

# Research Chronicler

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol I Issue I : October 2013

Editor-In-chief  
Prof. K. N. Shelke

# Research Chronicler

A peer-reviewed refereed and indexed international multidisciplinary research journal

**Volume I Issue I: October – 2013**

## CONTENTS

Sr. No.	Title of the Paper	Author	Page No.	Download
1	Dalit Subalternity in Omprakash Valmiki's Autobiography: Joothan	Dr. Adya Prasad Pandey	1-10	<a href="#">111.PDF</a>
2	Subaltern Expression in Arundhati Roy's <i>The God of Small Things</i>	Dr. Rajendra Lokhande	11-15	<a href="#">112.PDF</a>
3	Corruption: Its Nature and Effects on Human Life	Prof. Suresh Sutar	16-21	<a href="#">113.PDF</a>
4	Re-reading Motherhood: A study of Four Matriarchs in the Literature of African Diaspora	Prof. Jyoti Mundhe	22-29	<a href="#">114.PDF</a>
5	Emerging Promise of Business Ecosystem	Prof. Gunasundari	30-36	<a href="#">115.PDF</a>
6	Lakshmi Holmstrom's <i>Kannagi</i> : A Feminist Perspective	Dr. Mythili Mukund	37-42	<a href="#">116.PDF</a>
7	Shatasthala in Veershaiva Religion	Prof. Vishwajeet Pilake Dr. Dattatraya Gatade	43-48	<a href="#">117.PDF</a>

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## Shatasthala in Veershaiva Religion

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### ABSTRACT

In every religion there are some guidelines for the devotees which help him for his spiritual upliftment. In Hinduism there are *pooja* (prayer) and *yatra* (pilgrimage) to be performed but they lack firm background. While we talk about veershaivism there is a unique framework that is formulated for the devotee's spiritual upliftment. In the present research paper an attempt has been made to study Veershaiva Lingayat community's framework of social and cultural practices for spiritual upliftment. For the proposed study the South Maharashtra plateau, covering Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, and Solapur districts, is selected for the study of Veershaiva Lingayat community. The geographical position of the study region is in the southern part of Maharashtra. The study region lies at the western limit of the Deccan Plateau.

**Key Words:** Veershaiva Lingayat, religion, Shatasthala, Astavarana, Panchachara

### Introduction:

There are various religions on the earth like Hinduism, Christianity, Islam,

Sikhism, Jainism, Veershaivism, etc. Though they differ in various ways like customs, rites and rituals, foods, philosophy,

and sacraments, there is one common thing in every religion that is the spiritual upliftment of the devotee. For this purpose every religion has employed certain practices or rituals. The social and spiritual frameworks are also well defined for the benefit of the devotee. Therefore, this paper attempts to study the spiritual framework in Veershaiva religion which defines how the Veershaiva devotee unites with god which is termed as ‘*Lingangsamarasya*’.

In Veershaiva religion the Veershaiva devotee can attain ‘*Lingangsamarasya*’ by doing his day to day life activities. For doing so there is a framework constructed to help the devotee. This framework is so formulated that in the process there cannot be any complication for the devotee. This framework has three tier bases. In the first, we have their religious code of conduct, which is known as ‘*Ashtavarana*’ (Eight coverings). It covers the Veershaivite life. These ‘*Ashtavarana*’ are the significant outer features of Veershaivite. The second tier is the ‘*Panchachara*’ which is their social code of conduct. This leads the way of the life of Veershaivite. With the help of the first two tiers, Veershaivite is guided towards ‘*Lingangsamarasya*’ by the process of ‘*Shatasthala*’. ‘*Shatasthala*’ is the process in which Veershaivite slowly and steadily meets the *Shiva* in six stages.

Every Veershaivite gives tremendous importance to above-mentioned three concepts. Various scholars have defined Veershaivism on these three concepts. Chandrashekhar has said “In Veershaiva

religion, the *Ashtavarana*, *Panchacharas* and *Shatasthala* are accepted as three main tenets. These are known as devotee’s *Anga*, *Prana* and *Atma* respectively.” About the same, Ishwaran has clarified: “The body of this religious system is the doctrine of *Ashtavarana* (Eight supportives); its breathe, the notion of *Panchachara*, five principles of conduct; and its soul, *Shatasthala* (sextapositional stage). Quoted in Dr. Ghugre S.B. (1989): Veershaivism in Maharashtra: A sociological analysis with special reference to Kolhapur District. An unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Shivaji University, Kolhapur. p. 214.

#### **Objectives:**

In the present research paper an attempt has been made to study Veershaiva Lingayat community from the religious point of view. However specific objectives are as under:

1. To highlight the framework of the Veershaiva Lingayat community related with spiritual development.
2. To examine the *Shatasthala* system in the Veershaiva Lingayat community.

#### **Database and Methodology:**

For the proposed study the south Maharashtra plateau, covering Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, and Solapur districts, is selected for the study of Veershaiva-Lingayat community. The geographical position of the study region is in the southern part of Maharashtra. The study region lies at the western limit of the Deccan Plateau.

The primary data is collected through the field survey to know the social and cultural dynamics of Veershaivas. The primary data as the main source is collected through intensive fieldwork with the help of questionnaire, methods of observations, interviews and discussions with experts. Secondary data is collected from books, journals, district Census handbooks, district gazetteers, statistical abstracts of the state, socio-economic reviews and district statistical abstracts.

### Study Area:

For the proposed study the south Maharashtra plateau, covering Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, and Solapur districts, is selected for the study of Veershaiva-Lingayat community. The geographical position of the study region is in the southern part of Maharashtra. The study region lies at the western limit of the Deccan Plateau.

The study region extends from 15°44' to 18°35'N latitude, while stretched from 73°33'E to 76°25'E longitude. The whole study region has total area of 42,264 sq.kms. The study area is situated in the river basins of the Krishna, Panchganga, and Bhima rivers. From the point of view of peninsular drainage the most of the study region belongs to drainage system of Krishna River.

From locational point of view the study region is surrounded by Raigarh, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts of Konkan on west, Pune and Ahmednagar districts of western Maharashtra region to

the north, Osmanabad district of Marathwada region of Maharashtra state to north-east and Gulbarga and Bijapur districts of north part of Karnataka state and Goa state to the south. Study region has the population of 1,27,50,248, that is 13.18% of the total population of the state of Maharashtra. While the study region covers 13.40 % of the total area of the said state. From this geographical location, this paper is going to study 'Shatsthala' system in Veershaiva religion. *Shatsthala* has the six stages by which a Veershaiva devotee unites with god.

### Shatsthala:

These stages are *Bhaktasthal*, *Maheshasthal*, *Prasadasthal*, *Pranlingasthal*, *Sharanasthal* and *Aikyasthal*. These stages explain how Veershaiva devotee attains the level of *Lingangsamarasya*. The five rules of *Panchachara* are based on *Shatsthala*. The word *Shatsthala* etymologically means Six places. In *Veershaivism* the term 'Sthala' is used in very special sense. Mogeysa Mayideva in *Anubhav Sutra* says "Sthala denotes the source from which the phenomenal world comes into being, and also which sustains it. While *la* denotes the goal in which it is finally dissolved. So the term *Sthala* is used to refer to the Supreme Being who is the source, support and goal of all beings."

*Shatsthala* can be interpreted as the six stages coming into the life of a *Veershaivite* in his spiritual journey. Each *Sthala* Shows a way to the next *Sthala*. When the system of *Shatsthala* is followed,

it is known as *Shivyog*. A detail study of each *Sthala* will throw light on their various aspects.

**1) Bhaktasthal:** Of all the *Sthala* it is the first from which a *Veershaivite* passes through. This stage is known as the stage of devotion. Here the devotee needs to give full attention towards *Shiva*. After taking the *Diksha*, the *Veershaivite* must believe in *Shiva*. The individual begins to believe in existence of the Supreme Being and offers his devotions to him. The individual soul begins to realize the nature of the universal soul and wonders at the marvelous powers of *Shiva*. This cultivates devotion towards *Shiva*.

In this *Sthala*, the devotee controls his mind against all the illusions of the physical world. If the Individual is not attracted towards materialistic nature of the world, his mind becomes pure. His *Bhakti* towards *Shiva* becomes firm. His *Bhakti* becomes *Nishta* *Bhakti* and he goes towards next *Sthala* i.e. *Maheshasthal*.

**2) Maheshasthal:** The word *Maheshwara* suggests that the devotee has to strengthen his *Bhakti* against all the doubts aroused in his mind about the great God, i.e. *Shiva*. Steadfast devotion is the chief mark of this stage. One should not mind any hardship. Devotee must worship his *Ishtalinga* with full devotion. He must not worship *linga* in temple. There is no need to go him for pilgrimages. He should not believe in astrology. Dr. K. Ishwaran says in this regard "The devotee can become *Maheshwara* through passionate devotion, worship of *Guru-Linga-Jangama*, and

service to mankind." Quoted in Dr. Ghugre S.B. (1989): *Veershaivism in Maharashtra: A sociological analysis with special reference to Kolhapur District*. An unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to Shivaji University, Kolhapur. p. 251

The vows, regulations and moral precepts, steadfast devotion, and freedom from desire enhance the soul's purity and elevate it to the higher stage. The individual soul is in happy or joyous mood, intent in conferring happiness on others. In this stage the individual is in a position to guide those who are in a lower stage.

**3) Prasadasthal:** *Prasadi Sthala* is characterized by the cultivation of balanced devotion. This gives purity in mind. The remnants after the offerings to the *Guru*, *Linga* and *Jangama* are *Prasad*. A *Prasadi* is always cheerful. He is pleasant in his talk, generous and modest.

The devotee who reaches this stage recognizes *Shiva's* presence in every organ of his body. He recognizes that everything in the world is a gift of *Shiva*. And with his any action, it doesn't get polluted. It means at this stage each and every action of the devotee should be pure. "Because of the development of mind and heart during this stage, sense of social obligation and responsibility is created in him. 'Runmukti' (Meaning return of social obligation) is the *Shivatatva* according to *Veershaivism*. As a result, the virtues like sympathy and social co-operation go on increasing." Dr.S.B.Ghugre, 1989: *Veershaivism in Maharashtra: A Sociological Analysis with special reference to Kolhapur District*. An

unpublished Ph.D. Thesis submitted to Shivaji University, Kolhapur. p. 253

**4) Pranlingasthal:** “The interest of the individual from this state is purely internal. He attains the jnana-linga status through experienced devotion. The trainee or pilgrim sees pranlinga seated in his heart through the inner vision. So he acquires the qualities of peace, prudence, truth, non-violence, self-abnegation, and universal brotherhood.” Sudha S.: *Society and Religious Consciousness: Veershaiva Movement in the Medieval Times*: An unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Osmania University, p. 69.

In *Pranlingasthal* devotee practices *Shivyog* by knowing the truth that Shiva resides in his soul. Devotee has attained state of total peace of mind. His desires from physical world’s illusions are over. His concentration lies only on Shiva. The importance to the outward form of pooja has completely waned or disappeared. But vachankaras or Veershaivite saints had critically explained that without any kind of work only Worship is worthless.

**5) Sharanasthal:** *Sharana* means surrender. Common Veershaivites greet each other with calling ‘*ShivSharnarth*’ means surrender to Shiva. This is the highest order of *Bhakti*. In *Veershaivism* there is famous dictum ‘*Sharana Sati Linga Pati*’ means *Sharana* (Veershaivite devotee) is the wife and *Linga* is her husband. “*Bhakti* assumes the form of self surrender which is higher form of *Bhakti*”. Sudha S.: *Society and Religious Consciousness: Veershaiva Movement in the Medieval Times*: An

unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Osmania University, p.70

In this *Sthala*, devotee forgets attachment to outer world including his own body. He gets knowledge about himself and Shiva. Finally became aware that he is not different from Shiva. Then he realizes about the vagueness in the world about purity-impurity, superiority by birth, castes, and creeds. This stage implies that devotee is dissolving in to *Shiva*.

**6) Aikyasthal:** This is the last stage in *Shivyog* which shows unity of Devotee with Shiva. The individual soul *linga* merges with universal soul. This *Sthala* is same as the *Moksha* in Hindu religion where devotee attains the ultimate position; however, the difference between the two is that in Hinduism *Moksha* is reached after death but in *Veershaivism* this *aikya* is achieved in devotee’s lifetime.

“Thus in the final stage there is complete unity and soul ceases to exist distinct from the god deity. The identity is complete and unqualified.” Sudha S.: *Society and Religious Consciousness: Veershaiva Movement in the Medieval Times*: An unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Osmania University, p.71. This is the self-realization step. *Aikyasthal* is the final stage in which *Jeeva* meets with *Shiva*.

This Six *Sthalas* show how a *Veershaivite* unites with Shiva, i.e. the salvation. The First three stages in *Shatssthal* shows devotee’s devotion towards Shiva while last three stages show devotee gets thorough knowledge of Shiva. These six stages show gradual development

of devotee's spiritual development. *Shatsthala* is not only a spiritual base but has taken care of psychology also. As these stages are constructed on experimental bases, Dr. Awlikar has stated that, "Shatsthala siddhant is not only philosophy but it is also a religious practice. It is not entirely dependent upon intellect, but also an experience. It is nearer mysticism than philosophy. Moreover it is the fine combination of philosophy and experience." Vivek- chintamani: Pune University, Pune. pp 38-39.

Thus from the above discussion we come to know that spiritual framework in *Veershaivism* is very unique based on three tiers viz. *Astavarana*, *Panchachara* and *Shatsthala*. *Astavarana* are covering in veershaivism or the physical features. *Panchachara* are the ways of social conduct. And *Shatsthala* is the process of union of devotee with the Supreme God (*Shiva*).

*Shatsthala* shows the gradual development of the devotee towards *Shiva*, and how he gets knowledge about *Shiva* from *Bhakti*.

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