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Impact of Sikhism on Indian Women during Medieval Period

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Abstract

The Status of women in our social environment has often reflected the cultural value of society. The culture has also association with the religion and religion and culture have a same impact on our lifestyle and way of living. These two things involve to the ideology and cultural norms of a Society. In the most societies, it can be seen that religion and culture have established a gender ideologies with clear distinctions between men and women's roles. Thus, this paper will examine the religious impact on gender; it will especially study the role of Sikhism in women's life. Sikhism has played a vital role in shaping the life of women during medieval period as there was the rule of Muslim rulers and the condition of women was varied in different community.

Key Words: miserable, inequalities, irrespective, omnipotent, ignorance.

Introduction

Women in India enjoyed good position during the early ancient period. They were regarded as symbol of prosperity and good fortune during the Vedic period condition of women was very good. But with the passage of time and after the Vedic period the position of women started to deteriorate and in the middle age with the continued attacks of the foreign invaders. So with became awful. The condition of women was so miserable in 12th to 17th century CE. Even in Hindu religion society had adopted dual attitude to the both; the woman and the goddess. The Devine woman was worshipped in the temples but common one was treated like slaves at home. But in the era of darkness divine light emerged in India to vanish all the darkness, with the birth of first Sikh Guru Nanak Dev. Guru Nanak dev ji raised strong voice against all the evils in the society. Guru Nanak Devi also raised his voice against the rituals like Sati pratha, Child marriage and killing of female. In between, Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak dev in 16 century with a new set of Social values, along with the new rituals and new institution. It was necessary as Guru Nanak dev saw the inequalities between men and women rights at Mughal Period. Guru Nanak dev ji dissatisfied with a all these created inequalities in societies. Guru Nanak dev laid down the new religion or social values for peoples in India

In the later period too, the all Guru took the same path and done good deeds for the welfare pf the women. Guru Amardas ji remove *parda* system in Sikhism and gave freedom to the women. Guruji also vanished evils like *sati pratha* and dowry system. Guru Gobind singh ji also describes the glory of women in his holy scripture, "**Chandi di War.**" Many renowned names in sikh history like Bibi Nanaki, Mata Gujri Ji, Mai Bhago are mentioned.



Preference to the Gender Equality in Sikhism

Guru Nanak dev introduced the Concept of Sangat (holy congregation) - where both men and women could sit together and equally participate in reciting the praises of the Divine and thereafter Pangat - sitting together, irrespective of caste or social status differences, to eat a common meal in the Institution of Langar (common kitchen) was introduced. Women were never excluded from any specific task. Both men and women took equal part in essential tasks, i.e., drawing water from wells, reaping and grounding corn, cooking in the kitchen, and cleaning the dishes. The Guru says: "Do come, my sisters and dear comrades! Clasp me in thine embrace. Meeting together, let us tells the tales of our Omnipotent God. In the True Lord are all merits, in us all demerits".

There are no priests or commentators, no rituals or philosophical doctrines that stand between a person and the Guru's Bani (Nam). There is a direct relationship with God for every man, woman, and child. Only the veil of ignorance or one's ego stands in the way between the human and the Divine Being.

A novel method applied by the Sikh Gurus for the uplifting of women was the abundant use of feminine symbols in Sikh scriptures and day-to-day life. The Sikh Gurus have used poetry as the medium of communication. The poetic utterances of the Gurus were not called "Guru Vak" which is masculine but 'Guru Bani" which is feminine. Guru Bani was placed on a very high pedestal and was given importance equivalent to that of the Gurus themselves. Thus the fourth Guru (Guru Ram Das) says:

Bani Guru hai, bani Vicch bani Amrit sare (SGGS, p.982). Bani is the Guru, the Guru Bani, Within Bani are contained all elixirs. Similarly, the Divine light was frequently referred to as Joti (a feminine symbol) and not channa (which is masculine).

In this Shabad, the Guru expresses the importance of women. It begins with the line "From a woman, a man is born" to emphasize that all men and women come from a woman. This theme then continues with the Guru highlighting, in a logical sequence, the various stages of life where the importance of woman is noted – "within woman, man is conceived," and then, "he is engaged and married" to a woman who becomes his friend, partner, and the source for future generations.

From woman, man is born;

Within woman, man is conceived; to the woman, he is engaged and married.

Woman becomes his friend; through woman, the future generations come.

When his woman dies, he seeks another woman; to the woman, he is bound.

So why call her bad? From her, kings are born.



From a woman, a woman is born; without a woman, there would be no one at all.

— *Guru Nanak, Raag Aasaa Mehal 1, Ang 473*

Shabad against Sati

In this Shabad, sati is an Indian custom of the immolation of a woman on her dead husband's funeral pyre either willingly or by societal inducement and compulsion. Guru Nanak said the following about this practice:

Do not call them 'satee', who burn themselves along with their husbands' corpses.

O Nanak, they alone are known as 'satee', who dies from the shock of separation. (1)

Some burn themselves along with their dead husbands: [but they need not, for] if they loved them they would endure the pain alive.

— *Sri Guru Granth Sahib page 787*

The Guru said that if the wife loves her husband, then she should endure the pain of separation alive; that she should rather continue living her life than suffer a quick death in the fire of her husband's funeral pyre. Further, Guru Nanak explains that a true "Sati" is a person who cannot endure the pain of separation from their loved one.

Shabad against dowry

Al Sikh Guru spoke against the common Rituals means dowry when a gift of money or valuables had to be given by the family at the time of their Marriage. Huge pressure was exerted on the bride's family for the extraction of a sizable fortune at times of marriage. It has historically been regarded as a contribution by her family to the married household's future expenses. The Gurus called this giving of gifts an "offer for the show" of the guests, and a "worthless display" which only increased "false egotism." Sikh families were discouraged from continuing this practice, and slowly this trend has diminished in some parts of Indian society. The following Shabad explains the Guru's position:

Any other dowry, which the self-willed manmukhs offer for the show, is only false egotism and a worthless display.

O my father please gives me the Name of the Lord God as my wedding gift and dowry. (4)

— *Sri Guru Granth Sahib page 79*

Sikh Women in History

This paper would not be complete without a brief mention of the names of some of the great Sikh women who helped shape Sikhism and its history. Mention can be made of:



1. Bibi Nanaki - Guru Nanak's sister and Mata Tripta - Guru Nanak's Mother. They played a very important role in encouraging young Nanak to pursue his lifelong mission. They were the first to recognize Nanak's saintliness and encouraged his religious pursuits.

2. Mata Khivi was the wife of Guru Angad Dev (the second Guru) and she was given charge of Langar (the common kitchen). She was an unlimited resource of bountiful food and helped to create a new social consciousness in Sikh women.

3. Bibi Bhani has a unique position in Sikh history. She was the daughter of the third Guru (Guru Amar Das), wife of the fourth Guru (Guru Ram Das), and mother of the fifth Guru (Guru Arjan Dev). Bibi Bhani was an inspiration during the formative period of Sikh history and symbolizes responsibility, dedication, humility, and fortitude.

4. Mata Gujari was an illuminating force behind her husband Guru Tegh Bahadur (the ninth Guru) and her son Guru Gobind Singh (the tenth Guru). After the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Mata Gujari guided and inspired her son Guru Gobind Singh. She was responsible for the training of the Sahibzadas (the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh)

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