



## Significance of Astavaranas in Lingayatism

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### Abstract:

Though Lingayatism has believed to be prevailed since pre-historic times, it was reformed by Vishwajyoti Basaveshwar in 12<sup>th</sup> century. He has formed certain principles and emphasized different practices to keep away from evil instincts and live happily to attain Moksha or Salvation in life. The Lingayatism is based on Astavaranas or Eight Shields. The paper discussed the significance of Astavaranas enunciated by Basaveshwar in 12<sup>th</sup> century.

### Introduction:

It is noted that Lingayatism or Veerashaivism was prevailed since remote past. Lord Shiva is the only god worshipped by followers of Lingayatism. Many of the philosophers have stated that Basaveshwar has found Lingayatism or Veerashaivism, but it is noted that Basaveshwar has reformed Lingayatism. Basaveshwar has improved and given systematic methods and principles to Lingayatism at the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. He was taught about the importance of Enlightenment, Work Culture, Democracy, Human Rights, Gender and Racial equality to form an egalitarian Society.

Basavanna or Basaveshwar was a Hindu philosopher, statesman, Kannada poet in the Shiva-focussed Bhakti movement and a social reformer during the reign of the Kalachuri-dynasty king Bijjala I in Karnataka, India. Basavanna spread social awareness through his poetry, popularly known as *Vachanaas*. Basavanna rejected gender or social discrimination, superstitions and rituals such as the wearing of sacred thread, but introduced *Ishtalinganecklace*, with an image of the Shiva Linga, to every person regardless of his or her birth, to be a constant reminder of one's bhakti to Shiva. As the chief minister of his kingdom, he introduced new public institutions such as the *AnubhavaMantapa*, which welcomed men and women from all socio-economic backgrounds to discuss spiritual and mundane questions of life, in open. The traditional legends and hagiographic texts state Basava to be the founder of the Lingayats. Basaveshwar found Astavaranas for the practice of Lingayatism and they are as under:

### Astavaranas:

Astavarana has very important place in Lingayat religion. Avarana means shield. Avarana hides the original shape of the things. The word Avarana is very significantly used in Lingayatism. The Astavarana are the eight fold shields that protect of the devotee from Vikaras. They protect the Anga (means Bad desires) from the onslaughts of Maya on him and guide him safely for final beatitude in the world.

They protect human beings from the evils attaching to the worldly life by putting the Anga out of the three taints and five sheaths. They guide human beings towards Moksha or Salvation and the ultimate happiness. These eight Avaranas or guards have special significance of their own and are the means of worship in this religious life. The Astavaranas are the spiritual one.

There are eight Avaranas, viz., Guru, Linga, Jangama, Padodaka (Tirtha) prasada, Vibhuti, Rudraksa and mantra. Avarana means a shield to protect, the follower of the religion who is worshipper of Shiva is protected from all bad instincts (Vikaras). These eight Avaranas help the Lingayats to earn the Moksha. These Astavaranas are described as under:

### **1. Guru:**

Hindu culture has given special significance to Guru or teacher. Without Guru one cannot learn anything. Real Guru has great knowledge, wisdom and authority in different subject areas and he used to impart the same to disciples or followers. A Guru always thinks for the betterment of his disciples and ultimately betterment of society. The Shivasharanas given the meaning of Guru to Dharma Guru, who is founder of religion and practice ethical practices and show way towards good things. Guru also give Deeksha and blessings with Mantra (Hymns) Chanting and preaches knowledge to pave way towards better life. Without the preaching and guidelines of Guru, it is impossible to control mind and attain spiritual life. Importance of Guru is revealed in the Vachana of Siddharameshwar as under:

*One who is aware that Shiva is Guru is indeed the Guru ;  
One who is aware that Shiva isLinga is indeed the Guru ;  
One who is aware that Shiva isJangama is indeed the Guru ;  
One who is aware that Shiva isPrasada is indeed the Guru ;  
One who is aware that Shiva is Achara is indeed the Guru ;  
Thus, being aware of the five-fold to be the five-bramhas,  
Supreme soul SanganaBasavanna is the Guru to me,  
Guru to you, and the Guru to the entire world, O Lord Guheshwara.*

According to ShivayogiSiddharama, Guru has all knowledge about Veerashaivism, which is based on Astavaranas. Hence, Guru has special significance in Veerashaivism or Lingayatism.

### **2. Linga:**

The Istalinga or Linga is needed by be worshipped everyday with devotion.Linga should be made by Sphatika or simple stone. The Linga should be wore to the human body at the time of birth as it is custom among Veerashaivas or Lingayats and it should be on the body of individual till his or her death. It always gives consciousness to human beings to do good deeds. Its loss is regarded as spiritual death. Daily worship of Linga is essential in spiritual life. It provides awareness of worshipper and wearer of his duty to god daily. It makes him or her aware of the necessity of religious life and spiritual disciplines in the way of salvation or Moksha.

### **3. Jangama:**

Jangama is one who is endowed with the true knowledge, sacrificed his life for the society and avoided all the worldly happiness and attained the divine happiness. Jangama is used to denote a person, who is endowed with knowledge par excellence, who moves from place to place preaching the doctrines of Lingayatism and guiding the devotees in their spiritual endeavour. Rathinasabhapathy (1982) says about Jangama that, Jangama is the moving temple. Hence, Jangamas are persons to impart the sacred knowledge, spiritual culture and religious practices. Generally, few of them are staying in Maths (Monasteries) or others are moving from place to place by spreading knowledge and spirituality among people.

### **4. Vibhuti:**

The term 'Vibhuti' is sacred ashes means prosperity, wealth, etc. While performing Lingapuja (Worship to Linga), each person has to wear Vibhuti, which is sacred ashes. It is a religious exercise. It is sacred ash identified as spiritual wealth and prosperity. The sacred ashes of the Lingayats remind them of their six-fold enemies, viz, the desire of the world, anger, avarice, infatuation, pride and hatred.

### **5. Rudraksha:**

Rudraksha are holy seeds of Rudraksha tree located mostly in Himalayan region, which symbolizes the opening of the inner eye that witnesses the truth. In Veerashaivism, Rudraksha is treated as holy and each of such Lingayat must wear the same on his body. It is believed that, Rudraksha burn the inward impurities and to realise himself. It is proved that wearing different shapes and faces of Rudraksha helps to cure different health problems and possess energy.

### **6. Padodaka:**

Padodaka is the holywater poured onto Ishtalinga and collected one. It's prepared from bathing the Ishtalinga or Guru's feet. It is one of the Ashtavarana of Lingayat Religion. This holy water is used in many sacred occasions to call upon good fortune and celestial blessing. It is sprinkled across while entering a new house, on the newly bought vehicle etc. The Padodaka is intended to produce a psychological effect on the devotee that he should wash his soul clean of the three taints, namely inferior taint, illusory taint and physical taint, as he has to wash his body clean of all physical dirt. The exercise for making the devotee aware of the three taints and the necessary of washing them away from the soul gradually by cultivating merely ordinary water called teertha. It is the symbol of the water of knowledge (Jnanajal) that washes away the taints that stick to and constrict to the soul.

### **7. Prasada:**

Prasada is the grace of blessings from guru-linga-jangama. Prasada, generally, means favour of grace of a superior being. In religion Prasad means favor or grace of God shown to the devotee. To obtain favour of the Lord, the devotee must keep constantly in mind that all that he does, eats, sees, hears, and enjoys is owing to the Lord. He expresses his gratitude to the Lord that whatever he enjoys and whatever he does is his Prasada. Hence the real Prasad is the stable cleanliness and calmness of mind; the

purity and equanimity of mind, which as the soul's agent and organ, brings about the purity and freedom of the soul. Such is the real sense and significance of Prasada.

#### **8. Mantra:**

A Mantra consists of certain letters arranged in a definite sequence of sound of which the letters are the representative sequence of sound of which the letters are the representative signs and they are also called as Chants. To produce the designed effect, the Mantra must be intended in the proper way according to both sound (Vani) and rhythm (Svar); for these reasons a Mantra ceases to be such when translated and becomes a mere sentence. By Mantra the sought for Devata appears and by success (Sidda) therein vision is head of the three worlds. As the Mantra is in fact Devata, by practice of this is known and no amount of theoretical knowledge will do. Not merely do the rhythmical vibrations of the sheaths of the worshipper but there forms the image of the Devata appears.

The mantra of the Lingayaths is "NamhaShivaya" and is called Panchakshari on account of its having five syllables. With Om prefixed, it becomes Shadaksharimantra. The mantra is expressive of Shiva and on that account is identical with Shiva, just as a predicate is identical with the subject.

The practice of the Mantra leads to salvation of Moksha. With Om prefixed to it the mantra becomes Shadakshar mantra (of six syllables). Om is Pranava and expresses Parashiva. Om is made up of a, u, m' and the three express the trinity of powers (Iccha, Jnana, Kriya), which are in turn identical with Satt, Chitt and Anand, The three positive qualities of Parabrahman according to Vedanta. The three powers are the three creative energies. The energy (Nada) in Sadakhatatva springs from Shiva-Shakti-Tattva and solidifies itself (Ghnibhavati) as the creative power of the Lord (Bindu or IshavarTattva) manifesting in the trinity of creative energies. Om then stands for the most general aspect of what which is the source of all, namely Parashiva. The Panchakshari Mantra (NamhaShivaya) is but an extended form of Om, i.e. Om elaborates or explicates itself in the form of "NamhaShivaya".

#### **Concluding Remarks:**

The aim of every religion or sect is to live life happier and peacefully and to attain salvation. To achieve salvation, different religions and sects have given different ways of life. Of which, Lingayat way of life as revealed in Astavaranas shows the systematic life of devotion, work, dedicated worship and Dasoha. Through such practice, everyone should get inner purity and external purity of body and mind. The followers of Astavaranas are protected by Shiva from all bad instincts and it is way to get salvation in life.

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