



## ANUBHAVA MANTAPA AS SPIRITUAL DEMOCRACY: THE EXPERIENTIAL FOUNDATIONS OF VĪRĀŚAIVA PHILOSOPHY

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper reconceptualizes the Anubhava Mantapa (twelfth century CE) not simply as a socio-religious establishment of the Vīrāśaiva movement but as a historically substantiated model of spiritual democracy deep-rooted in lived experience (anubhava). This study builds up the notion that Anubhava Mantapa served as a consciously structured phenomenological public platform to validate lived experiences rather than textual, ritual, or hereditary authority. Methodologically, the paper takes up a phenomenological-hermeneutic framework, backed by critical historiography and selective comparative analysis, to investigate vachanas and Śūnya Sampādane as performative authentications of shared realization. The analysis demonstrates that the concepts like Śūnya, Ishta Liṅga, kayaka, and dāsoha in Vīrāśaiva institution collectively represented an egalitarian spiritual praxis that incorporated ethics, metaphysics, and communal dialogue. The research aims at establishing its prevailing relevance as a non-Western paradigm of lived spiritual democracy without enforcing anachronistic political models in contemporary discourses on participatory and dialogical spirituality.

**Key Words:** Anubhava Mantapa; Vīrāśaivism-Anubhava; Spiritual democracy; Dialogical Spirituality; Participatory Epistemology.

### **1. Introduction:**

The Deccan plateau in twelfth century observed a reactionary phase in Indian socio-religious history. The Brahmanical social structure, stratified through caste hierarchies as well strengthened by Sanskrit textual transmission, had created organized gate keeping over sacred knowledge, ritual validity and spiritual authority. Under these circumstances, Basavanna (c. 1105-1167 CE) - a mystic, statesman and reformer introduced the Anubhava Mantapa at Kalyana (Basavakalyan, Karnataka) to establish a deliberative platform for experiential truth, open authentication and ethical responsibility. Traditional historiography acclaims the Mantapa as India's first religious parliament. However, the term continues to be narratively significant but methodologically narrow, frequently cited without factual support and without demonstration that experience (anubhava) was established as a logical method for validating truth.

Vīrāśaivism or Lingayat philosophy, which enlightened the Mantapa, developed as a radical movement focusing on the worship of Ishtalinga, the personal symbolization of the Absolute. Its metaphysical essence Shunya Brahma, the Absolute Void unites being and non-being as the essence of realization (Dasgupta 1940, 183). The teaching of Basava democratized access to the divine, positioning spirituality as an experience rather than textual mediation.

Governed by Allama Prabhu, the Anubhava Mantapa institutionalized such experiential pluralism. It appreciated contributions from Akka Mahadevi, marking an unprecedented inclusivity in religious discourse (Schouten 1995, 118). Anubhavaserved simultaneously as an ethical and epistemic principle truth validated through communal reflection as well as intersubjective resonance rather than hierarchical pronouncement. In this context, the Mantapa anticipated modern Phenomenological and dialogical and approaches to knowledge (Panikkar 1998, 105). It can even be considered as a proto-public sphere of spirituality, anticipating Habermas's notion of communicative rationality, even though rooted in bhakti sensibility rather than secular reason.

The term "spiritual democracy," afterwards articulated by Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, is traced back in Basava's experiment. Tagore envisaged it as "the communion of all souls in the freedom of truth" (Tagore 1931, 22) the philosophy exemplified in the Mantapa's participatory spirituality. Reverberating with William James's psychology of religious experience (1902, 15), it transmuted the inner life into a site of shared inquiry. Thus, the Anubhava Mantapa represents not only as a reformist institution but also as a philosophical model that harmonized social ethics with metaphysics, creating a living paradigm of dialogical, experiential spirituality.

### **2. Literature Review:**

The Vīrāśaiva or Liṅgāyat movement has been extensively studied as a medieval religious reform which interrogated Brahmanical orthodoxy and redefined the nature of devotion, spirituality and society in twelfth-century Karnataka. Scholarly discourse about its founder, Basavanna, as well as the foundation of Anubhava Mantapa has evolved from historical investigations to more nuanced readings that incorporate philosophical, sociological and phenomenological approaches.

Early historical studies positions the Vīrāśaiva movement in a context of ritual and social resistance. S. C. Nandimath (1942) first underscored the radical egalitarianism of the movement, by observing the process of disrupted caste hierarchies through its spiritual doctrine of direct devotion (bhakti) as well the community practice. Later on, M. R. Sakhare (1957) labelled the Anubhava Mantapa as the "first religious parliament of the world," recommending its deliberative and democratic ethos.

Though pioneering, these initial interpretations, tended to frame the movement fundamentally as a reformist reaction to Brahmanism instead of a unique way of experiential spirituality.

The Contemporary historians for instance M. M. Kalburgi (2002) have reexamined these assumptions, emphasizing that Basavanna's project was not simply socio-religious reform however a comprehensive realignment of consciousness and community. Kalburgi claims the vachanas as records of individual experience rather than dogmatic statements, asserting that "Anubhava Mantapa cannot be relegated to an institution; it was a movement of individual enlightenment expressed through collective dialogue" (Kalburgi 2002, 73).

The philosophical foundation of Vīraśaiva Philosophy particularly the principle of Śūnya Sampādane has been examined in relation to both Advaita and Śaiva traditions. M. R. Sakhare (1957) and Basavaraj Naikar (2005) give emphasis to the fact that Vīraśaiva metaphysics even though shares certain nondual intuitions with Advaita Vedānta, it deviates through its emphasis on experiential authentication (anubhava). The ultimate reality, Śūnya, cannot be considered as an abstract void but an experiential completeness realized by individual consciousness.

The translation of Śūnya Sampādane (1998) by K. S. Sadananda further elucidates that this text acts as the dialogical as well as the performative nature of realization. The dialogues between saints Allama Prabhu and Basavanna exaggerate the tension between silence and world, individuality and dissolution. These dialogical expressions represent the spirit of Anubhava Mantapa, which acted as a space for collective contemplation of the path of divine experience.

As per sociological perspective, scholars have underscored the Anubhava Mantapa as an exceptional experiment in community-based spirituality. Gail Omvedt (2008) translates it as an initial form of "spiritual socialism," where social equality and metaphysical insight converged. The inclusion of women saints like Akka Mahadevi in the Mantapa and of members from varied castes as well occupations, embodies what M. N. Srinivas (1972) describes "a radical de sanctification of hierarchy."

The recent scholarship for instance H. S. Shivaprakash's (2012) work on Kannada mysticism illustrates the Mantapa not as a historical anomaly however as an enduring prototype of dialogic spirituality. Shivaprakash claims that the gathering denotes "a democratic mysticism based in the reciprocity of voices instead of the authority of revelation" (Shivaprakash 2012, 58).

Comparative studies have strived to place Vīraśaiva experientialism in broader global spiritual frameworks. Heinrich Zimmer (1951) derived initial parallels between the Tantric emphasis on the body as a site of realization and the Vīraśaiva concept of Ishta Linga the personal symbol of divinity worn on the neck as a perpetual reminder of the divine presence. Contemporary scholars such as Karen Pechelis (2013) and Andrew Nicholson (2010) have expanded this comparison by interpreting the Vīraśaiva synthesis as a vernacular expression of nondual spirituality which anticipates the participatory archetypes of consciousness recommended in contemporary transpersonal studies.

Additionally, in the domain of spirituality investigations, the Anubhava Mantapa reverberates with Jorge N. Ferrer's (2002) coined term "participatory spirituality," where truth emerges through intersubjective dialogue as well as shared transformation instead of individual revelation. This framework permits for a contemporary reinterpretation of the Mantapa as a pioneer to dialogical spirituality as well as interreligious discourse.

### **3. Research Gap:**

Although the Mantapa's inclusion of śaraṇas as well the women saints such as Akka Mahadevi has been admitted (Schouten 1995; Leslie 1998; King 1995; Omvedt 2008), its structure as an epistemic parliament remains under-theorized. Additionally, few studies validate methodological consistency in reading the Vachanas as testimony through phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, leaving a gap for a rigor-driven re-composition.

Thus, the Anubhava Mantapa is elucidated here not only as prehistoric spiritual dissent but as an institutional approach of collective equality, where speech (vac) turns into revelation, critique turns into purification, work turns into sacrament, and silence turns into sanction.

### **Research Questions and Hypothesis:**

- How does the Anubhava Mantapa exemplify a model of spiritual democracy different from political or institutional democracy?
- How does anubhava act as an epistemic principle authenticating spiritual knowledge in a collective framework?
- How do dialogical practices in the Mantapa redefine authorship, authority and authenticity in spiritual discourse?
- What is the significance of this model for contemporary spirituality studies as well as participatory spiritual frameworks?

The study proceeds with two hypotheses:

- H1: The Mantapa established anubhava as a replicable epistemic method validated through anubhava-goshti (collective witness and critical resonance), dislocating hereditary priestly authority as well as the scriptural monopoly
- H2: Kayaka (work as worship) as well dasoha (selfless sharing) were not marginal social reforms nevertheless ethical extension of realization itself, disintegrating metaphysical nonduality into everyday practice.

### **4. Research Methodology:**

Methodologically, the study employs a three-fold coherent protocol: (1) critical historiography to validate historical assertions through documented academic sources; (2) phenomenological epoché to support doctrinal presuppositions and detect experiential markers (negation, paradox, surrender, embodiment and silence); (3) hermeneutics of testimony (Ricoeur, Gadamer) to interpret the Vachanas as lived spiritual speech-acts, confirming dialogic self-correction as well as interpretive transparency. The Mantapa is thus construed as a proto-public of participating spiritual epistemology, where speech turns into revelation, critique turns into purification, work turns into sacrament, and shared silence turns into sanction. The study infers that the Mantapa provides a non-Western model for dialogical, ethical and experiential democracy in spirituality, proposing corrective insights for contemporary pluralistic spiritual communes.

The central thesis theorizes that the Mantapa democratized spiritual authorization by substituting scriptural hierarchy with experiential pramāṇa truth authenticated through dialogic witness, selfless sharing (dasoha) and ethical labor (kayaka).

## **5. Conceptual Framework:**

The term 'spiritual democracy' is used here not in a political sense, but as an experiential and epistemological category grounded in participatory realization.

### **5.1 Framing Spiritual Democracy:**

The concept of spiritual democracy emerges from a synthesis of mystical experience and egalitarian participation. It transcends the political connotation of democracy by rooting equality in the ontological premise that divinity resides within every human being. In this sense, democracy is not merely a civic structure but a spiritual orientation a recognition of the intrinsic sanctity and autonomy of consciousness.

Basavanna's Anubhava Mantapa (House of Experience) exemplified this vision through an open, dialogic forum in which individuals from diverse social strata caste, gender, and occupation gathered to share their realizations (anubhava). The Mantapa thus anticipated what John Dewey (1934) described as "the religious quality of democratic experience," in which communion arises through shared meaning-making rather than institutional authority.

For the rationale of this study, spiritual democracy is stated as a community-based formation of experiential participation which validates inner realization as a universal human potential. It indicates a metaphysical egalitarianism of souls, epistemological candidness to lived experience, as well as ethical inclusivity rooted in service (dāsabhāva) and love (bhakti). In the Anubhava Mantapa, authority was distributed; realization was validated through collective resonance and not through priestly intermediation. Such decentralization supports the Vīraśaiva belief that the Ishta Liṅga the personal symbol of Śiva provides every devotee a self-sufficient participation in the divine continuum (Sakhare 1957, 112).

### **5.2 Philosophical Underpinnings: Vīraśaiva Ontology and Epistemology**

Vīraśaiva philosophy is founded in a triadic ontology consisting of Śiva, Jīva, and Liṅga, signifying the eternal association of the absolute, the individual as well the mediating consciousness. The fundamental metaphysical principle of Śūnya the nothingness or fullness acts as both ontological foundation as well as epistemic culmination. As Allama Prabhu proclaims in the Śūnya Sampādane, "Śūnya is not emptiness, but fullness that transcends thought" (Kalburgi 2002, 87). This comprehension transforms spiritual quest into an experiential epistemology: knowledge is not obtained from scriptural exegesis but from direct, personified realization. Anubhava turns out to be the means and the measure of truth.

The Anubhava Mantapa established this epistemology in a communal format. The Participants shared their lived experiences as dialogic revelations, asserting that truth is co-realized through mutual recognition. William James (1902) described such dynamics in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as "the democracy of the divine," where the religious knowledge is authenticated through subjective proximity rather than ecclesiastical mediation.

Thus, the Vīraśaiva model represents a phenomenology of collective consciousness: each participant's realization enriches him shared horizon of understanding. This framework supports the modern participatory theories of spirituality proposed by Jorge Ferrer (2002), who recommends that spiritual knowing arises "not in isolated minds but in the intersubjective space of communion."

### **5.3 Phenomenological Method:**

The phenomenological method emphasizes this research by focusing on experience-as-lived rather than experience-as-described. As per Edmund Husserl's (1931) call for a "return to the things themselves," the study adjourns doctrinal presuppositions and focuses on the experiential intentionality articulated in the vachanas.

The Key to this inquiry is anubhava the direct, pre-conceptual realization of divine presence. As a phenomenological classification, anubhava corresponds to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) terms the "embodied consciousness of being-in-the-world." Through this perspective, the vachanas bring to light -the saint's attunement to the sacred in everyday life an embodied mysticism where love, labor and language develop into the extensions of divine awareness.

In phenomenological analysis, moments of paradox, silence and negation in the vachanas are interpreted as indicators of transcendence. For instance, Allama Prabhu declares, "In the house of the Void, there is no master, no disciple" (Śūnya Sampādane, III.45), he enunciates a radical erasure of hierarchy that is both social and metaphysical. These utterances demonstrate the experiential democracy of consciousness the dissolution of dualities into nonduality, a harmony.

### **5.4 Comparative Method and Inter-Spiritual Dialogue:**

While established in the Vīraśaiva tradition, the study utilizes a comparative method to place Anubhava Mantapa within global spiritual archetypes. It can be compared with Buddhist saṅghas, Sufi sama circles as well Quaker meetings which act as participatory spaces for collective realization. However, unlike these archetypes, the Mantapa uniquely integrates metaphysical discourse, mystical realization and social reform.

The comparative framework adopts Raimon Panikkar's (1999) methodology of diatopical hermeneutics, which encourages dialogue between diverse beliefs or faiths while honouring their intricate uniqueness. By adopting this methodology, the study aims to analyse Mantapa not as an isolated historical phenomenon but as part of a wider civilizational model of experiential dialogue.

This comparative approach also enriches contemporary spirituality studies. The Mantapa's notion of shared realization reverberates with Ferrer's participatory turn as well as Buber's (1958) notion of "I-Thou" association as a medium of sacred reciprocity. Such equivalences illustrate that the Vīraśaiva experimentation anticipates contemporary inter-spiritual models that underscore relationship, dialogue as well the mutual transformation as spiritual practice.

### **5.5 Academic Contribution:**

This study contributes to spirituality studies, Bhakti epistemology, comparative theology, and intercultural phenomenology, asserting that the Mantapa's dialogue system was not rhetoric but method. It resisted textual absolutism and hierarchical revelation, emphasizing experience as the only acceptable ruler of authenticity. As this research places the Mantapa against Western frameworks of participatory spirituality (James, Buber, Dewey, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Ferrer) , it also inserts a precise reflexive layer acknowledging conceptual borrowing, interpretive location, cross-cultural equivalence devoid of

metaphysical conflation as well as the subjective limits of verification. While Viraśaiva/Lingayat philosophy has been studied extensively for its egalitarian social revolt and for its metaphysics of Śūnya, research lacks essential academic elements.

### **5.6 Relevance of the Study:**

This research is essential in the modern crisis of spiritual consumerism, authoritarian religiosity, and the fragmentation of communal inquiry. The Mantapa provides a counter-model that rejects textual absolutism, ritual monopoly, and gender-caste exclusion, positioning spiritual realization as participatory knowing validated in communal discourse, livelihood, and ethical action. The study argues that the Mantapa prefigured participatory spiritual publics, anticipating deliberative knowledge models not in the secular political sense but in an indigenous spiritual-ethical framework.

### **6. The Anubhava Mantapa: A Model of Spiritual Democracy**

The Anubhava Mantapa emerged as a revolutionary experiment in spiritual democracy in socio-religious turmoil. Conceived not just as an assembly however as a “parliament of conscience” (Nandimath 1942), Anubhav Mantapa transcended ritualism, caste as well as patriarchy. Basavanna envisaged a dialogical community where realization (anubhava), was not merely a scriptural authority however was determined by spiritual authenticity (Sakhare 1957, 43). Liberation was thus strived for collectively, not in isolation an insightful synthesis of the spiritual as well as social.

The descriptions from Śūnya Sampādane illustrate a decentralized structure headed by Allama Prabhu as pradhana guru as well as Basavanna as pradhanakaranik a facilitator to make sure every that voice was heard. This functional hierarchy indicated what Habermas (1984) later termed as the ideal speech situation: A dialogue rooted in equality as well as mutual respect. The Mantapa’s inclusivity encompassed farmers, artisans as well as the women mystics like Akka Mahadevi, whose contribution redefined both the sacred and the feminine (Shivaprakash 2012, 62). The Dialogues started with a vachana a poetic declaration of realization followed by collective interpretation, transforming speech (vac) in an indicative act (Zimmer 1951, 210). Language in this manner became both manifestation as well the medium of liberation, acknowledging the democratic essence of discourse.

The Dialogue in the Mantapa was not ornate however epistemological the means of assessing and validating experience. When a sharana articulated a vachana, others engaged critically, creating a shared discernment of truth. This reflects Gadamer’s (1989) fusion of horizons, where comprehension develops through dialogue. The interactions between Allama Prabhu and Akka Mahadevi in Śūnya Sampādane illustrate this process concluding in silence, the ultimate authentication of non-dual realization. The authorization thus was experiential, not institutional.

The inclusion of women indicated a radical development of spiritual subjectivity. The notable women mystics among them like Akka Mahadevi and Neelambike articulated autonomy over both consciousness as well as body. Akka’s rebellious statement “Take these garments off me, O Lord! What need have I for them who sees the Lord’s form everywhere?” (Ramanujan 1973, 84) transformed nakedness into an emblem of divine transparency instead of renouncement. The acceptance of such expressions in Mandapa indicated an early model of gender-inclusive spirituality (Pechelis 2013, 198). As Omvedt (2008, 141) remarks, the feminine articulations here was not marginal however revelatory.

Ethically, the Mantapa was rooted in Kayaka (work as worship) as well as Dasoha (selfless sharing). This ethics repositioned divinity in everyday labour, democratizing devotion. Basavanna’s declaration “the work of the hands is the worship of the Lord” (Naikar 2005, 77) exemplifies an early synthesis of social action and spirituality anticipating Gandhian ethics in later centuries. Every task turned out to beyajña (sacrifice), dissolving boundaries between the secular and the sacred.

The hermeneutic depth of Mantapawas in its collective interpretation of experience. Each expression was subject to reflection, creating what Ricoeur (1976) labelled as “thought arising from language.” Enlightenment was attained not through doctrinal agreement however through shared silence, when differences converge to unity. As Kalburgi (2002, 79) comments, “The ultimate sanction of truth in the Mantapa was not argument won, but silence shared.”

Thus the Mantapa exemplifies a prototype of experiential pluralism. In spite of divergent dispositions Basavanna’s pragmatic devotion, Akka’s erotic surrender, Allama’s mysticism all converged in the experiential void (Śūnya). This corresponds to Ferrer’s (2002, 111) notion of “participatory knowing,” where truth is co-created instead of unilaterally revelation.

The Anubhava Mantapa’s legacy transcends its prehistoric origins. Its inclusive, dialogical, and experiential ethos reverberates with contemporary participatory as well as interfaith spiritual movements. As Nicholson (2010) and Pechelis (2013) observe, it anticipates a form of lived pluralism a spirituality rooted in the experience instead of doctrine. In an era of ideological divide, the Mantapa proposes a vision of spiritual democracy where dialogue, not doctrine, develop into the truest form of worship.

### **7. The Experiential Foundations of Viraśaiva Philosophy:**

#### **7.1 Experience (Anubhava) as the Core of Viraśaiva Epistemology:**

At the centre of Viraśaiva philosophy is anubhava candid, lived experience of the divine signifying both its epistemological method as well as the spiritual goal. Basavanna frequently asserts that “the experience of the Lord is the only scripture” (vachana, qtd. in Ramanujan 1973, 67). Revelation shifts from the textual to the experiential, from external authority to interior immediacy in this assertion,. The Anubhava Mantapa established this experiential mode of knowing, where truth was validated through shared realization instead of doctrines.

Contrary to Vedāntic epistemology, which underscores śruti (scripture) and yukti (reason) as channels of knowledge, Viraśaiva philosophy prioritizes anubhava as both the source as well the criterion of truth (Balasubramanian 1994, 121). All doctrines, rituals and symbols find their authenticity as they arise from as well return to the direct experience. Thus, experience develops into pramāṇa the measure of knowledge.

This orientation places Viraśaivism in a tradition of experiential spiritualities, similar to the Tantric as well as Bhakti traditions however differentiated by its explicit communal dimension. Thus the Mantapadeveloped a platform where anubhava was articulated, verified and celebrated a collective epistemology of the divine.

#### **7.2 The Metaphysics of Śūnya: The Fullness of the Void**

The concept of Śūnya is one of the significant concepts in Viraśaiva metaphysics. It is often misunderstood as nihilism, however Śūnyasignifies a transcendental fullness a reality which is all-inclusive and dissolves otherness between being and non-

being. The Śūnya Sampādane (“Attainment of the Void”) portrays the process of realization through dialogues among mystics, bringing out Śūnya as the experiential culmination of anubhava (Sadananda 1998, 23).

Allama Prabhu, the leading mystic of the Mantapa, exemplifies this doctrine in his silence as well the paradoxical utterances. His teaching “the void is not nothingness, but the womb of all being” (Kalburgi 2002, 82) resonates the Mahāyāna Buddhist concept of Śūnyatā yet differs through its prominence on immanence instead of transcendence. Thus the Vīraśaiva, Śūnya is not found elsewhere it is realized in the consciousness.

Philosophically, Śūnya represents a nondual state of being that transcends both materialism as well as idealism. In phenomenological terminologies, it corresponds to pure awareness preceding to conceptual bifurcation. This awareness anticipates later insights in transpersonal psychology as well the consciousness studies, which identify the “void” as the base of integrative awareness (Ferrer 2002, 119). Thus, Śūnya in Vīraśaiva Philosophy functions as both lived reality as well as the ontological principle a metaphysical state realized through experience.

### **7.3. Ishta Liṅga: The Embodied Symbol of Immanence**

The Ishta Liṅga a small symbol of Śiva worn on the body signifies the embodiment of divinity as well as the democratization of the divine. Every sharana was taught to wear the Liṅga, worshipping it daily as a remembrance that the divine dwells within and not in the distant temples. This practice, revolutionary in that time, subverted the monopolization of divine by religious intermediaries (Naikar 2005, 83).

The Ishta Liṅga honors immanence. It is simultaneously an emblem as well as sacrament: a visible symbol of the invisible reality. Zimmer (1951, 235) relates it to the Tantric yantra, where the divine power is geometrically concentrated as well as personally internalized. However, for the Vīraśaiva, the Liṅga is not just a tool but a way of being it functions as a perpetual awareness of divine presence in every thought, act and relation.

In the Mantapa, deliberations of the Liṅga turned around its experiential purpose. Allama Prabhu guides Basavanna that “the Liṅga which you worship is not the one you wear, but the one which breathes in you” (Śūnya Sampādane, trans. Sadananda 1998, 34). The Ishta Liṅga thus is a symbol of the body as a temple or turning the body into a site of continuous spiritual union. This exemplifies the Vīraśaivabelief of kayaka-yoga the elevation of worldly life as divine activity.

### **7.4 Kayaka and Dasoha: The Ethics of Experiential Spirituality**

The principles of Kayaka (work as worship) as well as Dasoha (sharing of labor’s fruit) form the ethical basis of Vīraśaiva spiritual democracy. They bridge the division between spiritual as well as the material life by sacralising day-to-day work. Basavanna’s assertion, “Whatever the work or occupation, do it as a service to your Lord” (Ramanujan 1973, 91), converts labour into meditation as well as economy into ethics.

In Anubhava Mantapa, Kayaka was deliberated as the awareness of Śūnya in action the expression of the completeness of the nothingness in the world. By means of Kayaka, the sharana internalizes divine presence; whereas Dasoha extends it externally through generosity. Sakhare (1957, 58) remarks that this dual exercise eradicated social hierarchies by categorizing all forms of labor intellectual or manual on equal foundation.

From a contemporary perspective, Kayaka and Dasohadenote a form of “ethical mysticism” (Rao 1999, 147) that incorporates transcendence with social obligation. They anticipate the spirituality of engaged action noticed in figures like Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. In this way, Vīraśaiva ethics represents a spiritual democracy honouring labour where divine awareness is articulated not in withdrawal however through compassionate participation.

### **7.5. The Dialogic Nature of Realization:**

The distinguishing feature of Vīraśaivamysticism is that anubhava is not private however dialogical. Individual realization attains completeness only if articulated and acknowledged in community. The Anubhava Mantapa acted as a platform for this through conversation, reflection and critique. In this sense, anubhavaturns out to be an event of intersubjectivity confirming Buber’s comprehension that “all real living is meeting” (Buber 1958, 62).

The dialogical approach confirmed that mystical insight should remain dynamic as well self-corrective. It prohibited spiritual experience from falling into individual dogmatism. In the words of Gadamer - each dialogue was a hermeneutic encounter, fusing personal horizons into a shared understanding (Gadamer 1989, 371). This process establishes “hermeneutics of experience” truth revealed through relational presence.

### **7.6 The Synthesis of Knowledge and Devotion:**

Vīraśaiva philosophy bridges jñāna (knowledge) and bhakti (devotion), integrating cognition and emotion into an experiential unity. Allama’s austere mysticism and Basavanna’s social devotion illustrate two poles of this synthesis. In the Śūnya Sampādane, Allama teaches that knowledge without love is sterile, while Basavanna affirms that love without discernment lapses into attachment (Kalburgi 2002, 95). The Mantapa thus became the crucible where these energies balanced, forging an integral path that unites intellect and surrender.

This integration aligns with what Sri Aurobindo (1950, 442) later described as the “spiritual synthesis of knowledge, devotion, and works.” The Vīraśaiva path anticipates such an integral yoga, grounding it in the immediacy of life. Every thought, emotion and act becomes a mode of worship anubhava embodied in existence.

### **7.7 The Phenomenology of Śūnya Sampādane:**

As per phenomenological perspective, Śūnya Sampādane is interpreted as revealing of consciousness from diversity to unity. The dialogues indicate progressive stages of realization: interrogation, negation, awareness and silence. Every saint articulates an aspect of Śūnya Basavanna the ethical, Allama the ontological and Akka the erotic. The development from speech to silence reflects the phenomenological decline, leading to pure awareness without conceptual residue (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 202).

The culmination in silence cannot be considered as an end but fulfilment the recognition that all language stem from and returns to Śūnya. As Kalburgi (2002, 101) remarks, “The culmination of dialogue in the Mantapa was not agreement but illumination.” At this point, individual consciousness melts in the collective domain of awareness, portraying the ultimate spiritual democracy where each and every one are unified in the fullness of nothingness.

### **7.8 Contemporary Relevance of Experiential Foundations:**

The Vīraśaivas' experiential philosophy reverberates with contemporary engagements in spirituality studies that underscore embodiment, direct experience as well as intersubjectivity. Jorge Ferrer's (2002) "participatory turn" in religious studies discovers a historical precursor in Anubhava Mantapa, where knowledge was developed through shared understanding. In the same way, Ken Wilber's (2000) fundamental model of consciousness correspondences the Vīraśaiva synthesis of transpersonal as well as personal dimensions.

The cotemporary world which is divided by ideology as well as identity, the experiential foundations of Vīraśaivism propose a concept of unity without homogeneity of diversity rooted in shared being. Thus The Anubhava Mantapa demonstrates the manner in which spiritual democracy can function not as an abstraction but as a lived tradition. It invites a reconsideration of religion as conversation instead of conversion, participation instead of possession.

### **8. Spiritual Democracy and Ethical Practice in Anubhava Mantapa:**

The Anubhava Mantapa, instituted under the visionary leadership of Basavanna in the 12th century CE, denotes one of the most revolutionary socio-spiritual inventions in Indian history. Often defined as the first spiritual parliament, the Mantapa strived for translating mystical experience (anubhava) into social as well as ethical practice. It created a dialogic platform where realization was not an individual experience but a collective responsibility, combining spiritual awareness with social transformation (Kalburgi 2002, 44).

The core or central concepts of this spiritual democracy are *kayaka* (work as worship) and *dasoha* (service as sharing). These concepts transcend ritual piety to embed spirituality in labour as well as community life. Through *kayaka*, each act turns out to be a medium of divine realization, erasing division between sacred as well as secular (Ramanujan 1973, xvii). The Mantapa consequently redefined spirituality as a democratic practice rooted in human dignity as well as productive engagement.

The Mantapa's insistence on anubhava direct, lived experience as the only legitimate means to truth was equivalently transformative. Contrarily to Brahmanical orthodoxy, which honored textual authority as well as priestly mediation, the Vīraśaiva archetype democratized access to the divine by asserting that revelation can be experienced by all, irrespective of gender, caste or education (Schouten 1995, 72). This experiential mode marked a paradigmatic shift from institutional hierarchy to participatory internal revelation in Indian spirituality.

From a philosophical perspective, the Mantapa stands for the synthesis of metaphysics as well as social ethics. The metaphysical notion of *Śūnya* (void) in Vīraśaiva philosophy articulates a non-dual state of being, a lived experience in which distinctions dissolve in the process of spiritual realization. Basavanna's articulation "The rich will make temples for Śiva. What shall I, a poor man, do? My legs are pillars, the body the shrine, the head a cupola of gold" transforms this metaphysics into a lived spirituality which decentralizes the sacred space (Basava Vachana 47). Here, the temple represents one's own body, and the divinity is realized in selfless action.

Additionally, the Mantapa's inclusivity encompassed women mystics like Akka Mahadevi, whose Vachanas articulated the attainment of divine union through the perpetual state of self-awareness as well as renunciation of social norms (Ramanujan 1973, 60). The acceptance of her expression in the Mantapa's discourse underscores its spiritual equality a democracy which accepted differences of expressions as well as the experiences however are celebrated as a means of truth-seeking.

With this perspective, Anubhava Mantapa can be examined as an experimental prototype of deliberative spirituality that is a participatory system which unites the internal aspect of realization with the external structures of justice. The Spiritual democracy in this context does not indicate a formal institution but a lived practice of equality deep-rooted in divine principles. By blending transcendence in ethical work as well as the social dialogue, Basavanna's revelation anticipates contemporary deliberations on engaged spirituality, where mysticism and morality synthesize as reciprocally reinforcing dimensions of human flourishing (Chapple 2017, 109).

Fundamentally, the Anubhava Mantapa exemplifies the synthesis of ethical accountability, spiritual experience as well as communal dialogue presenting an eternal model for a spirituality which is both internally transformative and externally justified.

### **9. Comparative Insights-Anubhava Mantapa and Modern Spiritual Humanism:**

The Anubhava Mantapa's prominence on experiential realization as well as the social equality can be traced in contemporary movements of spiritual humanism as well as participative spirituality as lived experience. Both assert that the real spirituality should be manifested as ethical practice as well as social responsibility. The spiritual democracy of Basavanna anticipates modern spiritual and social ideologies for instance - Gandhi's Sarvodaya, Aurobindo's Integral Yoga and the philosophies of Panikkar and Teilhard de Chardin which connect the self-realization with collective transformation. By rejecting ritualism as well as the institutional religion, these approaches consider self-purification, service and transformative action as the base of spirituality.

As per the Western perspective, the Mantapa's dialogical structure corresponds to Buber's I-Thou relation as well as Dewey's concept of "religious experience" Both assert that spirituality results from participatory deliberations and shared inquiry. The Czech phenomenologist Karel Dobiáš broadens this vision, by describing spirituality as a "shared field of presence," endorsing the Mantapa's anubhavashti the communal authentication of personal realization.

The presence of women mystics like Akka Mahadevi in this democratic assembly challenged the patriarchal spiritual order. Her assertion, "I am not woman, I am not man," anticipates reclamation of the feminist spirituality of the body as well as the consciousness as sites of the divine.

Eventually, the Mantapa offers an eternal model of ethical as well as the dialogical spirituality which democratizes mystical experience as well as integrates self-knowledge with social ethics. It invites modern seekers to transcend privatized mysticism as well as incorporate equality, dialogue and service as essential principles in the process of awakening.

### **Conclusion:**

While concluding it can be said that the enduring legacy of Anubhava Mantapa rests in its synthesis of inner realization as well as social transformation. Envisioned by Basavanna, it remains a living model for spiritual democracy where direct

experience (anubhava) is considered as the criterion of truth. Unlike a medieval artifact, it continues to enlighten contemporary movements in spiritual humanism, transformative education as well as interreligious dialogue (Chapple 2017, 109).

In contemporary India, Viraśaivism as well as the Lingayat movement continue the Mantapa's ethos of self-realization, equality and ethical labour. The twin principles of Dasoha (selfless sharing) and Kayaka (work as worship) have lasting relevance in the pursuit of ecological harmony and social justice (Sastri 2011, 56). The notion of "work is worship" bridges spirituality as well as sustainability, exemplifying sustainable spirituality the sanctification of daily life as well as the recognition of interdependency among all beings. Globally, the Mantapa presents a model of dialogical spirituality, in which revelation is plural as well as the truth arises through shared interrogation. In an age characterized by religious and ideological polarization, its participatory philosophy serves as an solution to sectarianism. The notion of anubhava goshti (collective contemplation) exemplifies inter spiritual dialogues proposed by Bede Griffiths and Wayne Teasdale, recommending "the meeting of mystic hearts" beyond ideological confines (Teasdale 1999, 48). It also reverberates with Raimon Panikkar's notion of diatopical hermeneutics ideological consideration across spiritual worlds (Panikkar 1999, 142).

Educationally, the Mantapa predicts transformative learning models that prioritizes experience as well reflection over rote instruction. In this context, Basavanna's council anticipated contemporary consciousness-based education developed by Paulo Freire, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and J. Krishnamurti (Dirkx 2001, 137). Learning here turn out to be an act of awakening instead of gathering of doctrine. The gender inclusivity in Mantapa also redefined spiritual subjectivity. The mystics like Akka Mahadevi embodies "spiritual feminism," amalgamating mystical realization with social emancipation (King 1995, 117). Her bold expressions of divine affection continue to encourage feminist theologians retrieving the sacred feminine in spiritual discourse.

Ultimately, the Anubhava Mantapa offers a non-Western archetype of democratic mysticism, in which spirituality is both internally transcendent and externally participatory. Rejecting ritual as well as textual authority, it confirms authenticity as well as community over institutional power. Its philosophy that divine realization is not separable from equality, justice, and compassion remains eternal. Basavanna's conception-work is worship and love is God, is a call to blend mystical insight with ethical action for collective awakening of humanity.

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