

## Basavesvara – Avatara Purusha

(on the occasion of the “Basavashree Award” presentation ceremony to Justice Shivraj V. Patil at Ravindra Kalakshetra Bangalore on 18.08.2002)

It is a unique feature of the Hindu Religion that the Supreme Being appears from time to time in some form, human and otherwise, to retrieve Dharma from degeneracy and decay. The Lord said in Bhagavat Gita:

*Yatha yatha hi Dharmasya*

*Glanir bhavati Bharata*

*Abyuctanam a darmasya*

*Tathmanam Srajami Aham*

Whenever Dharma (Righteousness) declines and A-Dharma (Unrighteousness) increases, I embody myself. No other religion has either said this or produced incarnation of the Supreme Being in history.

This incarnation is not confined to avathars like Narasimha, Rama or Krishna. Sages and Saints have come into the world from time to time, in order to restore Dharma among the people. For instance, when Hinduism was completely enveloped in ritualism and mere ceremonies and worship, Adi Sankara appeared on the scene and removed all the dirt and dust that had obliterated the finer concepts of the ancient Dharma (Sanatana Dharma).

In our own lifetime Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Narayana Guru and Ramana have tried rid the Hindu Religion of many of the later day distortions and preach the basic principles of Dharma. These Saints and Sages are not incarnations of the Supreme Being but *Avatara Purushas*, great men endowed with divinity. To this category belongs Basavesvara – an Avatara Purusha.

I have read some books on Basavesvara where a controversy was raised whether Basavesvara was a Saint or a Social Reformer. My answer is that he was both a Saint and Social Reformer. I shall very briefly sustain the statement.

The Bhagavat Gita talks of a four-fold path to salvation:

1. The path of Abyasa, Rituals
2. The path of Jnana – Knowledge
3. The path of Dyana – Meditation and Bhakti
4. The path of Karma – Duty without expectation of the fruits thereof

Of these paths, Dyana or the Bhakti marga is easiest. The devotee is not called upon to undergo painful austerities or reach the highly intellectual heights of Jnana nor perform duties sacrificing the fruits thereof. But in the Bhakti marga, the devotee is expected to surrender himself completely to the Supreme Being.

The Lord says in Bhagavat Gita:

*Sarva Dharman Parityajya*

*Mam ekam saranam Vraja*

*Aham tva Sarvapapebhya*

*Mokshayisyami ma Suchah:*

Renounce all dharmas and take refuge in me, I shall liberate you from all sins, grieve not.

A few of examples of the saints of the Bhakti movement may be recalled on this occasion. This Alvars and Nayanmars of Tamilnadu, Naryana Bhattadri of Kerala, Purandara Dasa of Karnataka, Thukkaram of Maharashtra, Meera Bai of Rajasthan and Gujarat Guru Nanak of Punjab, Tulsi Das and Kabir of North India, Mahapurusa Sankara Deva of Assam and the east, Chaitanya Maha Prabhu of Bengal & Orissa,

Annamacharya of Andhra Pradesh and Tyagaraja of South India, were the greatest emponents of Bhakti marga.

Basavesvara falls into that category of Saints who propogated Bhakti cult among the people.

Basavesvara says

“The Universe is in Thee

But thou art in me”.

“Look where I will, I find thee there

The vast expanse that meets

my eye is filled by Thee

Thou art the eye of the Universe

Thou art its beaming face

Thine hands are outstretched everywhere

O Kudala Sangama Deva, I find

Thy footprints evident everywhere”.

“The Lord could be won over only by devotion and not either by music or vedic chants”.

Basavesvara had realized God and established emotional rapport with God which all those I had mentioned earlier had done.

He says:

“To me all the lovers of God are one

such is my faith. There is not

the slightest doubt in me about this

There is no high – born for me

Nor low – born.”

Finally he says, “God resides within those whose deeds correspond to their words”.

Basavesvara stood for social transformation of the caste-ridden society of his times. That as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, he preached the concept of a caste-less, classless society of universal brotherhood, an ideal which even today appears to us as a receding horizon puts the present generation to shame. Even in 12<sup>th</sup> Century he supported inter-caste marriages. In one case his support for the marriage of a low-caste boy with a high-caste girl drew the wrath of the king of the state. Basavesvara's crusade against hierarchy based on caste and his revolt against blind faith and superstition awakened the masses of Karnataka.

Basavesvara emphasized on the dignity of Labour and propagated the ideal vigorously. The *Gayaka* or work doctrine of Basavesvara was a revolt against the classification of people on the basis of their birth. One of the reasons which put India back during the world wide Industrial Revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century was the contempt for manual labour prevalent in India in those days.

But Basavesvara preached to the masses the importance work in ones life. The later day version that "Work is Worship" was enunciated by him, Centuries ago

He said

"Work on the soil, toil hard within  
your limits – consecrate to the Lord  
the food that you thus earn  
and share it with others.  
Show me O Lord, the feet of such  
a devotee as this – His body  
Is pure, his mind is pure, his  
Conduct is pure, the words that he speaks are holy.

Our scripture contains instances of great persons doing manual labour. In Ramayana the great King Janaka found Sita when he was ploughing the soil while preparing the ground for Yaga. In canto 66 Bala Kanda Valmiki says:

Once when I was ploughing the land for performing yaga etc. – The great King Janaka did not consider ploughing as mean work.

In Mahabharata, Krishna the avatar of Vishnu himself served as a Charioteer for Arjuna

Thus physical work in those days was not considered beneath ones dignity.

Once when I was traveling in a cab in New York a well-dressed man was driving the vehicle. He looked at me once twice and then asked me "Sir, Are you from India?" I replied "Yes, and in order to encourage him to speak, I asked him "Have you been to India?". The Driver said "I am an admirer of the philosophy and culture of India and the east. It is my dream to visit that part of the world some day. I am a junior professor in a college and I am working on Saturdays to earn enough to finance my trip". No wonder those countries are rich and we continue to be poor.

Basavesvara wanted the people to follow right path in life. Society remains good and peaceful only to the extent that the people observe good conduct.

Law and order is maintained where 90% of the people observe the law and 10% violate it. If however 10% observe the law and 90% violate it, there will be no orderly society but only chaos.

He exhorted the people as follows:

Do not kill

Do not steal

Do not tell a lie

Avoid anger

Be tolerant

Do not self aggrandize or despise others.

This is the only way to commend yourself to God and win His approval.

All religions, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, Sikh or Zoroastrian preach the same. Is there a single religion which says you may kill, rob, cheat, covet or practice cruelty?

Imagine what a glorious place the world will be if all of us followed the moral code of Basavesvara.

To sum up, Basavesvara was an Avatar Purusha, one of the galaxy of Saints and Sages who had appeared in human form to lead the humanity on the path of Dharma or righteousness. He was social revolutionary who fought against the distortions that had developed in the Hindu Religion by ignorance and superstition. His ideas are relevant even today in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century world.

The second thing, which gives me immense pleasure, is the conferment of *Basavashree* on my esteemed friend Justice Shivraj V Patil. Justice Shivraj V Patil is a living embodiment of the philosophy and teachings of Basavesvara.

Devotion to God and duty, humility and nobility are some of his outstanding qualities. By sheer hard work, integrity and ability Justice Shivraj V Patil has climbed every step of the ladder and reached the highest level in the judiciary. What more tribute can one pay after the Basava Vedike has chosen Justice Shivraj V Patil for the prestigious award of Basavashree. I am confident that this Award will be the forerunner for many more national and international awards in the days ahead. I wish him all success.