

Reflection of Composite Culture in India: Historical Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on those cultural values that unify the nation. A unique feature of Indian culture is its unity in diversity. The elements of unity and diversity should be explained and discussed. Secondly, Indian society has remained open to external influences. In other words, the cultures of outside society have found an easy acceptance in the Indian society and these were made the integral part of the Indian culture. India is known for its rich cultural heritage and diversity. India is huge creel of living and different cultural traditions, traditional expressions, and elusive and cultural heritage

Keywords: Religions, Islam, Hinduism, Traditions, Composite, Culture, Freedom And Nationalism.

INTRODUCTION

India's merged traditions rejoiced its multiculturalism. It brings together people of various religions, languages, and customs. These harmonies promote a sense of national distinctiveness while relating to provincial disparity. India's prosperous olden times as the frame of culture include both interior and exterior heights. Indian civilization has been by far received a lot of distinction and admiration global. The wealthy civilizing culture, linguistic, and sacred multiplicity in India has a deep force on the societal structure of the country and shapes its national identity.

In simple terms, as per the dictionary meaning 'culture' is the arts, customs and institutions of a nation, people or group. 'Composite' means "made up of various parts". S Abid Hussain, a well-known scholar, in the introduction to his book. The National Culture of India-says, "Culture is a sense of ultimate values possessed by a particular society as expressed in its collective institutions, by its individual members in their dispositions, feelings, attitudes and manners as well as in significant forms which they give to material objects." (S Abid Hussain)

Composite culture has been the mainstay of our society for ages. Experts point out that this is our unity's *raison d'etre*. This has made modern India a model nation. While some countries have suffered from the process of balkanization,

India has remained on a strong edifice. Of course, before India became a nation-state, partition took place. But that was the result of divisive communal politics that ripped apart our polity, leaving deep scars. Even after this, India's composite culture remained largely intact. A foray into the making of this composite culture reveals its fascinating facets.

Many external influences have shaped our society. They have come in the form of trade, commerce, conquests, religion, culture, etc; The Various processes involved are rather intricate. First, the making of composite cultural society goes back to the era when the Dravidians, the Mangoloid and the like lived. Then, came the Aryans. Later, conquests by the Sakas, the Yue-chi, the Kushans, the Bactrians, the Scythians and the Huns followed. The medieval ages saw the advent of the Uzbeks, the Turkomans, the Tajiks, the Iranians, the Turanians, the Afghans and the Pathans. Obviously, there were skirmishes between the invaders and the natives. In culture, many exchanges took place resulting in cultural assimilation and synthesis. Blending of disparate cultures was not a smooth affair. Rather, it had a roller-coaster ride.

Scholars opine that composite culture took a definite and clear shape between the 12th and 16th centuries AD. During this period, there was amalgamation of the Indian, Iranian and Arabian heritages. They represented Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Islam religions and philosophies respectively. "The Islamic organisation launched one hundred meetings starting from that date "around the theme of freedom, nationalism and how the organisation can the minority community contribute to nation building."(Pandit, Ambika 2018:5)

The intermingling of Hindu and Islamic religious beliefs gave rise to Sufism. Sufi saints and poets effectively established a bond among common people of both communities. They were held in high esteem. Kabir, Sheikh Salim Chisti, Hazrat Baba Farid Ganj-Shakkar, Hazrat Nizam-ud din Auliya are some of the outstanding sufi saints of this period. "Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a Pashtun Indian independence activist, along with his Khudai Khidmatgar, heralded composite nationalism, emphasizing the fact that Muslims were natives of the Indian subcontinent as with their Hindu brethren" (Dalton, Dennis 2014: 457)

The Bhakti movement also endeared itself to large sections of people by questioning some of the obnoxious practices and beliefs prevailing in the society. Sultan Zainul-Abidin of Kashmir till today is remembered as 'Bud Shah' meaning great monarch, for his policies of religious tolerance, peace and bonhomie. Dara Shikoh wrote *Majma-ul-Bahren* (The influence of two cultures). Akbar established a new religion 'Din-e-ilahi' -based on syncretism foundation.

Down south, the Adil Shahi sultans who ruled from Bijapur did not practise religious bigotry. Many Hindus held high posts in their courts. Ibrahim Adil Shah II was called 'Jagadguru'. He was a connoisseur of the arts, sculpture, music and culture. *Kitab-e-Nauras*, one of his works on music, has hymns in praise of Saraswati and Ganesh. In Karnataka, there are many shrines which signify the religious amity between Hindus and Muslims. Shirahatti's Fakiraswamy and Bababudan Giri shrines among many and most of the darghas attract the devotees of both these communities in good numbers. The jathras (fairs) of Hampi, Kottur, Keragodu, Koppal, Gulbarga and Moharrum festival of Mudgal and other places also see the participation of people of various communities.

Ghalib lavishes praise on Banaras, the holy city of the Hindus. He had stayed in Banaras for a few days while going from Delhi to Calcutta (Kolkata) and he fell in love with this holy city. Similarly Nazir Akbarabadi wrote several poems celebrating Hindu festivals. His poems are in simple Hindustani. Many Sufis also wrote popular songs on Holi, the festival of colour.

Also, Holi, Dussehra and Diwali were officially celebrated in Mughal Darbars with great pomp and pageantry. On the day of Diwali, Moghul princesses would go round and distribute saris to the poor Hindu women and the Red fort was decorated with lamps and it was known as *jashn-e-chiraghan* (i.e. festival of lamps). Both Nauruz and Diwali were celebrated in grand manner. Nauruz is a central Asian festival.

It is also important to note that both the Hindu epics-Ramayana and Mahabharata-were translated into Persian and Arabic and were beautifully calligraphed. It is said there are 60 different Persian and Arabic translations of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Dara Shikoh, son of Shah Jahan who was appointed successor to the throne of India but lost to Aurangzeb in the battle of Samugarh, translated Upanishad into Persian and named it *Sirr-e-Akbar* (The Great Mystery). Dara Shikoh had mastered Sanskrit language by spending a few years in Benaras with the well-known scholars of that language. He was of the opinion that the concept of tawheedi (oneness of God) was found in Upanishad. The handwritten manuscript of *Sirr-e-Akbar* prepared by

Darasikoh himself is in the library of Darul Musannifin, Azamgarh. Dara Shikoh begins with Bismilliah al-Rehman al-Rahim on left side and Ganesha namaka on the right with a small figure of Ganesha.

Darashikoh also wrote his magnum.opus which he named *Majma' - ul-Bahrayn* i.e. Commingling of Two Oceans (i.e. Hinduism and Islam). He compares teachings of two religions and concludes that difference is of language (one is in Sanskrit and other in Arabic), not of content. Hinduism and Islam have remarkable similarities in terms of contents and he discusses all the theological terms of two religions and draws this conclusion. Books like *Majma'-l-Bahrayn* are true representative of our composite culture. "Maulana Madani, who wrote a book *Muttahida Qaumiyat Aur Islam* persuasively argued in favour of composite nationalism by profusely quoting from the Quran the prophets, shared the same territory with the unbelievers and hence their Qaumiyat was not different from those who did not believe in their message. According to Maulana Madani, the very spirit of the Koran is to encourage harmonious co-existence in a multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-religious world".(Chitkara, M. G. 1998: 240)

Islamic ritual practices influenced indigenous Hindu practices and vice versa. Many scholars have pointed out that Satya Narayan Katha which is widely prevalent in northern India today came into existence by imitating the Muslim practice of the public narration of Prophet's lifestory, especially in Bengal and subsequently it spread to the other parts of north India. Common Hindus are hardly aware of origin in the practice of Satya Narayan Katha.

Similarly, several Sufi rituals, practices and beliefs, have deep imprint of indigenous practices. The noted German scholar, Gruhnbalm, thinks that the Sufi doctrine of *fana' fi Allah* (annihilation in Allah) is result of Hindu doctrine of *smadhi* in which a person annihilates himself in Ishwara, the Ultimate Being. It is also important to note that many great Sufi saints like Baba Farid of Punjab, Sheikh Mohammad of Maharashtra and others wrote in local languages like Punjabi or Marathi. This made them much more acceptable among the local populace.

Baba Farid is highly respected by the Sikhs as his Punjabi verses have been included in the *Adi Granth sahib*. Punjab University has established Baba Farid Chair and a lot of work on Sufism is done through this department. The Sikh Gurus had great regard for Sufi saints. When the foundation stone for Har Mandir was being laid, the Sikh Guru Arjan Dev insisted that Mian Mir, the Sufi saint of Lahore, would be the one to lay the foundation stone. He was requested and he came and laid the foundation stone of Hat Mandir.

Raja Rammohan Roy, the social reformer of the 19th century, had deep knowledge of both Hindu and Islamic scriptures. In addition, he was attracted by Christian charity and European rationalism. "Composite nationalism (Hindustani: mushtareka wataniyat or muttihadah qaumiyat) is a concept that argues that the Indian nation is made up of people of diverse cultures, castes, communities, and faiths" (Bahadur, Kalim 1998: 33)

The national liberation struggle also had the ingredients of composite culture. Many people of various communities rallied around and participated in large numbers braving many odds. "The idea teaches that "nationalism cannot be defined by religion in India. While Indian citizens maintain their distinctive religious traditions, they are members of one united Indian nation. Composite nationalism maintains that prior to the arrival of the British into the subcontinent, no enmity between people of different religious faiths existed; and as such these artificial divisions can be overcome by Indian society" (Hardiman, David 2003:22)

In recent times, concerted efforts were made to topple this edifice of composite culture. They were represented by the forces of communalism and fundamentalism. Throwing proper historical analysis to the wind, they distorted facts and incited communal passions for their nefarious interests. They scoffed at our multi-cultural past. Their strategy was aimed at the establishment of a theocratic state.

CONCLUSION

Indian society is known for its capacity to broad-mindedness reception, and social unity making it exceptional in nourishing its culture. It need not see far to know the plight of people in such a state. It is necessary for progressive people to close ranks and combat forces opposed to composite culture. Only then can our fledgling democracy hope to survive. One of the most important frames of India's enriching cultural aggregation has been the idea of a joint Hindu-Muslim syncretic culture. Sufism is an important concept that influenced religion in India in the medieval ages.

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