



THE PILLARS OF LINGAYATISM – A STUDY

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Abstract:- Lingayats follow the teachings and philosophy of the 12th-century social reformer Basavanna, particularly his vachanas (verses). In contrast, Veerashaivas, who existed before Basavanna, are considered a sub-sect of the Lingayat tradition. While Basavanna's vachanas mention "Shiva," he was referring not to the Hindu deity Shiva, but to the Ishtalinga—a representation of the formless divine that members of the community wear around their necks as a symbol of their faith. Imagine a spiritual path that emphasizes personal devotion, direct divine connection, and the importance of spiritual guidance. This is the essence of Lingayatism, a religious movement founded in the 12th century by Basava, a philosopher and statesman in Karnataka. Lingayatism is built upon three foundational pillars: the Guru, the Linga, and the Jangama. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in shaping the spiritual and social order of the Lingayat community. Let's delve deeper into these pillars to understand their pillar of Lingayatism is the Guru, the spiritual guide who plays a pivotal role in the religious and personal lives of the followers. In Lingayatism, the Guru is not just a teacher but a mentor who leads the disciple on the path of spiritual enlightenment and moral integrity.

KEY WORDS;-LINGAYATHA VEERASHIVA GURU,LINGA JANGAMA POOJA SHIVA SHAIVA BASAVA

INTRODUCTION

Lingayats are followers of 12th-century social reformer Basavanna and his vachana (verses) philosophy, which emphasized equality, social justice, and devotion, rejecting Brahmanical authority, temple worship, and caste distinctions. They promoted work as worship and offered spiritual enlightenment for all, including householders and artisans. Lingayats worship ishtalinga, a formless God, and reject rituals, focusing on honest labour and social redistribution.

In contrast, Veerashaivas, a sub-sect, follow Vedic traditions and worship Lord Shiva from Hindu mythology. The ongoing debate surrounds the distinct identities of Lingayats and Veerashaivas, with modern political and cultural movements pushing for the recognition of Lingayats as a separate religion.

Lingayats Overview

Lingayats follow the teachings and philosophy of the 12th-century social reformer Basavanna, particularly his vachanas (verses). In contrast, Veerashaivas, who existed before Basavanna, are considered a sub-sect of the Lingayat tradition. While Basavanna's vachanas mention "Shiva," he was referring not to the Hindu deity Shiva, but to the Ishtalinga—a representation of the formless divine—that members of the community wear around their necks as a symbol of their faith.

They stressed the importance of being a compassionate and socially productive human being in this world and in this life.

They considered all forms of labour and means of livelihood (kayaka) a form of worship, provided the honest earnings from labour (kayaka) are primarily used for social redistribution, called 'dasoha'.

The Sharanas emphasized socially productive and honest labour as a form of worship, rejecting renunciation and asceticism as the path to enlightenment as preached by the existing forms of Vedic, Agamic, Buddhism, Jainism, and other traditions.

They offered a spiritual path accessible to ordinary people—householders, farmers, traders, and artisans alike.

Lingayat is found primarily in Karnataka, where Lingayats comprise a major population. Lingayats are also found in significant numbers in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

Veerashaivas Overview

Veerashaivism, a sect deeply rooted in the Vedas and Agamas, centres solely around the worship of Lord Shiva as mentioned in Hindu mythology. Its followers are devoted to five religious centres known as Pancha Peethas, which are established similarly to the four peethas set up by Adi Shankara.

The Veerashaiva tradition is predominantly practised across the Indian states of Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, with a strong emphasis on exclusive devotion to Shiva.

Lingayat Movement

Lingayats are a Shaivite sect in Hinduism that emerged in the 12th Century AD in Karnataka during the reign of the Kalachuri dynasty. Basavanna, a minister in the court of Kalachuri King Bijjala (1157-67 CE), was the key proponent of Lingayatism. They opposed elaborate rituals prescribed by Hindu priests. The followers were called Veerashaivas (heroes of Shiva) or the Lingayats (wearers of Shivalinga). The movement included:

Ishtalinga Worship: Worshipping Shiva in his manifestations as linga. A symbol representing the inner self, rather than through idols or temple worship.

Rejection of Brahmanical Authority: Lingayats prioritized direct worship of Shiva and rejected the Vedic authority, the caste system, and Brahmin ceremonies.

Social Reform: Encouraging post-puberty marriage, re-marriage of widows, and the promotion of inter-caste relationships.

Lingayats Legacy

The Lingayat movement in medieval South India played a pivotal role in challenging the rigid social hierarchy, promoting social equality, and influencing Kannada literature and culture. Its emphasis on equality, social justice, and devotion continues to hold relevance in modern times, shaping political and cultural debates.

Social Change: In medieval South India, the Lingayat movement was crucial in opposing the strict social hierarchy and advancing social equality.

Cultural Impact: Kannada literature and culture were profoundly impacted by the movement, and the vachanas went on to play a significant role in the area's literary legacy.

Lingayat Identity: In recent times, some Lingayats have called for recognition as a separate religion or as a distinct caste within Hinduism, leading to political debates and movements in Karnataka.

Modern Relevance: The Lingayat movement's emphasis on equality, social justice, and devotion continues to resonate with people in South India and beyond.

GURU, LINGA, AND JANGAMA

Imagine a spiritual path that emphasizes personal devotion, direct divine connection, and the importance of spiritual guidance. This is the essence of Lingayatism, a religious movement founded in the 12th century by Basava, a philosopher and statesman in Karnataka.

Lingayatism is built upon three foundational pillars: the Guru, the Linga, and the Jangama. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in shaping the spiritual and social order of the Lingayat community. Let's delve deeper into these pillars to understand their

The guru: spiritual guide and mentor

The first pillar of Lingayatism is the Guru, the spiritual guide who plays a pivotal role in the religious and personal lives of the followers. In Lingayatism, the Guru is not just a teacher but a mentor who leads the disciple on the path of spiritual enlightenment and moral integrity.

The role of the guru

The Guru in Lingayatism is considered a bridge between the disciple and the divine. Their primary role is to impart knowledge and wisdom, guiding the followers towards a life of righteousness and devotion. The Guru helps interpret the sacred texts and rituals, ensuring that the teachings are correctly understood and followed.

Personal connection with the guru

Unlike some religious traditions where the spiritual guide is a distant figure, in Lingayatism, the relationship between the Guru and the disciple is deeply personal. This personal connection ensures that the guidance is tailored to the individual's spiritual needs and challenges. The Guru's role extends beyond religious instruction to include personal counseling and support in everyday life.

The guru as a moral compass

The Guru in Lingayatism also serves as a moral compass, exemplifying the values of honesty, compassion, and humility. By living a life that reflects these virtues, the Guru inspires followers to emulate these qualities in their own lives. This moral leadership is crucial in fostering a community that upholds ethical standards and social harmony.

The linga: symbol of divine consciousness

The second pillar of Lingayatism is the Linga, a symbol of divine consciousness and the universal creative energy. The Linga is central to the religious practices and daily lives of Lingayats, serving as a constant reminder of their devotion to the divine.

The significance of the linga

The Linga symbolizes the formless and infinite nature of the divine. It represents Lord Shiva, who is considered the supreme deity in Lingayatism. By worshipping the Linga, followers

acknowledge the omnipresence and omnipotence of the divine, fostering a sense of unity with the cosmos.

Personal linga and its importance

One unique aspect of Lingayatism is the personal Linga, a small emblem worn by the followers, usually around the neck. This personal Linga is more than just a religious symbol; it is a manifestation of the individual's personal connection with the divine. It serves as a constant reminder of their spiritual commitments and responsibilities.

Rituals and practices involving the linga

Worship of the Linga involves various rituals and practices, including daily pujas (prayers) and abhishekas (ritual bathing of the Linga). These rituals are designed to foster a disciplined spiritual practice, helping devotees focus their minds and hearts on the divine. The act of worship also serves as a means of purification, both physically and spiritually.

The jangama: itinerant preacher and spiritual seeker

The third pillar of Lingayatism is the Jangama, an itinerant preacher who embodies the ideals of spiritual seeking and teaching. Jangamas are monks who renounce worldly attachments to dedicate their lives to spreading the teachings of Lingayatism and serving the community.

The role of the jangama

Jangamas play a critical role in propagating the spiritual and social ideals of Lingayatism. They travel from village to village, delivering sermons, conducting rituals, and offering spiritual guidance. Their itinerant lifestyle symbolizes the transient nature of life and the importance of spiritual quest over material pursuits.

Spiritual journey of the jangama

The life of a Jangama is marked by rigorous spiritual discipline. They undergo extensive training and initiation, which includes learning the sacred texts, mastering various rituals, and cultivating inner virtues such as detachment and humility. This spiritual journey is not only a personal quest but also a means of serving others by sharing their wisdom and experiences.

The jangama as a community leader

In addition to their role as spiritual teachers, Jangamas often act as community leaders and mediators. They help resolve conflicts, provide support during crises, and guide the community in moral and ethical matters. Their presence reinforces the values of compassion, service, and social justice within the Lingayat community.

Conclusion

The pillars of Lingayatism—Guru, Linga, and Jangama—collectively represent the core values and spiritual ideals of the movement. The Guru provides personalized spiritual guidance, the Linga symbolizes a direct connection with the divine, and the Jangama embodies the spirit of continuous seeking and teaching. Together, these pillars create a holistic framework that supports the spiritual growth and social harmony of the Lingayat community.

By understanding these pillars, we gain insights into the rich spiritual heritage of Lingayatism and the profound wisdom it offers for leading a life of devotion, integrity, and service.

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