



IMPACT FACTOR:3.021

PP:114to119

RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF BHAKTI THOUGHT IN GURU NANAK TEACHINGS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to describe the genesis of the Bhakti cult in the medieval India and its implication. Bhakti Movement of Medieval India was shaking the social structure and challenging the privileges and authority of the custodians of religion and was trying to establish direct relation between God and men. The study displays the basic significance of the Bhakti movement in the religious, social, economic and cultural spheres of its contemporary times. The nature of the Bhakti Movement had been analyzed with special inclination to forms and concepts which re-emerged during this phase. A brief analysis of the religious concerns and reforms of Guru Nanak had been depicted and their contribution in the socio-religion activities of the time. The study accentuated the bhakti movement from the historical perspective and the significance which emphasis on the hope and inspiration to the masses who understand their faith rather than being exploited by the hierarchical caste. The Bhakti Movement is an intrinsic spiritual or religious movement, but also had strong socio-economic connotation.

Key Words: - Faith, Bhakti, Hindus, reformers, saints and religion.

INTRODUCTION:-

Genesis of the Bhakti Cult: - The devotional worship of God with the ultimate object of attaining moksha or salvation is called Bhakti. In the religious terminology Bhakti means the worship of a personal God and is a spirit of love and the attainment of liberation. The cult of Bhakti is as old as the Indian religious tradition going back to the prehistoric times of the Indus Valley Civilization and Culture. We find mention of Bhakti in the Vedas, Upanishads, the Epics Puranas and the Religious Scriptures like, The Bhagvada Gita, The Bhagavata Purana, The wings thoughts of Vaishnava acharyas. The evolution and early development of Bhakti thought and ideology, is said to have been originated in the South in the teachings of the Tamilian Mystic- saints of the 7th- 9th Centuries A.D, as a reaction against the growing tide of Buddhism and Jainism. It flourished in South India for about two centuries through its well-defined wings, Saivism and Vaishnavism. The exponents of Shiva Worship were collectively called as *Nayakars* while those of Vishnu became known as *Alvars*. It was systematized by Ramanuja in the 12th century A.D. and propagated throughout India. It was spread in the north by the Ramananda who was greatly influenced by the teachings of Ramanuja. However the impact of Islam on the rise of the Bhakti Cult cannot be denied. This impact primarily to be seen in the Nirguns sect of Bhakti, was not so much metaphysical and spiritual, but at its social and organizational level. All the higher thinkers, all the religious reformers, all the sincere devotees among the Hindus from the earlier times, have proclaimed one and only one supreme God behind the countless deities of popular worship and have declared the equality of all true admirers and placed a simple sincere faith above religious ceremonies. So what really happened after the Muslim conquest was a re-emphasis on the essential monotheistic character of the idea of God and the superiority of the path of devotion over ritualistic sacrifices and mere books of knowledge and wisdom. In analyzing the nature of the Bhakti Movement, the first question we would discuss is, whether it was a revivalist movement. It is true that concepts like monotheism, a personal God and other concepts of Bhakti are found in earlier Hindu philosophy. However the fact is that there is no consciousness of a revival in the writing of the Bhakti leaders, no reference to pure Vedic literature and rituals of pollution of Hinduism, or recreation of golden past. Bhakti Movement is not a revivalist movement. We could use the term neo-Bhaktism for the particular effervescence that took place between 13th- 15th centuries. The fact that a substantial number of Bhakti saints, particularly among the Nirgunas, were from the lower classes and the nature of their teaching indicated a definite social content in the Bhakti movement with the thrust being against the caste system and its manifestations. This had led to opinion that Bhakti movement was more of a social rather than a religious movement. The use of the term Bhakti gives the impression of a homogenous movement. This is far from the truth being done for the sake of the convenience. A major division which deserves note was between the Saguna sect and the Nirguna sect. In the former, there was a belief in highly personalized deity and the predominance of an emotional approach and appeal Mirabai and Tuslidas were among the leaders of this sect. They rejected the rationale of vedantism, believed in temple traditions, supported idol worship, and directly and indirectly supported the caste system. The Nirguna believed in an impersonal God. Kabir's- Ram and Nanak-Hari are used in an impersonal sense, not the mythical, physical sense. They followed rational approach, rejected caste and

idol worship and questioned brahminical superiority. The Sagunas were reformists and functioned within the establishment, the Nirgunas on the other hand, were non-conformists and anti-establishment. This however, is a very colossal division of the Bhakti saints for the sake of convenience.

Significance of Bhakti Movement: - The basic significance of the Bhakti saints is their partial success in creating a climate of understanding between Hindus and Muslims and providing a framework within which they could meet without synthesis. Thus, the Bhakti Movement had profound effects in the religious, social, economic and cultural spheres of its contemporary times. In religion, the Bhakti movement succeeded in diminishing the personification of deities, it loosened the rigid organisation of rituals. Its most important contribution in religion, however, is that it provided hope of spiritual salvation for lower classes and created an atmosphere of co-existence, in concept if not in practice, between them and their co-religionists they were alienated from. It provided an essential background to the ideas of Akbar and his concept of “*Tauhid*” or unity of all religions. Concurrently, there was a marked decline in the States of the Hindu priestly class and there was a decline of idol worship too.

Politically, it generated a similar movement at the topics reflected in Akbar’s concept of “*Wahadut-ul-Wajud*” and “*Sulh-I-Kul*” which imparted strength and stability to the Mughal Empire. It also provided strength and inspiration to the rebellious movements against the Mughals, like the Sikhs, Satnamis and Marathas. In the social context, though it failed to change the basic social structure. Though for the first time since 600 B.C, the tyranny of the social hierarchy was openly voiced and propagated from towns to villages. The pastoral heritage of the Jats had demanded them in relation to other peasant communities. They turned to Bhakti to protect against a social discrimination which had no material basis any longer. The Bhakti Movement also brought about the spiritual enfranchisement of women. The economic impact of the Bhakti movement was not direct though it did probably open up a large number of professions to the lower classes. This must have worked to enhance social mobility thereby widening up greater opportunities and thus increased productivity. Material life therefore, was not to be ignored; the economy thus got a boost with increase in Bhakti followers. In the culture sphere, the Bhakti Movement resulted in the coming to age of popular culture. The two major areas which developed are folklore and vernacular, both of which immensely enriched India’s heritage. The saints discarded the classical language Sanskrit and depended not on the force of inspiration derived from the texts, but on the rustic common use. Ramananda and Kabir enriched the eastern type of Hindi, Namdeva- Marathi, Mirabai and Surdas- Braj Bhasha, Tulsidas- Awadhi, Nanak-Punjabi, Bengali and Maithali were enriched by the Vaishnava’s who also enriched Tamil, Kananda and Telugu. Thus the Bhakti Movement stimulated evolution and enrichment of literature of the spoken languages. Consequently, literature, singing and music gained tremendous popularity during this period.

A PREVIEW OF GURU NANAK (1469-1538):- Guru Nanak an important Bhakti reformer of the period was the founder of the Sikh faith in India. He was born in 1469 A.D, in Talwandi, now Nankana Sahib in Pakistan to a Khatri (trader) family. Nanak turned a sanyasi, though temporarily and initiated the Bhakti Movement in north-western India. He emphasized on humanity of character and adherence to a high code of ethics in his teachings

rather than in dogmas. A pure monotheist, he sought to demolish the caste barrier. For Nanak God is 'Ek', 'The One.' His ideas remind the Upanishadic ideas when he says that God is simply one without a second. For Nanak God in his original aspect is Nirguna - Absolute, devoid of all attributes. Guru Nanak said that all creation rest of the Universe, *Paramatama* created *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Mahesha*. This seems that his attitude towards the deities of the Hindu religion is not different from his attitude towards the Hindu Scriptures. Nanak gave more importance on the recitation of the name of God. He says one should love the Name, because it is not a mere repetition of words but a *sadhana* (devotion). Nanak gives more emphasis on the repetition on Nam, without this performance life is useless, they are lucky who find treasure of Nam by the help of true Guru. Nam-Ras is ambrosial. Nanak used different names for Supreme. Most of them are *Govind*, *Gopal*, *Kartar*, *Hari*, *Jagadish*, *Thakur*, *Ram*, *Rahim*, *Karim* and *Sahib* etc., but in all he alone is and there is no other. The guru's tour was towards the east, which included the important religious places like Benaras, Patna and Gaya. He visited the holy places of the Hindus, mostly on restive occasions. For example, he went to Kurukshetra during the time of the big mela (fair). Similarly he reached Haridwar, where a large number of Hindus had assembled to have a dip in the sacred waters of the Ganges. In 1509, Nanak came to Puri where he saw the priests and other devotees of Jagannath performing *arti*, and explained the meaning of the term 'Arti, he said, means to get absorbed or merged in to the Lord. Traveling through various parts of India he came to Punjab and founded a new town called Kartarpur or the Creator's city, at the bank of the river Ravi. Guru Nanak went to the north and visited some yogis of the lower Himalayas, Nepal and Tibet and told them to be some use to the world and tried to convince them that they should exert themselves in the service of human beings. He said this because they were busy achieving their own moksha neglecting the entire human race. Guru Nanak carried the message of divine worship to every nook and corner of the country besides Ceylon and the Muslim places of pilgrimage at Mecca and Medina. During his travels, Guru Nanak might have collected the hymns of Kabir and Ravidas in Uttar Pradesh, of Jaidev in Bengal, of Namdev in Maharashtra and Shiekh Farid in Punjab. Guru Nanak adopted "Universal brotherhood" a concept of the sufi saints, to be his own slogan and championed the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. He introduced community lunch (Langar) at his *dehra* (a kin to the mathas of Sankaracharya) as a practical step to eradicate the evils of caste discrimination and untouchability from among his followers. Guru Nanak refused to wear the sacred thread on his body by which he decided to remain ever with the casteless. He composed hymns and sang them to the accompaniment of rabab, a stringed instrument played by his faithful attendant, Mardana. Purity of conduct and character was the first step in approaching God and secondly the guidance of Guru. He named formless God as "Akal Purush". His teachings are compiled in "Adi Granth". At the age of sixty-two, Guru Nanak returned to settle sown at Kartarpur where he took upon himself the duties of everyday life. He worked on his farm and provided source for his family. He held congregations and recited his hymns in the morning and evening. Kartarpur became the center of the Sikh faith which was gradually developing the characteristics of and organized religion. He died in Kartarpur in 1538. He chooses Angad as the new guru in place of his son. Though the teaching of Guru Nanak led a new religion, in the true sense he was a social reformer. He journeyed almost all the important places of

different religions and saw the social status of the people. He saw poverty, superstition, caste system and the miserable conditions of the women. Therefore social liberation of the people was a must. From the beginning of his social life, Guru Nanak was very conscious of the dignity of human beings. For him, the best way to serve God is to serve human beings. Guru Nanak considers God as the creator of all human beings. Therefore, all people are equal, irrespective of the diversity of caste, belief, faith, color, sex, and race. He stressed on universal brotherhood. He regarded the entire humanity as one family. On the other hand, Guru Nanak opposed the prevalent sati system in society and tried to give equal status to the women. Thus he traveled almost all part of India and awakened the demoralizing people to live a better life, but he himself lived a life of harmony and brotherhood. In fact he was a true social reformer who understood the problems of the people and tried to solve them. In brief, Guru Nanak stated his concept of God in the following manner: "There is one god His name is truth, He is the creator He is without fear and without halt. He is beyond time immortal, His spirit pervades the universe. He is not born, Nor does He die to be born again, He is self-existent By the guru's grace shalt thou worship Him". Guru Nanak can be said to be the pioneer of a mighty religious revolution. Guru Nanak supports his idea of monotheism with similes and metaphors. According to Nanak God is both transcendental and immanent. He is present in all things. When God is seen through the universe, we think of him as sargun (quality-full). In the words of Guru Nanak, he opines, "*There is but one God. His name is truth; he is the creator. He fears none; he is without hate. He never dies; he is beyond the cycle of births and death. He is self-illuminated. He is realized by the kindness of the true guru. He was true in the beginning; he was true when the ages commenced and has ever been true. He is also true now*". Again he says, "*By singing the Guru's hymns, I, the minstrel spread the lord glory. Nanak, by praising the true name, I have obtained the perfect Lord*". Guru Nanak and the Sikh Scriptures concentrate a wonderful amalgamation of civilizational and multicultural magnitudes of a society. Guru Nanak vigorously worked for the formation of social group, based on common social and moral code of conduct.

CONCLUSION: The brief assessment of this paper divulges the religious apprehensions and the life sketch of the Guru Nanak had been depicted and his impact in the socio-religion actions of the time. Bhakti Movement had shaken the social structure and challenged the privileges and authority of the custodians of religion and therefore was trying to establish direct relation between God and beings. Guru Nanak is the pioneer of Sikhism in India and was instrumental in establishing the colossal religion of the world through his teachings and revelations. Nanak focused on inner purity, spiritual and moral ethics of oneself towards the Lord. He was skeptical concerning caste and gender inequalities, idol worship, superficial observances, sacrificial sacraments, religious symbols, widow burning and many obsolete practices prevalent in the society which he believed was irrational and not conducive to liberation. He acknowledged on the law of karma, rebirth, admiration for Guru, importance of righteous conduct, selfless assertiveness, modesty and simplicity. Guru Nanak composed a set of poems known as "Japji" (recited as the Morning Prayer), Ashpati (Sanskrit Hymns), Baramah Tukari (Folk poetry) and Sidh Ghosth that is spiritual interfaith dialogue. Metaphorically, nineteen Ragas are written by Nanak in "Guru Granth Sahib" which is third

in number. The teachings of Guru Nanak is hitherto relevant in the contemporary world which is suffering from a deep moral and spiritual crises characterized by religious hostility, unbridled materialism, moral degeneration, superficial religiosity and exploitation of religion and religious symbols. The act of laying the foundations of a novel religion by Guru Nanak Dev, the foremost Guru of the Sikhs, comes to realizations not purely as an outcome of spiritual intensions but as a substitute to the general crises prevailing both in temporal and religious realms of the then society. The collectiveness and widespread emotional essence of Bhakti were thus rejuvenated in Sikhism, thus integrated the spiritual and temporal, multiethnic and civilizations aspects, and the instants of individuality and community.

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