

JAIN AND LLNGAYATA RELIGIONS IN INDIA : A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Religion is closely related to society. Religion contributes to the formation, maintenance and continuation of social order. Thomas O'Dea clarifies, "Religion is one of the important institutional structures making up the total social system".² Religion is also a basic need of human beings. Archie J.Balm says, "Religion is man's quest for his ultimate value".³ D.S.Sharma points out, "Religion is the highest need of human nature. Just as our bodies require food for their substance and our minds require knowledge for their expansion, so do our souls require religious experience for their perfection."⁴ Religion is the revelation of an individual and social life. Kingsley Davis clarifies, "So universal, permanent and pervasive is religion in human society that unless we understand it thoroughly, we shall fail to understand society".⁵

Keyword: Sociological , Society , Jain And Lingayata , Civilization.

INTRODUCTION:

India : The Land of Religions

India is a pluralistic society. The vast population of India is divided and scattered into many identifiable sectarian groups and sub-groups on the basis of their religious affiliations. The concept of religion is inextricably rooted in Indian culture. Religion has been the basis of Indian thought and life, and the unique guiding principle of her civilization through the ages. The quest for God made the Indians highly religious and spiritual. In the course of people's quest for God and salvation, many religions emerged. Since people of various religions reside in India, it is said that 'India is a Dharmabhoomi, i.e. India is a storehouse of religions or the land of religions'.

Indian social life is vastly dominated by so many religions and sectarian groups of major and minor influences. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism and Lingayatism are the major religions of India. Indian culture is noted for its high spirit of tolerance towards each other's religion. It exhibits the spirit of liberty, equality, fraternity and compassion. There would be no exaggeration, if it is said, 'religion is the second name of India'. Bhawan Das observes, "India is not only the land of romance, of art and beauty. It is in religion, earth's eternal shrine. India is religion".⁶

Jain and Lingayata : Two Religions in India

Jainism and Lingayatism, i.e. Jain and Lingayat, are the two major religions. Both have emerged in India and focus on the antiquity of Indian culture. Jainism and Lingayatism are two social streams and social systems in India. Jainism and Lingayatism are two historical, cultural, religious, spiritual and social traditions of Indian heritage.

Two Views

There are two views, opinions and approaches about the distinctness of Jainism and Lingayatism. The first scholarly view holds that Jainism and Lingayatism are merely the parts, sects or castes of Hinduism; while the second view holds that Jainism and Lingayatism are separate and distinct religions like Buddhism or Sikhism. The largest, i.e. about 80% population of the Indian society belongs to Hinduism. It is a religion which believes in Vedic literature, polytheism, idol worship, fire worshipping in the form of Homa & Yajnya, Varna and the caste systems.

The distinctness and identities of Jainism and Lingayatism can be stressed on the basis of Theological as well as Sociological tenets like founder of the religion, theism, philosophy, religious scriptures, symbol of religion, ideology, code of conduct, concept of universe, culture, ethics, sacrament system, view of life and way of life. To sum up, it can be said that Jainism and Lingayatism are two religions emerged in Indian society and both the religions differ from Hinduism and all other religions in India in a number of ways.

Jain Religion

Jain religion is called 'Jin religion'. Jain religion is also called 'Tirthankar religion', 'Ratnatraya religion', 'Shraman religion', 'Nayawadi religion', 'Syadwadi religion', or 'Anekantwadi religion'. Tirthankar means such a Super Soul, which gives the perfection to the total life of human beings. Jain community believes in the concept of 24 Tirthankaras. However, only the last two Tirthankaras have got a strong historical background.⁷ Parshwanath and Mahaveer, i.e. 23rd and 24th Tirthankaras have played a significant role in the spread, growth, prosperity and development of Jainism.

Lingayata Religion

Lingayata religion is also called by many names like 'Lingavanta religion', 'Lingadhar religion', 'Ishtalinga religion', 'Shaktivishishtadwait religion', 'Shat-sthal religion', 'Agam religion', 'Sharan religion', 'Basava religion', 'Shiva religion' or 'Veerashaiva religion'. However, two names - Lingayata and Veerashaiva - are commonly used and are more popularly known. Lingayata is one who wears 'Ishtalinga' on the body for all the time. Therefore, it is said that Lingayatras wear Ishtalinga from womb to tomb. Prophet Basaveshwara of the 12th century (1105-1167) played a vital role in the spread, growth, prosperity and development of Lingayatism.

Population and Sectarian Groups

The followers of Jainism and Lingayatism are found in every State of India in, more or less, numbers. The population of the Jain community is about 1 crore and that of Lingayata community is about 2 crores. Karnataka is the single State where more than 1 crore Lingayatras are found. Digambar and Shwetambar are the two major sects of the Jain community. There are no such specific sects in the Lingayat community. However, the Lingayatras are scattered and divided into many caste-like occupation-related groups.

Similarities and Differences

There are many similarities and a few differences between Jainism and Lingayatism, which can be highlighted in brief.

Similarities

1. Jainism and Lingayatism both are ancient Indian religions, which have variously contributed to the Indian heritage;
2. Jainism and Lingayatism regard 'Ahimsa', i.e. principle of non-violence, as the cornerstone of their respective philosophical foundations;
3. Jainism and Lingayatism have emerged as a revolt against Hinduism, i.e. Vedic religion;
4. Both have refused and opposed Varna system prevailing in the traditional Hinduism;
5. Both have denied and opposed fire-worshipping in the form of Homa-havana and Yadnya-yaga;
6. Both religions are anti-ritualistic and priest-craft;
7. Both have given preference to spiritualism than ritualism;
8. Both have similar views about vegetarian food system and food habits;
9. Both communities have accepted somewhat similar occupations and professions trade and agriculture, as a major means for earning their livelihood;
10. Both have similar dress-code;
11. Both have accepted similar naming traditions;
12. Both have accepted the importance of 'Guru tradition' and Mantras (recitation of sacred spells);
13. Both have accepted a realistic approach towards philosophy than the idealistic approach;
14. Both have given importance to rationalism, experimentation and scientific approach;
15. Both are peace-loving communities;
16. Jain ethics resembles in many respects with Lingayata ethics;

17. The view of life and way of life of both the communities are influenced by Hinduism.

Differences

In few respects, Jainism differs from Lingayatism.

1. Theism : Jainism is an atheistic system of faith; whereas Lingayatism is a theistic system of faith. Lingayatism is monotheistic and worships Lord Shiva in the form of Ishtalinga.
2. Concept of Universe : Jainism believes that the concept of creation of universe has nothing to do with the concept of God; whereas Lingayatism believes that the universe is merely the creation of Lord Shiva and Shakti;
3. Concept of Soul : In Jainism, the concept of soul has been given nuclear and utmost significance. According to Jainism, the soul and the soul only is basically responsible for all the happenings, incidents and phenomenon in one's life. Lingayatism does accept the concept of soul, but a soul gets perfection only after it gets Samarasya, i.e. union with the Super Soul Lord Shiva.
4. Concepts of Karma Siddhanta and Rebirth : Jainism follows Hinduism's concepts of Karma Siddhanta and Rebirth. According to Jainism, a soul gets rebirth which depend on the Karmas in the previous birth. Lingayatism believes that the Karmas of previous lives and rebirths are quite distinct concepts. According to Lingayatism, the concept of rebirth is not related to the concept of Karma. Moreover, Lingayatism does not believe in the very concept of rebirth. K. Ishwaran clarifies, "From the moment, he or she gets initiated as a Lingayata, through the meditation of a Jangama, who is regarded as a form Lord Shiva. He or she discards the notions worldly bondage and rebirth".⁸
5. Besides, the concepts of pollutions, fastings and sacrament systems related to birth, marriage and death of Jainism and Lingayatism vary from each other.

As seen from the above, the differences between these two communities are minor, whereas the similarities are substantial. Consequently, it is observed that there is a consistency in the social relationship existing between these two communities.

Moreover, antiquity, own religious identity, perpetuity of social life, minority, nationalist, non-violence-orientation are the major social common characteristics of both these communities.

CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL VALUES

There is an intimate relationship between religion and social values. Religion is also known by its social values. Ahimsa (non-violence), devotion, tolerance, renunciation, peaceability, Asteya (impassivity), Anekantvad (pluralism) are some of the major social values, principles and tenets of Jainism. Social equality, compassion, kindness, religious freedom, optimism, egalitarianism, experimentalism, simplicity of human behaviour, politeness, coordination, women's emancipation, Dasohavad (cooperation) and Kayakavad (dignity and divinity of work) are some of the major social values, principles and tenets of Lingayatism, which coordinate humanity and divinity.

Ahimsa : Jain and Lingayata Way of Life

Ahimsa (non-violence) is a view and way of life of both Jainism and Lingayatism. The precept of non-violence was termed as Ahimsa by Mahaveer, as Karuna by Gautam Buddha and as Daya by Mahatma Basaveshwara. 'Ahimsa Paramodharma' (Non-violence is the supreme religion) says Jainism, while Lingayatism insists 'Dayave Dharmada Mulavayya' (Compassion is the root of religion, nay, compassion is superior to religion). Ahimsa is the revelation of both these religions, nay, Ahimsa is the second name of Jainism and Lingayatism.

Ahimsa does not mean fear or withdrawal or submission. In fact, Ahimsa is a symbol of courage, boldness, tolerance and understanding. It is such a weapon with the help of which victory over violence can be achieved. Mahatma Gandhi, through the medium of non-violent freedom struggle, had shown this to the world. Indian society believes in 'Satyam aev Jayate' as well as in 'Ahimsa aev Jayate' (non-violence is the ultimate victor). The world would become a paradise when it would understand the gist of Ahimsa insisted upon by both Jainism and Lingayatism.

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