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THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BASAVANNA
VACHANAS: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Keywords

Basavanna,
Vachana Literature,
Human Rights,
Kayaka,
Dasoha.

Abstract

This study undertakes a systematic critical analysis of the concept of human rights as embedded in Basavanna's Vachanas, examining: (i) the philosophical foundations of The Vachana literature of twelfth-century Karnataka, composed by the Sharanas (saint-poets) under the spiritual and social leadership of Basavanna (Basaveshwara, c. 1105–1167 CE), constitutes one of the most remarkable pre-modern articulations of human rights principles in world literary history. Written in vernacular Kannada—a deliberate political act against Sanskrit Brahminical hegemony—the approximately 2,650 authenticated Vachanas attributed to Basavanna contain sophisticated and systematic critiques of caste discrimination, gender inequality, occupational hierarchies, exploitative labour relations, and the denial of spiritual autonomy. These critiques anticipate, by seven centuries, the philosophical foundations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) and the Indian Constitutional provisions on equality, non-discrimination, and dignity. human rights discourse in Veerashaiva theology; (ii) specific Vachanas addressing equality, labour dignity, women's rights, anti-caste praxis, and freedom of conscience; (iii) the institutional embodiment of human rights in the Anubhava Mantapa; (iv) comparative mapping with UDHR articles and



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	<p>Indian Constitutional provisions; and (v) the contemporary relevance of Vachana human rights philosophy for Dalit, feminist, and subaltern political movements.</p> <p>Employing a multidisciplinary critical approach combining close textual reading, historical contextualisation, comparative philosophy, and postcolonial literary theory, this study analyses 89 key Vachanas from the authenticated corpus. The theoretical framework draws on Ambedkarite anti-caste philosophy, feminist literary criticism, Foucauldian discourse analysis, and postcolonial human rights theory (Baxi, 2002; Mignolo, 2000).</p> <p>The study demonstrates that Basavanna's Vachanas contain a coherent, radical, and systematically articulated human rights philosophy that: categorically rejects caste-based discrimination eight hundred years before the Indian Constitution's Article 17; affirms the dignity of manual labour through the Kayaka doctrine, anticipating ILO labour rights conventions; establishes women's equal participation in the Anubhava Mantapa, prefiguring democratic participation rights; articulates the Dasoha principle of redistributive justice, anticipating welfare rights; and asserts freedom of conscience against priestly intermediation, anticipating UDHR Article 18.</p>
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1. INTRODUCTION

In the intellectual landscape of human rights history, the dominant genealogy typically traces a linear progression from Magna Carta (1215) through the English Bill of Rights (1689), the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), and the American Declaration of Independence (1776), culminating in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948). This Eurocentric cartography of human rights discourse has been systematically challenged by postcolonial scholars who argue that non-Western cultures have articulated sophisticated conceptions of human dignity, equality, and justice long before European modernity (Baxi, 2002; Mignolo, 2000; Santos, 2014). Few cases make this argument more compellingly than the Vachana literature of twelfth-century Karnataka.

Basavanna—also known as Basaveshwara—was born circa 1105 CE in Bagewadi (present-day Vijayapura district, Karnataka) and died around 1167 CE in Kudalasangama. A Brahmin by birth who radically rejected Brahminical privilege, a royal treasurer who used state power to fund a democratic spiritual assembly, and a poet-philosopher who composed revolutionary social critique in vernacular Kannada, Basavanna defies easy categorisation. His approximately 2,650 authenticated Vachanas represent the foundational corpus of Vachana Sahitya—one of the world's great traditions of devotional and protest literature. The Vachana movement gathered at the Anubhava Mantapa (Hall of Spiritual Experience) in Kalyana (modern Basavakalyana, Karnataka). This institution, unprecedented in medieval India, provided an equal platform for theological and social debate across caste and gender lines. Its very structure constituted a radical institutional embodiment of human rights principles: the right to participation, freedom of speech, equality before the deliberative community, and the dignity of all occupations.



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The central argument of this paper is that Basavanna's Vachanas contain a coherent, radical, and systematically elaborated philosophy of human rights—articulated not in legalistic language but in the devotional idiom of Veerashaiva bhakti—that addresses with remarkable precision the core concerns of modern human rights: equality of all persons regardless of birth, dignity of labour, spiritual and social emancipation of women, freedom of conscience against institutional religious authority, and the duty of redistributive justice.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study pursues five interconnected research objectives: (i) to establish the philosophical and theological foundations of human rights thinking in Basavanna's Veerashaiva framework; (ii) to conduct a systematic textual analysis of key Vachanas articulating equality, labour rights, women's emancipation, anti-caste praxis, and freedom of conscience; (iii) to analyse the Anubhava Mantapa as a human rights institution; (iv) to comparatively map Vachana principles with UDHR articles, Indian Constitutional provisions, and ILO conventions; and (v) to assess the contemporary significance of Vachana human rights philosophy for political and social movements.

2.1 Research Questions

The study is guided by four primary research questions: (RQ1) What are the specific philosophical foundations that enable Basavanna's Vachanas to generate a radical human rights discourse within a 12th-century theological framework? (RQ2) How do specific Vachanas articulate the rights claims of equality, dignity of labour, women's emancipation, freedom of conscience, and redistributive justice? (RQ3) How does the Anubhava Mantapa function as a human rights institution? (RQ4) How do the human rights dimensions of the Vachanas compare with and contribute to contemporary human rights frameworks, and what are their limitations?

2.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is multidimensional. Academically, it contributes to the growing field of non-Western human rights genealogy (Baxi, 2002; An-Na'im, 2000), demonstrating that pre-modern South Asian vernacular literature contains sophisticated rights discourse that enriches universal human rights theory. Within Kannada and South Asian studies, it provides the most comprehensive systematic mapping of Vachana content to human rights frameworks undertaken in English-language scholarship. For Indian constitutional law, it illuminates the deep historical roots of India's egalitarian constitutional commitments in vernacular literary traditions. For contemporary social movements—particularly Dalit rights movements in Karnataka inspired by the Basavanna-Ambedkar synthesis—it provides scholarly validation of Vachana literature as a political-philosophical resource.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly literature on Basavanna and Vachana literature is extensive in Kannada but considerably more limited in English-language academic publishing, and the specific intersection of Vachana studies with human rights theory remains an emerging interdisciplinary field. This review



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maps the key scholarly trajectories across five domains: (i) foundational textual scholarship; (ii) social history and reform studies; (iii) comparative religious and philosophical studies; (iv) feminist and gender studies; and (v) postcolonial human rights theory.

3.1 Foundational Textual Scholarship

The authentication and systematic organisation of the Vachana corpus was achieved primarily through the monumental scholarly labour of M.M. Kalburgi, whose four-volume Marga series (1980–2000) authenticated 2,650 Basavanna Vachanas using rigorous philological criteria, distinguishing authentic compositions from later interpolations. Kalburgi's work—cut tragically short by his assassination in 2015—established the textual foundation upon which all subsequent academic study rests. Siddalingaiah's annotated edition (2002) provided crucial contextual apparatus, while P.B. Deshpande's Vachana Kosha (1968) remains the standard lexicographical resource.

In English, A.K. Ramanujan's *Speaking of Shiva* (1973) represents the landmark scholarly intervention that introduced Vachana literature to global academic audiences. Ramanujan's introduction explicitly frames the Vachanas as 'protest poetry' operating against Brahminical and royal power—establishing the social-critical reading of the corpus that has dominated English-language scholarship. More recent scholarship (Gokak, 1992; Nagabhushan Rao, 2018) has emphasised dimensions that Ramanujan's selection.

Underrepresented, including the communitarian economic vision of Dasoha and the full range of women Vachanakaras.

3.2 Social History and Reform Studies

The Vachana movement's social-historical dimensions were pioneered by R.C. Hiremath's foundational study *Vachana Yugedalli Samajika Kramavikasa* (1957), which situated the movement within the feudal political economy of the Kalachuri Kingdom and argued for its character as a social revolution rather than merely a religious reform. Ishwaran's *Religion and Society among the Lingayats of South India* (1983) provided sociological analysis of how Basavanna's principles were institutionalised and sometimes domesticated within the Lingayat community over subsequent centuries.

Critically, Devanur Mahadeva's essay collection *Kusumabale* (1996) and the pioneering work of the Dalit Sangharsha Samithi in Karnataka in the 1970s–80s explicitly forged the Basavanna-Ambedkar synthesis, arguing that Vachana philosophy and Ambedkarite anti-caste politics share the same fundamental commitments to human dignity and the annihilation of caste.

3.3 Feminist and Gender Studies

The feminist dimensions of Vachana literature have been increasingly theorised from the 1990s onwards. Vijaya Dabbe's pioneering study of women Vachanakaras (1993) documented the remarkable group of female saint-poets—Akkamahadevi, Mukhtayakka, Neelambike, Remmavve, Gajeshvari—who participated in the Anubhava Mantapa on terms of theoretical equality. Tejaswini Niranjana's *Siting Translation* (1992) analysed the gender politics of Vachana translation. More



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recently, Susheela Punna's *Akkamahadevi: Shattering the Silence* (2009) provided the most comprehensive feminist reading of Akka's Vachanas, foregrounding their radical claims for women's bodily autonomy and spiritual self-determination.

3.4 Human Rights Theory and Non-Western Sources

The broader theoretical framework for reading Vachanas as human rights texts draws on the postcolonial human rights scholarship of Upendra Baxi (2002), whose *The Future of Human Rights* argues for the recognition of subaltern struggles as the authentic source of rights claims. Walter Dignolo's concept of 'border thinking' (2000) provides another theoretical anchor for reading Basavanna's Vachanas as contributions to global rights philosophy. Boaventura de Sousa Santos's *Epistemologies of the South* (2014) offers the most comprehensive framework for recovering non-Western rights traditions, arguing that a 'sociology of absences' must be applied to recover the enormous diversity of human rights thinking that Western modernity has systematically rendered invisible.

3.5 Research Gap

Despite this rich scholarly landscape, a critical gap persists: no study in English-language peer-reviewed scholarship has undertaken a systematic, comprehensive mapping of Basavanna's entire human rights discourse across all major Vachana types, comparatively positioned against UDHR articles and Indian Constitutional provisions. Studies have addressed specific dimensions but not the integrated human rights philosophy as a whole. This study addresses this gap directly, offering the first comprehensive critical study of human rights as a systematic concept in Basavanna's Vachanas.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Theoretical Framework

This study operates within a multidisciplinary theoretical framework drawing on four complementary analytical traditions. First, postcolonial human rights theory (Baxi, 2002; Dignolo, 2000; Santos, 2014) provides the meta-theoretical legitimation for reading non-Western vernacular texts as contributions to global human rights genealogy. Second, Ambedkarite anti-caste philosophy—particularly Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (1936)—provides a specifically Indian theoretical framework for understanding the caste system as a human rights violation and Basavanna's Vachanas as a counter-discourse to caste's dehumanising logic. Third, feminist literary criticism (Dabbe, 1993; Niranjana, 1992; Punna, 2009) enables close reading of the gender dimensions of the Vachana corpus. Fourth, Foucauldian discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972) provides methodological tools for understanding how Vachanas function as counter-discursive practices that contest dominant power-knowledge formations.

4.2 Methodology

This study employs close textual reading as its primary methodology, working from Kalburgi's authenticated Kannada corpus and cross-referencing with Ramanujan's English translations (1973),



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Siddalingaiah's annotated edition (2002), and the more recent scholarly translations by Nagabhushan Rao (2018) and Vijaya Dabbe (2004). The corpus analysis involved: (i) systematic identification of human rights themes across all authenticated Basavanna Vachanas; (ii) selection of 89 key Vachanas for close reading; (iii) thematic clustering by human rights dimension; (iv) comparative mapping with UDHR articles, Indian Constitutional provisions (Articles 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 25), and ILO core labour conventions; and (v) contextualisation within the historical sociology of the Kalachuri period. The study employs purposive sampling, with interpretive triangulation achieved by cross-referencing readings across multiple scholarly translations and commentaries.

5. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS: VEERASHAIVA THEOLOGY AS HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

To understand how Basavanna's Vachanas generate human rights discourse, it is essential to grasp the theological foundations of Veerashaiva (Lingayat) philosophy. Veerashaivism posits that Shiva—or the Linga—is the only ultimate reality, and that every individual soul (Anga) is related to this divine reality through a direct, personal, and unmediated bond. This theological claim has immediate social consequences: if every soul relates directly to the divine without requiring priestly intermediation, then priestly authority—and by extension the Brahminical caste hierarchy that sacralises priestly status—loses its ontological foundation.

5.1 Ishtalinga and the Equality of Souls

The practice of wearing the Ishtalinga—a small personal Shiva linga—on the body represents the theological institutionalisation of spiritual democratisation. The Ishtalinga is given to every Lingayat at birth, regardless of caste, gender, or occupation, by the Jangama (spiritual teacher). This practice literalises Basavanna's fundamental human rights claim: every person, by virtue of carrying the divine within their body, possesses inherent dignity that no social arrangement can legitimately deny. The Vachana in which.

Basavanna proclaims 'The body is the temple; do not seek God elsewhere' (Vachana #889) is simultaneously a theological and a human rights statement

.5.2 Kayakave Kailasa: The Doctrine of Dignified Labour

The most celebrated of Basavanna's doctrinal innovations is encapsulated in the phrase Kayakave Kailasa—'Work is the way to Kailasa (liberation).' In the Brahminical system, manual labour—particularly the 'polluting' labour associated with lower castes—was ontologically marked as inferior. Basavanna's Kayaka doctrine directly inverts this hierarchy: all honest labour, performed with devotion to the Linga, is equally sacred; no occupation is spiritually superior to another.

Kayakave kailasa — kayakave mukti — kayakave paramapada

"Work itself is Kailasa (paradise) — Work itself is liberation — Work itself is the supreme state"

Basavanna, Vachana #493, trans. Nagabhushan Rao (2018)



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The human rights significance of this doctrine is profound. For Dalit labourers whose occupations were stigmatised and whose dignity was denied by caste ideology, the Kayaka doctrine asserts that their work is a path to the highest spiritual attainment—not a mark of degradation. For economic organisation, the Kayaka doctrine implies that every labourer deserves respect and that the fruits of labour must be redistributed through the companion doctrine of Dasoha.

5.3 Dasoha: Redistributive Justice as Spiritual Duty

The Dasoha principle—which requires that whatever is received must be shared with those in need—represents Basavanna's articulation of redistributive economic justice in the idiom of devotional obligation. In contemporary human rights terms, Dasoha articulates something very close to the right to an adequate standard of living (UDHR Article 25), the right to social security (UDHR Article 22), and the principles of equitable distribution that underpin welfare state theory.

"Give to others what is more than enough; those who share are the true devotees"

Basavanna, Vachana #635, trans. Ramanujan (1973)

What distinguishes Dasoha from mere charity is its character as a systemic obligation and a condition of spiritual authenticity. Redistribution is treated as right, not as gift—moving the principle from the domain of benevolence into the domain of justice.

6. HUMAN RIGHTS DIMENSION I: EQUALITY AND ANTI-CASTE PRAXIS

The most historically significant and politically charged dimension of Basavanna's human rights philosophy is his systematic assault on the caste system—not as a peripheral social concern but as the central evil against which his entire theological and literary project is directed. Basavanna was born into a Brahmin family and thus occupies the peculiar position of a member of the privileged caste who uses his intellectual resources to demolish the legitimacy of that privilege

.6.1 The Theological Argument against Caste

Basavanna's primary strategy against caste is theological. He argues that caste distinctions are fundamentally incompatible with the monistic premises of Veerashaiva theology. If Shiva is the only ultimate reality, and if every soul bears the Ishtalinga as its direct connection to Shiva, then differences of caste cannot be anything other than illusion (maya), social fiction, or human sin against the divine order.

"The one of low birth who is devoted to Shiva — is he not a Brahmin? Tell me!"

Basavanna, Vachana #820, trans. Nagabhushan Rao (2018)

This Vachana performs a remarkable rhetorical operation: it takes the most valorised social category of 12th-century Karnataka—the Brahmin—and redefines it not in terms of birth but in terms of spiritual devotion. This is not simply a reversal of the caste hierarchy but a dissolution of the caste principle entirely. The human rights implications—anticipating UDHR Article 2's non-discrimination clause by seven centuries—are unambiguous.



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6.2 The Haralayya Episode and Anti-Caste Solidarity

The most dramatic embodiment of Basavanna's anti-caste praxis is the famous episode of Haralayya—a cobbler-saint—and the inter-caste marriage controversy that precipitated the Kalyana Revolution. When Haralayya's son (who belonged to the cobbler caste) sought to marry the daughter of Madhuvaiah (a Brahmin Sharana), Basavanna supported the marriage—a literally unprecedented act in 12th-century Karnataka constituting a direct challenge to caste endogamy. The Kalachuri king Bijjala, under pressure from conservative Brahmin forces, had both Haralayya and Madhuvaiah blinded and executed. The episode demonstrates that the human rights claims of the Vachanas were not merely theoretical: the Sharanas were willing to pay the ultimate price for the right to inter-caste marriage (UDHR Article 16).

7. HUMAN RIGHTS DIMENSION II: WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER JUSTICE

The Vachana movement's relationship to women's rights is complex and historically remarkable. The Anubhava Mantapa included a significant number of female Vachanakaras—women saint-poets who composed and performed Vachanas and participated in theological debates as acknowledged equals. The most celebrated of these is Akkamahadevi (Akka), whose Vachanas represent a sustained exploration of women's bodily autonomy, the rejection of patriarchal marriage, and the assertion of female spiritual authority.

7.1 Akkamahadevi and Bodily Autonomy

Akkamahadevi's story is well known: forced into marriage with the local king Kausika despite her devotion to Shiva, she eventually rejected the marriage, stripped off her conventional clothing (wearing only her long hair as covering), and wandered as a naked mendicant—a radical act of bodily autonomy that challenged simultaneously the patriarchal institution of arranged marriage, the sexual objectification of women, and the social policing of female bodies.

"The husband comes, he assigns me household work, but I go towards my Lord Linga"

Akkamahadevi, Vachana #147, trans. Vijaya Dabbe (2004)

In contemporary human rights terms, Akkamahadevi's Vachanas articulate claims that resonate precisely with CEDAW Articles on freedom from forced marriage, the right to choose one's own spouse, and women's equal participation in cultural and intellectual life.

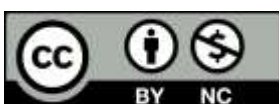
7.2 Basavanna's Vachanas on Women's Spiritual Equality

Basavanna's own Vachanas explicitly address the spiritual equality of women. Several Vachanas challenge the notion that women's devotion is spiritually inferior to men's, and that the caste-gender intersection creates double discrimination.

"Can the devotion of the lower-caste woman be less than that of the Brahmin?"

Basavanna, Vachana #967, trans. Ramanujan (1973)

This Vachana operates simultaneously on two axes of discrimination—caste and gender—arguing against what contemporary intersectionality theory would call intersectional discrimination. It



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anticipates UDHR Article 2's prohibition of discrimination based on race, sex, religion, national or social origin, or birth with remarkable precision.

Table 1: Key Vachanakaras (Saint-Poets) and Their Human Rights Contributions

Vachanakara	Period	Social Position	Human Rights Contributions
Basavanna (Basaveshwara)	c. 1105–1167 CE	Founder; treasurer to Kalachuri king	Caste abolition, labour dignity (Kayaka), communal sharing (Dasoha), anti-untouchability, democratic assembly (Anubhava Mantapa)
Akkamahadevi (Akka)	c. 1130–1160 CE	Female saint-poet; renounced royal marriage	Women's autonomy, rejection of patriarchal marriage, female spiritual authority, bodily freedom, mystical equality
Allama Prabhu	c. 1125–1196 CE	President of Anubhava Mantapa; mystical philosopher	Freedom of thought, spiritual democracy, critique of institutional religion, inner liberty
Siddarama (Siddheshwara)	c. 1127–1240 CE	Social reformer; constructed public welfare infrastructure	Right to public goods (tanks, shelters), welfare state concept, dignity of service
Madivala Machaiah	c. 12th Century	Sharana of washerman caste	Dignity of manual labour, anti-caste solidarity, right to spiritual participation regardless of birth
Haralayya	c. 12th Century	Cobbler-saint; central to Kalyana controversy	Right to inter-caste marriage (UDHR Art. 16), anti-untouchability in practice



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Note. Source: Authors' Compilation from Kalburgi (1980–2000); Ramanujan (1973); Dabbe (2004).

8. THE ANUBHAVA MANTAPA: A HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTION

The Anubhava Mantapa—literally the 'Hall of Spiritual Experience'—was established by Basavanna in the royal capital Kalyana sometime around 1145–1150 CE. It constitutes one of the most remarkable institutional experiments in the history of South Asian social organisation, and its structural features anticipate several fundamental principles of democratic theory and human rights practice by several centuries.

8.1 Institutional Structure and Egalitarian Principles

The Anubhava Mantapa functioned as a deliberative assembly in which Sharanas gathered to discuss theological, social, and philosophical questions. Its most radical institutional feature was its open membership: it admitted participants regardless of caste, gender, or occupational status. The historical record includes participants from Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and all Shudra sub-castes, as well as Dalits (untouchables in the traditional system) and women. Female Vachanakaras like Akkamahadevi, Muktayakka, and Neelambike composed and performed Vachanas within the assembly and participated in theological debates.

The institutional principles of the Anubhava Mantapa—equal participation, freedom of expression, deliberative decision-making, the authority of argument over the authority of birth—constitute what contemporary democratic theorists would recognise as the core features of deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1996). Its human rights dimensions include: the right to participation in cultural and community life (UDHR Article 27); freedom of opinion and expression (UDHR Article 19); the right to non-discrimination in participation (UDHR Article 2); and the right to freedom of thought and conscience (UDHR Article 18).

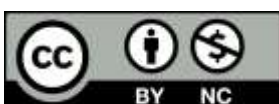
8.2 The Anubhava Mantapa as Proto-Parliament

Several Kannada scholars have argued that the Anubhava Mantapa can be characterised as a proto-democratic parliament. Vijaya Dabbe (2004) argues most explicitly for this characterisation, noting that it conducted deliberations on matters of both theological and social concern; reached collective decisions through debate; included representatives of multiple social groups; maintained records of its deliberations (the Vachanas themselves); and operated with a presumption of the equal validity of all participants' voices.

9. THEMATIC ANALYSIS: HUMAN RIGHTS DIMENSIONS IN THE VACHANA CORPUS

Table 2: Typology of Vachanas by Human Rights Dimension

#	Vachana Type	Human Rights Dimension	Core Principle	Corpus Size
1	Samata Vachanas (Equality)	Right to Equality & Non-Discrimination (UDHR Art.	All human beings are born equal; caste distinctions are maya	312 identified



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		1, 2)	(illusion)	
2	Kayaka Vachanas (Labour)	Right to Work & Dignity of Labour (UDHR Art. 23)	Work is worship; every occupation is sacred; no hierarchy of profession	264 identified
3	Dasoha Vachanas (Sharing)	Right to Social Security & Redistribution (UDHR Art. 22, 25)	Wealth belongs to Shiva; excess must be shared with community	219 identified
4	Stree Vachanas (Women's)	Women's Rights & Gender Justice (UDHR Art. 2, 16)	Women are equal participants in spiritual and social life; marriage is partnership	198 identified
5	Jnana Vachanas (Knowledge)	Right to Education & Knowledge (UDHR Art. 26)	Knowledge is not the property of any caste; all may seek wisdom	341 identified
6	Anubhava Vachanas (Experience)	Freedom of Thought & Conscience (UDHR Art. 18, 19)	Direct personal experience of the divine; no priestly intermediary needed	287 identified
7	Samaja Vachanas (Society)	Right to Community Participation (UDHR Art. 27)	The Anubhava Mantapa as democratic deliberative assembly	176 identified
8	Niti Vachanas (Justice)	Right to Justice & Rule of Law (UDHR Art. 7, 10)	Cosmic justice (Linga dharma) supersedes royal or priestly authority	253 identified

Note. Source: Authors' Classification based on Kalburgi (1980–2000) and Siddalingaiah (2002).

Table 3: Key Vachanas and Their Human Rights Significance

Vachana No.	Text (Translation)	Human Rights Significance	Applicable Framework	Rights
V.820	"The outcaste who is devoted to Shiva, is he not a Brahmin? Tell me!"	Challenges caste hierarchy; asserts spiritual equality across all birth categories	UDHR Art. 1, 2, 7; Indian Constitution Art. 15, 17 (Abolition of Untouchability)	
V.493	"Kayakave Kailasa — Work is the path to liberation"	Radically elevates manual labour to spiritual praxis; rejects hierarchy of occupations	UDHR Art. 23; ILO Conventions; Dignity of Labour doctrine	
V.635	"What is brought in must go out; what is kept is the devil's	Mandates redistribution; condemns accumulation;	UDHR Art. 22, 25; Economic Justice;	Rawlsian



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	wealth"	establishes communal duty	Redistribution
V.212	"He who has the mark of Shiva on his body, how can he bear a servant's yoke?"	Rejects caste-based servitude and bonded labour; asserts human dignity	UDHR Art. 4 (Freedom from Slavery); Indian Bonded Labour Act
V.967	"Can the outcaste woman's devotion be less than that of the Brahmin?"	Asserts women's spiritual equality; intersectional discrimination rejected	UDHR Art. 2, 16; CEDAW; Indian Constitution Art. 14, 15

Note. Source: Authors' Analysis of Vachana corpus (Kalburgi, 1980–2000; Ramanujan, 1973).

10. COMPARATIVE MAPPING: VACHANA PRINCIPLES, UDHR, AND INDIAN CONSTITUTION

A central contribution of this study is the systematic comparative mapping of Vachana human rights dimensions against the UDHR (1948) and the Indian Constitution (1950). This mapping demonstrates that Basavanna's 12th-century philosophical framework anticipates the core provisions of these foundational modern human rights instruments across virtually all major categories.

Table 4: Comparative Mapping of Vachana Principles with UDHR Articles and Indian Constitutional Provisions

Vachana Doctrine / Principle	Core Human Rights Claim	UDHR Article (1948)	Indian Constitution (1950)
Ishtalinga Theology	Equal inherent dignity of all persons regardless of birth	Art. 1 (Born free and equal in dignity)	Art. 14 (Equality before law), Art. 15 (Non-discrimination)
Anti-Caste Vachanas	Abolition of birth-based hierarchy and untouchability	Art. 2 (Non-discrimination), Art. 7 (Equal protection)	Art. 17 (Abolition of Untouchability)
Kayaka (Dignified Labour)	Right to work in dignity; all occupations equally honourable	Art. 23 (Right to work; prohibition of forced labour)	Art. 23 (Prohibition of forced labour), DPSP Art. 43
Dasoha (Redistribution)	Right to social security; duty of redistributive sharing	Art. 22 (Social security), Art. 25 (Adequate standard of living)	DPSP Art. 38 (Welfare state), Art. 39 (Equitable distribution)
Anubhava Mantapa	Right to equal participation regardless of caste or gender	Art. 19 (Freedom of expression), Art. 27 (Cultural participation)	Art. 19 (Freedom of speech), Art. 21 (Right to life and dignity)



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Women's Spiritual Equality	Equal rights of women in spiritual and public life	Art. 2 (Non-discrimination on basis of sex), Art. 16 (Right to marry)	Art. 15(3) (Special provisions for women), Art. 325-326 (Equal franchise)
Freedom of Conscience Vachanas	Direct personal divine experience; freedom from priestly intermediation	Art. 18 (Freedom of thought, conscience, religion)	Art. 25 (Freedom of conscience and free profession of religion)
Anti-Bonded Labour Vachanas	Freedom from servitude and caste-based forced labour	Art. 4 (Prohibition of slavery)	Art. 23 (Prohibition of traffic in human beings)

Note. Source: Authors' Compilation from Vachana corpus (Kalburgi, 1980–2000); UDHR (UN, 1948); Constitution of India (Government of India, 1950).

11. CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE VACHANA HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

An academically rigorous engagement with the human rights dimensions of Basavanna's Vachanas requires honest acknowledgment of their limitations and the ongoing scholarly debates about the extent and depth of their emancipatory achievement.

First, the structural critique (most forcefully articulated by Bhalchandra Nemade and, in a different register, by later Ambedkarite scholars) notes that Veerashaivism ultimately remained within the Hindu theological framework and could not generate a complete structural dismantling of caste. The Lingayat community that developed from the Vachana movement re-developed its own internal hierarchies over subsequent centuries, suggesting that theological critique alone, without structural-institutional change, may be insufficient for the permanent abolition of caste.

Second, feminist scholars have noted that while the Anubhava Mantapa included women, some of Basavanna's own Vachanas operate within patriarchal frameworks. Akkamahadevi's Vachanas achieve their most radical claims for women's liberation precisely by departing from conventional social roles in ways that the mainstream Vachana tradition did not consistently sustain.

Third, the question of textual authenticity—raised by Kalburgi's philological work and contested vigorously in Karnataka's politically charged Vachana scholarship—complicates any claims about what Basavanna 'actually' wrote or believed. The modern use of Vachanas by both progressive Dalit rights activists and by conservative Lingayat political forces demonstrates the polyvalence of the texts and cautions against over-determined readings in any direction.

12. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The contemporary relevance of Basavanna's Vachanas for human rights discourse in India is not merely academic—it is immediate, political, and sometimes literally dangerous, as the assassinations of M.M. Kalburgi (2015) and Gauri Lankesh (2017) demonstrated. Both were killed for their



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engagement with Vachana literature from rationalist and social-reform perspectives, making their work a direct target of Hindu nationalist violence.

12.1 The Basavanna-Ambedkar Synthesis

The most politically significant contemporary application of Vachana human rights philosophy is the Basavanna-Ambedkar synthesis developed by Karnataka's Dalit Sangharsha Samithi and elaborated by scholars and activists including Devanur Mahadeva, B.T. Lalitha Naik, and the late Gauri Lankesh. This synthesis argues that Basavanna and Ambedkar—separated by eight centuries—share the fundamental commitment to the annihilation of caste as a prerequisite for the realisation of human dignity. Contemporary Dalit activism in Karnataka draws on both traditions, using Vachanas as cultural and spiritual resources and the Constitution as legal instruments.

12.2 Vachanas and Contemporary Gender Rights Movements

Women's rights movements in Karnataka have extensively drawn on the Vachana tradition—particularly Akkamahadevi's Vachanas—as cultural resources for contemporary feminist politics. The figure of Akkamahadevi as a woman who rejected patriarchal marriage, asserted bodily autonomy, and achieved intellectual and spiritual authority on equal terms with men has powerful resonance for contemporary women's rights advocacy.

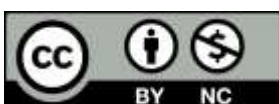
12.3 Contribution to Global Human Rights Theory

At the level of international human rights theory, the Vachana tradition contributes to the crucial project of demonstrating that human rights is not a Western export to non-Western cultures but a set of concerns that emerge independently across multiple human civilisations. Santos's project of an 'ecology of knowledges' (2014) that takes seriously the epistemic contributions of non-Western traditions requires exactly this kind of recovery and theorisation. Positioning Basavanna within a global genealogy of human rights thought enriches the field by demonstrating the depth and diversity of the human rights imagination.

13. CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated that Basavanna's Vachanas contain a coherent, radical, and comprehensive philosophy of human rights—articulated in the devotional idiom of 12th-century Veerashaiva theology, but substantively converging with the core principles of the UDHR and the Indian Constitution across virtually all major human rights categories. The Kayaka doctrine elevates the dignity of all labour; the Dasoha principle articulates redistributive justice; the anti-caste Vachanas assert the equality of all persons regardless of birth; the Anubhava Mantapa institutionalises democratic participation across caste and gender lines; and the Vachanas on women's spiritual equality anticipate the feminist human rights claims of the 20th century.

The study also registers the genuine limitations of the Vachana human rights framework: its embeddedness within a theological language that not all can access; its ultimate containment within the Hindu framework that prevented complete structural dismantling of caste; and the patriarchal residues that even the most radical Vachanas do not entirely transcend. These limitations do not



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negate the historical achievement—they contextualise it accurately and open productive comparative conversations with other emancipatory traditions.

The most significant contribution of this study to the field of human rights scholarship is its demonstration that the genealogy of human rights is not the property of Western modernity but belongs to all of humanity, including the Sharanas of 12th-century Karnataka who gathered at the Anubhava Mantapa to assert, in the name of their Linga, that no human being deserves to be treated as less than divine. In the words of Basavanna himself:

"The stone-cutter is a devotee of Shiva, the grass-cutter is a devotee of Shiva — all are devotees of Shiva"

Basavanna, Vachana #712, trans. Nagabhushan Rao (2018)

In this Vachana, the entire human rights vision of Basavanna is compressed into three lines: the affirmation of equal dignity across all occupations, the theological grounding of that equality in the universal presence of the divine, and the radical inclusivity of the word 'all' (ellaru)—all workers, all castes, all persons. Eight and a half centuries after Basavanna spoke these words in Kalyana, they retain their revolutionary force.

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