



HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SHAIVISM IN BANARAS DURING THE MEDIVIAL PERIOD

KEYWORDS

Vandana Sharma

PhD Scholar (Shaivism), Department Of Philosophy, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu.

This paper aims at bringing out the Cultural and Historical Development of Shaivism during the Medieval Period in the city of Kashi.

Shaivism is the oldest sect that has its roots in time immemorial. The word "Shaivism" has been derived from the Sanskrit root "Shiva" which means "the auspicious one or Kalyankari."

The ruins of Mohen-Jo-Daro and the research of Sir John Marshall make it clear that the worship of Shiva is as old as history itself. The historical origins of Shaivism are not entirely clear and have been the subject of debate amongst various scholars. Many Scholars, Scientists and Historians have identified the seal of a Yogi sitting in Dhyaanmudra surrounded by animals found during the excavations at Mohen-Jo-Daro with the proto type Shiva known as "Pashupati". Earlier the date of Indus Valley Civilization was concluded as 5,500 years old. However a recent study by Archeological Survey Of India and Scientists from IIT-Kharagpur states that Indus Valley Civilization is at least 8000 years old. Archeological Survey of India and the Scientists in their report published in the prestigious journal "Nature" on My 25th 2016, further claim that this civilization existed at least a 1000 years before it came to an end. According to Anindya Sarkar, head of the Department Of Geology and Geophysics at IIT-Kharagpur, this revelation will open newer roads for research scholars of History, Philosophy and Science.

Though Shiva is the summum bonum of the whole creation yet in order to understand scriptural history it is important to see Shiva as an entity. In the oldest text known to mankind we find references of Shiva as Rudra. In Rig Veda Ch 6:V 49 Rudra is referred to as "Bhuvnasya Pitram" or the Father of the Universe. Rig Veda Ch 7:V59 dedicates the Death conquering mantra or the Mahamrityunjay mantra to Triyambhokam or the one with 3 eyes who is the bestower of Moksha or liberation. Rig Veda Ch7:V46 addresses him as "Self dependent Godhead". Shri Rudram offers salutation to Rudra by saying "Om Bhagwate Rudraye". Strangely, the word "Bhagwate" is not even used for Vishnu in any part of the Vedas and Vedas alone are taken as authentic Pramans.

As per the Upanishads, the Mandukya Upanishadh, Shlok 12 defines the 4th state or the State of pure consciousness as Shivam and Advaityam. Isha Upanishadh, Shlok 1 describes everything to be pervaded by Shiva "Isaasyam Idam Sarvam". Shwetashwata Upanishadh describes Shiva as the uncaused cause of the entire Brahman and the cause of Hiranyagarbha. Even Kena, Katha, Kaivalya, Atharva Shikha and other Upanishads talk of Shiva as the Summum Bonum.

These references are enough to conclude the importance of Shaivism in various eras.

Shaivism had its roots spread not only in India, but also in countries like China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and many other parts of South East Asia and Europe. Today, Shaivism forms one of the most important currents of classical and modern Hinduism. Shaivism considers Shiva as the whole of Brahman. "He" for Shiva is used to

keep up with the conventions. However, Shiva may be referred to as "He, She or it". He is beyond sexes and forms yet all sexes and forms emerge out of him, stay in him and finally merge back into him. He is Saguna as well as Nirguna. Shiva has no avatars or incarnations and is forever graceful and merciful. He performs Utpatti (Creation), Stiti (Preservation), Sanghar (Destruction in order to recreate), Tirobhav (Concealment), Anugreh (Grace).

Whenever we talk of Shiva, it is impossible to ignore the city of Kashi, Varanasi or Banaras as you may call it. Kashi is not only the oldest city in the world but also has mythological, philosophical & literary significance. The word Kashi first appears in the oldest text Rig Veda. The word Kashi is derived from the Sanskrit root KAS which means "to shine". Hence it is referred to as the city of lights. The name Varanasi may have emerged due to the city's geographical location between 2 rivers-The River Varuna on the North Border and The River Assi on the South Border. Which combined to form the word "Varanasi". According to Puranic Legends of Mahabharata, the Pandavas had visited the city of Kashi on instruction of Shri Krishna to perform penance to Shiva and be free from the sin of Brahmhatya that they had incurred during the war of Mahabharata. The city holds a high stature amongst Hindu population and especially amongst Shaivites due to the presence of the Kashi Vishwanath Jyotirlingam. Kashi is also one of the 51 Shaktipeeths known as the Vishalakshi Shaktipeeth. This city also holds a key position for revival of Hinduism when Buddhism had aggressively attacked Hinduism. It was during this time that Jagadguru Adi Shankracharya had written down his commentaries or Bhashyas in this city of kashi and had revived Hinduism and its popularity.

The city of Varanasi or Banaras, also called the cultural capital of India, has great historical and religious significance. Hindus hold the ancient city of Kashi in great regards for reasons more than one. The city of Kashi, now Varanasi, in Uttar Pradesh, is believed to be the "Moksha Dhaam", i.e. it is believed to have been blessed by the Almighty. Hindus believe that a person who breaths his last in Kashi, is blessed with eternal salvation, thus freed from the tormenting cycle of birth and death. This has attracted people from all over the world to this place.

River Ganges, believed to be a goddess, often revered as a mother, flows across this city in its mighty form. From the tresses of Lord Shiva, Ganga descends on this earth and absolves the sins of everyone, who comes to her for penance. This gives the river her name as *Paapnasini*. Varanasi is also believed to be the birth place of Parsvanath, the twenty third Teerthankar of Jains. Lord Buddha, after attaining salvation, delivered his first sermon, "Turning the Wheel of Law", in Sarnath, which is at small distance from Varanasi. This has also attracted Buddhists from all over the world to the city of "Kashi". In fact, Varanasi is the oldest living and continuously habituated cities in the world.

Besides being home to a plethora of religions, contrasting cultures and distinct people, Varanasi has stood the test of time and has made her mark in trade, commerce, craft, art, education, mysticism and mouthwatering food. Varanasi is renowned for its silk, muslin,

gold/silver brocades, ivory works, perfumes and sculptures. From Tulsidas of the bygone era, the sage who wrote Ramcharit Manas, on the banks of river Ganga in Kashi, to Munshi PremChand of modern times have praised the city and have expressed their love and fondness for her.

Archeological evidences suggested by Kenneth Fletcher conclude that urban settlement of this area began around 2000 BCE placing Kashi amongst the oldest living cities in the world. Recent excavations at Athka and Ramnagar suggest that Kashi was populated by Vedic people during 1800 BCE. Shaivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism have co-existed in Varanasi harmoniously. However, Shaivism remains dominant in Banaras since ages.

Kashi was and is also an important centre for Buddhist and Jainas. Chinese traveler Xuan Zang, who visited the city around 635 AD, was in awe of the city and wrote generously about the influence of Shaivism. Buddhism continued to grow in the 8th century, until Adi Shankaracharya re-established Shaivism and made the worship of Shiva as an official sect of Varanasi. Basava, who was a religious reformer and promoter of Shiva focused Bhakti movement from Karnataka established Veera Shaivism also known as the Lingayats Shaivism. Gorakhnath who was the founder of Aadinath or Nath tradition of Shaivism established the Nath Sampradaya. He originally was a Buddhist who converted to Shaivism and was highly influenced by the teachings of Kumarila and Adi Shankracharya. He is known to master Yoga and Advait Vedanta

Annie Besant chose the city of Kashi as the home for her 'Theosophical Society' and Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, established the institute 'Benares Hindu University, the biggest University in Asia. Ayurveda is said to be originated at Kashi and is believed to be the basis of modern medical sciences such as Plastic surgery, Cataract and Calculus operations. Maharishi Patanjali is to be credited for such remarkable discoveries, inventions and contributions in the field of Medicine, Science, Yog and Sanskrit. Till date modern scientists marvel his brilliance and are awestruck by his dexterity and research. This city has stood as a witness to these remarkable contributions in time and history.

Islamic invasion in Varanasi started with Mohammad Ghaznavi who converted Hindus to Islam by the force of sword. Mohammad Ghaznavi had vowed to invade India every year in order to destroy idolatry, kill the kafirs, capture prisoners of war, and plunder vast wealth that India was well-known for. He extended his meanness to Varanasi without hesitation. The fortune of Varanasi suffered a great deal with the coming of the Mughals during the 12th century. A city that was peaceful, love bound and was a symbol of spirituality became a centre of mass destruction by the Mughals. Slowly, Buddhism, Jainism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism were losing its grip and Mughal rulers were all geared up to destroy every cultural and religious evidences of Hinduism. During this time period Shaivism also faced harsh refutation from Islamic rulers. Records of the same can be found in Tarikh-i-Yamini of Utbi.

Black clouds took on Kasi during 1194 when the founder of Delhi Sultanat and the first ruler of the slave dynasty "Qutub-Ud-Din Aibak" entered Kashi and destroyed nearly 1000 temples and erected on the ruins 1000 mosques. He took away from Hindu temples 1400 camel loads of gold, silver and precious stones. This broke the economic back bone of the city and dampened the religious and spiritual spirit of Kashi. The records of the same can be sited in Taj-ul-Masir of Hasan Nizami.

Taking the journey forward, in 1351 Firuz Shah Tuglaq who was the 3rd ruler of the Tuglaq Dynasty, ascended the throne of the Delhi Sultanate and styled himself as the Deputy to the Khalifa of Egypt. He proved his loyalty to Islam by prosecuting Hindus and destroying their temples. In 1376, Firuz Shah ordered to bring down all remaining temples in Varanasi and replacing them with Mosques.

Written references of the same can be traced in "Tarikh-i-Firuz Shah" In the 14th Century Sikandar Lodhi of the Lodhi dynasty ordered to completely demolish all traces of Hinduism and rename the city of Varanasi as Mohammadbad.

In the 15th century Akbar's rule was a sigh of relief. It was during his rule that Shaivism regained its strength and he rebuilt the Vishweshra Temple and the Bindu Mahadev Temple.

This happiness was short lived and Varanasi struck dooms day during the 16th century with the coming of the most barbaric ruler that history can vouch for- Aurangzeb. As per records found in Maasir-i-Alamgiri, on the orders of Aurangzeb, Vishweshwara Temple and Bindu Mahadev temple were destroyed to ruins. Shortly, Kriti-visheshwara temple too was destroyed. In 1669, Aurangzed ordered to destroy the Kashivishwanath Temple and built the Gyanvapi Mosque. The remains of the Mosque are still prevalent at the Kashi Vishwanath Temple Site.

Finally, after Aurangzeb the city again saw day light with the coming of Maharaja Balwant Singh. Under his rule Shaktism, Vaisnavism Buddhism and Jainism revived and Shaivism again became the dominant religion of Varanasi.

Despite various attacks on Varanasi, the city continues to be a city that has faith and spirituality dripping from each nook and corner. Even today the city of Kashi continues to be a dominant centre for Shaivism. No amount of refutation, forced Mughal laws, forced conversions could have an effect upon the growing popularity of Shaivism. Hence, it can be concluded that Shaivism was a dominant religion in Banaras during the Medieval times and still continues to dominate the city of Kashi.

Kashi proves that faith won over the sword.....faith won over time!!!

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