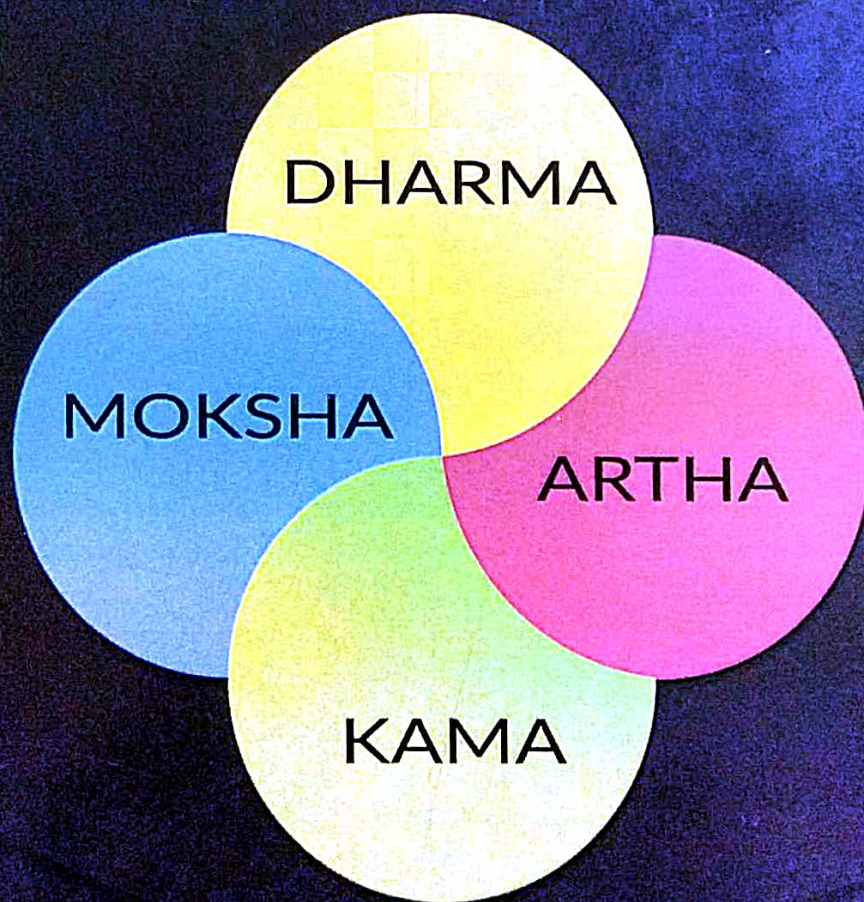


APPLIED [®]
INDIAN
PARADIGMS OF
HUMAN
RIGHTS

WITH REFERENCE TO SAMVEDANAA,
SANSKAAR & ADHIKAAR



PIYUSH AGGARWAL & DR. ASHUTOSH ANGIRAS

Human Rights in India: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract

An attempt has been made in the paper to connect the urge of socio-economic and political equality and human rights in historical perspective. The tenants of liberty quality, fraternity and justice have been traced from the socio-cultural and the religious values of India. The religious and cultural aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism in the Ancient and the Sufi and Bhati Movements in medieval India have been elaborate in the context of human rights. The paper elaborates also elaborate on the human rights movement in modern India.

Human rights refer to "the basic rights and freedoms, to which all human beings are entitled, oft held to include the right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression and equality before the law. They are concerned with the dignity of human- beings and ought to maintain a level of self-esteem which promotes a sense of belongingness among the human. In the present world – order, they are regarded as the grammar of political governance, which must not be denied by any government. They are the absolute rights of

human beings and everyone has an equal claim upon them. Article 1 and 2 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights hold "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." and that "everyone is entitled to all rights set forth in this "Declaration", without distinction of any kind, such as, race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, nation or social origin, property birth or other status."¹ In the modern terminology human rights are of very new origin and they are traced back to the rhetoric of the democratic alliance of the Second World War.² As a socio-religious concept human rights has been passing through many generations and many civilization of human folk before coming to the present stage and the origin of human rights can be traced back to very beginning of human civilization across the world.

The critics of the modern terminology and the internationalization of human rights have alleged that the modern concept of human rights is influenced by the western values and the agenda of western powers to the glorification and universalize their values over the whole world. Their argument is that the cultural differences and cultural-relativism are not given proper space while developing the universal theory and the law for the advancement of human rights at the international level. The regional and local cultures have been not only ignored but also criticized due to the lack of modern out-look and social conservatism in the mainstream discourse of human rights.

The concept of culture-relativism in human rights has been recognized by the education and research institutions at the national and international levels. The teachers and researchers on the human rights are tracing the genesis of human rights to the very dawn of human civilization now a day. The new and basic argument regarding the historical

evolution and the development of human rights is that the development of human civilization is very much imbibed to the development of human rights and human values and they depend on each other for their growth. Definitely human civilization could not flourish without securing the right to dignity and right to development to the human beings.

Although as to subject of international activism and international politics human rights are not an age – old phenomena, their evolution can be traced back to the rhetoric of Second-World War and to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): but as socio-religious concept human rights has been evolved throughout the history of mankind, they are intricately attached to the laws, customs and religion throughout the ages of human civilization.³

In much of human history, people have acquired rights and responsibilities through their membership in a family, group, community, religion and polity. Most of the human societies and civilizations have had traditions similar to the “golden rule” of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” The Hindu Vedas, Buddhism, Sikhism, Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, the Bible, the Quran (Koran), and the Analects of Confucius are the oldest written sources which address questions of people’s duties, rights, and responsibilities. In fact, all societies, whether in their oral or written traditions have had systems of property and justice as well as the ways of tending to the health and welfare of their members.⁴

The relevance and importance of human rights has been increasing in today’s world and slowly they are becoming the symbol of democratic and good governance. The national historians are linking the development of their national civilization along with the socio-cultural and religious

tolerance and protection of human rights from many centuries back. Every nation as a civilized modern nation is claiming to be more sincere and sensitive for the protection and promotion of human rights from a very long time.

India is also claimed to be one of the oldest civilization-state with moral values and a long cultural heritage. It has witnessed too many socio-religious and cultural movements and political set-ups in the ancient, medieval and modern periods. Although a systematic campaign and the movements for the recognition of human rights in written and modern form could start only after the establishment of British Empire. The genesis of human rights and duties in India, however, can be traced back to the ancient and medieval periods of the Indian civilization. A large number of anecdotes and historical documents still exist to prove that the community relations under the Indian civilization were always governed by the principles of moral rights and duties.

As we know that India has not only been a civilization-state with multiple religions and cultures living and prospering together but it has also witnessed inevitably the competition among the followers of different faiths and their concerns over the human values. There are various views on the emergence and development of human and moral values across the country. However, no religious texts and historical documents denied human values and moral duties. In fact every religion and culture has established certain paradigm of the moral rights and duties. Despite the diversities and ambiguities the selected texts of Hinduism, Buddhism of Ancient India, "Sufi" and "Bhakti" Movement of Medieval India and the "Freedom Struggle" of Modern India can be identified as the crucial movements for the development of human rights and duties in India.⁵

Significantly, the popular movements for the promotion of human values and moral duties emerged in the medieval India. It was the first ever in the history of Indian civilization that the hymns of saints questioned the exploitation of the masses at the hands of ruling class. During the ancient India the concepts of peace, human values and duties came through establishment/ruling classes either it was within the Hinduism or Buddhism.

The voices from below particularly the poetry of Sufi and Bhakti saints for the first time in the Indian history, advocated emancipating masses from the exploitation of dominated classes. The proponents of both "Sufi" and "Bhakti" movement voiced their concerns of human equality, freedom and justice and presented their views on the pathetic condition of the masses from both the Hindus and Muslims. They registered their protest against the social hierarchies and the inhuman treatment which was meted out to the Dalits (untouchables) and Women in the middle age. In their mystical thought and preaching, the saints voiced for the freedom of human kind from the socio, religious and political nexuses of the time. This notion was further concretized and shaped into the Civil, Political, Economic and cultural rights and social justice during the freedom struggle.

The "Sufi" and "Bhakti" saints launched a serious attack on the socio, religious and political evils, which were promoted by the Mullah (the Muslim clergy) and the Pandits (the Hindus clergy) to serve the interest of the dominant classes during the medieval period. They negated the concept of sacred language and the middleman (priest) to worship the God and advocates for the direct relationship between the god and individual. To end the religious bigotry and the exploitation of masses at the hands of middleman,

they wrote hymns in vernacular and inspired the common men to worship the God in their own language instead of paying the middleman for the sacred language.

To strengthen the direct worship and a direct relationship between the God and individual, they developed the new concept of *Jeev Atma* (a feminine soul) and *Parmata* (God). By transforming the relation of god and individual into a sacred relationship of husband and wife they established that as the wife doesn't need any sacred language and middleman to meet her husband and same is true in the relationship of *Jeev Atma* and *Parmatma*.

The voices and the struggle of the Sufi and Bhagti saints sharpened and entered into new areas with the advent of Guru Nank and Bullah Shah.

Sufism

Sufi movement started with Baba Farid and ended with Bullah Shah at whose time the Sufi movement reached to its zenith. Sufism initiated reforms within Islamic personal laws and critiqued the orthodox traditions that it found contrary to egalitarianism. With the rise of its following and popularity, the message of Sufism got embedded in the minds of people and enabled them to transcend the social and religious boundaries. It became like the thought of common man at the time of Baba Bullah Shah. It is precious to note that Sufism experienced a sea change in peoples thought and action. The mystical content with which Baba Farid initiated Sufism in India experienced a radical change with the advent of Baba Bullah Shah. To quote Baba Farid:

"Uth Farida sutaya, Subah Nivaz Gujar.

Jo ser sai na nive, so ser kap uttar.

Farida benivaja kuttaya, eh na bhali reety.

*Kabuh na chal aaya, paj-e waqat Masit."*⁶

The orthodoxy was condemned by the proponents of Sufism from very beginning and the medium of vernacular language. Baba Farid negated the concept of middlemen and sought to establish the relationship of individual with God directly. Sufism, however, remained under the Shariat and the five-time prayer was considered necessary for religious life. In the above lines Baba Farid asked for the *Jeev Atama* to follow the rule of five time prayer in the Mosque to lead a spiritual life.

As mentioned above that the Sufist thought experienced a sea change with the advent of Baba Bullah Shah and crossed the lines of Shariat. Bullah Shah launched a direct attack on the socio - religious bigotry and orthodox regressive traditions of Islam. To quote Bullah Shah:

*“Je koi snau Sayied aakhe,
dojakh milan sjawa.*

*Je koi sanu Arayai aakhe,
Babishti Peenghan pawa.”⁷*

In the above lines Bullah Shah condemned the caste hierarchies' under the Islam. Bullah Shah was of a higher caste (Sayied) and his Guru (Mentor) was of a lower caste (Arayai). While expressing his regard to his Guru (Mentor) Bullah Shah wrote that he will love to those who will call him of low caste, and will pray to god for a place in heaven. Bullah Shah also condemned the religious orthodoxy. To quote Bullah Shah

“Vrindavan me Gayon charave,

Lanka chad ken ad vajave,

Makke da haji ban jave,

Wa wa rang watainda.”⁸

In these lines Bullah shah wrote that Both Hindus and Muslims worship the same god. The god is Lord Krishna to Hindus when they visited to Vrindavan and Prophet Mohammad to Muslims when they visited to Mecca. The god is the same. Only the names of god are changed. It imparts the message of humanity and secular tradition which developed during the Sufi movement in India.

Bhakti Movement

The proponents of Bhakti Movement like Bhagat Ravi Das, Bhagat Kabir, Meera Bhai, and Guru Nanak Dev, among others, sharply attacked the Varna System and the socio-religious and political evils of the time. To quote Saint Kabir:

*“Garbh vas mein kulh nahi Jati,
Braham bind de sabh utpaatti.
Kahu re Pandit Baaman kab ke hoye,
Bamn keh-keh janam mat khoye.
Jee tu Brahmin, brahmini jaaiaa,
Taou toon aan bat kaabe nahi aaiaa.
Tum kat Braahman hum kat Sood.
Ham kat lohoo tum kat soodh.
Kahu Kabir Jo Brahm bichare,
So Brahmin kabiath hain hamare.”⁹*

In these lines Kabir launches an attack on the caste hierarchy and concept of supremacy of the Brahmin caste. Kabir argued that all the human beings are shaped in the women womb and the biological process for birth of whole humankind is also same, how then a similarly born Brahmin can be greater and higher than other castes people? He argued that the higher status and the greatness of human beings are found in their deeds and thought. Greatness has

nothing to do with the "caste of birth" as all human beings are the creation of same God.

Bhakti movement reached to its zenith with the advent of Sikhism. The inclusion of the hymns of the Dalit saints in the Ad-Granth (the holy book of Sikhs) as equal to the saints from upper caste was one of the radical achievement of the Sikhism to establish the human equality in middle ages. The negation of the Hindu order of purity and pollution and the starting of the tradition of "Langar" (serving of free food to all without any discrimination and to take this food everyone is required to sit in line irrespective of one social economy and political status) by the first guru of Sikhs and the further development of this tradition at the Sikh Temples were the remarkable to promote the human equality in the middle ages.

The hymns of Guru Granth Sahib (the holy book of Sikhs) openly condemns the caste and gender divide in Indian society. In the words of Guru Nanak:

"Bhand jaminye, Bhand manggan Viaho.

Bhand hoye dosti, Bhand chalo raho.

Bhand moa Bhand bhaliye, Bhand hoye bandan.

So kyo manda ahiye, jit janmey Rajan.

*Bhand hi upache, Bhand baj na koi."*¹⁰

Guru Nanak wrote that we are all born from woman (Bhand); we are conceived in the womb of woman, engaged and married to a woman. We make friendship with woman and our lineage continued because of woman. When one woman dies, we take another one, we are bound with the world through woman. Why should we talk bad of her, who gives birth to kings? Man is born from woman; there is no one without her.

Guru Nanak also condemned the caste hierarchy and concept of the graded inequality that is central to caste system. To quote Guru Nanak:

"Nicha ander nich jat hu Aat nich,

Nank tin ke snag sath.

*Wadain sang kya rish"*¹¹

In these lines Guru condemned the arrogance and proud of upper caste, to which the upper caste feel to have taken birth in a higher caste. Guru predicts that he likes the people of lower caste (low origin), who have a real sense of life rather than the arrogance and proud to be born in the higher caste.

Conclusion

Both the Sufi and the Bhakti movement proved to be popular religious movements that impacted over the religious set-up during medieval period of the Indian history. Their imprints have arguably been much more enduring on the socio-political set-up of the then Indian society. The concept of the socio-religious equality and the negation of sacred language and middleman by the Sufi and Bhati Saints became the four pillars for the social reformers who followed them in modern India.

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“पुमान् पुमांसं परिपातु विश्वतः।”

- ऋग्वेद 9-65-14

This is a verse from the Rig-Veda which means, “Every man must protect the rights of the other man in order to survive.” Following this saying, a Rishi of Atharva Veda endorsed the statement of Rig Veda and reaffirmed and resolved in this mantra – “याँश्च पश्यामि याँश्च न तेषु मा सुमतिं कृधि।” ऋग्वेद 17-1-7, which means, “The people I know and the people who are not known to me; they must be protected with my positive and constructive approach or thought.”



Piyush Aggarwal – By profession he is a die-hard Sanskrit teacher who believes in unconventional application of Sanskrit language and to make Sanskrit relevant and utilitarian to modern times. He is traditionally sound in Sanskrit language and literature along with mastery over Computational Sanskrit. He has done extensive survey works regarding Sanskrit & published questionnaires & papers on various issues related to Indian Psychology-Human Rights-Computational Sanskrit-Public Administration and Wellbeing.



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