

Shaiva Sects in The Varada River Valley Region

(12th to 14th Century CE)

Rajappa M. H.

Associate Professor, Department of History

Smt. Indira Gandhi Government First Grade Women's College, Sagar, Shivamogga District.

Dr. Mahadevappa Rangannavar

Associate Professor, Department of History

Government First Grade College, Sirsi, Uttara Kannada District.

Abstract: Ancient civilizations developed in river valleys. The river-valley region is a centre of diverse cultures. The Varada River Valley contains a distinctive culture and tradition. These river-valley regions are highly fertile and possess a rich economic, cultural and religious history. The Varada River Valley has acquired its own importance in the cultural history of Karnataka. In particular, the inscriptions, literature, religious sects, art, architecture and other cultural fields found in this region have introduced a new dimension to the history of the area.

Keywords: Shaiva, Lakulisha, Kapalika, Kalamukha, Hoysala, Pashupata, Sect, Belagavi

I. Introduction:

The Varada River flows through parts of Sagar and Soraba taluks of Shivamogga District, Sirsi taluk of Uttara Kannada District, and parts of Hanagal, Haveri and Savanur taluks of Haveri District. The river flows in a north-easterly direction and has contributed to the development of diverse traditions in the regions through which it passes. Compared with other religions, Hinduism is distinctive. It was not founded by any single individual. It is considered an Apaurusheya Dharma—a religion without a human author. It is one of the most ancient, extensive and complex religions. No single religious scripture has absolute authority, and the absence of a strong emphasis on conversion is one of its distinctive characteristics. The four Vedas are the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. The four varnas are Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The four Ashramas are Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa. The four Purusharthas are Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Hindu thought incorporates these concepts and advocates the pursuit of Artha and Kama in accordance with Dharma as a means of attaining Moksha.

Shaiva Sects: Shaivism is a highly complex religious tradition. Based on available inscriptions and literary sources, it is very difficult to distinguish and describe all the different Shaiva sects separately. The principal deity worshipped by all Shaiva branches is Shiva. It is also difficult to understand the subtle philosophical differences between the practices of the different branches. The number of Shaiva sects increased over time. Among the important sects are the following:

1. Pashupata Sect

The origin of Shaivism can perhaps be traced to the period of the Harappan Civilization. It is believed that during the Harappan period, Pashupati Shiva was worshipped. During the Vedic period, the worship of Rudra gained greater importance. In the Shvetashvatara Upanishad, Shiva appears as Mahadeva and as the supreme among the Vedic gods. His greatness is also reflected in the Kena Upanishad through the account associated with his consort Uma Haimavati. On the basis of the available evidence, the Pashupata sect appears to be one of the oldest Shaiva sects. The Mahabharata refers to the Pashupata tradition. Pashupati, the husband of Uma and identified with Shrikantha or Shiva, is referred to as Pashupata. The Vayu Purana mentions Maheshvara being born as a Brahmacharin named Lakulin. The same tradition is also mentioned in the Linga Purana.

According to the Pashupata sect, liberation can be attained through knowledge and action, accompanied by the destruction of suffering. Certain specific practices had been incorporated into the Pashupata tradition from ancient times. It advocated a disciplined ascetic way of life and worshipped Lord Shiva as the supreme deity. There are many beautiful Shiva temples in different parts of Soraba Taluk. Shiva is worshipped under various names such as Parameshvara, Ishvara, Mallikarjuna, Rameshvara, Kotesvara and Somanatha.

2. Lakulisha Sect

The Shaiva sect propagated by the yogi Lakulisha is known as the Lakulisha sect. Lakulisha is regarded as the 28th incarnation of Shiva. There is a belief that Shiva incarnated as Lakulisha at Karvan in Gujarat. Sculptures of Lakulisha are found particularly in Orissa and Bengal. A Lakulisha sculpture mentioned in an inscription has been discovered at Mathura. The sculpture depicts Lakulisha with three eyes and two arms. It is dated to the 2nd century BCE.¹ The sect adopted certain principles of Samkhya philosophy and is understood to have advocated the path of Yoga.² Lakulisha appears to have revised the principles of the Pashupata sect and composed the Lakulagama. After Lakulisha, Kaushika is said to have systematized the Pashupata Sutras and given this sect a distinct form. The sect had eighteen ascetics, who helped popularize it. The eighteenth ascetic, Kaundinya, composed a commentary called the Pancharthabhashya. The Pashupata tradition gradually developed into the Lakulisha tradition. A 12th-century inscription from Karvan (Kayavarohana) mentions the village. There is a temple of Nakuleshvara there, and images of Lakulisha are said to have been carved on two lingas. Images of Lakulisha resemble an ordinary human being.³ He is shown holding a fruit in his right hand and a staff in his left hand. There is a temple dedicated to Lakulisha at Badami. Sculptures of Lakulisha are also found at Pattadakal, Mahakuta, Banavasi and Balligavi. The temples at Banavasi and Balligavi contain traces of the Lakulisha tradition. An inscription from Balligavi describes the religion of Lakulisha as bringing auspiciousness to the three worlds and granting fortunate results to his devotees.⁴ Inscriptions from places such as Oruvai, Arasikere, Kuruvatti, Kadur and Hadagali also provide information about the Lakulisha sect. The ancient sculptures found in Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra provide evidence that Lakulisha and Kalamukha were separate sects. The Lakulisha tradition contains the concept of a seated nude Shiva associated with the staff-shaped linga, whereas the concept of a standing or walking nude Shiva/Bhairava is associated with the Tantric tradition. Lakulisha was known by various names such as Lakula, Vakula, Lanjana, Laguda and Langala.⁵

3. Kapalika Sect

The word Kapalika/Kapalin is mentioned in the Yajnavalkya Smriti, generally dated to around the 1st century CE. The Kapalikas worshipped Unmatta Bhairava, the fierce form of Shiva.⁶ They remembered Shiva under names such as Shambhu, Bhairava and Kalisha. The Kapalikas were devotees of Shiva accompanied by Uma. They wore⁷ Kashaya (red) garments. They shaved their heads and carried a kamandalu, skull (kapala), and khatvanga. They also wore the sacred thread and earrings. The source states that they consumed soma, practised meat-eating, human sacrifice and Vamachara practices. Devoted practitioners of this sect were called Mahavratas.

Over time, the Kapalika tradition merged into the Natha tradition. The Natha tradition was also Shaiva in character. The term “Natha” is explained in the source through “Na” and “Tha,” with Shiva associated with the principle responsible for the existence of the three worlds. The Natha tradition is also known as Siddhamata, Siddhamarga, Avadhuta tradition and Yogamarga. Ascetics belonging to this tradition generally added the word Natha to their names. Among householders, weavers, Kurubas and Jogis are mentioned as being traditionally associated with the Natha sect. The most famous yogi of the Natha tradition was Gorakhanatha, associated with the 9th century CE.

4. Kalamukha Sect

Shaiva and Shakta traditions were closely interconnected. The Kalamukha and Kapalika sects are described as products of a distinctive synthesis of Shaiva and Shakta traditions. The Kalamukha sect had several centres in Andhra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in South India. In Karnataka, important centres included.

Shivamogga, Balligave, Bandalike, Kotipura, Toravanda, Kuppagadde, Kubaturu, Mudi, Barangi, Elivala, Anavatti, Talagunda, Sogal in Belagavi District, Huli in Dharwad District, Banavasi and Sirsi in Uttara Kannada District. The Kalamukha sect was influential in medieval Karnataka. Its importance is evident from the inscriptions and sculptures found in these regions. Many inscriptions from the periods of the Gangas, Rashtrakutas, Chalukyas, Hoysalas, Kalachuris, and Seunas mention the Kalamukhas. The Kalamukhas held an important position in society due to their distinctive cultural contributions. Their importance is particularly evident in temple construction, agraharas and ghatikasthanas. The Shaiva sect preserved a distinctive tradition in this region. During the reign of Singhana II of Devagiri, in the 13th century, several prominent figures were active in different areas. These included Kriyashakti, the disciple of Chandrabhushana Siddhanti; Rajaguru Kedarashakti; Someshvara; poet Trivikrama; Tribhuvana Vidyachakravarti; Vaidyanatha Chattopadhyaya; and Sakala Chandra. Kalamukhas in the Varada River Valley.⁸ The Kalamukha sect, one of the important branches of Shaivism, was powerful in the Varada River Valley region from the 1st century to the end of the 13th century, according to the source. Although all Shaiva sects worshipped Shiva as the supreme deity, they differed in several philosophical respects. However, it is difficult to describe these differences precisely.

The Vamana Purana mentions four Shaiva sects: Shaiva, Pashupata, Kaladama, Kapalika.⁹ Since the identity of “Kaladama” is unclear, the source suggests that they may perhaps be identified with the Kalamukhas. The term Kapalika literally refers to one who holds a kapala, or skull. A copper-plate inscription belonging to approximately 810 CE, during the Ganga period, mentions the Kalamukhas.¹⁰ This is described as one of the

earliest references to the Kalamukhas in Karnataka. It mentions Ishvara Dasa Muni, the chief disciple of the Kalamukha teacher Kalashakti. The inscription states that the muni lived in a cave on a hill.¹¹ The Shivapurana mentions four Shaiva divisions, including Shaiva, Pashupata, Mahavrata and Kapalika traditions. Commentators associated with Shankaracharya identify four Shaiva divisions: Shaiva Karuka, Siddhanti, Kapalika and Pashupata. Vachaspati refers to the Karuka Siddhanti as the Karudika Siddhanti. Ramanujacharya identifies the Karuka Siddhanti with the Kalamukhas. Brahmarshiva also identifies four groups among the Shaivas: Pashupati, Kapali, Kalamukha and Shaiva. These references clearly indicate that the Kalamukha and Pashupata sects were distinct.¹² However, inscriptions sometimes describe the teachers of these two traditions in similar terms. The inscriptions of the Varada River Valley describe Kalamukha teachers as those who “revived the Lakulagama tradition” and as those who “strengthened the Pashupata observance.” More than thirty ascetics or Tapodhanas are mentioned in inscriptions from this region.

An important feature of the Kalamukha tradition was that it did not develop primarily through the patronage of officials or kings; rather, it developed around temples. Some Kannada inscriptions refer to Kalamukha teachers as Rajagurus (royal preceptors). The source states that as temples developed in the region during the 11th and 12th centuries,¹³ the Kalamukha sect also expanded. Balligavi: A Major Kalamukha Centre. An inscription from Balligavi, dated to around 1009 CE, mentions the Tripurantakeshvara Temple, Kedaresvara Temple and the original Nandikeshvara Temple. The inscriptions indicate that these temples were important centres of the Kalamukha religious establishment. Even before 1019 CE, Balligavi had become a centre of Kalamukha learning. Several inscriptions indicate that the Kalamukhas were influential around the Nandikeshvara temple. The source states that Lakulishvara, who excelled in logic, provided a strong foundation for Kalamukha activities. It can therefore be stated with confidence that Balligavi in Shivamogga District was a principal centre of the Kalamukhas. There are, however, different opinions regarding their original homeland. Scholars such as M. H. Krishna and A. Venkatasubbayya have expressed the view that the Kalamukhas originated in Kashmir. However, only some of the teachers mentioned in Karnataka inscriptions are identified as being of Kashmiri origin. The source suggests that perhaps a branch of Kashmiri Shaivism migrated to Karnataka around the 10th or 11th century CE and became integrated with the Shaiva tradition already prevalent in Karnataka. Kalamukha activities increased during the periods of the Kalyana Chalukyas, Kalachuris and Hoysalas. This is evident from inscriptions belonging to their respective periods.

As mentioned earlier, more than 50 inscriptions at Balligavi alone record Kalamukha activities. Balligavi, known as the “Kedara of the South,” and the Kedaresvara Matha there were major centres of the Kalamukhas. Many Kalamukha ascetics lived at Balligavi. People from various parts of the country—including the poor, orphans, persons with disabilities, singers, musicians, dancers, beggars and saints—came there. Balligavi became an important centre for medical assistance to orphans and the sick, charity and other social services.

The educational centres taught subjects such as: Vedic studies, grammar, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa, Samkhya, Yoga, the eighteen Puranas, poetry, Drama. These subjects were taught to students and ascetics at the educational centres. Toravanda in Soraba Taluk, there are several important inscriptions at Toravanda village in Soraba Taluk. The village was formerly known as Torevardhana. The name “Torevardhana” is mentioned in an inscription dated 1074 CE. A third inscription near Bayalu Basavanna Temple reveals that the poet Vasudevaraja Pandita composed the inscription in 1252 CE. Although the inscription is large, extending to 51 lines/sections, the script is damaged up to the 35th section. Consequently, some of the information at the beginning of the inscription is unclear. It is a donative inscription written in the Champu style. It records¹⁴ and praises the public welfare activities carried out by Kama, son of Dasiraja.

II. Conclusion

The Varada River Valley region, which represents a remarkable meeting point of the Malnad and semi-Malnad regions, possesses considerable cultural diversity. The region contains various dimensions of artistic expression. Examination of its art, architecture, monuments, inscriptions, hero stones, Mahasati stones and coins reveal traces of the Bhakti and Shakti traditions. The 12th century CE, in particular, possesses distinctive religious, cultural and historical importance in this region. There is a need for further research into this unique region. The author expresses the view that because there is insufficient systematic knowledge of the historical traditions of the various religious sects that existed in this land, the search for historical truth is being hindered, and this has consequently become an obstacle to the progress of the present.

Footnotes / References

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