

Research Papers



**INTRIGUING QUESTIONS ABOUT SOCIETAL IMPACT- A STRONG
RESPONSE TO A DELICATE ISSUE -THE APPLICATION OF
TENETS OF SRIVAISHNAVISM IN MEDIEVAL SOUTH INDIAN
SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HOYSALAS**

vidya sridhara

Abstract

Topical prologue -Medieval South Indian Society projects a conglomeration of various ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural collectivities. It was also quite complex in terms of severance in each one of these collectivities and their historical and socio cultural specificities. A discussion of these patterns focused on continuity and change as well as fruition of new specificities in Medieval Indian society. The rise of Bhakti doctrine accentuated some of these socio-religious, cultural, and economic differences. It pronounced values of secularism socialism and democracy as its main ideals.

Religion has played a vital part in Medieval Indian society due to various reasons and it has assumed numerous forms and nomenclatures in relation to different groups of people associated with it transformations and changes which occurred in course of time. These changes in intellectual ambience and social structure during medieval period were thus inevitable. Within the vast spectrum of Religious movements have been a perpetual feature of Medieval Indian socio religious life

Bhakti means devotion or unselfish love. It comes from the root "Bhaj"— which means to serve or be deeply interested in. Bhakti is, therefore, an intense attachment to God or deep interest in God and or interest in things concerned with God. Religion in South Asia – G.A.Oddie Religious conversion and Revival movements in Medieval and Modern times –Manohar books New Delhi 2009–Introduction pp 1-12

K.L Sharma – Indian Social Structure and Change –Rawat publications New Delhi –Introduction pp

1-34

Since post Vedic times we come across new religious currents flowing in the form of Buddhism and Jainism. Spurring of Theistic religions have always characterized the dynamics of religion in Indian society. Religious sects such as Vaishnavism, Sri Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Veera shaivism etc emerged as the components of orthodox Brahmanism during Medieval period in South India .

**IMPACT OF SRIVAISHNAVISM ON
TEMPLE BUILDINGACTIVITY**

Medieval South India witnessed many structural changes in temple building activities. The Hoysalas who ruled a major portion of South India were in the frontage of implementing these changes. The Hoysala king Bitti deva who got converted to Sri Vaishnavism ardently patronized this philosophy of Sri Ramanuja by building temples all round his empire. The following temples were built during his reign.

Please cite this Article as : Vidya Sridhara , INTRIGUING QUESTIONS ABOUT SOCIETAL IMPACT- A STRONG RESPONSE TO A DELICATE ISSUE -THE APPLICATION OF TENETS OF SRIVAISHNAVISM IN MEDIEVAL SOUTH INDIAN SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HOYSALAS : Review of Research (May ; 2012)

ü KEERTHI NARAYANA TEMPLE - TALAKADU

ü KESHAVA TEMPLE -BELURU

ü KAPPE CHENNIGARAYA TEMPLE - BELURU

The Temples thus built by king Bittideva later named as Vishnuvardhana are called as master pieces which laid emphasis on temple building activity. Artisans were called on from all over the empire to carve and chisel beautiful temples. There are several epigraphs which indicate the Sri Ramanuja's

It was only the Kannada version of Vishnuvardhana opines R.R. Diwakar op cit p.394 Grewal, J. S. -The State and Society in Medieval India New Delhi Oxford University Press, 2005. - xii, pp545-6

Gerard Foekaema Architecture decorated with Architecture Medieval Temples of Karnatka 100-1300.A.D. 2003 has vivid explanations about this.

propagation of Sri Vaishnavism. The steady advancement of Sri Vaishnavism as well as Bhakti movement with its universal appeal to all in the name of singular devotional faith seemed to promise vital sect participation for some lower class in the form of highly ranked ritual roles hitherto unknown. So much so as to threaten the traditional Brahman monopoly of leadership in ritual affairs. The Copper plates records of Melukote were of great assistance for micro level analysis of architectural extravaganza. Demeanor of several surveys of all Vaishnava temples around the South Karnataka region to know more about these socio religious impact of Srivaishnavism was screened minutely. The impact of Sri Vaishnavism on Hoysala society was a multi dimensional study.

MODIFICATIONS IN SOCIETAL FACTORS IN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

Various factors caused the metamorphic changes in the otherwise orthodox South Indian society which was under the monopolist Brahman hands.

1. Rise of a new social order-The Society came to witness a new social order where the Brahmin priestly class of people overwhelmingly assumed the role of king makers. The Scenario amplified radical and sweeping modifications with the rise of Bhakti movement.

Epigraphia Carnatica Vol.VI Epigraphs

numbering 124 to 216 are from Melukote

Ramanuja - Encyclopedia Britannica 2003 Encyclopedia Britannica Premium Service.

Dasgupta, Surendranath- A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol.III Delhi Motilal Banarsidass, 1975.

Satish Chandra- [Essays on Medieval Indian History](#)- Oxford University press New Delhi. 2003 pp 549-50

Srinivasa Chari, S. M.- Vishistadvaita Vedanta. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1998.

1. Introduces revolutionary societal changes- Sri Vaishnavism as a moderate and judicious socio religious movement introduced many revolutionary societal aspects such as inter mingling inter dining inter caste marriages and intermittent cohesion among social groups.

2. Increase in sect participation-The development of the Sri Vaishnavism and Bhakti movement with its universal appeal to all men in the name of devotional faith followed through Sri Ramanuja's leadership seemed to promise vital sect participation for some lower castes in the form of highly ranked ritual roles, so much so as to threaten the traditional Brahman monopoly of leadership in ritual affairs.

3. Emphasis on differential purity of ritual activities-The Bhakti movement implicitly undermined one principle upon which caste hierarchy was based differential purity of birth to the extent that it tended to measure or validate purity in terms of ritual activities for all participants.

4. Recitation of Sanskrit scriptures -The Southern school of interpretation of the meaning of prapatti in the place of Tamil scripture in devotional observances as described earlier. Recitation of Sanskrit scriptures was extended to all learners at all study centers.

5. The change in the role of Guru -The change in the role of a scholar person as Guru was evolved as a methodology of commitment to up gradation of the caste based distinctions and disruptions which were earlier very conventional and heterogeneous because their approach towards society was undergoing noncommittal and evasive changes.

6. Conversion of king-Sri Vaishnavism and its sacred philosophy promoted many socio religious changes. The very conversion of king Bittideva to Sri Vaishnava cult enhanced the chances of Sri Ramanuja to find a firm root in Hoysala Country and propagate his popular

Vishishtadwaitha philosophy.

7. Boom in construction activities-The most demanding changes that took place was the boom in construction of delightful and magnificent temples for Lord Vishnu. Many highly exclusive and defined sources regarding the societal impact has been attested.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

As a direct effect of this new reformed thought differential and harsh punishment for criminals became more convincingly enhanced. The polluting effect of physical contact for higher caste person with a lower caste person became a scandalous offence. There was very limited access to lower castes in administrative or judicial offices. The development of the Sri Vaishnavism and Bhakti movement with its universal appeal to all men in the name of devotional faith followed through Sri Ramanuja's leadership seemed to promise vital sect participation for some lower castes in the form of highly ranked ritual roles, so much so as to intimidate the conventional Brahman monopoly of leadership in ritual affairs.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN SOCIAL FABRICATIONS

The spread of this philosophy boosted many socio religious changes that shook the societal living such as temple building mobility among artisan class gift of land for temple building consecration of Vishnu images remission of taxes etc during the Hoysala rule

Important evidence through stone and copperplate inscriptions has attested to the fact that lower castes occupied a significant place as respected and integrated members of Hindu society in Medieval South India unlike the untouchables at the very bottom of the society

1. **Kshatriya identification** -Some individual South Indian lower caste /class families emerged to have gained Kshatriya identification theories through their successful assumption of roles as warrior leaders during the period of greatest martial activity.

2. **Changes in agrarian order**-The agrarian orders of South India were primarily changing among the far off communities lying at the margins of Hindu society. They were brought under the warrior control at a greatly accelerated

rate and linked to the older, more stable and orderly agrarian communities.

3. **Rise in power of local communities**- Superior state power was brought much more directly into the control and management of local communities which gained political power gradually. Mobilizing human as well as material resources over enormous regions to create the greatest war like state in South India was thus a feasible factor of the new social trend.

Rise of Nayakas- The change in society necessitated a new class of political segments called nayakas who became instrumental in setting up a new political hegemony after the fall of Hoysalas' power. The establishment of Vijayanagar empire on the ruins of Hoysala Dynasty was an immediate answer to the changes in the social rankings of lower classes to warrior class. The total control by the Vijayanagara political system that culminated in the Martialization of South India was achieved ingredient at the expense of some of the largely autonomous power of landed Brahman. The new warrior state did not perpetuate subservience to the Brahmin control of local communities. At the same time Brahman villages were displaced as

such as gowdas , nayakas ,lambanais etc

1. the centers of religious activity by the rise of sect managed temples and by challenges to exclusive Brahman control over religion and rituals.

THE POLITICAL EXPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS ART DURING MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The artists, Kings and the Elite public were conscious of this message of showing the triumph of good over evil. The carvings of images had political implications which was evident in the carvings on the images of this period..It can be called as the political expression of religious art. The god's avatars as Narasimha, Vamana Trivikrama Dasharathi Rama were taken suitable for purpose. The depiction of varaha images has the vivid dimension of victory of the good over evil vanquishing enemy subsequent victory of good king restoration of dharma and individual prowess.

1. The whole myth was involved and enacted on the temple walls depicting a political answer to the neighboring enemy. The image so carved

celebrated the important aspect of victory .The fresh foundation for ancient religion succeeding custom called Sanathana dharma was thus necessitated through religious matter.

Political aspect of Indian religious art is an example of this line of Historical research Investigation in an area where religion political and personal benefit of the artist or king combine to produce a listing work or art. Ibid. p. 2 introduction

Hindu myth Hindu history Heinrich von Stietencron permanent black 2005 p.12

They implied a political meaning rather than a religious purport

The same applies to Vishnu manifestations as a boar. P.13

Avataras or the incarnations

But the image conveyed more than personal valor namely the deliverance from foreign oppression Sanathana dharama meant the precious religion

1. During Hoysala period the incarnations of Vishnu were given much adoration.The images carved depicting his vavaataras. The Varaha Matsya and the KURMA images gained momentum.

2. Their chance to flatter their patrons lies in the almost unlimited richness of the mythological material and in the possibility to choose a particular theme and emphasize on a particular aspect. The message is carried by association and discount allusion.The historical situation prompted many possible themes for sculptural representations on a temple wall. Each historical religion underwent changes in course of time and may expressed themselves in new concepts of ritual practices.

3. The limits of tolerance was flexible but if fundamental differences regarding the highest deity or the path to & state of liberation persisted for a long time the break was final and a new religion was born accordingly.

4. The saints seers animals trees holy plants and mythical god are very abundant. Secular scene are very less can be found only temple walls or doorways. Although the patrons of artists were kings their victories battles and their treaties are not depicted. Epic heroes and their battles are shown.

5. This was because the artists wanted to depict the alleged spiritual quest for the ultimate unchanging reality did not bother to preserve in stone the transitory achievements of kings who are

mortal.

The size of the external beauty of their temple, the continuation and luxurious expansion of it spiritual and also their own means of living depended largely on

The Hoysala artists depict a number of possibilities to endow their images with a double meaning which can be addressed by those to whom it is addressed.

The socio political environment of the artists who were involved in these works were considered as the pious class

This explains the emerging of new sects called as Sri Vaishnavism and Shaiva cults during 12th 13th centuries

1. the generous donations of land and wealth by ruling princes. Artists and temple priests had a common interest in winning the benevolence of their royal patrons.

2. Kings were often named after gods some of the kings acquired additional names in praise of their characters or achievement such as Veera Narasimha.

3. The kings responsibilities were also based on divine institutions and followed the pattern of divine actions such as Protecting the earth , providing the security for the good, punishing the wicked, conquering the enemies, establishing Sanathanadharama , granting prosperity to their subjects, ruling as a supreme hero. Court poets and bards have openly compared their patrons exploits with those gods.

CONCLUSION- This study approached at these conclusions after the examination of various co-relative aspects which determined the social behavior different castes during medieval period. The Brahmin oligarchy had to move away from their high fashioned superiority to towards the preaching and practice of heterogeneous cohesion in society .The doctrine of Bhakti was popularized to involve the various ethnic groups in one uniform social set up there by causing vivid altercations in society. The society which opened itself to several makeovers in course of time and these modifications were so forceful that society witnessed different degrees of diversification and disintegration towards a new horizon which was a blend of preemptive progression and a confirmed departure from of

For this winning they used the medium of art especially religious art. Both in internal visual arts

there is ample scope for discreet connecting political reality with the timeless sphere of the gods

such as Vishnuvardhana Narasimha Somanatha Virupaksha Someshwara etc

The artists found expression in his art by implicitly praising their kings in very good words. The visual representations of gods through the temple depict was adopted to gain political actuality.

hierarchical monotony. This brought about phenomenal cultural transition of society The swift spread of Bhakti doctrines and spread of Sri Ramanuja's Philosophy in South India which became a force to reckon with has been visualized distinctively through our study of various source materials. All these socio religious issues were tackled sensitively by the Hoysala kings. The impact of Bhakti movement on the lower castes was examined with advantage along with the popularization of tenets of Srivaishnavism. This study has been committed to disclose the implications of this religion which thoroughly changed the mindset of the society. These changes tended to accept and re-affirm the disabilities under which the lower castes were to live in society with limited access to sacred learning and ritual practicing.