Engaging Past through Religion: A Historical analysis of World Views in Indian Subcontinent 15ᵗʰ to 18ᵗʰ century

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of religion and world view, emerging out of religious practices, spiritual traditions etc., in shaping space of living beings. Contrary to the paradigm of situating religion as outcome of matter, this paper traces the continuity of Religion as a guiding force when living beings are navigating transformation in time and space. The vantage point is what motivates a man? How do we engage the man, his past and associated lived space?

Introduction

The written history has largely focused to the past documented in the records prepared by man engaged in activities related to power and state. Considering these written documents as the past of man, history writing process is dominated by the world of conquest, victory, defeat, superior and inferior etc. Was past always conquest oriented? Was past always homogenous across the continents? What is rational of creating a history which negates the evidences of heterogeneous existence? What types of ethos have emerged in Indian subcontinent from historical times? Why name of Krishna is more legitimised in Indian culture irrespective of changing time? How idea of mother has evolved in India and how it has shaped eths of society? Obviously, these spaces are part of past but never considered sites of history writing in academics. The methodology of the paper is to engage the past related to the space of religion, ethics and living organisms, and how these spaces provide the continuity of ideas contrary to the ideas of conquest, and explore the past as it existed.

B. Nicolini[i] has argued that the world did not engage the Africans on unequal or hierarchical frame prior to 16ᵗʰ century. Michel Rolph Trouillot[ii] questions, Did Europe exist before 1492? Have Historians and written history not homogenised the past? These questions re-examines the given history as the past. Infact, these modes of engaging past are largely constructed on the basis of understanding the faith vs reason where matrixes of faith are conceptualised as something beyond the comprehension of historians. This paper questions one sided engagement of past through tools which are constructed in a frame where religion is not a determining force rather a force determined by matter.

First of all what motivates a man or what motivates human being irrespective of time period , how his entire world view is shaped , is a human being motivated by anyone factor or multiple factor ? What shapes the imagination of society? OR How do we examine the widespread acceptance of Krishna and his acceptance as dominant figure in the society and why people in Indian subcontinent have lived with memories of Krishna and not with the memories of Bhism? Why do we celebrate certain imaginations and not others? How does ideas travel in space over a period of time in continuity? How does a community reproduce a sense of identity when it has migrated to an alien land or how does a diasporic community celebrate imagination over thousands

of years irrespective of change into the spaces as well as time? There are diasporic communities with their memories or migration, even deterrotorialised diaspora. People who do not have any sense from where they originally migrated, but they also nurture sense of identity[iii]. Similarly, why do people worship ancestors and why do ideas change with a change of a person or change with time or how does experiences change and reshape our understanding about the society? These questions problematize the existing understanding about relations of religion and consciousness of people.

Religion led Transformation of Vision and Human Relations

Considering Max Weber, it is clear that he states that materialism is nothing but reducing the sensory experiences to economic determinism, and it is an ahistorical approach. At the outset, it seems that Max Weber has explored the forces which empowers a man to defy the tradition and provides elements to reconceptualise issues of ethics and morality. Infact, Max Weber clearly argue that technology always never leads to innovation[iv]. He raises questions about the driving force which provides new orientation to world view such as considering wealth as evil to pursuit of wealth as duty. On the basis of these arguments, Max Weber argues that religion is the most powerful driving force in determining ethics and morality, and the ethics and morality can create two entities in the same technoscape. It also shows that the consciousness cannot be determined by any one factor and historian must explores specific issues of causation. In this way, Max Weber considers the immense role of ethics created out of Protestantism and its role in making of modernism in Western Europe.

Similarly, the question about emergence of modernism has been questioned in recent times by intellectuals who do not defines Modernism largely in terms of Technoscape. The paradigm of defining the modernism in recent times is how the relations of living beings did were altered and Utopias were conceptualised. In this context, the existing history of Modernism in situated largely in the interface of colonialism has been questioned. Gail Omvedt[v] states that colonialism induced modernity is an ahistorical interpretation. Unlike Cynthia Talbot[vi] who has focused on various inscriptions written in Sanskrit and Telgu language where world view is conceptualised in terms of Dharmashastras and Nitishashtras in Deccan during 14th and 15th century, Gail argues that the vernacular literature and writings of Bhakti saints provides a world view which stands for change of human relations. Cynthia refers to interaction of Turks and how the idea of dharma means in inscriptions of Prola Nayak ; Dharma means to preserve an order which is dominated by the priestly class. Gail argues that this time has been defined in the world view of priestly class as time of Kaliyuga. On the other side, Utopias are conceptualised in the vernacular literatures.

Locating Utopias in India during the 15th century, Gail Omvedt states that Utopias are projected visions and these visions are driving force to alter the structures of society such as Sukavati, Amarapur, Premnagar, Begumpura etc. Kabir defined Khalsa as the one who is enlightened, having truth and focus on the Naam. Bhai Nand lal[vii] has defined Khalsa is one who does not speak ill of other, who fights in the front ranks, conquers five evils, who destroys doubt, give up ego, keep away from woman, not his wife, etc. Infact, Khalsa became a vision of change and challenge to all types of brutality, and the Colonial State was most feared against this rallying calling to every Khalsa and Indian people

"Delhi Takht Par Bahegi Aap Guru Ki Fauj….

Raaj Karega Khalsa Aaakki Rahe Na Koye……"[viii]

Gail Omvedt examines the existing literature because she is locating utopia in the world view of Bhakti saints , the alternative to what has existed in 13th, 14th and 15th century . In this scenario, it is problematic to conceptualise religion within the domain of individual human beings or practices of rituals performed on various occasions by individuals. How do we situate religion with reference to Bhakti saints? Can there be new lines of conceptualisation of religion in terms of conceptualisation of family and spirituality? Has Religion existed in the same manner after Bhakti saints or is it re-articulated in a manner shaping the ideas of religion in the entire Indian subcontinent?

The question arises that how religion and spirituality is conceptualised with reference to Buddha? The pre-Bhakti Saints world view about religion is the spirituality was located outside the domain of family except the priestly class who could claim to spirituality within the family. The idea of religion from 14th century in India

is re-articulated in the domain of family. Saint Namdev[ix] argues that the experience of God has to be witnessed from within and the end of sacrifice or pilgrimages is not spirituality rather it is a way to spirituality, and therefore, Saint Namdev does not considers giving up sex a way to spirituality. The reform has to start from within and the struggle is against the five evils within the human body. This re-articulation had a larger impact on the overall transformation of world view and human relations. It meant that the centrality of religion and spirituality from transformed from the religious structure to the human body. The idea of Ghat took over the site of religious structure. It is repeated continuously in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib J- " bhugat gi-aan da-i-aa bhandaaran ghat ghat vaajeh naad"[x]

Infact, the spaces of life of Saint Namdev covers sites which are outside the structured spaces of religion such as at riverbeds, on the way, interaction with human beings etc. Kabir has also emphasised the importance of Ghat by arguing that the body is a charkha made of 5 elements and 25 desires. The body has been conceptualised as a house which has 9 doors of interaction and 10th door is for final spirituality. In this sense, Kabir distinguishes the knowledge arisen out of Triloki (matter/Kaal) and knowledge arisen out of fourth lok(Alokik/Akal). There emerges the identity imposed by the society and NIJ Ghar(original identity of person). This classification of knowledge and conceptualisation of world view radically alters the idea of religion in India in the post 14th century. No doubt, this classification was not outright accepted by the masses, particularly who had controlled the process of knowledge. This contradiction become more evident in the case Saint Ravidas. Here, the paper is not focusing on sayings of Saint Ravidas, but how Saint Ravidas was perceived by the society, particularly in the context of his occupational background of leather worker who was not considered according to then established precedent to be propagator of ideas about religion and spirituality.

Gail Omvedt refers to Naavdas and Anantdas and examines how they perceived Ravidas. Naavdas says Ravidas doesn't go against Vedas but he is an untouchable and how can an untouchable become saint. But Naavdas and Anantdas questions this and Anantdas gives an instance that he was a Brahmin in previous birth, but he kept an untouchable wife and eaten meat so because of wrong deed he was born in untouchable household. When he was born he refused to take milk of his mother because she was untouchable; as a result, Guru Ramananda comes in between and initiate his family and says one day he took a bagging with trader because of which he was cursed and born in house of untouchable. Now this version of perceiving Saint Ravidas belonging to the occupational background not recognised as legitimate force to argue for religion and spirituality is not reflected in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Perceiving in the abovementioned background, it seems that the clear cut example of bringing all Bhakti Saints together as a category of Spiritual authorities /Bhagats is visible for the first time in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Infact, the history of Gurus in Punjab is largely a history of reconceptualising the spirituality and human relations. The messages and ideas propagated by Gurus have been addressed to all human beings of Indian subcontinent. The concept of Sikh Rahit Maryada initiated by Guru Nanak emphasised on Sangat and Pangat. The idea of offering foods to the followers in a very egalitarian way so as to break the past of hierarchy and joining Sangat to visualise the God in a very collective way and as a collective identity of Sangat. The Maryada was very important for the Gurus and it was to be observed in the personal as well as public life. Bhai Nand Lal states, ' Par istri siu neh lagavai, Gobind Singh va Sikh na bhavai'[xi]. These principles of Maryada can be located in various texts of 17th and 18th century.

Religion as Source of World View: Text Dasbodh & Zafarnama

The texts Dasbodh by Samarth Ramdas and Zafarnama by Guru Gobind Singh refer to the new ways of conceptualisation of world view in Indian subcontinent during 16th and 18th century. Samrath Ramdas has written the text Dasbodh[xii] and this text established new etiquettes for kingship and idea of Man. Infact, the idea of Swaraj and idea of man propagated by Shivaji was an outcome of teachings of Samrath Ramdas. Two aspects associated with Samrath Ramdas shows how idea of collectivity was continuously engaged. First of all, there is need to examine spaces of interaction among the Sadhus, Yogis , Gurus and how these interactions shaped the emerging consciousness of people particularly in the conquest oriented legitimacy of Delhi Sultanate and Mughals. The reference of Saint Namdev opposing the order of Sultan, particularly after the fall of political power at Devgiri and Kakatiya state[xiii] in 14th century. The challenge by Bhakti Saint to the Sultan of Delhi Sultanate situates the role of defining world view by Bhakti Saints and there defining role in shaping emerging politics. Another important example is interaction of Samrath Ramdas and Guru Hargobind[xiv]. Guru

Samrath Ramdas was a Sanyasi and Guru Hargobind was a Saint in the perception of masses. In 1630, both spiritual authorities met at Nanakmata. Due to continuous repression by State under Mughals , particularly denial of right to worship in case of Punjab, Guru Hargobind had started the practice of Miri and Piri, particularly after sacrifice of Guru Arjun Dev. The two swords defined two values celebrated by the Guru-one for protecting the poor and other for destroying the tyrant, particularly under state run by Mughals. During the interaction, Samrath Ramdas questioned Guru Hargobind about this tradition of carrying sword as it was not popularly legitimised in the life of Saints. Guru Hargobind justified the Miri-Piri to stop injustice and ensure continuity of right to worship. It is also clear that the Samrath Ramdas had started conceptualised idea of Swaraj and a political power conceptualised for the welfare both lokik and after death later on. No doubt, the radical idea of Gurus taking responsibility to protect the poor in hand was a new innovation in Punjab and this tradition was gradually legitimised in other parts of Indian subcontinent.

This issue become more relevant and clear from the case study of Banda Singh Badhaur. The journey of Banda Singh Bahadur starts as Lachman Das in Rajauri in Western Kashmir and it covers learning at Sanyasi Janki Das, Samrath Ram Das, Yogi Amar Nath to Guru Gobind Singh. The evolution of nomenclature from Lachman Das to Madho Das to Banda Singh Bahadur reflects the different traditions of world view acquired by Lachman Das, and how these traditions facilitated transformation of Banda Singh Bahadur into a personality who uprooted the trunk of rulers who were known to exploit the masses.

This idea of righteousness and to fight to protect what is right is a continuous process of learning as clearly visible from the sacrifice of Guru Arjun Dev. Infact, the Sacrifice was chosen willingly for protecting the right to worship as it was considered a right which nobody could take away. With increasing acts of Gurus ready to face sacrifice rather than compromising the values or right to worship, the sense of Right was deeply imbibed among the people of Punjab and Sikhs in particular and Indian subcontinent in general.

The clear cut example of legitimacy is reflected in the Zafarnama[xv] written by Guru Gobind Singh and it was sent to Aurangzeb in 1705 after battle of Chamkaur. There are many ways in which historians have approached the Zafarnama. This paper examines Zafarnama in terms of questioning the legitimacy of State under Mughals and the constructs new Idea of Man. In a way, this text creates new idea of man as well as examines idea of religion in terms of its impact on the human beings in Indian subcontinent in 18th century. The historical context of the Zafarnama is battle of Chamkaur. Historically, examining the Zafarnama, it is quite clear that Guru Gobind Singh classifies man not in terms of rituals or practices associated with the rituals, rather a person is a person who owns his words. A person whosoever may be he/she, be a ruler, sadhu or a common man, if he/she does not own his/her own words, the his entire worldly and spiritual earnings are lost. Guru Gobind directly rejects the identity of Aurangzeb as true Muslim by arguing that Aurangzeb had taken oath in the name of Koran, but he had not honoured his own words. Guru Gobind Singh explains the background which forced him to take the sword in his hands. He clarifies that when all honest arrangements to solve a crisis have failed, it is legitimate to take sword in hand. Further, he says that the appropriate definition of religion is that the person fulfils his promise. After questioning the religious position of Aurangzeb, the Zafarnama states that Aurangzeb must stop harming and tormenting the people, Aurangzeb was questioned about his strange ways of justice.

Guru Gobind Singh questions the morality of Aurangzeb as a Man who got killed four sons, and argue that the Coiled Snake still remains to confront tyrants. Further, the text place the idea of religion and religiosity in the context of how a person deals with other human beings. The frame of analysing religion is not conceptualised in terms of acts of worship or rituals rather in terms how life of people have been shaped. In this context, the kingship of Mughals is challenged and its inevitable end was stated. At the end of the text, Guru Gobind Singh argues that Aurangzeb must stop tormenting and maiming innocent people, and he states that hapless people should not be oppressed.

Religion as a Source of Alternative– Satnamis and Khalsa

Like the text of Dasbodh and Zafarnama, the issues of legitimacy was argued by the emergence of new society arisen out of religious ideas such as Satnamis of Narnawl. The Satnamis have been classified as householders and as people who belonged to the identity not considered as legitimate to rule. Mustaidd Khan[xvi] says that Satnamis were Goldsmiths, carpenters, sweepers, tanners, and other ignoble beings. Infact, the Persian

documents perceives issues of Legitimacy of peasants such as Jats, Sikhs, Satnamis as the law and order problem. The history writings have also considered largely these issues as revolts or struggle against policies of state. On analysing these developments within the frame of legitimacy, it becomes clear that the common thread among all these developments was that people of India had developed new ideas of right and wrong. Wilfred argues that the description of struggle waged by Satnamis against the State which considered as illegitimate by Satnamis and the manner of suppression and brutality committed by the state on Satnamis shows that the State was either unware about changing notions of legitimacy in the society by 18th century. Infact, Mustaidd[xvii] refers to the brutal annihilation of Satnamis by the army of the state. This pattern of suppression has been used against all those forces of 18th century who challenged the kingship of Mughals on the ground of morality and manner in which people were treated. In this scenario, it becomes problematic to conceptualise these movements as merely restricted to revenue collection, beyond the frame of revenue collection, these movements were about the world view nurtured by people and these world views were totally in contrast to the vision of state unfolded , particularly, during the tenure of Aurangzeb. The Capability of state based on arms and ammunition was challenged by the new forces who were armed with not ammunition, but with the idea of a Man and its relation with other man at the level of society. No doubt, these notions had deeper linkages with spiritual orientations having crafted well organised concept of sacrifice. In a way, this struggle of people of India and state under Mughals during 18th century is a struggle of notion of sacrifice against notion of conquest. The question arises whether the notion of sacrifice was a well organised concept in 18th century? How did it differ from earlier concept of sacrifices?

The classic case to study history of sacrifices and its methodology can be taken as the study of Khalsa. This paper examines the social context of Khalsa which reorganised society and rearticulated the new identity of people. The case of Panj Piaras sets precedent in the sense that the conceptualisation of religion clearly broken the iron cage of social identity as well as hierarchy. The Four Panj Piaras were from Sudra background and after becoming Khalsa all the five acquired new identity, and the identity was not centred on social structure rather on the vision of Sikh Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh not only initiated the Panj Piaras, but he himself also got initiated at the hands of Panj Piaras. It was radical innovation. In this sense, the creation of Khalsa was a total break with evils of past and became the institution of collective decision on occasions as per requirement. Jagjit Singh[xviii] says that Guru Gobind Singh submitted to the collective decision of Panj Piaras and on the request of Panj Piaras, Guru left the palace. Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh clearly instructed Banda Singh Bahadur to abide by the Khalsa. On analysing the history of Punjab with reference to sacrifices of people, it becomes clear that the Sikh and people associated with Gurus did not sacrifice principles. It was a journey of principles, ethics and world view in terms of life of people.

Unlike the colonial view or materialist view of History Indian subcontinent, the analysis of history of Indian subcontinent from the perspectives of changing ethos and role of religion, it becomes clear that the society was continuously evolving and this evolution was dynamic and transformative. The creation of Khalsa, Satnamis, etc., were radical re-articulation of society centred on empathy, and the subjugation of idea of conquest to the idea of empathy. These ideas were operating, interacting and reshaping life of people across the subcontinent. Further, these world views affected all ways of life. In case of Punjab, one finds the classic case of creating new identity out of various caste base identity. After becoming Panj Piaras, the five people had acquired a new identity and new signs and symbols, and this new identity was not based on rituals but on the basis of prescribed behaviour as outlined in the teaching of Gurus. On the other hand, the idea of Swaraj created in Deccan under leadership of Shivaji was also based on creating correspondence among the existing identities, and opening channels of communication among the barriers of iron cage. M.R.Kantak[xix] refers to case of coronation of Shivaji where the rulers sought legitimacy not from one priestly class or only one caste, rather representative of all castes participated in the coronation of Chatrapati Shivaji such as Brahmin oured Ghee, Marathas poured milk, representative of Vaishya poured curd and representative of Sudras poured water. Prior to Shivaji's idea of Swarajya, the Deccan had not witnessed participation of people from below in the state formation at such a large level. Shivaji included the following castes in the functioning of the state and it was a radical departure in Deccan; it included consequently, almost all available performing castes and communities[xx] like the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the peasant Marathas (Kunbis), the Mavalas, the Hetkaris, the Ramoshis,Dhangars, the Nhavis (barbers), the Mahars, the Mang-garudis,the Chamars (cobblers) , the Bhandaris, the Kolis, the Gabits, Bhills etc. This case of conceptualisation of Swarajya did not annihilate

caste as an identity, but it established the political culture where Hindus having different identity could work and coordinate together in the political domain while maintain their customary practices in social and cultural field. No doubt, the fluid nature of military can be mapped historically and Kolf [xxi]has also examined these aspects of warfare and conceptualised warfare as a cultural construct. He argues that the idea of warrior was not based on birth rather it was based on the capability of who can mobilise the resources of warfare. In this case, Kolf analyse the case of peasants of Doab, The Kolis, Valmikis, Baheliyas, Qasbatis etc., and their participation in warfare through forces who mobilised armies for the state such as case of Chandelas.

The mapping of different castes participating warrior in military struggles is visible in the work of Kolf, but the idea of Swarajya was an idea which fundamentally accepted castes from below as legitimised force required to participate in the making of state as per idea of Swarajya.

Conclusion

Religion and ideas emerging out of religious domain becomes catalyst for transforming the society in Indian subcontinent from 15th to 18th century. The institutions of Pilgrimages, Langar, Sangat, Guru, Khalsa, and Swarajya etc. created alternative heterogeneous lines of organisation and conceptualisation of self and other. The Self was not based on any social identity or identity based on birth, rather the new self was conceptualised on the principles of defining what a man is? This idea of man laid the foundation of a new society in India. This man was determined to recognise the other as a human beings and was committed to sacrifice life for the principles celebrated by the community. Kharak Singh[xxii] says about independence movement and argues that out of 121 persons hanged, 26444 imprisoned for life and 1300 massacred in Jallianwala Bagh protest, 93, 2047 and 799 were Sikhs respectively. Therefore, there is a need to engage the past through religion and its impact in creating new ethos shaping world views. This manner of engaging the past will provide new insights about history of people in India.

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