

HINDUISATION OF FOLK DEITIES AND EMERGENCE OF HINDU REVIVALISM

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Abstract

A slow and gradual change has been taking place amid the traditional practices in the religious sphere in India in recent years. With the increased consciousness vis-a-vis a religious identity these have led to significant changes in the nature of traditional practices of worship. The quiet Sanskritisation of deities of folk tradition, a kind of revivalism, has brought significant changes to traditional patterns of worship. This article examines the nature of this process of Sanskritisation and assesses its impact on traditional society as well as the acceptance and recognition of this change among both the revivalist and the conservatives. The study draws from fieldwork conducted in the state of Tamil Nadu to discern the changes taking place in pattern of worship.

Keywords: Sanskritisation, folk deities, worship, India.

Introduction

The silent revolution in the form of Sanskritisation in India in recent years has resulted in a reawakening of religious identity. The consciousness for obtaining religious identity is nurtured day by day by this process. As a result the revivalists have given more popularity to the worship of folk deities and to accommodate such deities in the spectrum of Hinduism. The revivalists have made various preparations to incorporate such deities. These activities include the change of *sthalapuranas* (religious texts), installation of Vedic deities in the temples of folk tradition and other rituals. This revival process, however, has led to the emergence of two types of thinking. First, the revivalists were satisfied with the Sanskritisation process itself as their own. Secondly, the conservatives of folk tradition conceived of this as the ritual domination of the upper class and willfully made to erase the identity of folk culture and rituals associated with them. This article examines this complex process of Sanskritisation, its origins and development, and considers how it has contributed to the emergence of religious revivalism in India.

History of Tamils' Religion

Tamilagam is situated in the deep southern part of India. The concept of God in ancient Tamilagam is centred on the worship of the mother goddess generally. The mother goddess is known by various names such as *Kotravai*, *Palaiyol*, *Kanamar Selvi*, *Kadu Kizhal* and *Kadal Kelu Selvi*.¹ They evolved in the social context of the Tamils based upon the five geographical divisions² which are popularly known in Tamil literature as *Tinai* (Eco-bio power land stratification³). The gods and goddesses were *Cheyon* of Kurinji,⁴ *Mayon*

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or *Mal* of Mullai,⁵ *Venthan* of Marutham,⁶ *Nediyon* (Varanan or *Varunan*) of Neithal⁷ and *Kotravai* of Palai.⁸

The Vedic priests adopted various means to Sanskritise the deities of folk tradition. Even though there are diversified characteristics between the Vedic and the folk tradition, they inducted these deities in their spectrum; they created various *sthalapuranas* which emphasised the relation between these gods and goddesses with any one of the gods and goddesses of Vedic tradition. For example, a male deity called *Kuttandavar* is worshipped in many parts of the Tamil country, especially in South Arcot district. The image consists of a head like a big mask with a rubicund face and lion's teeth projecting downwards outside the mouth from the angles of the upper jaw. According to legend the creation of *Kuttandavar*, the god of Indra, is for the crime of murdering a Vedic priest, became incarnated in the form of *Kuttandavar*, and a curse was laid upon him that his body leaving only the head. These types of stories need to be carefully examined, because they are regarded as the *kuladevatas* by the oppressed and downtrodden people. In these circumstances they also altered the structure of these deities into either degraded or cursed form.

Hence changes have been made only on the popular deities. For example, *Mariamman*, another deity of subalterns, is highly influenced by the Vedic rituals. She is usually garlanded with skulls. But recently, the skull garland has been replaced by the lemon garland. Her poor outlook has been altered into a pleasant one. Sometimes these restructuring processes led to the degradation of the deities. When they stress the holiness of the deities of Vedic tradition at the same time they denied the holiness of the deities of the folk tradition. They described the gods and goddesses of folk tradition either as watching deities to the deities of Vedic religion or they related these deities with contagious diseases.

The process of Sanskritisation can also be seen in the popular temples dedicated to the deities of folk religion. For example, the increase in the number of devotees to Samayapuram, Punnainallur, Vazhangaiman *Mariamman* temples in Tamil Nadu boosted the financial position. It attracts the Vedic priests to switch over their interest to *Mariamman* on account of the financial benefits. They not only dominate during the time of worship, but also on various other occasions. They have introduced the custom of *Kumbhabhishekam*. In addition to this, they have made *Mariamman* as a *Suddhadevatas* (non-vegetarian deity). With regard to the temples of folk tradition *Vinayakar*, *Murugan*, *Iyyappan* and others, Vedic deities are replaced by the deities of folk tradition such as *Aiyanar*, *Madurai Viran* and *Karuppannasamy*. Even the people of the folk tradition have begun to follow some customs and habits of higher castes in order to raise their social status.

Tinai based deities

The folk deities evolved on the base of the five geographical divisions popularly known in Tamil literature as '*Tinai*'.⁹ The *Paripatal* and *Tirumurukkatruppadaai* seem to represent the transition from the worship of tribal folk deities to the universalisation of godhead and the evolution of formal religious systems, which under the Pallavas and Pandyas

of the seventh-ninth centuries AD became crystallised as the Puranic Vaishnava and Saiva religions. It was a new regional synthesis of Puranic forms in which the northern Sanskrit elements assumed a dominant position while the local or folk cults and their deities were either completely merged or remained as major components of the Puranic pantheon.¹⁰

Tolkappiyam in Porul, Ahathinai Sutra five located the climate to environmental zone (Tinai) on the basis of agamic deities worshipped by the early Tamils. Science and religion met in this agnomic religious ground. Mayon (Thirumal – ‘mal’ is cloud, and ‘Thiru’ is sacred as per Tamil context) was the chief worshipping deity of Vedic Aryans was a pre-Vedic and non-Vedic God.¹¹ Nediyan was the chief deity of Neithal (coastal) belt. As Nediyan is the god of water (Aazhiyon – God of Sea) he is also called Narayana (*Nara*-water and *ayana*-sleeping). Venthan was the chief worshipping deity of the riverine agrarian belt. Venthan means one who encompasses and protects. In literature of succeeding ages, Siva is called Venthan. In Manickavasakar’s *Thiruvvasagam*, *Sivapuranam* song-one of the lines use the term Venthan for Siva. Likewise in gnomic literature ‘*Kontra Venthan*’, the title of the book refers to Siva. Therefore Tolkappiyar’s Venthan¹² the chief deity of Marutham, of the riverine and agrarian belt is Siva and not Indra. Under the wand of Sanskritisation of early middle ages in Tamil Nadu, the medieval commentators who lived after 10th century AD missed the key-note themes of *Tinai* social structure and agamic religion of non-Vedic religious base of early Tamils. They inadvertently inducted Indra, the chief Rig-Vedic deity of Aryans¹³ in Tolkappiyam in place of Siva. This in turn, with mesmeric impact had brainwashed the Tamil scholar ever since. Hence they miss Siva in Tolkappiyam. ‘Varuna’ is Nediyan, i.e. God of Waters. Venthan (Siva) is God of Space who is encompassing and protecting the cosmos. Siva is also called Veliyan (Space) in the context of Sangam literature.

Vishnu, in Tamil context is not only the God of Sky, is also called Mayon or Thirumal. He is related to rain. Vishnu, Siva, Muruga, Sakthi, Lakshmi, Krishna, Balarama are non-Vedic and pre-Vedic gods opposed by the Indo Aryans. These deities had a later admission in Vedic religion.¹⁴ Evidence can be found in Vedic literature.¹⁵ P.L. Swamy¹⁶ has pointed out that in the worship of north Indian goddesses like Lajjagowri, one can see the synchronisation of the cult of the Kotravai, the Dravidian mother goddess (which also seems to be the Harappan mother goddess), the cult of the forest goddess in the Vanavasi Kotarimata at Lothal (which is the ‘*Kanamar Selvi*’ of Sangam poems), the cult of the Paleolithic mother (*Palaiyol*) and the latter Aryan – Dravidian fused cult of Renuka (the Sanskritised form of *Ellamma*n or *Mariamman*).

In India, when Dravidians excelled in civilisation it attracted the eyes of Aryans, when they began to penetrate towards south. Slowly they influenced the whole society. Socially, politically, culturally and economically Vedic people became stronger and influential. In order to dominate the people, they Sanskritised all walks of life and through which they tried to attain the formation of Hindu revivalism. In Tamil Nadu it also occurs in the form of Sanskritisation of the deities of folk tradition. It is clearly visible when we take a closer look on the puranic story and temples of the popular deities of folk tradition. The Vedic people admitted folk deities in their scriptures and puranic stories in due course which gave way to the conversion of the deities of folk tradition into Vedic group.

The process of Sanskritisation

The development of Hinduism can be interpreted as a constant interaction between the religion of the upper social groups, represented by the Brahmans (priests and teachers), and the religion of other groups. From the time of the Aryan invasion (c. 1500 BC) the indigenous inhabitants of the subcontinent have tended to adapt their religious and social life to Brahmanic norms. This has developed from the desire of lower-class groups to rise on the social ladder by adopting the ways and beliefs of the higher castes.

This process, sometimes called 'Sanskritisation,' began in Vedic times when non-Aryan chieftains accepted the ministrations of Brahmans and thus achieved social status for themselves and their subjects. It was probably the principal method by which Hinduism spread through the subcontinent and into Southeast Asia. Sanskritisation still continues in the form of the conversion of tribal groups, and it is reflected by the persistent tendency of low-caste Hindus to try to raise their status by adopting high-caste customs, such as wearing the sacred cord and becoming vegetarians. Thus, the history of Hinduism can be interpreted as the imposition of orthodox custom upon wider and wider ranges of people and, complementarily, as the survival of features of non-Aryan religions that gained strength steadily until they were adapted by the Vedic people.

Now the people have lost grip over Vedic tradition. They are changing their attention towards the worship of folk deities.¹⁷ Large number of people began to worship of folk deities. Whereas, the popular temples of Vedic tradition lose their attraction and there are no large crowds in these shrines.¹⁸ There are some exceptions, but in total the grip over the worship of Vedic tradition is slowly declining. The Hindu revivalists finding favour on this started to assimilate all the popular local elements and incorporated them in their Hindu fold.

Sanskritisation and Hindutva

The process of Sanskritisation resulted in the growth of Hindutva, movements advocating Hindu nationalism, and the consciousness of Hindu revivalism. When it Sanskritised the folk deities it resulted in positive and negative impacts to the *hindutvavadis* and folk worshippers respectively. At the matured level of Sanskritisation of folk deities Vedic people and *hindutvavadis* enjoy maximum level of followers and constitute a majority.¹⁹ This helped them to boast a hindutva ideology.

The first method of Sanskritisation of folk deities is conversion of folk deities into Vedic deities and also the installation of Vedic deities in the temples of folk tradition which have resulted in the supremacy of Vedic deities over folk deities.²⁰ For this purpose they are all now made as the subordinate sister or avatar or personification of Vedic deities.²¹ The *sthalapuranas* and other literary evidences are being created and restructured.²² It is achieved either through providing a link with any Vedic deity. The impact of these puranas and stories is perceived by the people in different connotations. They perceived all these stories with the mentality of superiority of Vedic deities and Vedic people over folk deities and folk worshippers respectively. Another interesting feature is Sanskritised marriage of Vedic deities with folk deities. Less importance is given to the folk deities at

the same time greater importance is given to Vedic counterpart.²³ Having seen all these features the folk worshippers internalise the insignificant role of folk female deities and later justified it connecting with their day to day life.

Frequently the folk deities are incorporated with Vedic stories. A popular story now systematically popularised is Thippainjamman story with Sita, an epic character of Ramayana.²⁴ This story is viewed as internalising Ramayana from its original epic nature. Creating aversion over the blood sacrifices is an important mode of Sanskritisation. The projection of impurity of blood sacrifices and undue popularity towards this resulted in the discontinuing of blood sacrifices by the folk worshippers both in the urban and rural folk temples.²⁵ It slowly tends to the entry of Vedic priests into the folk temples for pujas and rituals.²⁶

Agamas influenced the construction of temples of folk tradition. Agamic rules and Vaasthu Sastras are strictly followed at the time of construction of a temple. Due to these, the simple structure of folk temples is altered with various features such as sanctum sanctorum, mantapas, prakaras, gopuras and other related features.²⁷ The introduction and influence of agamas restricted the entry of folk worshippers into the sanctum sanctorum.²⁸ Ferocious look of folk deities is converted into soft look. It symbolically represented the modernisation process by which folk deities are alienated from their worshippers. Extensive temple building activities in the name of Hindu congregation result in the projection of Hindu religion, as majoritarian religion.

Emergence of Hindutva

The Hindu Revivalism is not a recent phenomena but it dates back to 1820s²⁹ when the British adopted the policy of divide and rule caused the emergence of Hindu revivalism.³⁰ The Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj and other organisations were started for the propagation of Hindu revivalism.³¹ The freedom aided by religious leaders also caused the emergence of Hindu revivalism especially in the southern part of India.

The revivalism generated in various forms. First, it was a linguistic and literary process. In this era much literature glorified the Vedic culture such as *Mukkoodarpallu*, *Periyapuranam*, *Kamba Ramayanam* and other literature were created. In this list modern literature such as Jeyamohan's *Vishnupuram* also glorifies the Vedic culture and Vedic people. In fact, it was the means for a deeper and wider process. Secondly it became a political process.³² At the time of the freedom movement it gained the religion cum nationalism dimension. At this time, they gained political power and became pressure groups. Thirdly, it became an economic process. During this time a form of land grant and other monetary benefits, brahmanical landlord system or agrarian economy was implemented. Finally, in order to get wide respect and control over the society, they converted the process of Sanskritisation into a religious one.³³ Now, the Hindu revivalism and the process of Sanskritisation are a multi-dimensional one and not a single factor.³⁴

Revivalism has another characteristic. The Aryan pride and the Vedic glory are the important aspects of that revivalism. The Sangh Parivar, for example, is attempting to revive the ancient golden age by recourse to caste and religion. In concrete terms it is through recourse to manuvad dharma and the religious texts of the upper castes that

a golden age can once again be established.³⁵ The folk people have been aggressively hinduised obstructing their search for their identity and heritage. Women have been relegated to spaces of homes and kitchens, encouraging them to internalise images of sati, Sita and Savitri and take up occupations in homes as cooks, mothers and wives.³⁶

With Hindutva, therefore, as their articulated ideology, the second invasion of Aryans has been inaugurated.³⁷ But what must be noted is the significant difference between the first and second Aryan invasions.³⁸ While the first began with the territorial colonisation of the Dravidians followed by the subjugation of their minds through Vedic religion and culture and the indirect control of the monarchical governance system, the second started with the direct control of the modern democratic governance system, followed by the colonisation of the Dravidian minds through resurgence of Vedic religion and culture and modern technology, and reinforcing this colonisation process by exercising control over the capitalist market economy.³⁹

Achyut Yagnik, political scientist and coordinator of the Ahmedabad-based centre for Social Knowledge and Action has noted: "The Sangh has systematically made inroads among Dalits and tribal and is using them as instruments of Hindutva. This is being achieved with extended government patronage. A systematic Hindutva campaign is on the tribal religion. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal have registered their presence at the village level".⁴⁰ Hindutva is not an ideology of ordinary, peace-loving, working class Hindus. On the other hand, as can be seen, it is an ideology of Brahmanism evolved to maintain its caste supremacy.⁴¹

Functioning of Hindutva Forces

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), VHP, Shiv Sena and other outfits function in different ways in different places. Needless to say, all these activities aim at making people unite on the basis of religion, keeping aside all other identities of oppression like folk, tribal, regional languages, etc. At the regional level, Hindutva forces function in the following ways: *Hindutvavadis* sponsor money for temple festivals of different cities and villages. They are encouraging people to celebrate Hindu festivals.⁴² Popularisation of Vedic deities like Rama and Ganesh, by distributing their pictures to each house is carried out.⁴³ Propagation of Hinduism as the mother of all other religions and preaching that minority religions of India should come under the organisational structure of Hinduism.⁴⁴ Making people believe that many Hindus are being converted to Islam and Christianity is an important slogan of these elements.⁴⁵ They have installed flagpoles in every nook and corner and hoisted BJP and RSS flags. Conversion of common places like playgrounds, community halls, government schools, temples, etc, in each village into 'Shaka'⁴⁶ centres.⁴⁷ So far in all of Tamil Nadu 1,051 shakas were created, according to a report in the *Outlook* magazine.⁴⁸

Organising public meetings in each village and city, at which hardcore Hindutva leaders used to deliver inflammatory speeches. Bringing a section of people in each village and city into its fold by dividing the unity of the village and instigating violence through them is a main target. Distracting Dalits and Tribal from getting organised on the basis of their respective identities and luring them to get organised on the basis of the Hindu identity.⁴⁹ Bringing the rural folk religions of Dalits and Tribal into the Vedic fold and

incorporation of *pujaris* of folk traditions into the Hindu fold by offering them a monthly salary is another method.⁵⁰ Hoisting the Saffron flag in each temple (both in cities and villages)⁵¹ and projecting a false view that the Hindu religion is perishing, and creating an army of Hindus to protect it.

Making full use of the media is nowadays becoming a centre of activity. Organisation of '*Kumbabishegam*' and *Yagam* on a larger scale and making Vedic people leaders a deciding authority in grave issues affecting the nation. Appointing *Hindutvavadis* to high posts in the government administration, judiciary, media, etc, in a planned manner with an idea of pushing forward their hidden agenda. Making *Hindutva* cadres function as 'cultural police' who safeguard 'Hindu culture.'⁵² Suppressing the anti-communal efforts of secular thinking citizens and isolating them. Pressurising the minorities to return to the 'mother religion' is systematically made. Coaxing the Tribals, who certainly do not fall under the 'Hindu fold', into believing that they are Hindus.⁵³

In the guise of offering financial assistance, uniting all small temples with big ones and forcing them to conduct ceremonies according to Vedic traditions, sidelining or burying the folk traditions of Dalits.⁵⁴ Sanskritisation is not only spreading to new sections and areas, it is also increasing among groups which are considered to be already Sanskritised in their style of life. The spread of Sanskritisation is aided by mass media and by such secular processes as the increased popularity of education and greater mobility, spatial as well as social. The idea of the equality of all men before the law, and the abolition of untouchability, are throwing open a culture which was the monopoly of small traditional elites to the entire body of Hindus. The effects of some acts of legislation, such as the introduction of prohibition of the consumption of alcoholic drinks in many states, and the banning of the sacrifice of birds and animals in Hindu temples, are such as to make the government an unwitting but powerful agent of Sanskritisation.⁵⁵

False propaganda, myths and symbols

The RSS outfits are busy in producing and discriminating myths in order to manipulate people's minds and behaviour and to manufacture consent for their hegemonistic designs.⁵⁶ The term 'propaganda' means a systematic attempt to affect the minds, emotions and actions of a given group for political purposes. In the most general terms any attempt to persuade or to coerce the persons to accept a certain point of view or to take a certain action is the method of propaganda. 'It is the application of suggestion to large groups of people in a planned and systematic manner for the purpose of controlling their attitude and securing a predetermined mode of conduct' opined Charles Bird.⁵⁷ This is what the RSS has been doing in recent years. The Mahabharatha and Ramayana are epics written by ancient scholars. But the Sangh Parivar outfits have been projecting them as historical events. The high percentage of illiteracy in the country is a fertile ground for mythical propaganda and for breeding religious communalism.⁵⁸

In similar manner, the Ganesha festival, a Vedic ritual, was used by Balgangathar Tilak to unite Hindus against the British during the freedom struggle. Now the same symbol is used by the RSS elements to unite Hindus against the minorities. In the process, the folk deities of Dalits and their traditions are being replaced by Ganesh.⁵⁹ Another deity Rama, a character found in the epic Ramayana, is projected as a symbol that unifies all the

Hindus. But, as is well known, Rama is a symbol of Aryans. He is the God of the Vedic people and certainly not that of the Dalits and Tribal, though today, Dalits and Tribal are being forced to accept him as their God. In the name of building a temple for Rama, efforts are on to unite the Tribal, Dalits and Backward Castes.

The RSS outfits will never allow the unity of Dalits, nor of Tribal. If these two sections of society emerge together as a separate force asserting their identity and rights, the supremacy of Vedic tradition will totter. Hence, the RSS elements use all possible methods to thwart the alliance or solidarity efforts of Dalits and Tribal. Luring Dalits and Tribal and instigating them against minorities is the usual game plan of the Sangh Parivar. However, in reality, the Hinduism of Dalits does not fall into the above-mentioned category. Their religion has its roots in 'folk traditions', local deities who are none other than the heroes who worked for their upliftment. In reality caste hierarchy has no place in their religion. The inequality and discrimination they suffer within their communities is an acquired heritage from the Brahmanic caste system.⁶⁰

Homogenisation of Culture

India is a land of diverse cultures, languages and religions. Its pluralism is the uniqueness of Indian society. Forgetting the richness of the nation, the outfits of the Sangh Parivar are propagating the theory of 'One Nation – One Culture – One Religion'. It is nothing but a cultural onslaught, which is totally unacceptable to people rooted in the world's largest democracy.⁶¹ The process of Sanskritisation is made popular not alone with the efforts taken by external agencies but also the cry and wish of the local people. The local people are interested in changing their customs and way of living. Hence, they started to accept various elements of Sanskritisation as their own. The local people nowadays have started to speak the languages of Vedic people and celebrated various festivals and ceremonies. They also started to adopt the Vedic method of living. In fact, they have also started to look down on local customs and celebrations and delineated towards Vedic rituals.

Revival of Old Practices

Many organisations of social and religious are working to revive the old traditional religions in the light of Vedic religious tradition. It is happening in Chotanagar tribal areas. The Adibasi Samaj Sudhar Sabha includes the Munda Jati, the Kahria Jati, and the Ho Jati Sudhar Sabhas. They stand for a two-fold programme. First, they try to organise the village life and the tribal religious festivals along modern lines. The Singhbhum Oraon Samaj Sudhar Sabha appoints committee on village and other levels. It has published a *karam* (important festival) story and song book for the use of the village folk. The committee puts out a printed programme for particular festivals with a directive for observing them. Some of these groups have begun to adopt Hindu festivals with great pomp.⁶² The festival of cart, the *Holi* and other popular Hindu festivals are being adopted by the tribal religions. Among the educated tribals Saraswathi puja and Janmashthami are becoming common and popular.⁶³

The second part of their programme includes activities in opposition to Christianity. They propagate that the tribal who have become Christian cannot claim to be Tribal because they totally discard everything which the tribal hold dear. The tribal Christians in their

opinion are denationalised. They go as far as to submit long memorandums to the state and Union Governments requesting them to withdraw or debar the tribal Christians' right to welfare facilities and service reservations constitutionally granted to the scheduled tribes.⁶⁴ The non-tribal religions play a great role in the revival of the tribal religions. There are some big temples which have become the centre of popular Hindu festivals in the tribal areas and these temples attract the simple tribal.⁶⁵ It is not only happening in Chota Nagpur, but also in parts of Tamil Nadu. The fundamentalist's organisation like VHP, RSS and other organisations engaged in the funding as well as the above-mentioned ground level activities in rural Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu *Gramakovil Pujarigal Peravai*, a sister organisation of VHP is making efforts to revive the Vedic religious customs and practices in the temples of folk tradition in organising state level, regional level conferences and providing training programmes to the benefit of the village priests with stipend.⁶⁶

Revolt of the Downtrodden Outcastes

Whenever the Sanskritisation process introduced or occurred in Tamil society, the Tamil people immediately responded on it. The downtrodden outcaste people were mobilised by their leaders to show opposition to the introduction of Hindu revivalism and the process of Sanskritisation. There are different struggles as to counter the different facets of Hindu revivalism, political level opposition to counter the superiority of Hindu fundamentalist. Likewise in all aspects so as to counter their superiority in religious aspect the struggle mobilised by the folk people to counter them. They are trying to get religious identity from their own folk religious tradition. The movement of the outcastes against the injustice of the Vedic social order has a long history behind it. Revolts and rebellions against the established order is a natural part of the history of the poor in all countries of the world.⁶⁷

The Adaptability of Hinduism

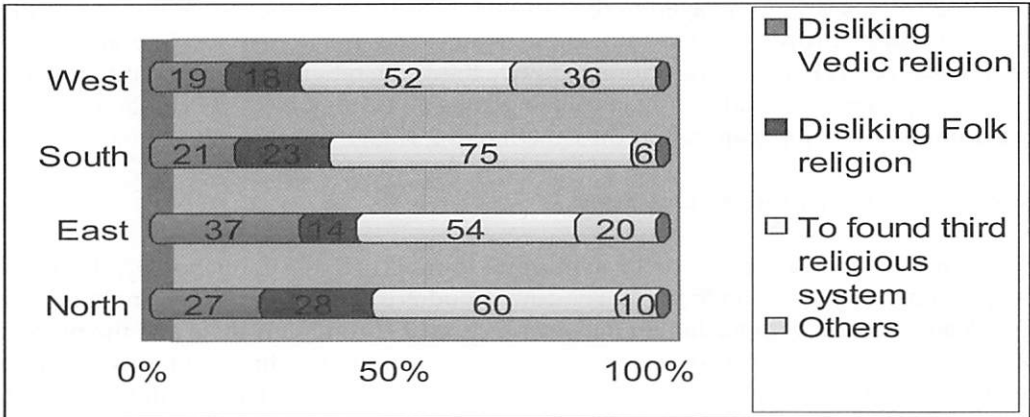
The adaptability of Hinduism to changing conditions is illustrated by the appearance in the Hindu pantheon of a new divinity, of special utility in an acquisitive society. This is the goddess Santosi Mata, first worshipped widely by women in many cities of Uttar Pradesh and now worshipped throughout India, largely as the result of a popular mythological film about her birth and the origin of her worship.⁶⁸ The new goddess was unheard of a few years ago and has no basis in any Puranic myth. Propitiated by comparatively simple and inexpensive rites performed at their homes without the involvement of a priest, Santosi, it is believed, grants practical and obvious blessings. News of Santosi's blessings is passed from housewife to housewife, and even moderately well-educated women have become her devotees. On both the intellectual and the popular level, Hinduism is thus in the process of adapting itself to new values and new conditions that have been brought about by mass education and industrialisation and is responding to 20th century challenges.

Emergence of new cults

New cults, built around saints, either alive or recently deceased, have come into existence in recent years.⁶⁹ Saibaba, a saint of modern India whose tomb is in Shirdi in Maharashtra, has large followers in south India, and there are Saibaba prayer groups in several south Indian cities. Shirdi is a favourable place for pilgrimage. The shrine of Ramana Maharishi

at Tiruvannamalai in Madras state is also visited, though his cult is not as popular as the Saibaba cult.⁷⁰ Among the living gurus or teachers, Swami Chinmayananda is popular and his lectures attract large audiences. The Ramakrishna Mission also provides a focus for the religious interests of many people.⁷¹ The rise of new cults and the functions they fulfill are subjects that need to be studied systematically.⁷²

Chart No. 14: Choosing of separate types of religious institutions

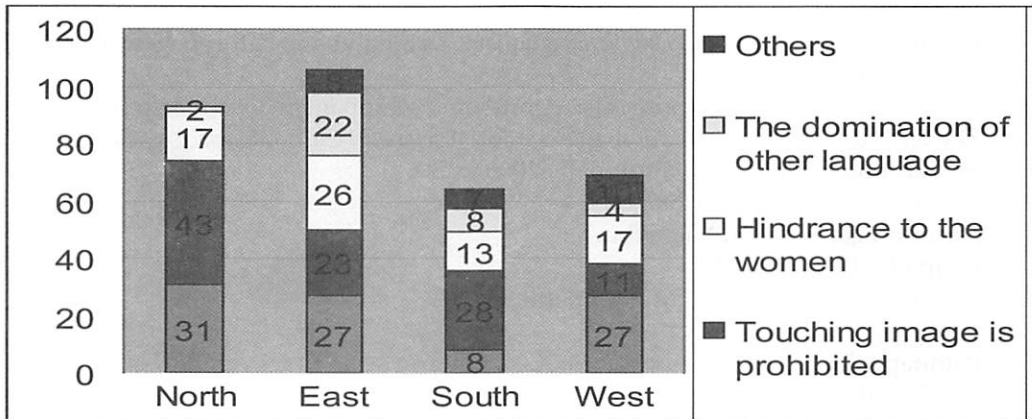


The folk people due to various reasons diverted their attention towards other groups of religious institutions such as Melmaruvathur Aathiparasakthi, Sabarimala Aiyappan worship and others. When the respondents in a survey were asked to pointed out the reason for the sudden deviation a good number of them pointed out the newly found third religious system apart from Folk and Vedic religious tradition. About 25 percent of them pointed out to the dislike of Vedic religions and 22 percent of them pointed out the dislike for folk religion. Hence, one can notice the equal responsibility of revivalists in proposing third religious system in order to bring the Folk masses into an institutionalised religious set up. The above bar chart No. 14 vividly explains this.⁷³

Offences of Vedic social order

It is widely known factor that Vedic social order resorted various offences on the local people and original inhabitants. The Vedic social order in its creation itself is resorted various unjust methods. It is based on varna social order which divided the whole society on caste basis and made it as a birth basis instead of occupational pattern. In the name of caste they restricted the lower caste people from enjoying common minimum benefits.⁷⁴ The lower caste people were not permitted to enter into residential quarters. They were not allowed to bathe or to drink in the common wells and ponds. They were not allowed to enter into the temples and not allowed to perform *pujas* and ceremonies. Social prestige and privileges were denied by mere stating the caste. The following table (Chart 15) shows the restrictions felt by the folk worshippers in their folk temples. When the worshippers were interviewed they identified the following hindrances in which many respondents pointed out the domination of other rituals and languages. Hindrance to women and prohibition to touch the image are considered as the major setback for folk deity worshippers, which was not so before the intervention of Vedic religion.⁷⁵

Chart No. 15: Blockades in Folk temples



Charles Metcalfe, a civil servant of the East India Company and also a revenue officer in India, in his revenue papers about the Indian villages, had recorded the following offences practiced in the Vedic social order.⁷⁶ High sounding names cannot be given to their (untouchables) children.⁷⁷ Their names must be such as to indicate contempt.⁷⁸ This is only the tip of the iceberg. There are so many offences imposed on the ordinary people.

Conclusion

To sum up, the process of Sanskritisation has resulted in the emergence of two types of thinking. The revivalists are satisfied with the Sanskritisation process as their own. On the other hand, the conservatives of folk tradition conceived this as the ritual domination of upper class and willfully made to erase the identity of the folk culture and rituals associated with them. The revivalism is generated in various forms. The process of Sanskritisation is effected in literary activity, politics, economy and culture. Now it is happening in the religious sphere in order to get easy mobility. The process of Sanskritisation is in vogue either involuntarily or voluntarily, but the thinking of Vedic people is always same. The Aryan pride and the Vedic glory are the two important aspects. Sanskritisation has given birth to Hindu revivalism and led to Hindutva ideology. The Sangh Parivar and *hindutvavadis* sensed the easy accessibility of their motto in the form of Sanskritisation. They regarded it as good because of its slow but steady nature. They are attempting to revive the ancient practices by recourse to caste and religion. The folk people have been Sanskritised, obstructing their search for their identity and heritage. The units of fundamentalists organisations such as RSS, Bajrang Dal, Vivekananda Seva Samithi, Bharathiya Janatha Party, Hindu Munnani, Akhila Bharathiya Vidyarthi Parishad are created in rural Tamil land and their activities are expanded to every nook and corner particularly in and around folk temples. One nation, one culture, one religion is the vision of *hindutvavadis*. But India is a land of diverse culture, languages, and religious beliefs. Even the Tamil society is richly adored as pluralistic one. The characteristics of the folk deities and its festivals, method of worship must be given wide popularity.

Endnotes

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