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Bhakti Traditions of Rajasthan: Philosophical Views of Sant Mavji and Sant Amritnathji

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Abstract:

Rajasthan has been a socio-religious hub of India ever since the earliest times. Various philosophies, ideologies and approaches related to religion emerged during the Medieval period. Of them, most of the ideologies were propagated by various sants (saints), some of which also established their order and clan in due course of time. The paper throws light on the socio-religious approach of Sant Mavji and Sant Amritnathji who were sants of Bhakti Tradition of Rajasthan. The study will reveal their brief biography and their contribution towards the cultural history of Rajasthan.

Keywords: *Heritage, Tradition, Orthodox, Monotheism, Dwaitadvait*

1. Introduction

Religion has been an important aspect of the culture of Rajasthan since time immemorial. The vast cultural heritage and philosophical treasure is based entirely on religionⁱ. From time to time, various saints emerged and directed a moral and truthful path to the society. The philosophy of these saints not only unleashed the society from the bondage of the orthodox view but also unveiled the new aspects of the religionⁱⁱ.

The advent of Bhakti strengthened the concept of secularism and that of omniscient and omnipotent God who was not restricted only to the spiritual dwellings. Bhakti traditions tried to transform a rigid, varna-based vedic religion concept into a flexible and simplified way of living based on morality and equality.

During the period from 12th to 18th century, the Bhakti movement which was a part of Vedic worshipping traditionsⁱⁱⁱ along with Stuti and Prarthana had spread to all regions of Rajasthan. Bhakti poetry and attitudes began to color many aspects of Hindu culture, religious and secular, and became an integral part of Rajasthan society. A few bhakti poets wrote against the hierarchy of caste system also^{iv}.

Various thought and philosophies sprouted out from the fast growing bhakti movement in Rajasthan^v and various sants propagated their ideologies. Two of the most important such Sants are – Sant Mavji and Sant Amritnathji.

2. Sant Mavji

2.1. Early Life

The basic information regarding the life of Saint Mavji is not received from his own compositions but from the later compositions of his devotees^{vi}. According to Pandit Ratan Lal ji of Shyampur, the place where Saint Mavji passed away, the date of birth of Saint Mavji is about 1707 A.D. Mavji was born in an ordinary Brahmin family of Rishi Daalam. His father was very poor and earned living by farming. His father was very spiritual in nature and as a result Mavji also got attached to bhakti of Lord Krishna in his early childhood only.

2.2. Education

Mavji was sent to study under the guidance of his teacher Shri Sahjanand who was a Brahmin and run a school. As there is no other evidence of Mavji having any spiritual guru, it is considered that Sahjanand was his only teacher and guru. When Mavji, s father found that he was not interested in learning Shastras and tradition teaching, he sent Mavji to work on his farm. But Mavji was not able to take care properly of his farms also. Later Mavji was married to Bakhat Bai. Sources indicate that Mavji married more than once in his life. Marriage with Rupaji of Banswara and Manubai of Gujarat is also evident in various sources. In his later stage, he also married a Rajput girl names Sahuji.

2.3. Propagation of Cult

Mavji soon became popular with his miracles and spiritual powers^{vii}. He went to Beneshwar for worshipping and stayed there for almost 5 years spreading bhakti in peoples. He wrote “Sam Sagar” which showed that number of his disciples was about 5000. In

some other sources it is evident that the number later rose to 8000. His main disciples were Jeevan Das, Suranand, Kehari Das, Uttam Das and Kushal Das. Mavji was a Saint as well as Social reformer. Various miracles are linked to him showing his divine powers. His bhakti was influenced by Dwaitadvait philosophy. Just like Dhanna, Meera and Narsi, he not only sang bhajans but also philosophized the simplicity of spirituality. He also propagated his reformic views just like Kabir. He did not claim himself to be an Acharya but still he founded a cult of his own. His cult was later called as "Nishkalank Sampradaya".

2.4. Philosophy

In his Pads, Mavji emphasized "Hari bhajan"^{viii}. He said that nothing in world is worth appreciating except and without Hari and that human body is granted by God only for performing good deeds and worshiping God. The place near Beneshwar, where Mavji preached bhakti in simplest way has now a temple of his cult Nishkalank Sampradaya.

The disciples of Mavji visualize him in the form of God Nishkalank. The common man treated him as Saint-poet and a Guru. He was a social reformer for the untouchable Bheels^{ix}. Besides bhakti, Mavji was a Yogi too and emphasized on Yog for the upliftment of a bhakt. Though Mavji worshipped idols as his family sanskar but proof is there which show that in his later stage of bhakti, he stopped and denied idol-worship. He opposed the blind-faiths, casteism and Brahmanism.

Mavji explained that the world is just like a deep well and man is in it. Hope is water but greed and false expectations are the chains of bondage along with the wordly relations. Gold and Silver are like stones burdened on back which does not let man to float. He gives many such comparisons to explain the instability of life and to promote people to try attaining grace of God.

He was monotheistic in his views and said that God is one and all living beings are originated from Him and they later merge in Him only. The main principles of his Nishkalank Sampradaya were:

- Upliftment of Untouchables and Bhils
- Bhakti towards God
- Eradication of Blind faiths
- Avoiding alcohol and meat
- Opposing selling of Girls
- Live life of simplicity
- Encourage feeling of co-operation

3. Sant Amritnathji

3.1. Early Life

Amritnath ji was the son of Chetan Ram ji Jat who was a farmer by occupation. He was born around 1850 A.D. It is said that he was so divine in nature that at the age of 7 years also he looked like a boy of 15 years. He insisted on Satvik path and himself had only satvik food.

After the death of his mother, he became a saint and left home at the age of 36 years. While traveling, he reached Rini town of Bikaner and met Swami Motinath ji of Mannathi tradition. Later he became disciple of Champa Nathji. Champa Nath named him as Amrit Nath and after formal processions, he was accepted in the Nath Panth. Amritnath preached various new and simplified forms of Yoga^x.

3.2. Propagation of Ideology

Amritnathji then spent 6 months roaming and preaching spirituality in Laxmangarh, Ramgarh and Fatehpur. Later some miracles of healing people were also associated with him. In the later stage of his life, he settled at the Khaki ki Teeba situated on the outskirts of Fatehpur and his ashram was made. The Amrit Nath ashram is named after Shri Amrit Nathji, whose samadhi, along with other Natha saints, is part of the current and now greatly expanded building. There are ashrams of these Nathas at Jhunjhunu, Bisau, Butiya, Barbas, Fatehpur and other locations. Many of these ashrams are very ancient. At them are many samadhis (tombs) of Natha saints who have achieved liberation whilst living.

3.3. Philosophy

His teachings included few principles out of which he emphasized more on yoga. He linked yoga and dietary discipline with the Bhakti^{xi}. According to him, Yoga is the only practice or science, which can establish the self into its true state. This is possible only on the foundation of sound food culture and sound life style. So far no one could discover such an easy way to health-promoting food technology as he did. His idea of Samadhi is very revolutionary and unique. According to him the real Samadhi is one which does not reverse to the former state after it touched the apex. This samadhi merges the self into the reservoir of the bliss of atman and the practitioner is emancipated from the psychic residue of infatuation for worldly pleasure.

Shri Amrit Nath ji has described three kinds of Samadhis:

- Bhakti Samadhi, the devotional Samadhi
- Yoga samadhi, which is attained as a result of the Yogic observance and
- Jnana Samadhi.

Jnana samadhi and Sahaja Samadhi are one and the same; when this samadhi is realised, there is no trace of yoga or meditation. The self which used to be a manifestation of the faculties is no more the same; it assumes some other quality which is non-

quality too. In this state there is no occasion for duality^{xii}. There is neither one nor two; there is of course a great vast void. There is no heaven, no patala the world, nor the earth. There is no karma- the action, nor karta the doer. Such is the knowledge of Sri Amrit Natha. Shri Amrit Nath Ji Amrit Nath concludes that Karma is supermost; it is the result of Karma, its power, that an inspired practitioner of Yoga finally enters into the Samadhi, the state of final extinction of the fire of life and its merger into the supreme cosmic consciousness for ever, having no trace whatsoever of material, sub-material or supra-material Karmic existence^{xiii}.

4. Inference

From the study, it can be inferred that the common thing in the saints was that all raised voice against the contemporary orthodox and complicated social structure of Hinduism^{xiv}. In other words, it can be said that Rajasthan was fast becoming a religious hub of the nation.

The thoughts of the bhakti saints became popular very quickly and most of the people easily acknowledged the simplicity of their views. A few saints insisted on morality and simplicity and said that God can be attained even while remaining within the brackets of family or society. In other words, one need not go to forests or leave the society or abandon the liabilities for the sake of attainment of salvation.

The main feature of the contemporary society of Rajasthan was that it was free from prejudice and showed equal respect to all the philosophies/views or sects. This is reflected in the people's inclination towards the other various sects also like Bishnoi, Laldasi, Niranjani, Charandasi and Ramsnehi etc.

The society which was fed up of the complicacies of religion tried to search the simpler way of attaining the blessings of the Almighty in the words of the saints. Be it of the Nirguna saints like Haridas Niranjani and Dadu Dayal or Saguna supporter Meera and Nagaridas. Such Sants always imbibed a message of harmony amongst various castes and classes of Medieval Rajasthan.

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