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PROBLEMS OF LINGAYAT WOMEN IN BIDAR CITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Veerashaiva Lingayatism or Lingayatism is sect of Hinduism and Shivasharana movement led Basaveshwar gave origin to Lingayatism. Lingayat philosophy equality of castes and gender. As such, in 12th century, both men and women of all castes were having equal rights of expression, participation in Anubhava Mantapa discussions, equal opportunities to employment and so on. With change in time, the principles of Lingayatism have changed and Lingayat women are facing gender inequality and as such, they are facing problems. The present study is based on survey (using Interview schedule) of total 140 Lingayat women in Bidar city. It is found that, nearly half of all the Lingayat women are facing gender inequality in education and economic activities. Though Lingayat philosophy is against evils like Dowry, still almost all women support the same. Hence, it is suggested to the Lingayat seers to spread Shivasharana's message of caste and gender equality among Lingayat people.



KEYWORDS: *Veerashaiva Lingayat, Lingayat women, Gender equality, Lingayat Philosophy, Problems of Lingayat women, Bidar city.*

INTRODUCTION

Veerashaiva Lingayatism or Lingayat is a distinct sect of Hinduism originating in the state of Karnataka, India. The genesis of Veerashaiva Lingayatism dates back to the 12th century and is associated with the social and religious reformer Basavanna or Basaveshwar. Basavanna became disillusioned with the rigid caste system and ritual practices of Hinduism and sought to create a more egalitarian and inclusive religious movement. This movement is popularly known as Shivasharana movement led by Basaveshwar in Kalyan (Present Basava Kalyan in Bidar district). Kayaka (Work) and Dasoha (Service) are the main important principles of Lingayatism. Further, all types of equality including caste and gender equality are emphasized by Lingayatism.

According to Shivamurthy Shivacharya Swamiji, emancipation of women or the spiritual equality is "important dimension in the humanitarian aspects of Shivasharanas". Basaveshwar and other Shivasharanas have made untiring efforts by putting all their energy for building a society of equals where both men and women could participate in spiritual and religions spheres on equal footing. Discrimination or exploitation of women on the basis of sex is against the very principle of rationalism of Shivasharanas, the religious movement of Basaveshwar and other Shivasharanas at Kalyan against the discrimination of caste, creed or sex attracted people across the country including women.

According to the Veerashaiva Philosophy of which Basaveshwar was the champion, men and women differ only in physiological level but they are one and the same in metaphysical aspect (Shivacharya, 1985).

Shivasharanas stressed the need for providing equal opportunity to both men and women and put this creed into practice. The women saints of the day proved the fact that they were in no way inferior to men in intelligence and soundness of judgement. Women were given equal opportunities to participate in the discoursed field in the Anubhava Mantapa (Hall of discussions on life experiences). They enjoyed equal status with men in that Mantapa and they were also expressing their opinions on life equally. "Basava advocated the cause of liberty and equality of women and proclaimed that an upright woman has equal rights as per with man. Basaveshwara said that women with ability are eligible for salvation and have the right to share education administration, employment and the like along with men" (Charantimath, 1995).

Basaveshwar and other Shivasharanas were treated all castes as equal, now in practice, there is no marital relations between different castes in Lingayatism. Status of women is lower compared to men in different aspects such as education, outside employment, property rights, etc. Even the Lingayat cultural rituals were also changing with the modernization. In this way, there are many of the changes in society during modern period. As such, the status of Lingayat women has also changed and modernized. In few of the religious rituals, socio-economic and educational life, Lingayat women are facing gender inequality. Hence, Lingayat women are facing problems in present society. To explore the problems faced by these women, a sample survey has been made in Bidar city of Karnataka and the particulars of the study are as under.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present study is made:

- To know the educational level and occupational or employment status of Lingayat women in Bidar city.
- To analyse the economic independence of Lingayat women by their participation in employment, income generating and self-employment activities.
- To study whether Lingayat women have economic independence and free to spend money in their families.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS:

As the title indicated, the present study is an attempt to explore the problems of Lingayat women in Bidar city and the city is located at the North of Karnataka. The author has surveyed various areas, where Lingayat families are living. Further, total 150 interviews were made with Lingayat women of different age groups and educational levels and such interviews were made using interview schedules. Of these 150 interviews, 10 were found with ambiguity and incorrect and are dropped and rejected. The primary data collected from total 140 Lingayat women is analyzed, interpreted and discussed as under.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

1. Age of Lingayat Women Surveyed:

Age of the Lingayat women helps to knowledge especially change of Lingayat culture from time to time. It is noted that, low age group, that is, women of less than 30 years of age have lesser knowledge about the history of Lingayat, culture and so on. Similarly, the old aged, that is women of more than 50 years of age have more knowledge about the Lingayat principles, culture, etc. The age of the Lingayat women surveyed is as under.

Table No. 1. Age of Lingayat Women Surveyed

Age Group	No. of Women	Percentage
Less than 25 Years	18	12.86
26 to 40 Years	46	32.86
40 to 60 Years	51	36.43
More than 60 Years	25	17.85
Total	140	100

As the low age group of Lingayat women have lesser knowledge of Lingayatism, only 18 (12.86%) were surveyed. 46 (32.86%) of the Lingayat women surveyed belongs to 26 to 40 years and 51 (36.43%) are in the age group of 40 to 60 years as they are middle aged. 25 (17.85%) of the Lingayat women surveyed are elderly that is, above 60 years. To gain knowledge of women of all age groups, Lingayat women of all age groups are surveyed for the study.

2. Educational Level:

Compared to earlier, many of Lingayat women are getting higher education and even few are completed research degrees like Ph.D/ M.Phil. But, few of the elderly Lingayat women are illiterates or low-educated. Education increases modern knowledge and improved lifestyle of Lingayat people.

Table No. 2. Educational Level

Educational Level	No. of Women	Percentage
Illiterate	17	12.14
Primary/ Secondary	53	37.86
Under-Graduate	14	10.00
Graduate	41	29.28
Post-Graduate/ Research	15	10.72
Total	140	100

Earlier, though educational level of Lingayat women is lower as few of the women that is, 17 (12.14%) are illiterate and 53 (37.86%) are completed primary or secondary education and most of them are of more than 45 years of age. 14 (10.00%) are under-graduates. 41 (29.28%) of the Lingayat women have completed their graduation and 15 (10.72%) have completed their post-graduation or research degrees. It is observed that, majority of low-educated and illiterate women are of higher age-group that is more than 45 years and highly educated (graduation and above) are of lower age group, that is less than 40 years. It shows that, there is increase in education among Lingayat women.

3. Occupation of Lingayat Women:

Lingayat culture emphasize educational and employment equality among women. As such, many of the Lingayat women are engaged in various types of occupations. The primary data collected on occupation of Lingayat women is disclosed as under.

Table No. 3. Occupation of Lingayat Women

Occupation	No. of Women	Percentage
Agriculture & Allied Sector	18	12.86
Self-employment & Business	24	17.14
Govt/ Pvt Employment & Service	15	10.71
Unorganized Sector & Seasonal Work	16	11.43
Unemployed Housewife	67	47.86
Total	140	100

Surprisingly, it is emphasized that, nearly half that is, 67 (47.86%) of the Lingayat women are unemployed housewives and even though, Lingayat community has given occupational equality, still they are unemployed. 18 (12.86%) of the Lingayat women are engaged in Agriculture and allied sector of their families. 24 (17.14%) are working in self-employment, business and income generating activities. 15 (10.71%) are working in Government or Private sector services. 16 (11.43%) of the Lingayat women are working in unorganized sector or seasonal work.

4. Freedom to Take up Employment, Occupation or Self-employment:

As discussed above, many of the Lingayat women are unemployed housewives. It is surprising to note that, though Lingayat community has assured equal rights in education and employment to women, still they are unemployed. In this context, the primary data has been collected on freedom of Lingayat women to take up employment, occupation or self-employment and tabulated as under.

Table No. 4. Freedom to Take up Employment, Occupation or Self-employment

Free to Take Up Employment & Self-employment	No. of Women	Percentage
Fully Free	31	22.14
Somewhat Free	34	24.29
Restricted by Family	75	53.57
Total	140	100

It is highlighted that, majority that is, 75 (53.57%) of all the Lingayat women are being restricted by their families to take up employment, occupation or self-employment. Only 31 (22.14%) are fully free to take up such economic activities. 34 (24.29%) of the Lingayat women are somewhat free to take up employment, occupation or self-employment. It shows that, though Lingayat culture promotes gender equality, still majority of the Lingayat women are deprived from employment equality.

5. Husband and Family Allow to Spend Money Freely:

Both husband and wife have equal rights in all the issues of family as per the principles of Lingayatism. It is observed that, in some of the Lingayat families, women have limited or no permission to spend the money lavishly or freely. It violates the economic equality among women.

Table No. 5. Husband and Family Allow to Spend Money Freely

Husband and Family Allow to Spend Money Freely	No. of Women	Percentage
Yes	42	30.00
No	27	19.29
Allow on Need Based	71	50.71
Total	140	100

Though, majority that is, 71 (50.71%) Lingayat women are permitted to spend money, they must have to convince their families on the genuineness of making such expenses, it shows the restrictions on spending for women. Even 27 (19.29%) of the Lingayat women are not allowed to make expenses or spend money. Only 42 (30.00%) of the women are allowed freely to make expenses and spend money. It shows that, though Lingayat culture emphasize gender equality in family and society, still on economic independence, there is prevalence of gender inequality.

6. Support Dowry Practice:

When the knowledge and practice of Lingayat women on different social evils has been gathered, it is found that, social evil of dowry is still prevailed among Lingayat people. It was asked to Lingayat women that whether they support dowry practice and collected primary data is presented in the following table.

Table No. 6. Support Dowry Practice

Support Dowry Practice	No. of Women	Percentage
Yes	132	94.28
No	08	5.72
Total	140	100

Almost all that is, 132 (94.28%) of Lingayat women surveyed support Dowry practice whereas only 08 (5.72%) are not supporting such practice. Though Lingayat philosophy is against dowry practice, still almost all women support and follow the same. Dowry is problem for Lingayat women, is also illegal and it is problem faced by Lingayat women.

7. Prevalence of Gender Inequality in Family:

From the above discussion, it is clear that, there is prevalence of gender inequality, which has become biggest problem among Lingayat people. In this regard, the information has been gathered from the Lingayat women that whether there is prevalence of gender inequality in family and collected primary data is analysed and discussed as under.

Table No. 7. Prevalence of Gender Inequality in Family

Support Dowry Practice	No. of Women	Percentage
Yes	94	67.14
No	37	26.43
Can't Say	09	6.43
Total	140	100

It is highlighted that, a great majority that is, 94 (67.14%) of all the Lingayat women have agreed that, there is prevalence of gender inequality in their families. Only 37 (26.43%) have not agreed to the same. 09 (6.43%) have not expressed their views on the same. It shows that, the gender inequality in families of majority of the Lingayat people is prevailed and as such, Lingayat women are facing many of the problems.

SUGGESTIONS:

From the present study, it is clear that, gender inequality is prevailed among Lingayat community. Consequently, women are facing many problems such as educational inequality, employment inequality, economic dependence, lack of freedom, support to dowry practice and so on. Hence, it is duty of the Lingayat seers to increase awareness and spread Principles of Lingayat community and messages of Shivasharanas among Lingayat people. Further, the evil practices like dowry should be condemned and prohibited among Lingayat people. It is duty of every Lingayat parent to educate their girl children equally with their boy children. Further, depending on their family income, it is suggested to Lingayat families to provide economic independence to women so that, they can spend money for family activities. Hence, spread of Lingayat principles to present generation is essentially needed to promote gender equality in families and society.

CONCLUSION:

Even though, Lingayat philosophy emphasized freedom of expression, freedom of education, freedom of employment and self-employment and freedom of moving in society to women, economic freedom, still it is found that, women are not free to express their ideas, move in society freely and free to undertake various employment or self-employment or spend money. Hence, Lingayat people should realize the freedom of women and provide opportunity to women to develop in all the areas and sectors.

To conclude, Lingayat philosophy is playing important role in spread of humanity and equality in society. The Lingayat people including women should realize the principles and culture of Lingayat community. They should follow and spread awareness on the principles of Lingayat culture among people of all the castes and communities. If everyone adopt, practice and follow such culture based on humanity and equality, then whole world should be developed.

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