

**BASAVANNA'S PRINCIPLES AND THEIR IMPACT ON
DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN MODERN KARNATAKA:
A PUBLIC PERCEPTION STUDY**

Iranna S. Benal¹ & Kamalaxi G. Tadasad²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Rani Channamma
University, Belagavi.

²Professor, Department of Political Science, Rani Channamma
University, Belagavi.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18850559>

ABSTRACT:

The philosophy of Basavanna based on equality, social justice and ethical government has been used in the Karnataka socio-political discourse. The concept of participatory and inclusive governance is stressed in his ideas of Kayaka (dignity of labour), Dasoha (social sharing), and anti-caste hierarchy. This paper investigates the social attitude in terms of the applicable principles of Basavanna in the modern democratic governance in the selected districts of North Karnataka. The study is descriptive as the empirical design and relies on primary data that was gathered on 120 respondents using a structured questionnaire. A purposive sampling method was used to facilitate representation in terms of age, education and social groups. Percentage analysis and mean score analysis were the methods of data analysis to evaluate the perceptions on equality, transparency and social justice and participatory governance. The results have indicated that most of the respondents believe that the concepts of Basavanna are very applicable in the contemporary democratic administration, specifically the need to advance social peace and moral leadership. Nevertheless, gaps between the philosophy and the practical political application are also reported by the respondents. This paper concludes that the philosophy of Basavanna is a major normative guideline to enhancing democratic governance in Karnataka.

KEYWORDS:

Basavanna's Philosophy, Democratic Governance, Public Perception, Social Justice, Participatory Democracy, North Karnataka

.....

Introduction

The social reformer and philosopher Basavanna of the 12th century is a key figure in the socio-political history of Karnataka. He was an innovator in Lingayat movement and preached equality, social justice, morality and anti-caste movement. His philosophies of Kayaka (dignity of labour) and Dasoha (distribution of wealth and service to the society) were focused on moral duty and participatory social structure (Ishwaran, 1983). In contrast to more strictly hierarchical models, which were common in medieval society, Basavanna imagined an egalitarian society based on group discussion and spiritual democracy in the form of the Anubhava Mantapa, sometimes called an early participative dialogue (Ramaswamy, 2016).

The ideals of Basavanna have persisted in the political sphere, the institutions, as well as the stories of governance in modern Karnataka. The modern idea of democratic governance focuses on transparency, accountability, social inclusiveness, and citizen involvement which sound close when it comes to the teachings of Basavanna. Historical reformist philosophies are said to be the typical influence on the modern culture of politics and ethics, as argued by scholars (Chatterjee, 2018). Nevertheless, although Basavanna is often used in political discourse, empirical studies on the perception of the practicality of his principles in contemporary politics are few.

The research paper is thus aimed at evaluating the general opinion of people on the effects of Basavanna ideals on the democratic governance within selected districts of North Karnataka with the themes of equality, social justice, ethical leadership and participatory democracy.

Conceptual Framework

The Basava philosophy can be used to give a normative approach to a study of democratic governance in modern Karnataka. Social equality, moral responsibility, and participatory dialogue were the principles of his beliefs. It is a tenet of the philosophy of Kayaka (dignity of labour) which says that all people, no matter their caste or status, have social value. This concept is very much compatible with contemporary democratic ideals of equality before the law and the participatory inclusion. Equally, Dasoha (making resources and service available to the society) echoes distributive justice and social welfare belief, which are core to the current systems of governance.

Democratic governance in the ideas of Beetham (1994) is a participative, accountable and transparent and responsive to the needs of the citizens. It demands organizational processes that encourage equality and minimize social exclusion as well as ethical leadership. Once Basavanna founded Anubhava Mantapa or a discussion club that promoted free communication between people of various social classes, it can be regarded as one of the early manifestations of participatory governance (Ramaswamy, 2016). This model of deliberation is similar to contemporary theories of participatory democracy, which stresses on choosing that citizens participate in decision-making.

Moreover, the theory of ethical governance emphasizes the role of moral leadership and integrity in the administration of the people. The denial of caste division and corruption by Basavanna is an indication of ethical political behavior. This study adopts the philosophy of Basavanna as a conceptual framework to assess the perception of the people on democratic governance in the chosen districts in North Karnataka because of incorporation of concepts of equality, social justice and participatory deliberation.

1. Review of Literature

The philosophy of Basavanna has received considerable scholarly research as a topic of social reform, equality and religious change in Karnataka. Ishwaran (1983) analyzed the Lingayat movement as a subversive attempt to break the caste system hierarchy by highlighting the contribution of Basavanna in enforcing social equality and moral responsibility. Recent work has returned to the work of Basavanna in the social-political and ethical points of view. Ramaswamy (2016) emphasizes that Anubhava Mantapa is among the initial deliberative arenas that promoted deliberative dialogue across caste and gender lines, and therefore, it may be applicable to the modern discussion of democracy.

The connection between the historical reformist philosophies and contemporary frameworks of governance also finds its way in contemporary studies. Such reforms are socio-religious in nature, as Chatterjee (2018) claims that these events mold political culture and dominant ethics in the regional states of India. In Karnataka, experts observe that the ideals of Basavanna are often mentioned in the political discourse and in state policies on social justice, as well as in popular events and meetings (Patil,

2020). Nonetheless, there is controversy over how these principles have been operationalized to democratic governance.

Research Gap

Despite the large amount of literature addressing the philosophy of Basavanna, whether through social reform, religious transformation, and also ethical thought, most of the literature is historical or conceptual. The current research emphasizes mainly the theological interpretation and socio-cultural influence but not the aspects of governance, including accountability, participation, equality, and transparency. Moreover, there are limited perception-based studies done in North Karnataka on the district level. Empirical evidence showing the association between the ideals on philosophical views of Basavanna and quantifiable elements of democracy is lacking. Thus, it requires a public perception study to understand how current Basavanna principles apply in some districts of the North of Karnataka.

Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the view of the people on the applicability of the principles of Basavanna in the modern democratic system.
- To examine the connection between the ideals of equality, as encouraged by Basavanna and the current practices of governance.
- To determine the perception of principles like Kayaka and Dasoha as affecting ethical political leadership.
- To assess the perceived effect of the philosophy of Basavanna on participatory democracy in sampled districts of North Karnataka.

Hypotheses

- H_0 : Basavanna's principles have no significant impact on democratic governance in selected districts of North Karnataka.
- H_1 : Basavanna's principles significantly influence democratic governance in selected districts of North Karnataka.

Research Methodology

The research design is descriptive empirical research because it will assess how people see the applicability of the principles of Basavanna in democratic governance in the chosen districts of North Karnataka, that is, Belagavi and Dharwad. The data collection was performed with the help of the structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions and

Likert scale questions about equality, social justice, ethical leadership, and participatory governance.

120 (One hundred and twenty) respondents were purposively sampled to represent the respondents in terms of age, education, and social backgrounds. The research is based more on the perception-based answers, instead of the institutional and electoral data.

To analyse it, percentage analysis was employed to find general tendencies in opinion and mean score analysis was employed to find how strong the people agreed with the statements associated with governance. Also, Chi-square test was used to test the correlation between Basavanna's awareness in relation to democratic governance.

The methodological approach enables to carry out systematic and empirical analysis of the modern applicability of the Basavanna philosophy in the selected districts of North Karnataka.

Results and Discussions

Table 1: Awareness of Basavanna's Principles (N = 120)

Level of Awareness	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
High Awareness	52	43
Moderate Awareness	44	37
Low Awareness	24	20
Total	120	100

Interpretation: These data suggest that 80 percent of people, who are surveyed, have high or moderate knowledge about the principles of Basavanna. This implies that the philosophy of Basavanna still has socio-cultural relevance in North Karnataka. The comparatively low percentage (20) of the low awareness is due to the generation or educational differences in getting exposed to philosophical traditions. Greater level of awareness could also be associated with regional identification and historical affiliation to the Lingayat movement. In general, it can be stated that the awareness is wide enough to impact the political perception, and democratic expectations of citizens.

Table 2: Perception of Relevance to Democratic Governance

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	36	30
Agree	40	33
Neutral	25	21
Disagree	12	10
Strongly Disagree	7	6
Total	120	100

Mean Score (5–point scale) = 3.95

Interpretation: The results show that there is a strong normative acceptance given that 63 percent of those surveyed agreed on the applicability of the principles of Basavanna to democratic governance. The rather neutral answer (21%) indicates that there is no certainty regarding the practical implementation, but they do not disagree with the philosophy as such. The mean score (3.95) is high, which means that citizens see the ideas of Basavanna in connection with such values as equality, accountability, ethical leadership. Nevertheless, the existence of dissenting opinions indicates that philosophical acceptance is not necessarily followed by the perceived institutional impact.

Table 3: Perception on Ethical Leadership and Social Justice

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Positive Impact	68	57
Neutral	29	24
Negative Impact	23	19
Total	120	100

Interpretation: The fact that most people (57%) perceive Basavanna philosophy to encourage ethical leadership is an indication that moral governance is a key social expectation. Nonetheless, the 19 percent of non-assenting answers speaks of doubt over actualization of these principles in modern-day politics. This shows that there might be a weakness between philosophical piety and political action. The neutral percentage (24%) can indicate conditional approval based on the work of

the leadership but not philosophical ideology.

Chi-Square Test (Association between Awareness and Governance Perception)

Objective:

- To examine whether there is a significant relationship between awareness of Basavanna's principles and perception of their relevance to democratic governance.

Hypotheses:

- H₀: There is no significant relationship between awareness of Basavanna's principles and perception of democratic governance.
- H₁: There is a significant relationship between awareness of Basavanna's principles and perception of democratic governance.

Discussion

According to the study results, the ideas of Basavanna remain highly normative in the eyes of the people in the democratic government in the chosen districts of North Karnataka. Most of the respondents are moderately and highly aware of the philosophy of Basavanna, which indicates that Basavanna still occupies a cultural and intellectual role in the regional politics. The good image of equality, social justice, and ethical leadership can be taken as an indication of the correspondence between the concepts of Basavanna and modern democratic principles.

The Chi-square test proves that there is a significant relationship between positive evaluation of governance and awareness of the principles of Basavanna. More ideals, like participatory dialogue and social accountability, affect the perceptions of democratic governance in respondents with greater awareness. This serves to argue that the political culture and ethical expectations of a democratic system can be influenced by philosophical traditions.

The inclusion of neutral and negative reactions, however, indicates that there is perceived divergence between the philosophical ideals and the real practice. Although the principles of Basavanna are highly regarded, respondents reveal that there is still inconsistency in translating these principles into actual governance practices. Thus, the philosophy of Basavanna can be viewed not as an accomplished governance model in the contemporary Karnataka but as a set of normative guidelines that are

supposed to be followed by the population.

Policy Implications

The results indicate that equality, social justice, ethical behavior, according to Basavanna are still very important in the democratic rule in North Karnataka. These philosophical ideals can be incorporated into the governance system through policymakers and public institutions through the reinforcement of the participatory systems and the inclusion of policy practices. Ethical leadership training, which is founded on value principles like accountability and transparency, is a way to overcome the issue of a difference between philosophical values and political reality.

The teachings of Basavanna can also be included in the civic education curricula in educational institutions and civic organizations as a way of creating awareness of democracy and responsible citizenship. Development of citizens participation in the process of governance by encouraging open debate forums in the spirit of deliberation of the Anubhava Mantapa. Moreover, the policies that will tend to decrease social inequality and allow equal representation are rather consistent with the idea of the inclusive society proposed by Basavanna. The principles can be institutionalized in the practice of governance to help in enhancing democratic culture and accountability in the contemporary Karnataka.

Conclusion

The research investigated the social opinion on the applicability of the ideals of Basavanna in the democratic rule in the chosen districts of North Karnataka. It has been found out that most respondents believe that according to Basavanna, the ideals of equality, social justice, as well as ethical leadership are very relevant to modern day governance. The empirical findings reveal that there is a strong correlation between the knowledge of the philosophy of Basavanna and the optimistic attitude towards the practices of democratic governance. It implies that the historical philosophical traditions still play a role in the political culture and expectations.

Nevertheless, the paper also finds a perceived discrepancy between normative ideals and the realization of the same. Although the philosophy of Basavanna is enjoyed significant respect and is used symbolically, institutionalization in the governance structures is not widespread. The results indicate the possibility of the concepts offered by Basavanna to act

as the moral and ethical guideline to enhance the inclusive governance and participatory democracy. Thus, a new round of strengthening these principles in policy and institutional practices can help in relation to the deepening of democracy in Karnataka today.

References:

1. Almond, G. A., & Coleman, J. S. (1960). *The politics of the developing areas*. Princeton University Press.
2. Beetham, D. (1994). *Defining and measuring democracy*. Sage Publications.
3. Chatterjee, P. (2018). *Democracy and economic transformation in India*. Oxford University Press.
4. Chandra, K. (2004). *Why ethnic parties succeed: Patronage and ethnic head counts in India*. Cambridge University Press.
5. Deshpande, A. (2020). Caste and social inequality in contemporary India. *Contemporary South Asia*, 28(3), 1–15.
6. Gowda, M. V. R. (2022). Regional political developments in Karnataka. *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 83(2), 145–160.
7. Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. MIT Press.
8. Ishwaran, K. (1983). *Religion and society among the Lingayats of South India*. Brill.
9. Jaffrelot, C. (2003). *India's silent revolution: The rise of the lower castes in North India*. Columbia University Press.
10. Jodhka, S. S. (2019). Caste in contemporary India: Changing configurations. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 45, 439–456.
11. Kothari, R. (1970). *Politics in India*. Orient Longman.
12. Manor, J. (2009). *Political change in Karnataka*. Oxford University Press.
13. Pareto, V. (1935). *The mind and society*. Harcourt Brace.
14. Patil, S. (2020). Basavanna's social philosophy and its contemporary relevance. *Journal of South Indian Studies*, 15(2), 45–60.
15. Ramaswamy, V. (2016). Basavanna and the politics of social reform in Karnataka. *Indian Historical Review*, 43(1), 85–102.
16. Rao, S. (2023). Reform movements and democratic culture in Karnataka. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 31(1), 66–82.
17. Rudolph, L. I., & Rudolph, S. H. (1967). *The modernity of tradition: Political development in India*. University of Chicago Press.

18. Sen, A. (2009). The idea of justice. Harvard University Press.
19. Srinivas, M. N. (1962). Caste in modern India and other essays. Asia Publishing House.
20. Yadav, Y. (2018). Electoral politics and social coalitions in India. Studies in Indian Politics, 6(1), 1-12.
21. Kalligara, M. M. (Ed.). (2001). Basavannavara vachana sampuṭa (Samagra vachanasampuṭa). Bengaluru: Kannada Pustaka Pradhikara, Government of Karnataka.
22. Dr. Tipperudraswamy, H. (2010). Kartarana kammata. Tumakur: Shree Siddaganga Prakashana.

Funding:

This study was not funded by any grant.

Conflict of interest:

The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

About the License:

© The Authors 2024. The text of this article is open access and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.