of the vedas.<sup>55</sup>

The virasaiva saint’s greatest aspiration is to be union with Linga. It is always reflecting in their prayers:

Lord! Keep me in the Linga like fire in the stone; keep me in the Linga like wind embraced to scent; oh! Naginatha, dear to Rekenna, keep me in the Linga just as the oil is hidden in the light of the lamp. It is the innermost place of residence in you.<sup>56</sup>

For a Virasaiva, the Linga means a lot as follows: (a) The symbol of the Para Brahman, the supreme lord. (b) The mass of light or the column of blazing fire. (c) The cosmic principle which is the source of the universe. (d) The visible symbol of the invisible caitanyaexisting internally in beings.

### 6.1.2. The Significance of Linga Worship

This idea of a particular symbol has originated in giving a concrete shape to the abstract idea. The particular symbol is called Ista-Lingaas. Ista-Lingaas has two aspects; one is outer covering and other is the inner kernel. The outer covering which is an oval shape representing the universe or macrocosm and inner kernel represents microcosm or the pose of the body of the votary at the time of worship.<sup>57</sup> According to Kumara Swamiji, “The worship of istalinga which represents the infinite is designed to made man fit for the reception of that divine energy which pervades the whole universe”<sup>58</sup>

## 6.2. SACRED SCRIPTURES

<sup>52</sup> Sargent, *The Lingayat*, 14

<sup>53</sup> Moses, *Lingayat*, 17.

<sup>54</sup> Kumara Swamiji, *mirror of Lingayathism*, 1

<sup>55</sup> Nandimath, *Lingayathism*, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>57</sup> Swamiji, *Mirror of Lingayathism*, 2

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 3

The sacred scripture of Lingayat is known as Vachanas, it is written in Kannada language. Vachana were mainly composed in simple language, easily understood even to the common people. The divine sayings of the Vachanas are mostly in the form of prose and poetry. They are styled in three line rhythm. It is known as tripadi<sup>59</sup>. Most significant part of Vachanas was written by Basava himself. Lingayat rejects the sacred scripture of Hindus (Vedas) except some. But they totally ignore the later part of Vedas where Brahmans give more important. <sup>60</sup> The following is on saying from Vachana:-

The images are lifeless  
They cannot speak  
I know, for I have cried aloud to them<sup>61</sup>

### 6.3. THE EIGHT IDENTIFYING MARKS

Virasaivaitis are more attached with eight fold covering Ashtavaranas which is essential feature of their faith. They are (1) The Guru, (2) The Linga, (3) The Jangama, (4) The Padodaka, (5) The Prasada, (6) The Vibhuti, (7) The Rudraksha and (8) The Mantra.

#### 6.3.1. The Guru

In Lingayathism Guru is a highly respected person. Lingayathism mentions three function of the Guru, namely, the initiator or Diksha- Guru, the educator or Siksha-Guru, and the moksha –Guru who secures salvation one or more person can do these functions but they are equally honored<sup>62</sup>

#### 6.3.2. The Linga

The Linga is an emblem of the supreme God. Wearing a linga is a central principle of this religion. “The linga is believed to be equal to the Guru in respect of the reverence due to it, though is offered by him, since it respects Siva.”<sup>63</sup>

#### 6.3.3. The Jangama

The Jangama is a Sanskrit word, meaning moving object or that which is not fixed in one place.<sup>64</sup> He is traveling religious leader, one who preach their religion and teach morality among Lingayats. Sarana Defines Jangama as a,

Jangama is one who has negated six things- attachment, upadhis, office, dependence, karana and lampata, he who is firm in the path of the Pramathas, who is a great sarana and who has wiped out the distinctions such as guru, sishya, bhakta, father, son, I and you.<sup>65</sup>

Jangama does not mean an individual but a group or class of individual whose vocation is preach and teach.

#### 6.3.4. The Padodaka

<sup>59</sup> Moses, *Lingayat*, 20.

<sup>60</sup> Basavaraja, *Basaveswara*, 188.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>64</sup> Basavaraja, *Basaveswara*, 142.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 142,143.

The “padodaka” literally means the water from the feet of the Guru, hence holy water. Virasaiva strongly believes that in the holiness of their Guru and Jangamas who lead the life of purity and chastity. All that is been touched by these people are considered to be holy. Strictly Virasaiva community must make use of them. The Padodaka is one of them. According to Basavaraja:-“The padodaka is holy water obtained from the Guru specially at the time of his Linga puja for the purpose of sipping, which the Lingayatsbelieves purifies the mind and body”<sup>66</sup> This is considered as the devotion to Guru.

### **6.3.5. Prasada**

The prasada is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘favor’. LingayathismPrasada is signified by food concentrated by the touch of the Guru. The main purpose of the originators in bring prasada and padodaka in to the cult to abolish all kind of distinction, such as caste, rank and sex and to bring equality and brotherhood in religion as well as society.

### **6.3.6. The Vibhuti**

The vibhuti is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘great prosperity’, but is used in the technical sense of ‘holy ash’. It is prepared by a virtuous, religious and learned man by a special process. Basavaraja in his book he says,

There are elaborate rules to strictly observed in its preparation, which state how and from what kind of cow, the dung is to be collected, dried and burnt with utterance of the mantras, and mixed with other holy vegetable ingredients, etc.<sup>67</sup>

Even today they strictly are observing the process. This ash is smeared horizon on the forehead of the Linagayat.

### **6.3.7. The Rudraksha**

The Rudraksha are a kind of seeds sacred to siva.<sup>68</sup> They believe that these originated from the eyes of Rudra they are called Rudrakshas. They wear this in the form of garlands round their neck, wrist head etc. They are used in the counting of prayers.

### **6.3.8. Mantra**

The mantra is a sacred formula and consists of five syllables, na-ma-si-vaya altogether forming a sentence, meaning “obeisance to siva. This is called the Panchaksharamahamantra, the great matra of five letters. The sixth mantra is ‘om’ it is known as shadakshara.<sup>69</sup> Virasaiva considered this as the King of all Mantras, it is far weightier than the 70 million other mantras. They do not accept any other mantra other than this. These eight are known as the covering or marks of virasavism, that distinguishing Lingayathism from other sects.

## **6.4. Blind Belief and Superstitions**

Lingayathism strictly oppose blind beliefs and superstitions in Hinduism. Traditional Hindus regard certain days and certain places as favorable or unfavorable. Marriages,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 145, 146.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 146.

rituals, worship are performed based upon these auspicious times. “For traditional Hindus especially in Basava’s day women were considered inferior even bad omens. At that time the Hindu temples became commercial centers”

Basavaraja says

The superstitions belief in worthless deities like mari and masani and the observance of the day, week, star, auspicious and in auspicious omens and such other irrational customs were condemned by sarana.<sup>70</sup>

Sarana also says, one must trust the one supreme power with a singular faith. Lingayat opposed the idea that some were forbidden from worship. They declared worship was open to all. They stood against the abolition of ceremonial pollution at birth, death, menstruation.<sup>71</sup> The teaching of Basava and other saints brought lot of changes in area of superstitions.

### **6.5. Mutt (Mathas)**

Matt are the religious training centers of Lingayats. It is the place they interpret the tenants of their religion, writing book, preaching and guiding people in their spiritual life.

Iswara says,

The mathas, which provided a predominantly religious education in the medieval period, have now come forward to offer modern scientific and technological education. They themselves become modernized in order to participate in the overall process of populisticLingayat modernization in the century.<sup>72</sup>

Each mutt has a tradition that connects it to Basava or one of four of his contemporaries. These five gurus are believed to have come from the faces of Shiva and then founded five mutts.<sup>73</sup> In the modern time mutt provide free boarding and education for many needy students in Karnataka.

### **6.6. HOLY PLACES OF LINGAYAT**

There are many places that are significant to Veerashaivas which are tracing back us to 12 century history. The holy places of lingayaths are BasvanaBagewadi, BasavaKalyana, KudalaSangama, Shrishaila, Ulavi and Yedeyur

### **Conclusion**

The teachings of Basava and other early Virasaiva leaders were more relevant and unique in those days. Lingayathism came as a social and religious movement, but could not bring much change in the social aspect as they taught. Although Lingayathism frowned upon rigid caste hierarchy and preached ‘brotherhood’ of mankind; in actual practice, it is not exactly so. The Lingayats are the 12<sup>th</sup> largest unreached people group of India. They remain one of the major spiritual strongholds of India. Since they are the major and most unreached people group in Karnataka we Christian leaders take it seriously.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 176

<sup>71</sup> Moses, *Lingayat*, 19.

<sup>72</sup> Iswaran, *Religion and Society*, 83.

<sup>73</sup> Moses, *Lingayat*, 32

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