The literary controversies are always around the questions of 'correct/true' interpretations or 'misinterpretation/distortion'. We have already shown that a linguistic/literary community gets divided into two groups viz., secularists and the communitarians. The secularists criticise the communitarians for misinterpreting their creative works. According to them, the so-called spokespersons of the communities are ignorant of subtleties of literary works. They stake claims of scholarship, competence and ability to interpret history and recreate it imaginatively. The creative works, according to them, need not follow factual history because they attempt to depict 'human nature' in all its faces and they symbolise 'universal values'. That is, creative literature cannot afford to be sectarian and cannot serve the interests of any particular community. In turn, the communitarians accuse the creative writers of misrepresenting/distorting their history and hurting the religious sentiments of the community. They also do the act of interpreting creative writings. From their point of view, an act of interpretation is intended to establish what they believe to be the truth. They try to establish the truth by means of collective, institutional and scholarly processes. In fact, they are not much interested in 'aesthetics' of literary texts in the way the creative writers are. They try to circulate and establish their interpretation as the correct reading of the controversial text. They always imagine that they represent the sentiments of the majority of the community. Interpreting, thus, has not remained an act of individuals. Collective/Social interpretation has become a means of defining the future norms of interpretation and excluding anything against their conventions of interpretations. In the post-colonial period, the communities have

1 Recently, the Right wing forces have tried to establish their version of religion and history. In 1999, they destroyed the paintings of famous painter M.F. Hussain. A Saraswati portrait by the painter was accused of showing the goddess Saraswati in semi-nude posture. The Right wing activists claimed that a Muslim should not distort Hindu goddesses and hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindus. Monica Juneja, who has written an analysis of this controversy, points out that, this controversy was an attempt by the Hindu forces to reclaim the public sphere for monopoly (Juneja, 1997:155-158). In 2003, another section of the Right wing activists destroyed the properties of the famous Bhandarkar Research Institute in Pune protesting against the distortion of Maratha history by James Laine in his book Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India. In both cases, the Right wing forces projected themselves as the sole representatives of the Hindu popular sentiments.
found it necessary to act collectively, enunciate the principles of interpretation and to consolidate their powers to ultimately set the terms for discursive practices. There are some efforts to understand and theorise the phenomenon of collective interpretation. One such effort is done by Stanley Fish. Fish describes the collective interpretation as part of interpretive communities (henceforth IC). In the following discussion, we shall examine the founding principles of IC as outlined by Fish and see if his notion of IC is viable to analyse and understand the relationship between literary controversies and communities.

We probe into Vacana Deepti (1996) and Dharmakarana controversies (1997) in order to test Stanley Fish's notion of IC. This chapter constitutes seven sections. In the first part we shall explain what is IC. The section elaborates the relationship between collective interpretation and the Viraśāiva community. In the third section, we attempt to delineate the Vacana Deepti controversy to demonstrate how the Viraśāivas have interpreted the vacanas collectively in the context of the Vacana Deepti controversy. The fourth section examines the religious implications on the controversy. The fifth section will focus on the Dharmakarana controversy. In this section, we delineate the differences between two sections of the Viraśāiva community who are actively involved in the act of interpretation. In the sixth section we shall examine the socio-political and economic changes in the public sphere of Karnataka affecting the general life of the Viraśāivas. This section discusses the community's efforts to consolidate itself strongly, to act collectively and negotiate the new reality and experiences. The seventh and the last section is devoted to the analysis of crisis in Viraśaivism and the identity politics of the Viraśāiva community in the light of the new realities and its attempts to safeguard the 'traditional' power of interpretation. We assume that the act of interpretation is symbolic of the community's power structure and relations.

I

Reading the Interpretive Communities

Stanley Fish's notion of IC is useful to understand how the reading communities are formed to receive and appreciate literary or classical works in a particular way. IC designates a community of readers who share a particular reading 'strategy' or "set of
community assumptions" (Abrams, 1993:271). Fish proposes that their interpretation in effect, 'creates' all the seemingly objective features of text as well as the "intentions, speakers, and authors" that may be inferred from that text. IC does not signify a collective of individuals but a bundle of strategies or norms of interpretation that we hold in common and which regulate the way we think and perceive. According to Fish,

Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. If it is an article of faith in particular community that there are a variety of texts, its members will boast a repertoire of strategies for making them. And if a community believes in the existence of only one text, then the single strategy its members employ will be forever writing it (Fish, 1988:327).

In the above notes, Fish seeks to account for the variety as well as the stability of reading/writing processes. For him, an interpretation of a literary text is not unique, individualistic or idiosyncratic, but shared and pre-determined. The validity of any reading, however, obvious it may seem to a reader, will always depend on the assumptions and strategies of reading that s/he happens to share with other members of IC. Fish sees IC as an "engine of change" (Fish, 1990:150) with corporately held agreements, learned concepts and beliefs, and that these beliefs are not nested but subject to "challenge and revision under certain circumstances" (ibid: 150). He points out,

The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the 'true text', but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being (Fish, 1988:327-328).

However, he does not confine IC to 'sovereign' status of the readers but admits the possibility of constant changes in the ways of reading and interpreting. IC and its members are not static or rigid but are free to interact and transform the entire system. Fish recognizes the instability of IC because,

...interpretive communities grow and decline, and individuals move from one to another; thus, while the alignments are not permanent, they are always there, providing just enough stability for the interpretative battles to go on, and just enough shift and slippage to assure that they will never be settled (ibid: 328).

IC will leave certain recognizable signs to read a text in a particular manner. Therefore,
...the very existence of the 'marks' is a function of an interpretative community, for they will be recognized (that is, made) only by its members. Those outside will be deploying a different set of interpretive strategies (interpretation cannot be withheld) and will therefore be making different marks (ibid: 329).

The above remarks dismantle the existence of universal readership and thus deny a unified meaning. Fish is aware that different kinds of ICs exist because of differences in the ways of interpretation. He does not argue that IC is formed around a particular literary form or text. His emphasis on the discursive practices of IC goes against the traditional distinctions such as emotive and scientific language, form and content, description and interpretation, intrinsic and extrinsic, etc. He points out that it does not matter for IC if a text in question is a literary work or a historical work; if the work indicates truth or not for it is a matter defined and decided by IC.

Fish makes reference to a religious text to build a theory of IC. He shows the significance for religious institutions/individuals in forming IC of their own. In this connection, he says:

Indeed, it has always been possible to put into action interpretive strategies designed to make all texts one, or to put it more accurately, to be forever making the same text. Augustine urges, just such a strategy, for example, in On Christian Doctrine where he delivers the 'rule of faith', which is of course a rule of interpretation (ibid: 326).

Any deviation from the accepted rules of interpretation seems "to be figurative" (ibid: 327). A reader is right in reading a text only if s/he is successful in showing "the reign of charity" (ibid: 327). A set of directions to read a religious text will always be available to the readers so that they can demonstrate "the reign of charity" and demonstrate "God's love for us and our answering responsibility to love our fellow creatures for His sake" (ibid: 327). What he means is that the rules of interpreting (in the disguise of "rule of faith") the religious texts are considered and usually obeyed by the readers (can be followers or devotees too) and in a way they, as readers, are not free to make their choices.
However, Fish's notion of IC has limited use. It does not help us to know the reasons for a possible gap within a community. For example, the tensions between the several ideological interests within IC cannot be reduced to mere reading strategies or interpretations. In the 1980s, Fish was subjected to mounting criticism from numerous theorists. Vincent Leitch quotes Edward Said who showed the limitations in Fish's theory of IC. According to Edward Said IC is acceptable up to a certain point. He qualifies it by saying,

> If, as we have recently been told by Stanley Fish, every act of interpretation is made possible and given force by an interpretive community, then we must go a great deal further in showing what situation, what historical and social configuration, what political interest are concretely entailed by the very existence of interpretive communities (Leitch, 1995:40)

Fish's theory isolates a reader from social structure and reduces the process of interpretation to aesthetic activity. And there is not much scope for understanding the 'politics of interpretation'. Even if there is a focus on the process of reading/interpreting a text, we have to concentrate on the political orientations of any reading or interpretation. Hayden White has noticed the politics of interpretation in connection with the interpretation of historical narratives. According to him,

> This "politics" has to do with the kind of authority the interpreter claims vis-à-vis the established political authorities of his society, on the one side, and vis-à-vis other interpreters in his own field of study or investigation, on the other, as the basis of whatever rights he conceives himself to possess and whatever duties he feels obliged to discharge as a professional seeker of truth (italics in original, White, 1982:113).

He considers that the act of interpretation indicates some sort of authority over other kinds of interpretation. The question of authority, hence, will help us to understand the power relations between several interpretive communities. To put it in other words, IC lives in a world of unequal power relations. While a few ICs may be able to establish their interpretations, some other might fail. In addition to this factor, collective interpretation of texts become necessary if a community finds that it has to read its scriptural history anew in tune with the new requirements. Therefore, there is a need to
understand what the new requirements of a community are and why it feels the urgency to realise it requirements.

Another limitation in Fish's notion of IC is that he does not consider a reader/writer as part of a social community placed in particular hierarchical relations. We may note that a community functions through certain institutions and organisations. These institutions and organisation also contribute to the interpretive acts of IC.

In the context of our dissertation, the space of religious organisations and caste associations present the Viraśaivas with a very crucial domain for negotiation. They act as facilitator for the Viraśaivas to negotiate with the personal as well as community problems or crisis. They perform the function of securing and sustaining community interests. A collective imagination is necessary for the Viraśaiva seers and religious leaders to consolidate their organisation/institutional base and exert influence on the functioning of the society generally. One way of realising the collective imagination for them is to critically engage with the discursive practices. The discursive practices involve interpreting literary or historical or religious texts. Therefore, a caste institution or a religious organisation finds it effective and influential to select a particular text and interpret it in a particular way. In order to get its interpretations a wider acceptance and legitimacy, it employs its organizational or institutional apparatus. Therefore, an act of interpretation and institutional base share a dialectical relationship. An organization or an institution may give legitimacy to interpretive activities of its members or the members may use institutional support to gain legitimacy for their interpretive activities. Therefore, IC implies institutional or organisational base but the latter need not always be IC.

II

Collective Interpretations and the Viraśaiva Community

As we know the hierarchical structure of the Viraśaiva community has resulted in multiple textual traditions. Since there is no consensus on what textual tradition really constitutes the community and since there are differences over perception and resolution of internal conflicts and differences, each religious organisation or corporate association
interpret the Viraśaiva literature from different vantage points. Therefore one can safely argue that though the Viraśaiva community can be considered as IC it has its own internal dissenters.

We have already noticed that the Viraśaivas have developed monastic tradition since time immemorial. The two monastic traditions of the community i.e. Gurustala and Virakta mutts have both played a crucial role in determining the religious life of the community. These two mutt traditions have their branches spread all over the state. However, in recent times several sub-castes of the community have established their mutts, with specific caste labels, either as alternatives to the above mentioned mutt traditions or as their branches. The mutt traditions have rendered the modern Viraśaivas their own specific caste and regional identity. They are also centres of power in negotiating with internal and external factors. They have not remained as mere religious centres but have become enunciatory domains for political articulations and social changes. The political orientations of the mutts are recorded by Shouten as such,

There are more virakta gurus — and some of the gurustalada tradition too—who are known for their political influence. Especially in the fifties and sixties, it was not unusual that the results of elections were determined by the propaganda of some mighty gurus among their followers. The virakta monastery of Chitradurga and the gurustalada matha at Sirigere had an age-old conflict and their competition played a major role in regional political elections (Shouten, 1991:274).

The influence of the Viraśaiva mutts is also extended to educational field. Public education has been one of the powerful vehicles to promote their mutt traditions and customs.

However, the interests of various social groups and the Viraśaiva mutts within the community have not just co-existed in a harmonious condition. There are many clashes

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1 For information on the emergence, socio-geographical details of these two traditions refer chapt. 3, pp. 142-145.
2 Chandrashekhara Narayanapura has given a detailed index of Viraśaiva mutts of these two traditions (2002). According to the index, there is large number of Guru as well as Viraktha mutts besides other kinds of mutts like Sharanastala and Dasoha mutts.
3 For more information on the role of Viraśaiva mutts in the promotion of education in Karnataka see chapt. 3, pp.146-147.
among them to gain hegemonic influence. But these clashes have occurred in terms of a common discourse of Viraśaiva literature, especially vacanas. Each social group, caste-association and mutt of the Viraśaivas tries to present itself as the authentic agency of the Viraśaiva people and their 'common interest'. Therefore, any analysis of collective interpretation by the religious organisations or caste associations should entail an analysis of the mutual or antagonistic perspectives of Viraśaivism. The analysis may reveal why and when do mutual or antagonistic perspectives and interpretation of Viraśaivism arise and decline. In other words, we need to consider how these organisations and associations, despite different pedigree and traditions, share identification with the common narratives of Viraśaivism and simultaneously articulate differences.

III

The Vacana Deepti Controversy

In a book releasing function two years ago\(^5\) in Bangalore, the former director of Karnataka Development Authority and a well-known Kannada writer, Baraguru Ramachandrappa, called for a comprehensive study of vacanas from a literary point of view. While emphasizing the social relevance of vacanas, he cautioned about the contemporary attempts to appropriate vacanas for communal purpose. He pointed out that the fundamentalists misused the vacanas for sectarian purpose and the literary analysis must work against the fundamentalist forces in Karnataka. His cautionary words and suggestion were made in the background of a series of literary controversies that arose in Karnataka recently. We have already examined some of these controversies in which the Viraśaiva community demanded for a ban on three literary works. The Vacana Deepti controversy is one such 'sectarian' incident mentioned by Baraguru. A distinguishing feature of the Vacana Deepti controversy is that vacanas, taken as literary as well as religious narratives, became the common ground for several social groups to justify their differences and foreground their interpretations as correct and authentic. Before examining these differences, let us have a bird's eye view of the controversy.

\(^5\) Vijaya-Karnataka, a Kannada daily, reported the proceedings of the function (Oct. 2\(^{nd}\), 2002).
Basava Vacana Deepti (1996) is a compilation of Basava’s vacanas revised and edited by MM under the pen name of Basavatmaje (daughter of Basava). The controversy around this compilation arose because MM changed the ankitanaama of Basava’s vacanas. Ankitanaama signifies a devotional signature and it is the name of God worshipped by vacanakaras. It is a tradition among the vacanakaras to end his/her vacana with a specific ankitanaama. It is believed to be the "authorised pen name" (Sangamada, 1996:71) of vacanakaras. According to Chidanandamurthy,

Ankitanaamas are the names of respective ishtalingas of each vacanakara and these names were given by their [vacanakaras] respective gurus (Chidanandamurthy 1998:76).

Basava’s vacanas carry Kudalasangamadeva6 as ankitanaama. Similarly Allama Prabhu’s vacanas contain Guheshwara as the ankitanaama. MM replaced it with another ankitanaama namely Lingadeva. For MM, the reason for changing the ankitanaama and revising vacanas included rewriting the narratives of vacanas. She believed that rewriting vacanas would automatically include rewriting the history of Lingayaths. She found it necessary to rewrite vacanas because they were "contaminated by the casteists" (MM, 1998:14) and it was a "historical necessity" (MM, 1997:33) to correct the mistakes done in the past. For instance, she blamed her predecessors for contaminating the vacanas of Chennabasavanna by attributing wrong vacanas to him and according to her, this has amounted to several controversies around his life.

Many literary scholars, religious heads and intellectuals all over Karnataka were shocked to witness her 'audacity' to tamper the signature of the divine figure. It was reported in a journal Basava Belagu (1997) that the religious heads of Chittaragi mutt (Ilakal), Gurubasaweshwara mutt (Hulusuru) and Hiremutt (Bhalki) and Rashtriyaa Basavadal of Solapur registered their protest against MM for changing the ankitanaama.  

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6 Kudalasangama is the name of a place in Bagalkote, a town in the northern Karnataka. There is also a temple by that name. It is a holy place for the Viraśaivas. Basava spent his formative as well as last days after the Revolution at Kalyana here. 
7 A few ankitanaamas of the other vacanakaras are as follows: Akkamahadevi-Chennamallikarjuna;Devara Daasimayya—Ramantha; Aydakki Maarayya—A mareshwara Linga; Maadara Chennayya—Nijaatma Ramaramanaa; Muktaayakka—Ajaganna.
They boycotted the convention of Lingayath Sharanas organised by her at Kudalasangama. The journal also carried several letters condemning MM. Jagadguru Shivamurthy Shivacharya Mahaswamy of Sirigere mutt condemned her "pride, selfishness, narrow mindedness" (1997: 46); B.V. Virabhadrappa, a literary critique, accused MM of "forgery" (ibid: 68); M.R. Pampanagowda considered MM's new anthology a "literary crime" (ibid: 63); Giraddi Govindaraju, an English professor and a critic in Kannada, called her a "black spot on any society" (ibid: 54); for Maate Sharanaambike, a woman religious guru, the anthology was nothing but "murder of Basavanna" (ibid: 58). The then President of the Karnataka Sahitya Akademy and its members such as Lingadevaru Halemane, Fakir Mohammad Katpadi, K.B. Siddayya and Rajashekar Niramanvi collectively condemned the cultural and 'literary crime' committed by MM. They held, "she shattered the cultural values of Karnataka" (ibid: 65). The then Chief Minister J.H. Patel, in a meeting in the Lingayat heartland Bidar, promised the gathering that MM's book will be banned and that "she will be jailed" (MM, 1997: 80). Owing to growing pressure from various mutts and the Virasaiva followers, the Karnataka Government banned the anthology and passed an order that no body should publish, circulate or sell it in any form in the public. The Department of Kannada and Culture ordered for confiscation of the anthology twice on the grounds that MM hurt the religious sentiments of the Virasaivas. Very recently, after seven years of the controversy, a Virasaiva-Lingayath meeting organized by the ABVM deplored MM in strong words for replacing Vachanaankita. A resolution was passed in the meeting demanding an immediate legal action against the "guilty".

A review of Vacana Deepti by Siddappa Langoti, the editor of Basava Belagu, would gives us a vivid description of the 'crimes' committed by MM. He lists the crimes. According to Langoti, MM,

a) abridged the vacanas of Basava and considered the abridged versions as original,

b) rearranged some parts of the vacanas,

c) added new words to the original ones,

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8 MM uses the term 'Lingayath' instead of ViraSaiva. We shall explain her predilection in the following discussions.

d) changed the lines of the vacanas randomly without giving any reason,  
e) deleted the Sanskrit shlokas in the vacanas, and  
f) retained the original name Kudalasangamadeva in some vacanas and replaced it with the new name Lingadeva in some other vacanas.

Langoti accused MM of changing the name deliberately because she was selfish. He points out that MM lacks philosophical clarity and she is confused over the philosophy of Linga. He considers her justification for the new anthology as full of irrational and irresponsible scholarship (Langoti, 1997:66). He denounces her religious practices as hypocritical and pretentious. He writes that she did not practice what she preached. He condemns that her orthodoxy and ritual practices were against what Basava stood for. He criticises her book Basava Dharmada Samskaragalu (Rituals of Basava Dharma) in strong words because it gives guidelines for several rituals to be observed by a Viraśaiva. He questions, why MM needs to construct Gadduge (a sacred tomb) for Lingananda Swamy, her guru, spending money indiscriminately and lavishly (ibid: 31), Since Basava was against any kind of static monument and extravagance, Langoti feels that it is not necessary to build any Gadduge. Another article by Shivasharanappa Wali in the same issue points out,

...the identity of Basavanna rests on the ankitanaama. It is the core of all vacanas. It cannot be replaced/substituted because it is the main source to trace the history of twelfth century Shiva Sharanas (Wali, 1997:33).

Wali condemns MM’s arrogance for distorting the divine identity of Basava and considers it as treason to the nation, because tarnishing a national figure is a crime (ibid: 34).

The Vacana Deepti controversy was both literary as well as religious. For instance, Giraddi Govindaraja and Pampanagowda members of Karnataka Saahitya Akademy were agitated over the violation of ‘literary’ norms by MM, whom they consider as an influential religious leader. For Jagadguru Shivamurthy Shivacharya Mahaswamy and Pujya Maate Sharanaambike, MM’s compilation was a sign of religious corruption and distortion of history.
What strikes us in all the above-cited condemnations is a strong criticism of MM's irresponsibility and lack of accountability to the society. They also subscribe for certain essentialist conception of vacanas. For both proponents and the opponents of the anthology, vacanas symbolise history, literature as well as religion. However, for the opponents of Vacana Deepti, any change in the ankitanaama was nothing but going against the wishes of divinity. The modern history of vacana tradition, as discussed in the previous chapter, clearly demonstrated that vacanas were newly collated, compiled and edited by several scholars. In this process, many vacanas came under severe scrutiny and they underwent several changes. But MM's new anthology created uproarious scene. This raises an obvious question - Why was this so? For this we may have to find an answer considering the institutional and organisational factors.

MM was least perturbed by oppositions to her new anthology. She persistently held campaigns and religious discourses for creating awareness about the importance of her new compilation and provided justification for changing the ankitanaama. She asked the Lingayath devotees not to panic about the government's decision to confiscate Vacana Deepti (MM, 1998:6). She condemned the then minister of Kannada and Culture Leeladevi R. Prasad for her prejudices, because it was under the Department of Kannada and Culture that the order of confiscation was issued. MM thought that the minister avenged MM's agitation against Mahachaitra in 1994. According to MM, it was a long cherished revenge on the part of the minister. The author of Mahachaitra, H. S. Shivaprakash, is her son-in-law. They both are from that Lingayath community but their religious belief did not accept that Basava was the founder of Lingayath religion. MM's suspicion was that the minister took revenge on her for disseminating Basava's philosophy of monotheism and considering him as the founder of the Lingayath religion. Nevertheless, MM considered her encounter with the minister as the encounter between truth and tradition (ibid: 2). MM thought that she stood for truth. She declared that she would discover the truth and she would not be cowed.

MM's criticism on the minister took on the old religious debates of the origin and founder of Virasaiva religion. She holds that since Leeladevi did not believe in the
Basava cult, she did not have any right to exercise her power to interfere in the religious matters of Basava followers. MM’s attack on the minister was not just intended to expose her interference but also to show the Viraśaivas that there was an ill intention behind her decision to confiscate the anthology. This encounter at the personal level was supplemented by MM’s religious discourses, speeches and commentaries justifying the relevance of *Vacana Deepti*.

IV

Rewriting Vacanas and the Dynamics of Religious Intervention

MM published *Vacana Deepti* even while the *Mahachaitra* controversy had not yet subsided. The *Mahachaitra* controversy clearly demonstrated her influence, popularity and power as a Lingayath guru and she could convince the other Lingayath organisations that her initiative against the play was legitimate, valid and inevitable. Now, with the support of her followers, she thought she should realise the ‘dream’ of rewriting the vacanas, which was still unrealised for a long time. She had already begun re-writing and compiling the vacanas by the time the *Mahachaitra* controversy broke out.

The *ankitanaama* was changed according to the wishes of her guru Shri Lingananda\(^{10}\). She reminisces that it was her guru’s wish to revise and refine vacanas (MM, 2000:5). Lingananda Swamy was not happy with the previous editions and scholarly works on vacanas. He appreciated the earlier interpretations and praised Halakatti and the Karnataka University who collected and published a large number of volumes. But he was not happy that as the volumes failed to know the ‘genuine’ and the ‘corrupt’ vacanas. He thought it was high time that the vacanas be provided with a proper intellectual and theoretical interpretation. He wanted to re-write the vacanas on the basis of the philosophy of *Ishtalinga*. He had been advocating the significance of *Linga Tatwa* (the Linga principle) for a long time. He also wrote a book on *’Linga Tatwa Darpana’* (on the philosophy of Linga) in 1966 that was translated into English by Shrikanta Alli as

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\(^{10}\) His biography, written by MM, reveals that he was a Marxist before coming under the influence of Basava and the Lingayath religion (MM, 2000:4). MM is happy that Lingananda look a wise decision in 1956 to become the follower of Basava otherwise he would have become a Communist leader.
Mirror of Ishtalinga and later on by S.M.Angadi as Emblem of God (1973). We do not know if re-writing the vacanas for Lingananda should necessarily involve changing the ankitanaama. The philosophy of ishtalinga left long lasting influence and impression on MM and it was obvious in every aspect of the new anthology. We shall explain the concept of ishtalinga as understood by MM.

MM writes a long introduction to Vacana Deepti wherein she explains the concept of ishtalinga and how the new ankitanaama contained the philosophy of ishtalinga. In the introduction, she regrets for assuming that Basavanna was one among many Virashaiva saints and not realising that indeed he was the one who established the Lingayath religion (MM, 2000:6). She expresses her anger against Chidanandamurthy, H. Tipperudraswamy and Go. Ru. Chennabasappa (well-known names in the Kannada research field and all the three belong to the Lingayath community) for propagating false ideas that Basava was just a propagator and not the founder of the religion. According to her, Basava is the symbol of devotion and social reformation (MM, 1998:6). She believes that the Lingayath religion is distinct from the Hindu religion and the Lingayaths do not believe in it because it is caste-ridden and priesthood pervades in every walk of life. She upholds the concept of monotheism of Basava and according to her it is the greatest contribution to the philosophy of religion. The practice of monotheism is symbolically represented in the worship of ishtalinga. Worshipping the Linga is the most important component of the Lingayath faith.

In addition to the reasons substantiated in the introduction, she, at another occasion, held that the term Lingadeva signified monotheism (ibid: 6-7). Since Basava preached monotheism, it is inevitable that we should make sincere attempts to understand it through his vacanas. According to her, in the contemporary period, under the influence of the Brahminism, which is polytheistic, the Viraśaiva gurus also preach worship of many gurus and Gods. It is against this polytheist practices that she wishes to uphold the greatness of Lingadeva (ibid: 7). Also, she argues that the change of the ankitanaama is in accordance with Basava’s own wish. She writes in several editorials of Kalyana Kirana that she received divine inspiration from Basava in her dream to change
ankitanaama of his vacanas! The divine wish and inspiration is to show that her efforts to reveal the truth are altogether in a different level than mere academic exercise but envisaged a new world.

Assured of a reading public and followers MM believes in 'collective thinking' (MM, 1996) and her purpose was religious. The notion of collective thinking is possible if there is a commonly shared and accepted idea of vacanas. For her a collective/community exists not only in the past but also in the present. The collective thinking is inevitable to share and disseminate the idea of the Holy Scriptures. She borrows the idea of 'collective thinking' from her predecessors. These predecessors are Buddhists, Christian saints and Sikh gurus. Like one thousand Buddhist monks, in the ancient period, who spread Buddhist ideas after trained in it for six months, she also has plans to train her followers and spread Lingayath religion. She does not have to imagine a new community for this purpose. There is already a community of followers who adored MM. Therefore, she seeks to teach the reading public the ways of understanding and appreciating the vacanas compiled by her.

**Ishtalinga and the Vacana Deepti**

It appears that MM’s idea of Linga and Lingayath is based on her differences with the term Viraśaiva and the philosophy of Viraśaivism. In her opinion, Viraśaiva and Lingayath are distinct terms. Viraśaivism, in her view, means the classical religion based on the *Shaivagamas*, which are revered by the orthodox Viraśaivas. Lingayathism means the religion established by Basava. The distinction of Lingayathism and Lingayaths lie in the concept of *ishtalinga*. The ethics of Lingayathism, she opines, provide opportunity to everybody to access *ishtalinga* on equal terms without any discrimination. Basava introduced wearing Linga, according to MM, and it was a significant feature of his movement in the twelfth century. *Ishtalinga* provides the devotees with a personal cult form equal for all. Therefore, according to her, Lingayath religion upholds humanism and equality. It is precisely this humanism and equality that she wants to propagate. That is why, she emphasises the significance of *ishtalinga* as propounded in the vacanas.
The inconsistency of MM, exposed by Langoti, in retaining the original ankitanaama for some vacanas and replacing it in other vacanas are due to MM’s belief that Basava went through two important stages of enlightenment in his life. She explains these stages, as such,

I have retained the name Kudalasangama for some vacanas which were written when Basavanna believed in the Saiva tradition before establishing the Lingayath religion. But I have replaced it with the new Ankitanaama to designate the change in Basavanna’s notion of Lord Shiva and a new awareness of Ishtalinga after establishing the Lingayath religion (MM 1996:5).

These two stages in the life of Basava, according to MM, depict his journey towards realising the Almighty (Linga). In the first stage, Basava gave up the superstitious beliefs and left for Kudalasangama. During this stage, he worshipped Kudalasangamadeva, another name of Lord Shiva and used it as ankitanaama in his vacanas. He believed that Lord Shiva was the creator of the cosmos and that he was the God. But later in his life, he realised that Lord Shiva was one among the three (Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara). In the second stage, that is, when he was twenty one year old, Basava realised that he was under the false notion of God assuming a form. Awareness dawned on him that God is formless, universal and nameless. Ishtalinga is the symbol of the formless God. Therefore, the vacanas written during this later stage carry 'Lingadeva'. Basava, therefore, preached the notion of ishtalinga and he founded the Lingayath religion. While Lingadeva signifies the moving and immortal object, Kudalasangama symbolises static image of God. While Kudalasangama is confined to a fixed geographical area, Lingadeva signifies the universal. These two stages, hence, show Basava’s journey from ekadevata upasane (monodeitism) to ekadevopasane (monotheism). Therefore, MM writes Kudalasangamadeva whenever Basava addressed Lord Shiva, but whenever the Creator of the cosmos is remembered, it is replaced with Lingadeva. She also points out that the term Lingdeva is not her coinage but it is a term found in many vacanas. She blames others for ignoring this aspect and falsely attributing significance to the static image of God. She is highly critical of A. K. Ramanujan's translation of vacanas in Speaking of Shiva because he did not understand Basava's vacanas in their true sense. She thinks that A. K. Ramanujan was 'ignorant' of the significance of ishtalinga. She does not accept ‘The Lord of Meeting Rivers’ as an appropriate translation of Basava's ankitanaama. She
argues that Ramanujan failed in his translation because he did not understand the meaning of concepts like Creator, God or Almighty (MM, 1997:21).

According to MM, the new anthology of vacanas is an attempt to set right several distortions inserted into the life history of Basava. Therefore, she selected only those vacanas that give a true and authentic picture of Basava’s ideas. The agenda before MM is very clear: to circulate an idealised and perfect image of him.

She criticises L. Basavaraju, a well-known scholar on vacanas for he believes that vacanas preached polytheism and that they were written by lower caste Shiva Sharanas who practiced different customs, rituals and religious traditions. In Kalyana Kirana (MM, 1991:11-13), she writes that vacanas, that preach polytheism, were surreptitiously included and they cannot reveal anything genuine about the Lingayathism. She does not give recognition to 'strange' lower caste Gods/Goddesses. She believes that worshipping strange Gods is meaningless. Since, she is an ardent follower of monotheism, established by Basava, she dismisses several local deities and village Gods/Goddesses as insignificant. Let us not forget that even the vacanakaras themselves rejected the village/lower caste deities. However the lower castes worshipped their own deities and continued to write vacanas. If we today consider these vacanas as part of the Virasaiva tradition they may affect the very idea of monotheism, the basis of the religion. People like MM find them contrary to the very basis of Lingayathism and that is why they are against the kind of research people like Basavaraju are pursuing. It has a contemporary political agenda as well. The lower caste vacanakaras and their vacanas are the strong and unpleasant reminders of the caste hierarchy prevailing within the Lingayath religion. These vacanas question and demonstrate the fact that the Lingayath religion could not resolve the question of caste. They render the concept of egalitarian casteless society envisaged by the Virasaiva movement into mere rhetoric. They have raised many questions about ritualistic doctrines as laid down by Chennabasavanna, the Shatstala Brahma. MM cannot afford to allow this happen. Paradoxically she invokes folk tradition to project Basava as the cultural ideal of all times. She draws our attention to various folk
and compares them with Virasaiva puranas, which were written by 'Brahmin writers' like Palkurike Somanatha, Bhimakavi, Harihara, etc. She holds that the Virasaiva puranas do not highlight the revolutionary ideas of Basava but the folk songs admire Basava and his revolutionary ideas. These folksongs, according to her, contain rich details about Basava, his contribution to the philosophy, his devotion to Lord Shiva and his revolutionary ideas about caste system. The idea behind highlighted the folksongs is to show that Basava is very popular among the folk people of all creed and sects. They have all accepted Basava as their cultural icon.

MM defends *Vacana Deepti* by rejecting the previous editions of vacanas. According to her, the earlier compilations of vacanas lack scholarship and strong conviction towards Lingayath religion. For example, she does not accept the vacana volumes edited by M. M. Kalburgi and published by the Karnataka Government. This is because many unknown vacanas, whose authorship is suspicious, are included in the name of Basava. For instance, she blames the editor for his irresponsibility in mistaking Gabbi Devaiah's vacana for Basava. She strongly objects the fact that vacanas, preaching Brahmanism, are included. She wonders that when Basava fought against Brahmanism and ritualistic priesthood how can one include Brahminical vacanas. That is why, she did not include any vacana that is Brahminical. Is she de-constructing the nationalist discourses of Halakatti and Basavanal? We do not answer this question but leave it for future research.

**Freedom of Expression and Collective Imagination**

The controversy around *Vacana Deepti* was not about 'freedom of expression' or 'violation of individual rights', which is the normal case if a novel or a drama is banned or censored. In the instance of this controversy, the opponents of *Vacana Deepti* did not see MM as an embodiment of institutional power with a large following. MM also did not justify herself in terms of individual right. The central point of the controversy was about 'unnecessary interference' and distortion of the authorial intentions. The literary

"She publishes the folksongs in her journal. These folk songs, praising Basava, were collected by B. S. Gaddugimatha for his Ph.D. in Gulbaraga University (1963)."
community, which is usually agitated whenever a writer's freedom of expression is curbed, was silent on the issue of MM's freedom to re-write the vacanas. The literary community also joined hands with the Viraśaiva mutts in opposing MM.

The controversy brings in several important points relevant for our discussion. Firstly, the question of freedom of expression does not figure here for MM cannot project her as a mere individual. Secondly the public saw the whole controversy as an 'internal matter' of the Viraśaiva community. But a few creative writers joined the opposition and raised question of authorial intention, a reading practice upheld by them. Thirdly, MM deviated from the commonly accepted beliefs about vacanas and dared to change the ankitanaama which was a shock to the lakhs of believers and for the middle class intellectuals of Karnataka.

Even after four years of publication of Vacana Deepti, the controversy still continues to surface. One reason could be that MM continues to propagate the philosophy of Lingadeva through her new anthology. A recent incident in Basava Kalyana would give us a clear picture of the on going controversy. On 31st April 2002, the Bidar District administration imposed a ban on public meetings in Basava Kalyana on the occasion of a proposed annual religious convention namely 'Kalyana Parva', organised by MM. On 12th Feb. 2003 also, a huge procession was taken out against MM in Basava Kalyana to oppose her entry into the town for inaugurating the annual Kalyana Parva. There are many Virasaiva mutts in Basava Kalyana who are opposed to the idea of Lingadeva.

Despite widespread opposition to Vacana Deepti, MM has not withheld the anthology and has not stopped campaigning. Even though some activists of Rashtriya Basava Dal requested MM to withdraw the anthology (MM, 1997:94), MM was firm in her conviction and did not consider their request on the pretext that she did not want to go against the wishes of Guru Basava. She is resolute that changing the ankitanaama was not at all a "crime" as many would love to believe. So, she has not apologised to the public even though the opponents demanded so (ibid: 84).
The Viraśaiva community and the Organisational Apparatus

How do certain kinds of interpretations become part of commonsense and gain institutional legitimacy? To answer this question it is productive to examine the versions produced by the voluntary or non-state initiatives. The non-state initiatives played a central role in producing and circulating certain kinds of narratives. The religious mutts and community institutions, which have become centres of power, have significantly contributed to the multiple interpretations of vacanas. Many Viraśaiva mutts have established their own educational institutions, libraries/archives, research centres, spiritual centres and social welfare institutions. They conduct cultural programmes, competitions, seminars and conferences in collaboration with the literary community, educational institutions, and government bodies for disseminating the values of vacanas across region, community and language. Each mutt formulates certain general religious and moral principles that become binding on all the followers of that mutt. A common body of practices or a distinguishable ethos is accepted and normalised in such mutts. Since the state is not supposed to interfere in the religious life of the Lingayath community directly, these centres are free to circulate or propagate their ideas and practices among the followers. These days, many of them have realised the value of modern technology like media (both print and electronic) to disseminate their beliefs, ideas and principles. As a result, the upper strata of the community do not always need State apparatuses to accredit, legitimise and canonize the Viraśaiva religion and literature.

MM has been trying all along to popularise Vacana Deepti through her religious organisations namely the Rashtriya Basava Dal, and the Lingayatha Dharma Mahasabha (henceforth LDM). She established the LDM to spread the Lingayath religion. The Mahasabha was floated as an alternative to ABVM. One of the aims of the LDM is to popularise and spread the ideas of vacanakaras. There are many branches of Rashtriya Basava Dal across Karnataka, which are invested with this mission. Vishwa Kalyana Mission (World Welfare Mission) is another wing of MM whose task is to disseminate their ideas across the world. In 1984, the then chairman of the mission, Lingananda Swamy produced a Kannada film on Basava titled ‘Kranthiyogi Basavanna’ (Basavanna,
the saint revolutionary). Dialogues, screenplay and songs for the film were written by MM. In that film, vacanas are used extensively. However, they are used without changing the ankitanaama. The mission has many spiritual centres like Basava Mantapa and Basava Gangotri in and around Bangalore. As the names of the centres indicate, the cult of Basava is now dominant and the former devotion of MM for Akka Mahadevi is relegated to oblivion. MM is now organising Sharana Mela (The Sharana Festival) every year. The first Sharana Mela took place in January, 1988. She has written many books on vacanas, Lingayath rituals, novels, poems and history of Lingayath religion. Some of her books have also been translated into English. Besides these, Kalyana Kirana is the mouthpiece of MM’s ideology.

It is not only MM who has been defending and preaching the significance of Vacana Deepti. Her followers are also carrying out campaigns for the new anthology. According to Mathe Kasturidevi, MM’s ardent disciple, MM redeemed the declining Lingayath religion by restoring belief in Lingadeva. Kasturidevi believes that the post-twelfth century period witnessed a gradual degeneration of the glorious tradition of Basava. During this period, she argues, communalism and selfishness crept into the Lingayath religion. The subsequent religious heads, the literary community, research scholars, politicians, intellectuals and social workers created fragments in the Lingayath society. But, she believes, it is MM who rejuvenated the Lingayath religion. In several religious discourses, she quotes vacanas of Vacana Deepti to apprise the devotees on the importance of ishtalinga\(^\text{12}\). There were many poems written in praise of MM and her relentless efforts to lead the Lingayath community in the right path\(^\text{13}\).

V

The Dharmakarana Controversy and the Akhila Bharata Viraśaiva Mahasabha

Unlike the Mahachaitra controversy, the Dharmakarana controversy in 1997 started when the ABVM raised voice and started an agitation against the novel.\(^\text{14}\) The Mahasabha is not a religious organisation but an association. Like several other

\(^{12}\) For more information on Kasturi Devi’s views see Vacana Bala (the power of vacanas) (2003: 36-42).

\(^{13}\) For the poems see Kalyana Kirana (Sep. 2000)
associations\textsuperscript{15} of the Viraśaiva community, the Mahasabha is too proud of its corporate nature. Any Viraśaiva can enrol as a member of the Mahasabha. It was established in 1905 with the goal of working for the overall development of the community. It played a major role in the progress of the community during the colonial period. Unlike, the \textit{Rashtriya Basava Dal}, the ABVM claims the constituency of \textit{all} members of the community irrespective of caste/class. It has several sub-branches all over Karnataka and it works to sustain unity and achieve the overall growth of the community. When compared with the \textit{Basava Dal} and other such organisations, the ABVM is relatively flexible, secular and modern. A point to notice here is that the mutts, the corporate institutions and caste associations do not exist mutually an exclusive and autonomous space. They indeed depend on each other for the resources of self-definition and other identification. The fact that several Viraśaiva mutts have supported and recognised the ABVM speaks about the mutual relationship.

The ABVM has a love-hate relationship with the MM. The \textit{Vacana Deepti} controversy widened the gap between the ABVM and MM.\textsuperscript{16} During the \textit{Dharmakarana} controversy, the ABVM was very active in mobilizing, representing and shaping the opinions of the Viraśaivas to press the Karnataka Government to take action against the author and the novel\textsuperscript{17}.

The said controversy was not just confined to the question of interpretation. The author’s caste background was also invoked to sensationalise the issue. But the very fact that it could produce a marketable feeling of oneness among some sections of the Viraśaivas is significant. In our considered opinion, the controversy signifies the conventional divide between the Brahmins and the Viraśaivas in Karnataka and the

\textsuperscript{15} Virasaiva Sahakara Sangha (Viraśaiva Co-operative Society) is another association that acts, as a facilitator for the urban Viraśaivas to cater to their financial and domestic needs. They are found mainly in towns and cities.

\textsuperscript{16} In my conversation with a sub-editor of \textit{Basava Patha} (a Kannada journal devoted to the dissemination of Basava’s ideals) he informed me that MM’s act of changing the \textit{ankitanaama} is indeed a grave mistake. According to him, MM is after fame and since she has nothing much to offer to the society she creates disturbance in the society. The conversation was held on 21\textsuperscript{st}, June 2002.

\textsuperscript{17} For information on the objections raised by the Mahasabha refer chapt. 2, pp. 91-96.
antagonism is maintained in/by discourses of caste. Since the author is a Brahmin, his writing is seen as deliberate attempt to tarnish the image of the Virašaiva icons.

As part of the ABVM's agitation against the novel, a committee was set up for *Ganachara*. The committee was comprised of Vishwanathareddy Mudnal and Bhimanna Khandre to oversee the activities of the committee. The committee proposed to punish those who reproached Shivachara¹⁹ and Shiva Sharanas. In order to avoid any misgivings about Ganachara²⁰, the committee justified its relevance with modern notion of *Satyagraha*, propounded by Gandhi. Mudnal pointed out that Ganachara could not be constructed as an act of fundamentalism for it meant only the protection of religion. He held that it is a mechanism to bring the wrongdoers back to the right path. Its intention is not to go for 'blood bath' but to achieve its goals through non-violent means. They pointed out that non-violence should not be taken as weakness of the Virašaivas. Self-sacrifice is also a way of conducting the Ganachara and therefore, Mudnal observed fast unto death to pressurise the government to ban the novel. The committee called for sacrifice of one's life, if inevitable, to protect the Virašaiva religion. The plan of action under the principle of Ganachara was intended to protect the religion. Here one can see how the conventional principle is reinterpreted and put to use to achieve an immediate goal. It is a strategic, pragmatic move to reinforce Virašaiva principles in modern times. We need to consider it as an invention rather than a revival of the past and in that we differ from Vasavi’s analysis discussed in the introduction. The ABVM considered P.V.Narayana as a *bhavi* because he is a Brahmin but his novel for his writing offended the Virašaiva beliefs²¹.

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¹⁸ For more information on Ganachara, see chapt. 2, p.93.
¹⁹ It means that one should dedicate one's deeds to society on the basis of the belief that the world is a reality and Shiva is a real. One is not expected to speak against Lord Shiva or Linga.
²⁰ In the Virašaiva hagiographies of Basava, Chennabasavanna and A llama Prabhu, the term Ganachara is depicted as a tool to punish those who do not respect Lord Shiva or Linga. The term entailed some sort of 'violence'.
²¹ The Virašaiva Mahasabha of Manwi taluq passed a resolution endorsing the formation of the committee in its meeting held on 29th, March 1997.
It is revelatory to compare the views of ABVM with MM’s views\textsuperscript{22}. Also, important to note here is that she did not take any lead role in the controversy and did not directly participate in the agitation. However, she condemned the ignorance of P.V. Narayana about the Linga and Lingayathism. She pointed out that the Lingayath religion was premised on the strong ideals of the vacanas and the philosophy of ishtalinga. She cautioned that those who propagate ideals of Virasaivism did not have the right to use vacanas towards their goal. She did not have any doubt that P.V. Narayana followed the doctrines of Virasaivism. Her notion of Lingayathism was against Virashaiva hagiographers like Harihara, Raghavanka or Palkurike Somanatha, on whose evidence the ABVM made allegations against the novel. According to her, these medieval poets exaggerated the lives of Sharanas and they did not give accurate and honest details about their noble thoughts, their ideals of devotion and religion. She listed some of the loopholes found in Virasaiva puranas as such:

a) Basava and Allama Prabhu were depicted as the incarnations of Shivaganas (the members of the divine court of Lord Shiva at Kailasa.) But Basava who fought against metaphysical beliefs, was against any conception of heaven or heathen. Allama Prabhu was a step ahead and did not spare the Shiva Sharanas who gave importance to metaphysical notions.

b) Basava was a worshipper of Lord Shiva in his childhood but when he realised the significance of the Linga, he became the worshipper of Lingadeva. Since Harihara, Bhimakavi and Somanatha believed in Lord Shiva, they failed to comprehend Basava’s concept of God. They inserted Shaiva philosophy into the biographies of Basava.

There is also a general belief among the academicians that the medieval poets institutionalised the religion, which originally stood against any kind of institutionalisation. K. Ishwaran, a sociologist, is one among them. He has also discussed the origin and the contemporary state of the religion. He too does not use the concept

\textsuperscript{22} MM also demanded ban on the novel. For her views on the novel see, \textit{Kalyana Kirana}, Vol.31, No.1, 2000.
Viraśaiva anywhere. He says that the post-twelfth movement witnessed a steady institutionalisation of the religion and many Lingayath seers propagated the religion all over Karnataka. It was during this institution-building stage that the medieval poets inserted many unwanted doctrines into Lingayath religion. During this period many vested interests subverted the original objectives of the vacana movement (Isahwaran, 1983: 80). He cites an example of Harihara who popularised the doctrine of Divine Incarnation in his hagiographies of Shiva Sharanas. Ishwaran says,

So far as the Sarana tradition is concerned, there is no scope whatsoever for the concept of Divine Incarnation, for the simple reason that the central Sharana notion of the personal Linga is directly antithetical to such a concept (Ishwaran, 1983:71).

Like Ishawaran, there are many who distinguish between the Linga traditions as opposed to the Shaiva tradition.

MM wanted to demonstrate that the contemporary religious leaders as well as the creative writers grossly misunderstood Basava and his followers. In contrast to MM, the members of the ABVM did not highlight the contradictions between vacanas and the Viraśaiva puranas. They quoted several puranas liberally to show the misrepresentation of Sharanas in the novel. ABVM, unlike MM's religious outfits, could not afford to use the religious terminology beyond a point. Its operational sphere is the Kannada public sphere which makes the ABVM to use the vocabulary of civil society and nation. This dimension emerges very clearly in its employment of terminologies in defence of religious sentiments. The ABVM opposed the novel in terms of 'dignity of women', 'authentic history' 'distortion of historical truth', community sentiments and the 'unity of the Viraśaiva community' to mobilise opinion against the novel.

Collective interpretation of the Viraśaivas did not bother about the intentional or authorial fallacy. It was their interpretation that defined the intentions of the author. What mattered to them was the challenge posed by the novel to the received beliefs of the community and the anxiety of losing control over the narratives of Viraśaivism. Obviously the challenge is posed by the secularisation of these narratives that bring out
the internal differences thus breaking the monolithic constructions of Viraśaivism. There are new challenges thrown open by new socio-political realities in Karnataka. Therefore, the question before us is why a politically strong community such as the Viraśaiva community is so anxious and oversensitive to narratives in public sphere in the background of changing realities. Here we need to examine the political scenario as well as changes in the social relations between the Virasaiva community and various other social groups in Karnataka over the last thirty years in order to understand the anxiety and sensitivity of the Viraśaivas.

VI

Emergence of New Social Groups and the Public Sphere

Examining the controversy around M.F. Hussain's paintings in 1997, Monica Juneja observes:

Reading, viewing, listening do not subject consumers of a work to the omnipotence of a single aesthetic message that they absorb and which conditions them. Rather these acts make it possible to reinterpret or redefine intended meanings, also to question, defy or resist them. Works of art then, assimilated by different individuals and communities, absorbed through the filters of multiple identities, enter into a field of exchange and dialogue within a space in which contesting interpretations can be played out and engage critically with one another (Juneja, 1997:155).

Juneja demonstrates how the Right Wing Hindu forces are desperately trying to claim their monopoly over the public sphere now being 'infiltrated' by different castes and social groups. The Right Wing monopoly over the public sphere is translated into the ultimate determinant of the question of sexuality and social relations. This monopoly, Juneja feels, is characterised by two factors: cause as well as effect. That is, the Right Wing forces feel unable to handle the question of caste stratification and conflict within Hindu society, causing its particular definition of 'Indianness' to disintegrate under force of its own contradictions and repressions. The effect of this disintegration results in the reaction of the Hindu forces to suppress plurality and "to destroy the public sphere within which multiple perspectives and identities can find expression, engage with, contest, subvert and replenish one another" (ibid: 157).

Let us recall Maarga-I, Mahachaitra, Vacana Deepti and Dharmakarana controversies in the light of above explanation. They signify the crisis of the Viraśaiva
community in the contemporary period. It is the result of changing social, political, religious and literary equations between the Viraśaiva community and the emerging subaltern forces in the public sphere in Karnataka. As we argued in the introduction, it is not that 'crisis' is out there in the socio-political realms, it is also the result of certain kind of formation. The Viraśaivas feel 'under seize' due to the societal transformations and they construct a discourse of 'crisis' to give vent to their anxiety. Now, let us know more about the societal changes that have created an anxiety 'community under seize' for the Viraśaivas.

Politically there is a sea change in the balance of power between different caste groups, especially after the 1970s, in Karnataka. The political rise of new identities has significantly altered the perceptions about literature which no more can be seen from aesthetic perspectives or high culture is unrelated to the society. As rightly pointed out by Tejaswini Niranjana, the political changes such as the politics of Emergency in 1977, followed by the popular victory over the Congress in 1977 and the emergence of women, Dalit, peasant and tribal movements resulted in changing the discourses of literature and culture in Karnataka. These shifts have been the consequences of entry of a new group of writers in Kannada literature. She points out,

This period [1970s] is marked by the widely successful leftist Samudaya theatre movement, the predominantly non-Brahmin Bandaya [Revolt] writers' movement, and a self-conscious resurgence of women's writing (Niranjana, 1994:145).

Apart from the 'progressive' forces, the emergences of Dalit and feminist discourses have affected the general perception of Kannada literature. Naturally, the above changes have altered the ways of reading vacanas and perceiving Viraśaivism. They wrought in fundamental changes in the readership, production and consumption of Viraśaiva literature. This change gets reflected in the 'literary movements' of Kannada.

The first conference of the Bandaya Kannada Literary Movement in 1979 evolved a manifesto to resist any form of exploitation and oppression of the subaltern by the upper castes in society. The Bandaya writers were fascinated by the social ideals of Lohia
Socialism and Marxism. They emphasized on the social commitment of the creative writers. The first conference brought several non-Brahmin writers, including the Dalit writers, together. They criticized the discriminations based on caste, class, gender and religion. The newly educated people from the non-Brahmin communities supported the Bandaya writers intensely. They were for social justice against any form of oppression. Due to this social base, despite its theoretical ignorance and ideological inconsistency, the Bandaya literary movement and its *shudra* voice caught the imagination of the backward classes of Karnataka.

It is not out of place to mention how a remark on Kannada literature by a Dalit politician (1972) created furore in the Kannada literary circles. B.Basavalingappa, the civil administration minister in the Devaraj Urs government, described the Kannada literature as *Boosa* (the fodder), obviously referring to the shallowness of the 'aesthetic literature' and the upper caste blindness to social suffering and exploitation. The whole lot of upper caste creative writers were angered by his remarks and created an acrimonious scene. The *Boosa* controversy was so intense that it created large-scale social and administrative disturbance and culminated in the demand for Basavalingappa's resignation from the ministry. Throughout Karnataka, colleges and universities observed *bandhs* for and against the minister. In many places like Kanakapura, Mysore and Bangalore, the agitation turned violent and the police had to resort to *lathi charge* to disperse the pro-and anti-Basavalingappa supporters. The supporters were obviously Dalits. Many Kannada literary pundits like Jaware Gowda and Beechi condemned Basavalingappa for his 'irresponsible' remarks on the Kannada literature. The Kannada literary world was vertically divided into two groups: the conservatives and the progressives. There were many progressives who justified Basavalingappa's remarks. They tried apprising the public of the Dalit ideology behind Basavalingappa's remarks and criticized the castiesm of the upper caste writers for blaming Basavalingappa.

The first Dalit writers' conference was held in 1976. The *Boosa* controversy was the inspiration for this conference in many ways. Under the leadership of B. Krishnapa,
a new platform for the Dalits called Dalit Sangharsh Samiti was floated. Basavalingappa inaugurated its first public meeting. These political circumstances and platforms were also responsible for Dalit writings to emerge gradually in Kannada literary world. Another distinguishing feature of this period was the emergence of women writing in Kannada literature. The new writers opposed the oppression, questioned the accepted norms of life, asserted their social identity, condemned patriarchal structure, re-examined the mainstream Kannada literature from Dalit and women's perspective, and fought for social justice and equality.

The emergence of Dalits in the social and political scenario marks a new beginning in the social and political history of modern Karnataka. They disrupted the established discourses of society and culture. Changes in the policies pertaining to education, government jobs, land reforms and various other initiatives by the government in this decade enhanced the self-confidence and self-consciousness of the subaltern classes and communities. Devaraj Urs who represented the Congress party could win the state elections in 1972 by the tacit support of hitherto marginalized sections of the society. The Backward classes except the Viraśaivas and the SC/STs supported Devaraj Urs. He was successful in breaking the stronghold of the Vokkaligas25 and the Viraśaiva community by means of his pragmatic politics of building alliance with the subaltern sections. A commission was set up with the chairmanship of Havanur to reconsider the reservation policy in the state. This commission was known as the Havanur Backward Class Commission. The Commission not only considered the Viraśaivas as forward community but also included several new communities to the backward classes. Many lower caste/class groups of the Viraśaiva community came under reservation. In this connection, Mahesh Tippashetti observes,

23 Many branches of the Samiti were opened across Karnataka. They addressed the problems of Dalits like landlessness, caste violence, education, etc. Above all, they tried to create an awareness of Dalit identity through the reformation activities.

24 In 1999, a silver jubilee function in memory of twenty-five years of Boos a controversy was held. In the function, a seminar was organized which discussed social transformation, cultural life and challenges for the Dalit movement in future. Karnataka Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, 2000, published the proceedings of the seminar.

25 Vokkalinga community is the second largest non-Brahmin community in Karnataka. While the Viraśaivas constitute 17% of the total population in Karnataka, the Vokkaligas are 14%.
When Devaraj Urs implemented the recommendations of the Havanur report in the name of social justice, many professional sub-castes of the Viraśaiva community like Madivala, Jeera, Hoogara, Mali, Hadapada, Ambigera Kumbara, Bovi were considered as backward castes (Tippashetti, 2000:2).

The political interventions of the Congress government increased the internal dissidences within the Viraśaiva community. The move by the Congress government rigorously politicised the lower caste groups in Karnataka, a move the upper castes found very hard to stomach. Tippashetti notices that a decision to implement the Havanur commission report has made the lower and economically disadvantaged groups to rethink their social origin and redress their problems. They still identified Basava as their guru but severed their allegiance with the upper caste mutts. As substitution to the mainstream mutts, they floated their own mutts and caste associations in villages and towns.

The upper caste Viraśaivas were unhappy for they were forced to give up quite a few of the comforts and benefits enjoyed by them earlier and share the resources with the lower sections of the community including the Dalits. They strongly opposed the Havanur Commission and pressurized the government not to implement the recommendations. Bhimmanna Khandre opposed the recommendations of the commission and burnt the copies of the report in the state assembly (ibid: 3). The then president of the ABVM, J.B.Mallaradhya, severely criticized the recommendations of the commission. He strongly argued for the continuation of backward class status to all the Viraśaivas. He held a series of press conferences in 1977 as part of campaign against the Havanur Commission. But Urs did not give much importance to them. He exploited the anti upper caste feelings of the lower caste groups and succeeded in his effort. He introduced a series of reformist measures for the disadvantaged sections of the society. He also actively supported the revival of caste associations especially of the artisan and service castes. He channeled money and resources to their caste associations. Awakening the consciousness of the disadvantaged groups was the vocabulary of politics then. The ordinary voters were exposed to the advantages of political power and processes.
The singular achievement of the Devaraj Urs government, widely appreciated by many is land reforms. Land redistribution helped the disadvantaged groups a great deal and gave a decisive blow to the upper caste monopoly over the land. The Vīraśaiva community is one among the worst affected for they had to lose their traditional hold on the agricultural land.

Thus, the overall picture of the 1970s was one of transformation and change. The upper castes felt the force of the competition in the areas of government jobs, education and politics. The entry of the subaltern sections into the modern spaces, encouraged by the state for its own reasons of legitimacy and convenience, went a long way in checking the Vīraśaiva dominance in the politics of Karnataka. This change in the public domain has a lasting impact on the ways in which the Vīraśaiva identity has come to be constituted in the contemporary period.

In the religious sphere too, the upper caste Vīraśaivas had to make room for the emerging caste associations and religious organizations. In 1988, Basavalinga Swamy established Ambigara Caudayy Mutt in Naagaralu village of Bagalkote district. Ambigara Caudayya was a Sharana and a contemporary of Basava. Though he did not belong to an untouchable caste, it is certainly not a caste of the pure category of 'twice-born' Hindus. He was a ferryman by profession. He was one of the leaders in the twelfth century Vīraśaiva movement and composed several vacanas. The Ambigara Caudayy Mutt was established with the aim of propagating the ideals of the twelfth century Sharanas. Shri Basavalinga Swamy converted many people of danga sect into Lingayath religion and appointed Gurubasava Swamy as the head of the mutt. These people conduct religious functions and rituals in this mutt. Every year they celebrate the Jayanthostava of Ambigara Caudayya26.

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26 For more information: see, Chadrashakhar Naranapura's Karnatakada Vīraśaiva Mathagalu (Vīraśaiva Mutts of Karnataka, 2002, p. 676).
The changing scenario awakened at least a few religious heads of the Vīraśaiva community. In the heat of pro and anti Mandal agitations in 1990, Shri Mahanta Swamy of Chittaragi mutt (Ilakal) declared in 1994 that a Dalit would succeed him as the mathadisha. The left organizations, Dalits and progressive intellectuals welcomed this declaration. But the pontiff of the Mooru Savira mutt took strong objections to the move. The head of this influential and wealthy mutt, Gangadhara Rajayogindra Mahaswamy, categorically rejected the proposal of Mahanta Swamy and laid exclusive claim to take decision in this regard since the Chittaragi mutt came under his jurisdiction. Many Vīraśaiva devotees denounced Mahanta Swamy’s declaration as cheap gimmicks. However, not all mutts are hostile to the Dalits. There are many other Vīraśaiva mutts, which are ready to accommodate the Dalits in their mutt system.

VII

The Crisis in Vīraśaivism

The new wave of the Dalit-Bandaya movements provided a new framework for the understanding of the Vacanas. There are numerous proposals on the importance of and justification for rewriting the history of Vīraśaivism and the vacana movement from perspectives of the subaltern. Now the focus was on the lower caste vacana poets as well as women poets and their contribution to Vīraśaivism. Several studies revealed the contradictions and tensions between the upper caste devotees and the lower caste vacana poets. The subaltern social groups retrieved this critical tradition to expose the religious discrimination and exploitation of the mainstream Vīraśaivism. In this regard, Chandrashekar Patil, a poet, critic and playwright, observes,

The Navodaya and the Navya writers in Kannada emphasized on the literary merits of vacana movement, now—in the context of Dalit and Bandaya movements—there are efforts to analyse the multiple aspects of vacanas. In such studies it is natural that the life and personality of central figure of the movement, nature of his proposed concepts, inevitable strengths and limitations of the period’s social conditions will be focused (Patil, 1996:13).

27 The agitations were between the upper castes and the backward classes over the reservation policies recommended by the Mandal Commission and implemented by the V.P. Singh government.
28 This controversy is documented in Basava Belagu (1994, Vol.8, No. 4) and Paramjyothi a home journal of Mooru Savira mutt (1994, Vol.27, No.1).
Dalit movement and writings have not confined to only projecting their "own" culture and experiences or creating alternative cultural/social systems. They have actively intervened in the traditional spheres of the upper castes. As we have already discussed, in the context of *Maarga* and *Mahachaitra* controversies, the Dalit organizations have supported Kalburgi and Shivaprakash. In all these occasions, they have productively used the values of vacanas to speak back to their Viraśaiva masters.

L. Basavaraju, an erudite Kannada scholar, relentlessly researched on vacanas and Viraśaivism and contested the communal/religious appropriation of vacanas by the religious heads and the politicians. As Mogalli Ganesh, a Dalit writer, points out "Basavaraju unmasked the communal garb around vacana tradition through his well researched works" (Ganesh, 1993:6). In an interview for the *Lankesh Patrike* in 1993, Basavaraju explains that he was uncomfortable and unhappy with the communal framework within which vacanas were read and understood. He found it necessary to reinterpret the vacanas in order to dismantle the communal framework. He blames the rigidity of the mutts and seers for communalisation of the vacanas. According to him, the Dalit-Bandaya movement may be traced back to the twelfth century vacana movement for the vacana literature was initiated, produced and popularised by the lower caste Sharanas and not by the upper castes. In this sense the twelfth century vacana movement was secular. Vacanas of Madara Chennayya, Dohara Kakkayya, Samboli Nagideva, Ganesha Masanayya and others truly represent the vacana movement. He believes that some of the lower caste Sharanas lived before Basava. They enriched the vacana literature much before Basava. In his views, Basava was the follower of his elder contemporaries such as Madara Chennayya and Dohara Kakkayya. Basavaraju does not subscribe to the mainstream deification of Basava but emphasizes the values and beliefs of lower castes expressed through the vacanas.

Another instance of identifying Viraśaiva icons with lower castes is Mahadev Banakar's research on *Marulasiddheshwara Charitre* (History of Marulasiddheshwara). Banakar's research shows that Marulasiddheshwara, a lower caste Sharana belonging to the cobbler's community, established the *Ujjani Peetha*, one of the religious centres of
the Gurustala tradition. Many Gurustala Viraśaivas challenged and opposed his views. They believed that Marulasiddheshwara did not establish the Peetha.\(^{29}\)

There are other works, which have focused on lower caste women Sharanas too. H. L. Pushpa has written on women vacanakaras whose ideas, beliefs and ideals are not at all researched properly. She points out that a) their vacanas highlight the value of work, b) they criticize superstitious practices and opportunism, and c) they give ample details about woman and her place in society. Molige Mahadevi, Amuge Rayamma, Sule Sankavva, Urilinga Peddi and Mukthayakk are some of the lower caste women sharanes whose contribution to the vacana movement is appreciated (Pushpa, 1993:101-116)\(^{30}\). B.M.Puttaiah, a Kannada critic, has written about the aalkshita (ignored) vacanakaras (1999). He criticizes the commonsensical view that vacana movement was radical. According to him, such perception about vacanas has kept the mainstream vacanakaras as the main source of reference and has ignored the contribution of thousands of lower caste Sharanas. Lakshman Telagavi, a history professor in Kannada University, considers Madara Chennayya, Dohara Kakayya and Madara Dhulayya as the first Dalit writers in the literary history of Karnataka (Telagavi, 1999:97).

The overall academic scholarship in the post 1970s attempted to secularise and democratise the reading of Vacanas. Basava as a sole cultural icon came under interrogation after such scholarly work. It has made a small but steady beginning in destabilizing the dominant institutions and discourses of Viraśaivism. Many lower caste Viraśaivas have strongly challenged the mainstream Viraśaiva mutt system. Dalits writers productively used the vacanas of the downtrodden to oppose the dominance of the upper caste Viraśaivas. Polytheistic traditions of the Dalit Sharanas have been posed against the monolithic tradition of Viraśaivism. All these have resulted in decentring the twelfth century vacana movement with Basava as its central figure. The subaltern consciousness

\(^{29}\) Banakar narrates this incident while speaking against Dharmakarana. For more details see, the official report of eighty fourth session of Karnataka legislative council, March, 1997, pp. 179-180.

\(^{30}\) On another occasion she discusses the folk elements in vacanas (Pushpa, 2003: 61-70). She says that the Dalit sharanas like Allama Prabhu, Devara Dasimayya, Kannada Kayakada Ammidevayya, Bahurupi Chowdayya, etc. reflected their traditions and professions in their vacanas.
(within and outside the community) that forwards the notion of equality and casteless society propounded by vacanakaras is consolidating itself with the active support of the secular forces 'causing' displeasure for the upper caste Viraśaivas.

**Negotiating with the Changing Situations**

What are the implications of these developments on those upper caste Viraśaivas who have been enjoying social and political dominance in Karnataka? How have they responded to the changing situations? How do they respond to the new situation?

Interventions of the subaltern sections into the narratives of Viraśaivism have resulted in two kinds of responses from the dominant Viraśaivas. They either attempted to appropriate the new interpretations or whenever they found it a difficult task they suppressed such interpretations. All the upper caste groups came together in this effort. As Baraguru Ramachandrappa rightly points out,

> In recent times, there has been a consolidation of caste formations in the social sphere. The weaker sections have come to regard the social principle of uplifting those who are oppressed because of caste as their right...But it is an irony that even as the low castes are getting organized to fight for their rights, the upper castes are strengthening their organizations (Baraguru, 1997).

Baraguru made these remarks in the context of Dharmakaarana controversy. According to him, the reactionary behaviour of the upper caste Viraśaivas was due to the emergence of subaltern consciousness. He said,

> In recent times such controversies have become common and they are the outcome of unilateral attempts by certain castes to gain an upper hand. Conspiracies are being continually hatched to spoil the social sphere through caste arrogance and self-glorification. By getting organized, the powerful castes are not only trying to reestablish their social status, which is under threat in the new situation, but also trying to gain political clout (ibid).

Since the Viraśaiva mutts have begun accepting patronage from hitherto marginalized social groups, the upper caste Viraśaivas have become restless. The crisis felt by them is

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so acute that a recent convention of the Virasaiva seers in Kudalasangama\textsuperscript{32} passed a resolution that it was high time for the Virásaiva-Lingayath community\textsuperscript{33} shed its internal differences and to unite for the social and the political interests. Through out this convention the trope of 'community under seize' was employed to articulate the situation in which the Viraśaivas were caught. It was reported in the Hindu (2\textsuperscript{nd}, June, 2003) that, 

A larger number of swamis of different sub-sects of Veerasaivism on Sunday pledged to bring about unity and amity among the people of various castes and sub-castes within the Veerasaiva-Lingayath community.

Rambhapuri Jagadguru emphasized the need for unity among the sub-sects of the community, which, according to him, was on the decline both politically and socially. He urged the Viraśaivas, to rise to the occasion as one community and regain its lost glory. He strongly felt the need for bigger representation in the power corridor for the Viraśaivas. The convention ended with a decision to sort out the internal differences and chalking out plans to re-emerge socially and politically.

MM's insistence on monotheism is also in a way a response to the subaltern consciousness. The middle classes of Viraśaivas no more worship Basava or Lord Shiva alone. They worship non-Viraśaiva gods and goddesses too. Lord Ganesha, Lord Venkateshwara, Lord Raghavendra, Lord Ayyappa, Lord Manjunatha are some of the gods worshipped by the urban middle class Viraśaivas. They participate in the religious and spiritual programmes organised by the non-Virasaivas. They visit several temples of non-Virasaiva faith. In the rural areas, they worship local deities of various kinds. The Brahmin priests still hold the monopoly over important ritual ceremonies in temples. The criticism of the 'secular' forces against the corruption of spirituality, manipulative religion, deceit and extravagance of the Virasaiva mutts has added salt to the injury. They allege that the Virasaiva mutts have remained immersed in their ritual jamboree and internal squabbles.

\textsuperscript{32}This religious convention was held in June, 2003.  
\textsuperscript{33}Both Gurustala and Viraktha seers attended this meeting. These leaders strongly urged the Viraśaivas and politicians to unite and resolve the internal differences so as to encounter the social and political crisis of the community in the contemporary period.
Decline in religious belief has caused a severe concern and anxiety in people like MM. That is why, MM denounces the polytheism of Hindu religion and urges the youth to emerge as a "one religious force" and to practice monotheism (MM, 2003:8). She believes that orthodoxy and superstitious elements in the Hindu community have made the path easy for other religions to attract the Viraśaiva youth and convert them (ibid: 8). Her conviction is that Lingananda Swamy’s philosophy of monotheism and the notion of Ishtalinga can present such hazards to the community.

Studies on vacanas from Dalit perspectives and persistent interrogation of monopolistic hold of the Viraśaiva mutts have proved it difficult for the Viraśaivas and the community to regain control over the discourses of Viraśaiva religion, literature and history. That is why, regaining control over the narratives of Viraśaivism is very important for people like MM. It is through the narratives of vacanas that she has tried to shape the collective imagination of the Viraśaivas. The three literary controversies discussed in the first chapter are the symptomatic of this anxiety, crisis and response of the community to the present situation. In all the three controversies, the leaders of the community have made persistent efforts to regain and reinforce the centrality of Basava for Viraśaivism.

The Viraśaiva seers also have tried to represent themselves as the champions of the downtrodden. For instance, MM was angry with H.S.Shivaprakash for using Dalit Sharanas for his narrow ideologies in his play. According to her, Dalit Sharanas could never speak lightly about Basava because they were his followers and they adored him. An article by Kumara Kakkayya Pola in Kalyana Kirana (1994:13) condemns the ill treatment of the lower caste Sharanas in the play. Pola describes Shivaprakash as a traitor for presenting Madivala Machideva and other followers of Basava in a low taste. In his opinion, the portrayal of Dalit Sharanas in the play is against the popular beliefs about Basava. Kalyana Kirana published vacanas of Allama Prabhu, Madivala Machideva and
Dohara Kakkayya who praise the greatness of Basava to show that Basava was beyond any criticism because he championed the cause of the downtrodden.

The Viraśaiva mutts and religious leaders have not been totally against Dalit or subaltern articulations. As discussed in the Mahanta case just before, the Viraśaiva seers have begun to take initiatives to promote studies on the Dalit traditions of the vacana movement. Many mutts are open to the idea of including Dalits into their mutt system. However, the dominant Viraśaiva mutts recognize other Viraśaiva heads from the lower castes background only if the latter do not pose any kind of threat or challenge to the authority of the mainstream mutt tradition. The mainstream mutts still would like to hold or renew their power and authority to define and decide the community matters.

The core dispute and disagreements between the proponents and the opponents of the ban on the ‘controversial’ texts were not settled by text because it was the ‘interpretive’ angle of the interpreter, which was disputed, disagreed and condemned. One danger in these interpretations was that the vacanas were treated as a mere collection of proof-texts for their respective claims of ‘right’ interpretation. Such treatment rendered the vacanas to atomistic and ahistorical status. Consequently the interpreters foiled to consider the literary and historical trajectories of the vacanas as discussed in the previous chapters.

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34 Basava Mattu Dalilodaya (1984 and 1991) contains several articles that demonstrate Basava’s fight for the emancipation of Dalits.