

CONTRIBUTION OF DEV SAMAJ MOVEMENT IN SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORMS IN PUNJAB

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Abstract

In 19th century many socio-religious reform movement rises in India like Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Singh Sabha, Namdhari Movement and Dev Samaj also, but in this paper, the researcher has only discussed in the topic of Dev Samaj movement and its role of eradicating various social evils and people's orthodox ideologies. It was a reformative, revivalist, movement. Through this movement, social evils were attacked like child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, Purdah system, dowry system, inequality of people and orthodox ideology etc. This movement found the reasons for women suffering in society. The researcher has discussed the role of Dev Samaj movement which has been also commendable. It also played significant role in removing social evils and religious orthodox views of the people.

Introduction

India is land of old cultural heritage where number of rulers ruled from more than thousands of years. But in this paper the researcher will cover the nineteenth century picture of specific region when India was under British rule then social religious movements started at the same time. In 19th century there was various socio-religious reform movements started in Punjab as well as in India under the different communities of society. The present study seeks to explore and examine most but neglected aspects related to socio-religious movements in Punjab during under Punjab British Rule and to trace out the extent, nature and character of mutual relationship of the socio-religious movements and the province of Punjab. To the best of my knowledge, there is no such are

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an exclusive research work which may explain the role and contribution of Punjab in the socio-religious movement of the country and also its impact of the society. Similarly, there is no single book which may tell us about the role of the socio-religious movements in the Punjab during the period under review. Therefore, an attempt will be made to focus attention on various aspects and characteristics which were directly or indirectly related to the mutual relations between the socio-religious movements in Punjab and the role of Punjabi's in the Social-Religious Reform movements. In the proposed study only the aims and objectives as well as the achievement of the Social-Religious movements will not remain in focus rather many new significant features will be explored, re-examined and evaluated critically while keeping in mind the contribution and also the role of Punjab in the Social-Religious movement of the Punjab that had been launched by the Social-Religious Reforms movements of its role, contribution, struggle through with passive attitude. The Hindus, Sikhs and the Muslims have started different movements in the society like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Dev Samaj, Nirankari, Namdhari, Singh Sabha movement, Aligarh Movement, and Ahmadiya movement. The aim of these movements was to change the outlook of people of society and educate them. These movements tried to remove social evils from the society and uplift the conditions of poor people. Dev Samaj movement also contributed to the society. At that time caste system was an important issue in society and in the society, the miserable condition of women, illiteracy these were the important issues. Dev Samaj movement also played very important role. It played a very important role in eliminating these evils from the society. This movement gave a lot of attention to the education of the women and opened Schools, Colleges to remove these evils from society. In this paper, the researcher will explain about contribution of Dev Samaj Movement in social religious reform in Punjab.

Origin of Dev Samaj Movement & its development

Shiv Narayan Agnihotri was founder of this movement who was born on 20th December 1850, at Akbarpur, district Kanpur in the Uttar Pradesh of India. His father name Pandit Rameshwar Agnihotri and mother Mohan Kunwar. His family belonged to Gotra Kanya-Kubj Brahmin. His father Pandit Rameshwar Agnihotri had religious temperament. He worshipped his "Thakurs" and idols every day. He kept religious fasts. He distributed flour and sweet things in charity on the religious occasions. His mother was also religious mind when he had completed his education at his village primary school. He wanted more education and at the age of sixteen. Agnihotri enrolled himself in the Thomson College of engineering at Roorkee.

As a student he was introduced to Vedanta through the teaching of Shiv Dayal Singh who in 1871, formally initiated Agnihotri and his wife as his own disciple. Two years later Agnihotri left Roorkee for Lahore where he accepted a position as drawing master in the Government School. Initially Pandit Agnihotri accepted the rational, eclectic, and reformist ideology of the Brahma Samaj. He wrote and spoke in favour of marriage reform, against the evils of child marriage, and supported vegetarianism. In 1877, he met Swami Dayananda and although they agreed on many of the values commonly shared. Dayananda and Agnihotri clashed persistently. In the years that followed, Pandit Agnihotri defended Brahma ideals in opposition to the new Arya Samaj. Agnihotri also defended Sikhism against attacks made by the Arya Samaj in 1888-89.

Agnihotri dedicated more and more of his energy to the Brahma cause. He became a Brahma missionary travelling extensively throughout the Punjab and, finally, on 20 December 1882, he took Sannyas with the new name, Satya Nand Agnihotri. He decided to devote his entire life to

religious pursuit and social service. Factional strife, competition for leadership, differences over beliefs and the resulting tensions began to impinge on Agnihotri's commitment to the Brahma Samaj.

He found himself less and less comfortable within the Brahma movement, and finally resigned from the Punjab Brahma Samaj in 1886. The founding of the Dev Samaj in 1887 provided Agnihotri with a new opening. By the end of 1887, he and his new organization began to move away from the central ideology of the Brahma Samaj. In place of the eclectic rationalism of the Brahmos based on a reinterpretation of traditional Hindu texts, the Dev Samaj made the 'Guru' Pandit Agnihotri, and his own personal revelations the central principle.

"Book revelations" whether Arya, Brahma, Christian, or Islamic were rejected; the 'guru' became all. In 1892, Agnihotri initiated a policy of dual worship, both of himself and of God. Three years later the worship of God ended, leaving only the 'Guru' Pandit Agnihotri as the focus of worship and of all ideological innovation. Although the Dev Samaj followed patterns of leadership and legitimization different from those of other reform movements within Punjabi Hinduism, its ideology remained similar.

As with the Brahmos and Aryas, the Dev Samaj rejected contemporary Hinduism. Its rituals and deities were replaced by worship of the true 'guru,' Dev Bhagvan Atma. All caste restrictions were rejected. Members of the Dev Samaj was expected to practice inter dining and inter-caste marriage. Pandit Agnihotri also sought to change the role of women through the elimination of child marriage; he set the approved age of marriage at twenty for boys and sixteen for girls.

He discouraged excessive dowries, Pardah, and the traditional mourning rites carried out by Punjabi women. Agnihotri taught that widow marriage was acceptable and married a widow himself following the death of his first wife. The Dev Samaj maintained that women as well as men should be educated and, to further this end, it opened a coeducational school at Moga on 29 October 1899. This later became the Dev Samaj High School, and in 1901 the Samaj opened a separate Girl's School, the Dev Samaj Balika Vidyalaya.

Over the years the Dev Samaj founded other schools and colleges in many parts of the Punjab. Above all else, the Dev Samaj taught a strongly moral doctrine. Its members were urged to be completely honest in both their public and private lives. They should not lie, steal, cheat, accept bribes, or gamble. They should take neither liquor nor drugs and should Practice strict vegetarianism. The Samaj members were divided into three classes, Sahayaks, or sympathizers and Navajivan Yaftas, those who had found a new life.

The former joined the Dev Samaj, paid Rs ten per year, and accepted the leadership of Pandit Agnihotri. The latter members were expected to follow the strict moral code of the Dev Samaj, to reject all "false" religious symbols and to donate one tenth of their income to the Samaj. A third section of members included those who had taken a strict religious vow dedicating them to the pursuit of Dev Dharam. The strict moral code of the Dev Dharam appealed to educated Punjabis, who came to make up the membership of the Samaj.

Dev Samaji's were almost all educated, literate men and even a large percentage of their women were literate. Their position in society gave the movement far greater influence than sheer numbers would allow. The Samaj was always an elite organization even at its peak during the 1920's. Following the death of Pandit Agnihotri the movement declined, but did not disappear. Partition saw the loss of its properties in Lahore and as a result the centre of the movement shifted to the Moga, Ferozpur area where it still continues to adhere to the Vigyan Mulak Dharam, the Science Grounded Religion of Pandit Shiv Narayan Agnihotri.

Main Principles of Dev Samaj Movement

There are some principles of this movement which made for social religious reforms. These are as above:

1. It rejects all caste distinctions.
2. It rejects any idea of intercession, redemption and pilgrimages.
3. It believes in female education and her protection and progress.
4. It believes in the theory of truth, beauty and goodness.
5. It believes in thoughts, speech and action among all classes of people equally.
6. This movement removes egoistic forces as vanity, hatred, selfishness and to evolve such goods feelings as compassion, gratitude, reverence.
7. It believes the concept of in the science of moral and spiritual laws of soul.
8. It employees the scientific method and accept the scientific patterns of thoughts, beliefs that nature is self sufficient in its working.
9. It believes in logical approach.
10. This movement is deadly against superstition.
11. It believes in widow remarriage.
12. It is in favour of abolition of untouchability and practice of Sati System.
13. This movement prohibited intoxicants drinks and drugs which are the injurious to health purpose and of the cows slaughter issues.
14. The Dev Samaj movement its main program began to Ideal society principle lies in the status and position of women.
15. Child marriage and dowry system is also disliked by this movement.
16. It is in favour of inter caste and inter-state marriages.
17. The philosophy of universe is based on self existent and self sufficient. It is governed by nature of laws are universal, immutable, invaluable and eternal.
18. It believes in four kingdoms of nature human, animal vegetable and inanimate.

Conclusion

So it is clear that Education is the only instrument with which women can open a door of the justice. Other rule set the Dev Samaj movement was strictly banned at the occasion of marriage for example no drink, no cigarettes are offered, no meat diet is served, and no dancing women are believed to the entertaining. Even today's in marriage ceremony this system is openly begun but Dev Samaj condemned this system even in 18th century. The problem in Indian society was caste system and untouchability. The principles of Dev Samaj movement are helpful to change the outlook of the people. Dev Samaj movement strongly propagated the theory of truth and well being. It creates the equality among male and female.

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