Communal Coexistence in Ancient India

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Abstract

Communal harmony is considered essential in our nation. We are all gathered together to discuss how to establish societal harmony. Our adored motherland, India, is a vast land of culture, civilization, and history. It once served as the birthplace of powerful civilizations. Only a few other civilizations in the world can make the claim of being on par with this one given its long history of more than 5000 years. Geographically, it is a wonderful wonder. The vast Himalayan Mountains, the vast Gangetic Valley, lush green fields, sweltering deserts, densely vegetated woods, perennial rivers, silver sand beaches, the longest coastline areas, diverse wildlife, and flora, etc. are all present in this region. It is the seventh-biggest country in the world and the largest democracy. In terms of population, it is second only to China. Once upon a time, our motherland was referred to as the land of maharajas, snake charmers, temples, and woods. But the truth was very different from how it was described. This research paper seeks and explores to find out any evidential presence of communal harmony during ancient times in India.

Keywords: Communal harmony, Civilization, Indian Community

Introduction

The ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and inhabitants of west Asia all had a great affection for Indian spices. Before Jesus Christ was born, they and India had a thriving commercial relationship. Since the beginning of time, Indians have generally been kind, peaceful, and law-abiding citizens. This reality is revealed in the great epics the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and other literary works. When a new monarch was crowned, the Hindu emperors always upheld the primogeniture principle. Furthermore, even on the fields of battle, ancient Indian monarchs and emperors adhered strictly to the dharma. These are the iconic images of ancient India.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to look for historical evidence of intercommunal harmony in India. The first research starts with the Harrapan culture, which flourished between 3500 and 1800 B.C. Historians and archaeologists were left in shock and confusion due to their inability to interpret written records and the availability of multiple silence evidences. However, historians have developed some broad assumptions about the religious beliefs of the Harrapan people in light of the numerous Gods and Goddesses, places, creatures, and plants shown on seals. For example, there are a lot of situations about seals that are connected to it but not explained, such the proto-Shiva, the mother goddess's presentation, a yogi, and many others. Similar to this, it is believed that a large number of the buildings in Mohenjodaro's lower town and citadel acted as holy places or temples consecrated to God. Bulls, elephants, horses, and lambs are only a few examples of the various animals and creatures that were depicted. These images may have signified objects of worship that ultimately became part of Indian tradition. The general religious

harmony is best summed up by the words of R.C. Majumdar, "Though the degree of their (Harrapan) influence is not yet fully understood, there is no doubt that they undergird the whole texture of Hindu culture and civilisation."

During **Vedic and Later Vedic Phase** (1500 B.C- 600 B.C), the socio-religious ideas were primarily based on materialistic gains and were dominated by various kinds of sacrifices. We were also come to know about the assimilation of various different cultures and beliefs as shown in Atharveda, during this time phase. However, the point to be noted is that during this period we could underline certain important aspects of religious life which later became the part and partial of Indian tradition. For example, the concept of 'Rit' was developed during this period which later transformed into 'Dharma'[2]. Likewise, composition of Manusmriti (1200B.C) and Kautilya's Arthshastra(6th B.C) were based on the Vedic ideals , which provided a basic political thought for the upcoming Indian society. In words of G.Sundara Ramiah [1] " The earliest record of Indian thought and culture is found in the Veda".

The trend of assimilation of different ideas and religious harmony continued during **6th century B.C** till **300 C.E** (The period includes Maurya and Post Mauryan Period) and afterwards for which we have various sources to go through. This period was marked by the growth of various heterodox sects and new religious ideas and a peaceful acceptance, absorption and assimilation of various religious thoughts on the other hand. However, some historians had tried to paint this period with the presence of intra-sectarian rivalries and conflicts between the Vedic religion and non-Vedic religions based on some testimonial sources[3], but the deeper analysis of this period was quite away and above from the minor intra religious conflicts, if had any. In fact this period was marked by the assimilation of various Indic religions based on the beautiful statement of Rig Veda –'Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudha Vandanti'. The literal meaning of 'ekamsad vipra bahudha vandanti'[4]is 'God is one but the wise people/the sages speak of it variously' or ' Truth/ultimate reality is one, sage call it by many names'[8] of the dynamism variety and richness of the post-vedic religious scenario. For example Adinath(Rishabha),the 1st tirthankara of Jainism was accepted as an incarnation of Vishnu in the Bhagavata Purana[5]. Similarly Buddha accepted as an avtar of Vishnu around middle of sixth century A.D and found place in texts like Dashavataracarita of Kshenendra(11th century),Gitagovindaof Jayadeva(12th century) and many other inscriptions[6]. The philosophy of Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudha Vandanti' was not only limited to texts and ideas but actually practiced by the monarchs of the early India, latter confirmed by archaeological evidences and accepted by Muslim travelers as well. In spite of Ashoka's personal faith in Buddhism,the proclaimed policy of dhamma was not identified with it [2]. Eclecticism and toleration that characterized the religious policy of the Kushanas is known from their coins and inscriptions and confirmed by the archaeology of the period. Inspite of Buddhist leanings, the Kushanas patronized Brahmical scarifies and Brahmanas [2]. The Yavanas, the Sakas and the Kushanas had also patronized Vishnuite divinities as it clear by the well-known evidence of the Garuda pillar inscription at Besnagar wherein a Greek ambassador Heliodorus describes himself as a Bhagavat. Many Saka kings are known to have adopted Saiva names and a good repertrive of Saiva iconography appears on Kusana coins. Even the earliest image of goddess Saraswati too is dated in (Saka) year 54(133CE), when the kusana were ruling at Mathura,where the sculpture was found. (Aleruni(eleventh century) refers to the Buddha as an Avtara of Vishnu. The work of assimilation was not a one way process rather done by non-vedic sects as well. For example, Jainism, the other important religion of Karnataka, too introduced many themes of Hinduism like erection of basadis, installation of Tirthankaras and their attendant like Yaksa and Yaksini. It also accepted various

rituals like that of Brahmanical religion.

The broadness and the very adoptive nature of the then existing Vedic society was flourished and continued from **300 C.E to 9th Century A.D**. This phase includes the period of Gupta age (4th,5th and 1st half of the 6th century of the Christian era) and Post Gupta period. A deeper analysis of available evidences (Archaeological and Testimonials) and research papers published by various historians bring us to our assumption that the above phase (300 C.E to 9th Century A.D) was based on ideas of assimilation, negotiation and incorporation of local cults. The various foreign ruling families in pre-Gupta period-of Greek or Siythian origin-were given the semi-Kshatriya status (Vratya-Kshatriya) and on the other hand various tribal deities were assimilated into the Puranic tradition[7]. In words of **Dr. Priya Darshini** (**IHC** 2005-06 vol 66; pp167-172) "The King & chiefs of the Gupta age, by and large, acted on three levels. For legitimization of their authority, they used the mystique of the Vedic rituals & symbolism on the other hand and appropriated some elements of divinity to their person on the other. But for their personal goals, they subscribed to one or the other popular faiths, mostly of Brahmanic origin. In their public role, they assumed a liberal disposition, allowing freedom as well as, at times, promotion of religious beliefs and practices other than their own…". Thus, we can underline the factor of continuity and changes from the Harrapan society to the Post Gupta Society, which has given a vastness and broad outlook to the Indian Society [10].

Outcome of the Study

This study work makes an effort to identify the components of communalism or to highlight its forces, if any, in Ancient India. The results are outstanding and can be specifically mentioned under the following criteria. According to our understanding, establishing a political dominance based on rivalry and religious animosity is the first fundamental component. Our conclusion on this issue is that while there are indications of religious conflict in ancient India, which is to be expected in a society in transition, there is no political dominance, political rivalry, religious conflict, or use of religion as a justification for political dominance at that time. Since the majority of sects and religious organizations (both Vedic and non-Vedic groupings) focused solely on religious activities, they were less concerned with creating social codes of behavior to govern people's daily lives. Evidence supporting or attempting to demonstrate the political dominance of any religious organizations or sects was extremely rare. Second, it may be required to separate and identify one's religion in order to form a communal worldview. This idea was completely absent from ancient Indian society, contrary to some evidence from mediaeval India and evidence from modern India. In fact, the ancient Indian culture was characterized by assimilation of religion. In other word the latter one is the hallmark of the early Indian society until the arrival of Arabs. Numerous examples were quoted above about the greatness of the Ancient India which is the driving force behind the concept of 'Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudha Vandanti'. **Three,** another feature of communalism is presence of narrow cultural-religious outlook and urgency to change the religion of people by force offering economic opportunities, religious benefits and unconditional threats. This research paper finds that none of the above features (of communalism) were present or seen in the Ancient India. **Four,** the absence of conflict of religion in early India also make this period unique from that we found in Medieval India and Modern India. The probable reason behind this was that most of the religious sects/groups were of Indic origin itself and somehow originated as a reaction against the then Vedic religion.

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