

## Role of Mathas in the New Millennium

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The world has entered a new millennium. I have had the good fortune of observing during my lifetime, spanning over nine decades, the tremendous changes that have taken place in society, particularly in the lifestyle of people in India. To understand the present or the future in its proper perspective to shape it, we must have a clear understanding of our past. Life in India had always 'Dharma' (righteousness) as its foundation. Our predecessors lived full

life practicing the four supreme values of life namely, Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha (righteousness, materialism, family life, and Salvation). Analyzing the history of India, Sri Aurobindo Ghose said:

"Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it... For long ages, there was ingrained in India her spirituality, her powerful psychic tendency, her great yearning to grapple with the infinite and

possess it, her ineradicable religious sense, her idealism, her Yoga, the constant turn of her art, and her philosophy. But this was not and could not be her whole mentality, her entire spirit; spirituality itself does not flourish on earth in the void, even as our mountaintops do not rise like those of enchantment of dream out of the clouds without a base. When we look at the past history of India, what strikes us next is stupendous vitality, her inexhaustible power of life and joy of life, and her almost unimaginable prolific creativeness. For three thousand years at least, it is indeed much longer, she has been creating abundantly and incessantly, lavishly, with an inexhaustible many-sidedness, republics, kingdoms, and empires; philosophies and cosmogonies; sciences and creeds; arts and poems; all kinds of monuments; palaces and temples public works communities and societies religious orders laws, codes and rituals physical sciences ,psychic sciences, systems of Yoga systems of politics and administration arts spiritual arts worldly trades, industries fine crafts the list is endless and in each item, there are almost a plethora of activities. She creates and creates and is not satisfied and is not tired; she will not have an end of it, seems hardly to need a space for rest, a time for inertia and lying fallow.”

It is, therefore, relevant to examine our present-day lifestyle in the light of the above. We live in the age of science and technology which have given man stupendous power and the feeling that there is nothing in this world which he cannot achieve. It has been possible for him to create facilities that have enabled him to lead a quality life. At the same time, science and technology have

invested man with immense power which can destroy the whole world in a matter of seconds. For the world is saved from such a terrible eventuality, a man should realize that all the knowledge that he has been able to create and all gadgets that he has been able to make should be used only for the benefit of mankind. This, clearly, will become possible only when he does not turn his back to the moral and the spiritual side of life. Our ancient sages and seers were fully conscious of the fact that man is not a vegetable or an animal but a thinking and spiritual being who is sent here to use the animal mould for higher purposes and the realization of truth. The Sharanas of Karnataka were fully aware of the above facts of life. For them, spirituality did not mean running away from worldly life. They were practical philosophers. They not only preached ideals but also practiced them. They did not plead for the abandonment of sensual pleasures. They did not agree to suppression or repression but encouraged sublimation. They saw to it that they did not allow the human body to be spoilt because they considered it as a gift from God to be kept healthy in the service of fellow beings. In their scheme of things the other world (Devaloka) and this mortal world (Marthyaloka) were not different. Devaloka is that where truth prevails; Marthyaloka is that where untruth prevails. Even in case one wants to believe in a separate Devaloka, Basavanna has this comment:

**Ili Salluvaru Alliyoo Salluvaru  
Ili Salladavaru Alliyoo Sallaru,**

which translates into: those accepted here (on earth) are accepted there also (in heaven); those not accepted here (on

earth) are not accepted there (in heaven).

Sharanas gave to the world the twin principles of Kayaka (work by the individual which generates wealth) and Dasoha (serving humanity through proper utilization of the wealth for the benefit of all). I feel that this golden rule of Kayaka and Dasoha finds its echo in the thesis of the Nobel Laureate economist, Amartya Sen. This socio-economic model as developed by Basava in the twelfth century A.D. has the potential of ushering in universal brotherhood and happiness as it is an exploitation-free model in the sense that work produces wealth, gets utilized for the common good and does not get hoarded. Basava could implement this model, not by force, but through love and persuasion with spirituality as the background in all the operations.

Our Sharanas were not mere great masters and scholars of Vedas and Upanishads, they generously shared with the multitude their spiritual and intellectual wealth. Thus, we have the valuable gift of Vachana Sahithya from Basavanna and his contemporaries to humanity. Vachanas are literary guidelines meant to shape the character of the individual and make him a responsible citizen free from all dogmas and superstitions. Sharanas with their lofty concept of the universal brotherhood have the following prayer to God almighty:

Oh Lord, let not the question 'who is he?' cross our minds.  
Let our minds be always positive on the issue that 'he is ours'  
This is the gist of the beautiful vachana:

ಇವನಾರವ ಇವನಾರವ ಇವನಾರವನೆಂದು  
ಎನಿಸದಿರಯ್ಯ.

ಇವ ನಮ್ಮವ ಇವ ನಮ್ಮವ, ಇವ ನಮ್ಮವನೆಂದು  
ಎನಿಸಯ್ಯ.

ಕೂಡಲ ಸಂಗಮದೇವಾ ನಿಮ್ಮ ಮನೆಯ ಮಗನೆಂದು  
ಎನಿಸಯ್ಯ.

What a lofty thought! Basava is embracing the entire world with all concern and affection. We may remark here that capturing the full message of Vachanas into other languages is a difficult job because of the utter simplicity and the powerful message that the Vachanas carry and convey.

Despite the global village concept gaining ground in the context of advances made in information technology, we observe that man is becoming more and more self-centered showing increased tendencies of grabbing and hoarding, without caring for the needs of others. Unless this trend is arrested, the world will not be a safe place to live in particularly given the ever-growing pressure and exploding world population.

It is here that Mathas have a great role to play by educating people to shape their lives by following the path shown by Basava namely the Kayaka-Dasoha Path, which is a healthy and meaningful mix of harmonious materialism and spiritualism. So that Swamijis (the heads of mathas) succeed in their mission of providing people with spiritual education, they must themselves be role models and they must hold themselves accountable to the trust they are entrusted with overall wholesomeness Of the society. They must be well informed about our rich heritage and culture;

their lives must be simple, transparent, and spotless; they must understand the efficacy of pooja and prayer, they must practice this with absolute faith; they must strictly practice Brahmacharya which is a part of the holy order. While they remain highly spiritual, they must also possess enough worldly wisdom so that their activities can be socially relevant meant to help the poor and the downtrodden. They should be able to enlighten people that activities connected with the political, social, and economic systems constitute only the first level activity of life to help them to work, produce and enjoy the physical comforts. At the next stage of development, they should be able to move from materialistic culture to spiritual culture. Men and women who imbibe the spiritual culture will be able to create heaven on earth by not uttering falsehood, by not stealing, by never thinking of hurting anyone in God's creation, by not indulging in self-aggrandizement, by not denigrating others, and by not showing any kind of intolerance towards others.

While we must study and understand the various religions and practices, it is my firm belief that of all the religions, the religion of man (Manava Dharma) is the noblest whose quintessence is the compassion for all which is the basic mantra of Basavanna: (Is there a religion bereft of compassion and kindness)

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Before I conclude, I must record my sincere and deep appreciation of all those who started VSNA and all those who are nurturing for making it a useful instrument in bringing our culture and

heritage to the younger generations. I am also happy that VSNA is giving a helping hand in the developmental activities of educational institutions. I record with appreciation the generous contributions made by members of VSNA for the construction of the Diamond Jubilee Commemoration Hostel Block at Sree Siddaganga Math during 1997.

I feel that it is relevant to mention here that any person migrating to other countries has to educate his children about the rich heritage and culture of their motherland. This is a right, which cannot be denied to the children. It is interesting to note that the only right a person can deny to his children is the right to material property, that too if the property in question is the one made all by himself. A child's right to property cannot be denied if the property is made by his grandfather, let alone the property made by his other predecessors.

Such being the status of the inheritance, the right to the great spiritual and cultural wealth of thousands of years made by hundreds of his ancestors can certainly not be denied to the child of the migrant, the parents' claim of giving his child more opportunities and better quality life in a foreign land notwithstanding. In this regard, VSNA can play a vital role in providing the younger generation with a healthy philosophy of life and can even influence the environment if it is remembered that the whole world is looking towards India as a place of solace to the soul in a world of strife and that it is now accepted globally that spirituality is understood deeply and comprehensively only in India.