

SIDDHARAMESHWAR : AN INFLUENTIAL SHIVASHARANA IN THE VEERASHAIVA MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

12th Century has a significant place in south Indian socio-religious history. Sant Basavesvara and his disciples propagated reformist and radical Veershaiva movement. The Veershaiva movement spread over the region of Karnataka and also in the southern part of Maharashtra. In the region of Maharashtra many Shivsharanas or Veershaiva saints played a significant role in the promotion of social equality, eradication of superstitions etc. Among the Shivsharanas Siddharameshwar of Sonnalige or Modern Solapur was an influential one by various aspects. Siddharameshwar was a contemporary of Sant Basavesvara. He was a staunch follower of Pashupata sect in his early days. He also devotee of Kapilsiddha Mallikarjuna. After his meeting with the great Veershaiva Sant Allama Prabhu he went to Basavakalyan and initiated into Veerashavism by Channabasveshwara who has been considered as his religious guru or master. Siddharameshwar was a great Yogi, due to his supernatural Power in Yoga he has been honored by various titles such as Yogikulachakravarti, Yogiraj, Yoginatha etc. The contemporary epigraphic sources underlined his importance in Yoga power. Siddharameshwar was a reflective literary. He composed various type of literature in Kannada such as Vachana, Tripadi etc. His literary work has valuable place in medieval Kannada literature. Siddharameshwar was incomparable in his contemporaries for his active social work. He was a creator of huge reservoirs and tanks for his local peoples, had make provisions of food and education facilities for needy people, also various innovative experiments like Mass weddings etc. are credited to his name. He opposed the cast discrimination and all type of inequality. While considering his contribution as Shivsharana, he played a significant role in the spread of Veershaiva sect in South Maharashtra as well in adjoin region of Marathwada and probably some part of modern Telangana. According to Veershaiva literature he was hold a position of Acharya of Anubhav Mantapa a spiritual institution established by Sant Basaveshwara at Basavakalyan. In modern days he has been considered as the village deity of Solapur and a big fair is held in his memory every year. His thoughts, teaching and social activities have exercised deep influence on the generations of people from South Maharashtra as well as the part of north Karnataka.

Keywords : Veershaiva, Shivsharana, Kudavakkalinga, Istlinga, Ashtamasiddhi, Yogiraj, Yogramniya Kshetra, Anubhav Mantapa, Vachana, Tripadi, Kapilsiddha Mallikarjuna, Yoga Samadhi.

The 12th century history of south India witnessed the radical religious and social reforms. It was only due to the spread of Veerashaiva sect led by Saint Basavesvara. Along with Allama Prabhu and other shivsharanas, Basavesvara propagated the reformist Veerashaiva sect by promoting the traditional Shaivism in Karnataka. This new revolutionary movement of Veerashaiva also began

to spread in the region of South Maharashtra which was connected by geographical and cultural proximity as well as the same political umbrella. The contribution of many Shiva devotees from Maharashtra including Siddharameshwar of Sonnalige (Modern Sholapur in Maharashtra) played an important role in spreading the egalitarian movement of Veerashaivas.

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- डॉ० मुकेश गर्ग, पूर्व एसोसिएट प्रोफेसर हिंदी विभाग, दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय, दिल्ली
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Siddharameshwar: A Brief Biography

Siddharameshwar was a Veerashayya Shivasharana who was contemporary of Saint Basavesvara. He attained the title of Karmayogi on the strength of selfless social service. Siddharameshwar, with the power in Yoga also became a great Shivayogi. Due to the diverse characteristics of his historical figure, the study of his life and work is important in the cultural history of medieval Maharashtra as well as South India.

The Siddharama Charite or Siddharama Purana, a Kannada treatise written by Raghavanka a Hampi-based disciple of Harihar, a Kannada poet of the 12th century AD, is the only contemporary source of the life of Siddharameshwar.

The Vachanas or verses of Siddharameshwara are available and these are also an important source for the study of his life and work. Apart from literary sources, near about 35 inscriptions belong to the 13th century, which are found in Bijapur, Gulbarga, Dharwad, Shimoga or Shivamogga, Mandya, Chitradurga districts in Karnataka and also in the district of Maharashtra like Solapur, Osmanabad etc. attested the work of Siddharameshwar.

Although, it is true that Siddharameshwar was a contemporary of Basavesvara, Allama Prabhu and other prominent Shivasharana, like other religious and political leaders of the Medieval period, historians have different views on his life time.

Dr. Nandimath assumes that the period of Siddharameshwar was around 1160 A.D. while Dr. Bhandarkar has given 1127 A.D. to 1167 A.D. as the period of Siddharameshwara. Siddharama Shivayogi the book of Dr. M.B. Kottrashetty published by Dharwad University, states that 1130 to 1180 A.D. was the period of Siddharameshwar. According to Mr. Anand Kumbhar, who put his views on the basis of Ingalgi inscription (Gulbarga District), Siddharameshwar must have been buried before 1209. The Marathi and English texts published in Solapur on the basis of Ragavanka's work, claims 1088 to 1189 A.D. was the period of Siddharameshwara. The eminent scholars in Maharashtra like Dr. Ramachandra Dhare, Gonyid Patil, accepted the same period given by Dr. Kottrashetty. In general, 1130 to

1180 is considered to be the life period of Siddharameshwara.

Siddharameshwar was born at Sonnalige, (Modern Solapur, Maharashtra) in the Kudavakkalinga Kunbi family. Mordī Mūdaagowda was the chief or gauda of the Nadu (A administrative unit) his father and Suggaladevi was his mother. According to tradition Siddharameshwar was born with the blessings and prophecy of the famous Veerashayya Acharya Revansiddha. Mordī Mūdaagowda named the new born child as Dhuli Mahankala after the name of his family deity. Later on he became well known as Siddharama when he followed Nathasiddha tradition. However, from the inscriptions, his names are found as Ramayya, Ramnatha, Ramnathdev, Siddhanath, Siddharamnath, Siddharam, Siddharameshwar, Shivayogi Siddharam etc. even today the name Siddharameshwar is prevalent among the locals.

Siddharameshwar was the supreme devotee of Mallikarjuna at Srisaile. In his early days, he was a cowherd and a native devotee. He went Srisaile and obtained vision of Mallikarjuna. In order to gain constant proximity to Mallikarjuna, he established the temple of Srisaile Mallikarjuna in Sonnalige. That is why Sonnalige or modern Solapur is mentioned in the inscriptions as new Srisaile or Kailaspur. Siddharameshwara, on the orders of Mallikarjuna, created 68 lingas and 17 Shivalayas or temples of Lord Shiva at Sonnalige. Siddharameshwar himself has said in one of his verses that he has established 68 lingas and other Shivalayas.

Due to this religious work of Siddharameshwara, Sonnalige got the place of pilgrimage as it is mentioned in the inscriptions as 'Southern Varanasi'. Apart from this, he also built lakes, monasteries and Annachhatra or food huts. While Siddharameshwara and his followers engaged in social work, Allama Prabhu, one of the patrons Shivasharana of the Veerashayya sect visited Sonnalige. During this visit, Allama Prabhu advised Siddharameshwar to come to Kaylan and take initiation of Ishtlinga. Similarly, Siddharameshwar went to Kaylan (Now Basvakalyan, the capital of later Chalukays) and took Ishtlinga initiation from Channabasveshwar. This historic event mentioned by Dr. R.C. Hiremath, a

Srisaile as "Arrival of Siddharmeshwara at Solnalige" is a great event, and his initiation of Istlinga by Basaveswara was a greater event in the history of the Shaivite sect. Siddharmeshwara himself was having a great influence on the masses like that of Kings". Later, Siddharmeshwar also held the post of Acharya of the Ashwata established by Saint Basaveshwar at Solnalige in the year of 1167. Kalyan had to undergo a social and religious upheaval which is commonly known as Kalyana Kranti or Kalyan Revolution. After the death of Siddharmeshwara returned to Solnalige and took the name of Siddharmeshwar and entombed himself alive while practicing Yoga. Today, Siddharmeshwar is considered as the village deity of Solapur and a big fair is held in his honor every year.

Various aspects of Siddharmeshwar's historical personality:

The sources like inscriptions and Vachanas or Veerashaiva literature reflects the various aspects of his historical figure. Siddharmeshwar was a saint poet of the Veerashaiva sect, he was also a great yogi who attained Ashtamasiddhi (eight types of siddhis or eight types of super human or super natural powers). He was a popular and active social worker. He was a humanitarian preacher as well as an influential Shivsharana which had an impact on his contemporaries. He was also the creator of the highest quality literature which has an invaluable place in the medieval Kannada literature's.

1. Yogi Kula Chakravarti:

Due to Siddharmeshwar's supernatural Power in Yoga, he seems to have been honored with Yogikulachakravarti, Yogiraj, Yoginatha. Siddharmeshwar himself has mentioned in one of his Vachana that 'Yogi should be like me'. His contemporaries were freely praised for his superiority in yoga. Siddharmeshwar is referred to as the Yogi of the Yogis by Mahavalinga Kalleshwar while Yelleshwara Ketayya says that Siddharmeshwar to have attained divinity by the power of Yoga. Soddala Baacharasa a contemporary Shivasharana says that, 'Siddharama is the only Shivayogi.' Ragavanka has also described the power of Siddharmeshwar. Most noteworthy thing is that, Srisaile, the center of worship of the Shaivite sect

was also a place of worship for Siddharmeshwar, and in reality, he must have practiced yoga here. Before taking initiation of Veerashaiva sect, M. Chidamanda Murthy and Dr. Nandimath both have said that Siddharmeshwar was a follower of Pashupata Lakulisha Sampradaya in his early life. According to Dr. P.B. Desai, Srisaile was a very famous place of Kalamukha Pashupata, so Siddharmeshwar must have felt the attraction of Srisaile region and it was here that he completed his yoga practice.

Even through the primary sources like inscriptions, Siddharmeshwar's yoga prowess has been mentioned. The inscription of 1256 AD during the reign of Krishnadev Yadav at Phadakamuru (Padryakanur) in Bijapur district, Siddharmeshwar is referred to as 'Siddhendra Chakravarti' or as supreme sovereign among the foremost Siddhas. In the Budarsingi inscription of 1257, Solnalige means modern Solapur is mentioned as a 'Yogramiya Kshetra' or the land of Yoga. Due to Siddharmeshwar's authority in yoga, Solnalige must have become famous in the field of yoga. From this discussion, it can be seen that Siddharmeshwar was a great yogi who attained Ashtamasiddhi in the practice of Yoga.

2. Siddharmeshwara: A Creator of Literature

The period of Siddharmeshwar is considered to be the golden age of Kannada literature. Along with Basaveswara's, his prominent associates like Jedara Dasimayya, Allama prabhu, Chennabasveshwara, Akkamahadevi etc. and number of common Shivsharanas laid the foundation of a new value system in the social and spiritual spheres through their devotional literature. Vachana literature which emerged during this period is a unique feature of Veerashaiva sect. There is no doubt that Siddharmeshwar also became an integral part of the social revolution by his literary achievements. R. Narasimhacharya the author of Karnataka Kavicharite and Dr. S.C. Nandimath states that Siddharmeshwar was a Veerashaiva poet who wrote Vachanas, Mishrastotra, Tripadi, Basavastotra, Tripadi, Ashtavarana Stotra, Tripadi, Kaldivana and Mantragopya etc. In Vachana, he has Kapilsiddha Mallikarjuna as his signature or Mudrita while in Tripadi his signature as Yoginatha. The

Ashtavarana Tripadi, a book containing about 131 poems, explains the Ashtavarana conduct of Veerashaiva. In his literature, Siddharameshwar praises his adored deity Kapilsiddha Mallikarjuna of Srisaile (One of the holy center among the 16 Jyotirlingas) as well as Saint Basaveshwar and his guru Chennabasveshvara.

Among the literary works composed by Siddharameshwar, Vachana literature has a very important place. This Vachana literature created by the Veerashaiva saints is considered to be a gift of Kannada language to Indian literature. Vachana literally means prose but the language used by the Veerashaiva saints is neither prose nor verse, so prose literature with the fragrance of verse or poetic prose, is said to be Vachana literature. In short, the utterances revealed from the spontaneous and deep experience of Veerashaiva Shivsharanas or the spontaneous flow of their experiences of mystical bliss. "A Vachana can usually be three to thirty-five lines long. The end of each verse is in the name of the Guru or the adored deity of the poet which is called Mudrita or Signature. Siddharameshwar was one of the greatest philanthropists among his contemporary Veerashaiva saints.

His Vachanas are also engraved in all the available inscriptions in Karnataka and Maharashtra. Although Siddharameshwar himself is said to have composed 68,000 verses, only 1400 of his verses could available till date." The Vachanas of Siddharameshwara are the revelation of his own experiences by witnessing his adored deity Kapilsiddha Mallikarjuna. They express spirituality, religion, karma and ethics. His personality also reflected from the Vachanas in a number of roles such as a faithful organizer, an active public leader, a humanitarian philosopher and a guide who advocates morality.

3. Active Social Worker :

Due to Siddharameshwar's active social work, he has to be given a unique place in the contemporary Veerashaiva Shivsharanas. The social activities like creation of huge reservoirs, tanks, provision of food and education facilities, innovative experiments like Mass weddings etc. are credited to his name. Raghavanka has described Siddharameshwara constructed a tank for the

native residents of Sonnalige with the help of his 4000 followers. The Budarsingi inscriptions has also mentioned about this tank or reservoirs and the donor of the inscription had made a grant for the repairing or the upkeep of the tank. According to this inscription, it seems that the importance of Sonnalige was not reduced even after the life period of Siddharameshwara. Siddharameshwara is considered as pioneer of the mass wedding tradition. Raghavanka, his biographer also confirmed this event. "He also established a monastery and an Ashrama for the religious and educational purpose. Dr. Ramachandra Dhere described it as Kapilashrama." According to Budarsingi grant inscription, along with the religious activities like worship of Shiva, Shiva Diksha or initiation ceremony, the educational activities must had been run by this Ashrama. In the Veerashaiva sect, Basaveshwar is considered to be a symbol of devotion, Chennabasveshvara is considered to be the symbol of knowledge, Allama Prabhu is considered to be the symbol of asceticism, Akkamahadevi is considered to be the actual idol or symbol of Sharana Sati and Lingapati, while Siddharameshwar is considered to be the doer of karma. Siddharameshwar himself, however, was never proud of his social work. On the contrary, mentioning that this act was done in obedience to Kapilsiddha Mallikarjuna, Siddharameshwar in his one Vachana said, "People call me Dani by constructing lakes, wells, gardens, shelters, food pantries, but I am not a Dani, I have done this as you (Kapilsiddha Mallikarjuna) have said."

4. Influential Shivsharana :

Siddharameshwara's social and spiritual work signifies that he was one of the most influential Shivsharanas in his period. There is no doubt that the Veerashaiva Shivsharanas from Karnataka played an important role in the propagation of new religious and reformist thoughts in 12th century A.D. However, Siddharameshwar's area of work was Sonnalige or a modern Solapur. Therefore, the credit for the spread of the Veerashaiva sect in the area of Solapur, Sangali, Kolhapur a part of South Maharashtra and the frontier region of Marathwada including Osmanabad, Latur and

...probably goes to Siddharameshwar. The inscription available at Nilegion, Toramba and Itakala also confirms it. The inscriptions described the number of devotees of Siddharameshwar in this region. It is also known why a preacher of the Veerashaiva sect Allama Prabhu initiated Siddharameshwar into the sect. The reason may be that a popular and widely known social worker like Siddharameshwar should be the best person for the propagation of the Veerashaiva sect. The reason of Siddharameshwara's initiation into the sect of Veerashaivism has been significantly described by Dr. P.B. Desai as 'the triumph of the Veerashaiva movement'.

Siddharameshwar opposed inequality and caste discrimination in his life and advocated equality. In opposing caste discrimination, he said that the one whose caste pride has fallen and who has attained Shivpada is the real Veerashaiva. According to him, even if one is known as Shudra, if he is a devotee of Shiva, he must be considered as Veerashaiva. The thoughts and works of Siddharameshwara seems to have had a great impact on the common people of that time and on Veerashaiva Shivsharanas. All other leading Shivsharanas, including Basavesvara the promoter of the Veerashaiva sect, have praised the work of Siddharameshwar. He has described the greatness of Siddharameshwara as 'All the wealth is where the holy steps of Siddharama are, all the realms are there. The place where he lives is Varanasi. He was an independent Scholar or Pandita." Allama Prabhu says that I have learned allegiance from Siddharameshwara. Chennabasveshvara, the sectarian guru of Siddharameshwara, also praised him as 'such real Shivayogi'. Underlining her impenetrable relationship with Siddharameshwar, Akkamahadevi said, "Siddharama's Samadhi (mausoleum) became my Samadhi, because I am his darling daughter and he gave me blessings or Kripa Prasad out of compassion." Thus, Siddharameshwara played a significant role in the religious and cultural history of Maharashtra in 12th century. His thoughts, teaching and social activities have exercised deep influence on the generations of people from South Maharashtra as well as the part of north Karnataka.

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