

## MAHACHAITHRA – AN INNER VIEW

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Discrimination<sup>1</sup>, in all of its forms, is the under acknowledged human rights crisis even today. Various defined<sup>2</sup>, discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, colour, gender or place of birth threatens not only the lives and rights of millions of people but also the very fabric of the Constitution<sup>3</sup>. It may be noted that despite outlawing various forms of discriminations through the Constitution<sup>4</sup> and Acts of Parliament<sup>5</sup>, society continue to perpetuate and permit it with impunity and individual acts of discrimination on the basis of caste, in particular, are commonplace. This article critically examines why?

India offers a sad example where, despite equal protection<sup>6</sup>, non-discrimination clauses<sup>7</sup> and anti-discrimination laws<sup>8</sup>, the State has failed to protect its people from discrimination. Society, the government continue to discriminate on the basis of caste, colour etc, though prompting outcry but little remedy.

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<sup>1</sup> See, though not related to the Indian socio-legal content, Harold Fishbein, PEER, PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION (2002). Fishbein argues that humans' evolved inheritance predisposes us to develop prejudice and to discriminate against out-groups. He has focused on the literature on prejudice and discrimination related to four characteristics which involve among others sex, race.

<sup>2</sup> As described by Antonovsky that "discrimination may be defined as the effective injurious treatment of persons on grounds rationally irrelevant to the situation. Individuals are denied desired and expected rewards or opportunities for reasons related not to their capacities, merits or behaviour, but solely because of membership in an identifiable out-group". See Antonovsky, *The Social Meaning of Discrimination* 21(1) PHYLON 81–95 (1960) (available at <https://doi.org/10.2307/273741> (accessed 20 August, 2021))

<sup>3</sup> It may be also noted that the principle of equality and non-discrimination is one of the cornerstones of the international human rights system. Equality, at its most basic, means that individuals in like situations should be treated alike, and that individuals in different situations should be treated differently. Discrimination is commonly seen as an affront to human dignity, a core value that is foundational to all human rights. Discrimination law is one tool for achieving the broader goals of equality and human dignity.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see in the context of Article 14, 15 and 16 of the Constitution.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see in the context of

<sup>6</sup> See for example Article 14 of the Constitution. It provides that  
The State shall not deny to any person equality before law or equal protection of law.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Article 15(1) of the Constitution. It provides that The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

In the Indian context people born in some community undergo exploitation based on caste<sup>9</sup>, religion, colour of the skin and gender. People assert and distinguish some men are superior and while some others are inferior. *The upper class exploit the people of lower class*<sup>10</sup>. It is evident in the Indian history that many rebelled against this in their individual capacity were witnessed till twelve centuries, it took a community shape and such a mass movement was considered as a hallmark in Karnataka.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Karnataka and Vachana movement can be considered a milestone and at the same time a contrast, Girish Karnad a famous play writer aptly said *A tongue often takes its turn towards a paining tooth*<sup>11</sup>. The vachana movement not only encouraged people to write poems, short-stories, novels, epics and plays but also considerable research was undertaken and it continues till today. Since centuries many communities in Karnataka are not only keeping the beacon light of Vachana movement but they are actively trying their level test to find a suitable answer under this everlasting turning light. Such an attempt is not only restricted to find a suitable answer but take few steps forward to interpret and reinterpret the historical events in the domains of Kannada literature. All forms of Kannada literature have sincerely considered vachana movement very seriously, but drama being a powerful literary form made it more popular and meaningful.

‘Sankranthi’ by Lankesh, ‘Thaledanda’ by Girish Karnad, ‘Mahachaithra’ by H. S. Shivaprakash, ‘Jangamadedege’ by Sanehalli Panditharadhyaswamy, ‘Maranave Mahanavami’ by Sirigere Shivakumaraswamy, ‘Shivarathri’ by Chandrashekara Kambara, ‘Kettithu Kalyana’ by M. M. Kalburgi are the noted literary works in the play form were exclusively written based on vachana movement. Among these few are important from the popularity point of view, whereas, others are significant from the point of literature. ‘Mahachaithra’ by H. S. Shivaprakash without any doubt is important on both the views but as a literary piece as a drama form, it can be placed at the top of all.

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<sup>9</sup> See for example Marc Galanter, *Law and Caste in Modern India* 3(11) ASIAN SURVEY, 544 (1963) (available at <https://doi.org/10.2307/3023430>) (accessed 21 August 2021). Mark has described that “while there is in modern India no single nation-wide system of caste, there is what might be called an all-India legal culture. It describes the ways in which legal system recognizes and regulates caste and it suggests the ways in which these legal conceptions and rules may influence caste as an institution”.

<sup>10</sup> See Ingutia A K, Caste: In India and Africa 23 TRANSITION, 15 (1965) (available at V) (accessed 23 August 2021). Ingutia describes that “the caste system has survived in India for hundreds of years. It is a system in which people are classed according to their birth in that society”

<sup>11</sup> Kannada Drama-Yajamanya Sankathana, T. Venkatesh Murthy, Adhyayana Mandala, Bengaluru, 2009, pp 256.

The Vachana movement without Basavanna is something unimaginable and his participation is undeniable. The epicentre of all drama forms is Vachana movement and Basavanna as their centripetal force. But Basavanna as a character never make his appearance directly in ‘Mahachaitra’. It is interesting to note that in the same play the other characters enact exactly the same way as Basavanna and this is something remarkable. The main theme of the play is Vachana movement and the absence of Basavanna in the lead role depicts the fall of Kalyana and the same Kalyana was once founded by Thailapa II and built by Vikramaditya, but it eventually converted into a paradise of tools. It has been documented that there was an uproar against Basavanna centric Vachana movement in the Kannada literary world. The reason being was much earlier to Basavanna many were active in the movement like Madara Channaiah, Dohara Kakkaiyah, Ambigara Chowdaiah, Molige Maraiyah to name a few. Later on, Basavanna joined the movement. Basavanna in the movement is considered as a river but certainly not an ocean.

A river before it submerges into a sea, it takes turns and twists, fall and rise but never stop its journey, exactly the same way the Vachana movement tumbled upon many hardships and it came to an end without reaching its destiny. The Kalyana was built on uncountable dreams and its downfall was unfortunate. The bright side of the dream of Vachana movement was to eradicate caste, class and gender discrimination among people, but the sad part of Vachana movement that the dream was shattered and paved the way to inequality and further exploitation. At present the Dalit roots of Vachana movement has become a part of Hindu group as any other caste. For such a development who should held responsible? Basavanna? Bijjala? Sharanas? Citizen of Kalyana? Or people like us ate present? The question remains unanswered.

Basavanna as a chief of kinds treasury and as a leader of Vachana movement was unsuccessful and shouldered a dual responsibility but unable to render justice to both to a fullest extent. His situation was like a man plating his two legs in a separate boat. But he did manage with his knowledge and capacity amidst the power hunger men like Karnadeva brother and Somideva son of Bijjala, were proved to be a cause for the downfall of Kalyana.

The status of women according to the Hindu principle ‘*Ethranaryasthu Pujyanthe Ramanthe Thathra Devathaha*’ refers to as ‘women are worshiped on par with gods’ but at the same time another principle says that women are not eligible to have freedom and entire their life. They are monitored by men from birth till death as it as quoted in the Sanskrit text, ‘*Pitha Rakshathi Koumare, Bhartha Rakshathi Yauvane, Rakshanthi Sthaveere Puthraa Nasthri Swathanthra Marhathi*’, this has a wider meaning, a girl child at birth up to her puberty she is under her father’s care, after demurrage she is looked after by her husband and in her middle till death, she is taken care by son. So, in this saying only men have their upper hand on women.

Narayana Kramitha, Mangala Gupta, Aadinatha Shetty and Mukunda Bhatta maintained their male dominated views on Suley Sankavva and Akkamahadevi many women involved in public life face awkward situations and often hear nasty statements, time has passed by but the attitude of men remains stagnant.

A critical situation was witnessed in Kalyana at a time when a cross culture marriage took place between Sheelavantha a son of a lower caste father Madigara Haralaiah and Madhavi a daughter of an upper caste father Madhuvarasa. In that critical moment, Basavanna's duty to safeguard the fellow comrades but, instead he turns his face off from Kalyana in the play, with Machideva, Hadapada Happanna, Vaidya Sanganna, Soddala Bacharasa, Rayasada Manchanna, Mochi Haralaiah, Thuragahi Ramanna, Hendada Maraiah and Kinnara Bhommaiah proceed further with the scene in the drama. *What for him? By leaving us in utter desire and whirlpool, he silently left for Kappadisangama*<sup>12</sup> as Sankavva express her sadness and helplessness. Under his leadership a critical situation rosed through a cross cultural events, he just leaves the stage halfway without any reason, and for this there is no evidence in the history for such a question. It is like looking at a tip of a needle.

Anyone from an upper caste represent as a leader for a lower caste movement no matter how sincere in his leadership quality he cannot lead up to his capacity and movement end-up in utter failure. The reason being that as Marulasiddappa put it, *from the childhood the upper caste force directly or indirectly has a strong hold and a person fails to have a complete understanding of the feelings of the lower caste*<sup>13</sup>. Mogalli Ganesh express the above quoted statement in a metaphor as *Dalits are roots, Basavanna a flower!*<sup>14</sup> such a statement shows the opposite views of Basavanna between authority and community. In this background one can investigate Basavanna's departure from Kalyana.

The state authority itself sponsor the loot, vandalism and terrorism in Kalyana in the absence of Basavanna. At present, India is witnessing the same situation and it has become an order of the day. The monarchy is replaced by democracy, but the crime and atrocities continue as it was in 12 centuries. A sadness is covered over Kalyana but the cross-culture game continues on the streets of the same city, shows that the young generation can trust social practices.

The Vachana movement throw light on many events in the play 'Mahachaithra'. Actually the play is pregnant with many inner views, they are: to protect the dignity of the movement as per

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<sup>12</sup> Mahachaithra, H. S. Shivaprakash, Navakarnataka publication, Bengaluru, 1995, pp 34.

<sup>13</sup> Sadhana, Sankranthi – ondu Adhyayana (Article), K. Marulasiddhappa, Bengaluru University, Bengaluru, 1978, pp 133.

<sup>14</sup> Takararu, Dalitaru Beru-Basavanna hu, Mogalli Ganesh.

the desire of lower caste Sharanas, who made a firm decision to take up arms, a non-violence path was rejected by Channabasavanna and his fellow mates and escape from Kalyana after hearing the news of Basavanna's death, Neelambika maintain her mental balance, Bijjala's helplessness, low mentality of Narayana Kramitha, Mangala Gupta, Mukunda Bhatta, Aadinatha Shetty all are at power centres, and power mongers like Kasapaiah, Karnadeva, Sovideva willing to hold authority depicts the Basavanna's death a suicide? Or an assassination? The play never shows this, but the question is left to the audience to decide.

After the death of Basavanna the Sharanas wanted to put an end to exploitation by the state authority, they just barge into the sacred fireplace and destroy the Dakshabrahma who take shape as Veerabhadra and kill Bijjala. The play shows *the coldness and the end of Bijjala's reign with a rise of new horizon*<sup>15</sup>. The same coldness and new horizon are the two guiding lights helps us to deeper into the system.

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<sup>15</sup> Mahachaithra, H. S. Shivaprakash, Navakarnataka publication, Bengaluru, 1995, pp 12.