

Social Transformation of the Indian Society through Sanskritization at Sai Temples



Preeti Meena

Assistant Professor,
Deptt. of Sociology,
Government Arts Girls' College,
Kota, Rajasthan

Abstract

Sanskritization is one of the ongoing revolutionary social processes in India. It is the process under which the religious practices of the Hindu upper castes are adopted by the members of SCs and STs in order to raise their social and cultural status in the society. By now the members of SCs and STs are aware that their cultural modes are responsible for their low status in the society. Therefore, they are ready to give them up for the sake of their improvement. Srinivas defined sanskritization as a process by which "a low or middle Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently twice-born caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant class by the local community". The past of the lower Hindu castes in India is the history of struggle, exploitation, humiliation and injustice. The members of the upper Hindu castes have always kept themselves away from the members of the lower castes for several reasons. The members of the lower castes are now conscious of the fact that their own culture is responsible for this detachment. Now the members of the lower castes are ready to give up their own culture and to imbibe the culture of the members of the upper castes. Religious centres are open to all.

At present, the process of sanskritization in India is at full swing drawing all the members of the marginalized castes to raise their status in the society by joining it. The temples are the best examples to find the glimpses of sanskritization where the members of the Hindu religion irrespective of castes are seen together performing rituals forming a unity that knows no difference in the name of caste, and that allows all to enjoy collectively the blisses of the ritual

Keywords: Transformation, Sanskritization, Marginalized, Hierarchy, Rites, Rituals.

Introduction

Change is inevitable and their several factors that cause change in the society. Obviously, of them, religion is one effective factor. Religion has always played a great role in bringing about social change in the society and in leading the people all over the world to the path of humanity which teaches to love all the brethren and to help everyone on the humanitarian ground. As an unavoidable force, it has kept the people away from what is profane. Religion stands not only for the performances of the rituals in order to please the deities, but also for the service to humanity at large. It being a great source of morality, sacredness and humanity, it brings the people closer to the long established values associated with character, morality, truth, non-violence, world-brotherhood and humanity.

The Shirdi Sai Baba worship is getting more and more public approval despite much controversy. The fast increasing number of the Sai Temples all over the world and the people's unshaken faith in the divine powers of Sai Baba witness it. Every Sai Temple all over the world produces a scenario shared equally by the members of all the castes and religions. Keeping the devotees away from the known evil practices the Sai Temples impart them rich and socially approved values that bring them a particular identity in practical life. Unlike some particular temples, the Shirdi Sai Baba Temples allow everyone to enter and worship there. Indeed, they are playing a vital role in filling the long-age ditch of casteism that kept the members of the various so-called higher and lower castes. The Shirdi Sai Baba Temples all over the world mirror a tremendous socio-cultural and

religious change. Owing to the worship of Shirdi Sai Baba alongwith the traditional deities in the temples, several controversial statements were given, but the followers remained all unshaken, and the result is that the more the days are passing, the more temples of Sai Baba are coming into existence. The popularity of Shirdi Sai Baba lies in the fact that today he is worshipped all over the world.

Sanskritization

M. N. Srinivas, the eminent Indian sociologist, propounded the concept of Sanskritization in the context of his study of the Koorgs in South India, and generalized that Sanskritization is a major factor of social change in India. Sanskritization is one of the fastest ongoing social processes in India which are bringing about a tremendous social change, providing opportunities to the marginalized all over India to change their destiny through it. It is the process under which the marginalized attempt to raise their social and cultural status by imbibing and practicing the religious and cultural practices of the Hindu upper castes as well as give up those cultural modes of theirs which seem to have prevented them from enjoying a socially approved social status.

The study aims at studying and interpreting the social change in India through Sanskritization at the Sai Temples.

Review of Literature

Dwiendra Nath Thakur (2012) in the paper Imapact of Sanskritization and Westernization on India observes that Sanskritisation is a particular form of social change found in India. It denotes the process by which castes placed lower in the caste hierarchy seek upward mobility by emulating the rituals and practices of the upper or dominant castes. It is a process similar to passing in anthropological terms. This term was made popular by Indian sociologist M. N. Srinivas in the 1950s . This ambitious concept is again revolving back with the time in contemporary Indian society after the caste based policies , result was 'de-Sanskritization' it was no longer beneficial to be an upper caste and so attempts were made to re-claim any lower or backward caste roots. Westernization is a process whereby societies come under or adopt Western culture in such matters as industry, technology, law, politics, lifestyle, diet, language, religion, philosophy, and/or values. Westernization has been a pervasive and accelerating influence across the world in the last few centuries. It is usually a two-sided process, in which Western influences and interests themselves are joined by a wish of at least parts of the affected society to change towards a more Westernized society, in the hope of attaining Western life or some aspects of it.

Aya Ikegame (2012) in Karnataka: Caste, dominance and social change in the 'Indian village observes that Vishwakarma Caste claim to Brahmin status is not generally accepted outside the community, despite their assumption of some high-caste traits, such as wearing the sacred thread, and the Brahminisation of their rituals. For example, the sociologist M. N. Srinivas, who developed the concept of sanskritisation, juxtaposed the success of

the Lingayat caste in achieving advancement within Karnataka society by such means with the failure of the Vishwakarma to achieve the same. Their position as a left-hand caste has not aided their ambition.

Dixit RKS, Sandhya (2014) in Scenario of Sanskritization at Shaktipeeths – A Step towards Empowerment of the Marginalised (With Special Reference to Katyayani Shaktipeeth, Vrindavan hold that by now the members of SCs and STs are aware that their cultural modes are responsible for their low status in the society. Therefore, they are ready to give them up for the sake of their improvement. Shaktipeeths and Durga temples in India are effective platforms for it. They provide an opportunity to such people to observe the upper caste religious and cultural practices closely and then to follow them for their own betterment. The scenario of Sanskritization becomes perfect during the Nava Ratras of Chaitra and Ashwin months.

Cindy A. Nguyen (2016) in Book Review: M. N. Srinivas' Social Change in Modern India holds the idea that Srinivas examines the processes of Sanskritization and Westernization to understand religious, cultural, and social change in modern India. By systematically examining these two concepts, Srinivas challenges the following assumptions about Indian society: the static and universal structure of the four varnas of Indian caste society, the lack of mobility and ambiguity between castes, and the wholesale adoption of Western influence. Srinivas' overall contribution to understanding caste in pre-British and colonial India is the attention to regional differences, to the unevenness of Western influences, and the agency of caste and tribal groups to change secular and ritual rank.

Rajesh Kumar Sharma & Others (2017) in Sanskritization: An Effective Way to Higher Education observe that Sanskritization has brought about a tremendous change in the life of the members of SC and ST. It has changed their life-style and is motivating them to get education. It will not be an exaggeration to say that now getting higher education at colleges and universities has become their passion. Indeed, apart from the other cultural changes, the members of SC and ST are witnessing a revolutionary educational change. Obviously, it is just because of their being linked up with the process of Sanskritization.

RK Sharma (February, 2018) in A Sociological Interpretation of the Significance of the Little and the Great Traditions in India in the Context of Faith in Sai Baba comments that the Sai Baba Temple at Shirdi in Maharashtra is the best example of the prevalence of the little and the great traditions together in India. In Shirdi, the little tradition began with certain specific rituals and modes of worship performed by the local people irrespective of caste or religion in order to please Sai Baba as a local deity. The collective consciousness works incredibly among the people at the time of worship. This little tradition which seems to have developed in the form of the great tradition has brought about a tremendous social change as a result of the prevalence of the little

traditions in the specified study area. In a word, the worship of Sai Baba in Shirdi is a little tradition in its roots, as no ancient Hindu scripture has any reference to Sai Baba, and that probably in the twentieth century, being influenced by the miracles performed by Sai Baba, the people in Shirdi and the surrounding area started worshipping him as a god.

Ankur Betageri (July 2018) in A Refutation of M.N. Srinivas's Theory of Sanskritization comments that Srinivas misattributes the superior status of Brahmins in the varna hierarchy to the practice of vegetarianism and teetotalism and to "customs and beliefs" which, in spite of his disclaimers to the contrary, he assumes were unique to Brahmins "for all time." When Brahmins first came up with the hierarchy of varnas in the Purusha Sukta (c. 600 BCE) of the Rig Veda they, far from being vegetarians or teetotalers, were voracious meat-eaters and drinkers of the inebriating drink soma.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the concept of Sanskritization given by MN Srinivas
2. To brood over the fact if Sanskritization is bringing about a change in the Indian society, and if yes, how?
3. To observe and study the role of the various institutions in the process of Sanskritization.
4. To explore and find out the contribution of the temples in India in the process of Sanskritization.
5. To learn why and how the members of all the castes all over India are submitting themselves to the Sai-piety
6. To observe and explore the glimpses of Sanskritization visible at the Sai Temples, and particularly at Sai Baba Temple in Dholpur
7. To explore through interaction the social changes that are being brought about by the process of Sanskritization
8. To learn about both the positive and the negative aspects of the process of Sanskritization.
9. To apply and interpret M.N. Srinivas's theory of Sanskritization to the social change through the Sai temples in India
10. To study the cause and effect relationship of Sanskritization
11. To arrive at some generalization.

Hypotheses

1. Fed up with the materialistic modes of living that confine the people to eat, drink and be merry, the people of the modern age are returning to religion and seeking spiritual peace through meditation, piety and idol worship that includes the worship of the traditional deities and spiritual mentors.
2. Religion brings the people closer to sacred and keeps them away from profane
3. In religion lie the seeds of humanity, morality, character, brotherhood, non-violence and love and of all the other sources of true happiness
4. Change is inevitable, and the same is true of society and religion too
5. Religion is a panacea to all the social problems. Only the societies with a sufficient religious atmosphere prosper

6. The twenty first century opens several vistas of freedom through many of its ongoing social and cultural processes.
7. Sanskritization is an important ongoing socio-cultural process which allows the marginalized to raise their social status by imbibing the religious beliefs and ways of living of the members of the higher Hindu castes
8. For the sake of their social upliftment the members of the marginalized groups are changing their habits and cultural modes of living.
9. Religion is magnetically drawing them towards it, as it provides them mental peace and imparts them a sense of equality
10. Since the Shirdi Sai Temples are open to all, most of the members of the marginalized groups like to spend their time at the Sai temples all over India
11. Dholpur, a district of Rajasthan, situated between Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, is known for its mythological significance because of the Machkund. As in the other parts of the world, here too, the number of Shirdi Sai Temples and the followers of Sai Baba is increasing very fast.
12. The Sai temples in Dholpur produce a scenario which reflect a tremendous harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims, and among the people of the different Hindu castes.
13. Though everyday, on Thursdays in particular, the devotees of Sai Baba create a religious and spiritual environment in the city by their visits to the temples and by their loud singing of Sai hymns.
14. Some of the changes that the members of the marginalized groups are having, are- being purely vegetarian, teetotaler, maintaining sanitation in and around the houses, wearing fresh and clean clothes, passing time in spiritual meditation, changing the surnames etc.

Methodology

The study is an empirical study conducted on 200 units of information, selected randomly from the various Sai Baba temples in Dholpur. For the sake of the scientific spirit of the work both the primary data collected through the schedule, and the secondary data collected from the various books and journals were used. The investigator made a participant observation in order to explore and observe the social change in the Indian society being brought about by religion and particularly, by the Shirdi Sai Baba temples all over the world, and especially by the Shirdi Sai Baba temples in the Dholpur district of Rajasthan which is known for its communal harmony and religious, spiritual and historical environment. All the steps of scientific method and social research approved by the various eminent social scientists, such as, collection, classification and analysis of data, tabulation and interpretation, generalization were strictly followed during the course of the study. For the sake of objectivity, face-to-face interaction with all the selected units of information was made.

Conclusion

Throughout history, religion has continued to be a central part of societies and human experience,

shaping how individuals react to the environments in which they live. Similarly, the peasant society has always been governed by the local deities in whom the people reveal their unshakable faith. Since religion is such an important part of societies around the world, sociologists are very interested in studying it. Sociologists study religion as both a belief system and a social institution. As a belief system, religion shapes what people think and how they see the world. As a social institution, religion is a pattern of social action organized around the beliefs and practices that people develop to answer questions about the meaning of existence. As an institution, religion persists over time and has an organizational structure into which members are socialized. Religion, society, social change and sanskritization are complementary to and internally linked with one another. The educated or say the lettered in India reveal their faith in those deities whose reference is there in the Vedas and the other ancient Hindu scriptures, while the unlettered in the Indian villages have unshaken faith in the local deities. Both the little and the great traditions prevail in the Indian society side by side

Major Findings of the Study

1. Though a century of cyber revolution, the 21st century is an age of insecurity, mental tensions, frustrations, confusions and moral depravity. 100% units agree to it and consider this century more an age of moral depravity than of any other thing.
2. 100% units of information agree that a tremendous and incredibly fast social change is taking place in the Indian social system, and religion is playing a vital role in bringing about this social change.
3. 97%, that is 114 of the total units acclaim that the number of the Sai Temples is increasing incredibly fast setting aside all the previous records of erecting the temples of any other spiritual mentor or those of the traditional Hindu deities.
4. 82% of the selected units of information accept the Sai Temples as the effective platforms of Sanskritization where the members of all the Hindu castes and those of different religions are seen performing rituals together. Each of them agrees that while at the Sai Temples the devotees forget all the caste and religion differences.
5. 93% units of information agree that the Sai Temples bring the different cultures closer to each other and motivate the members of the marginalized in particular to imbibe the culture of the higher castes in order to raise their social and cultural status.
6. 70% units do not ignore that other temples of traditional deities and spiritual mentors other than the Shirdi Sai Temples too are contributing a lot to the social change in India.
7. According to 76% of the total units of information, the Sai Temples in Dholpur where on Thursdays in particular the members of the different religions and castes can be seen

together performing rituals, are the platforms of both Sanskritization and communal harmony.

8. According to 89% units of information, most of the members of the marginalized castes are getting benefited through the process of sanskritization. They have given up most of their evil practices and bad habits. Their faith in the powers of Sai Baba has made them all spiritually strong and religious minded. For it, they not only perform rituals but also observe fast.

Suggestions

1. The ongoing socio-cultural process of Sanskritization is meant for the marginalized, and so, they should raise their social status by joining it.
2. This process is associated with social change, and the change in the destiny of the marginalized.
3. The people who want to get benefit of the process, are advised to imbibe and adopt sanitation of the surroundings, cleanliness, religious environment and socially approved ways of healthy living
4. They should spend more and more time in spiritual meditation and in performing rituals at the Sai Temples
5. The members of the upper Hindu castes should let the members of the lower castes follow their religious beliefs for the sake of social solidarity
6. The process of Sanskritization provides opportunities of raising social status to the marginalized, hence, they should join it and join the main stream of the nation.

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