

# Scenario of Sanskritization at Shaktipeeths – A Step towards Empowerment of the Marginalised

(With Special Reference to Katyayani Shaktipeeth, Vrindavan (U.P.))

Dr. Rajesh Kumar Sharma<sup>1</sup> & Sandhya Dixit<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Head- Department of Sociology, Government P.G. College, Dholpur (Rajasthan)

<sup>2</sup> Project Fellow- UGC Major Research Project on Sanskritization

**Abstract-** Sanskritization is one of the ongoing revolutionary social processes in India. It is the process under which the religious practices of the Hindu upper castes are adopted by the members of SCs and STs in order to raise their social and cultural status in the society. By now the members of SCs and STs are aware that their cultural modes are responsible for their low status in the society. Therefore, they are ready to give them up for the sake of their improvement. Shaktipeeths and Durga temples in India are effective platforms for it. They provide an opportunity to such people to observe the upper caste religious and cultural practices closely and then to follow them for their own betterment. The scenario of Sanskritization becomes perfect during the Nava Ratras of Chaitra and Ashwin months. Obviously, it witnesses a revolutionary social change when during these specified Hindi months the people from all the castes mix up with one another and when they participate in the rituals together forgetting the differences of their castes. Eversince India has been a land of sages and saints. It is the land which gave thousands of spiritual saints from time to time. Spiritualism is in the spirit of India. It can be observed in everything. It will not be an exaggeration to say that spiritualism is another name of the Indian culture which is capable of magnetically drawing the people from all the four corners of the world. Spiritualism brings a real peace and satiety to the people, and helps the people keep themselves balanced. It links them up with God. Spiritualism is one of the features of the Hindu upper castes. Its impact can obviously be seen on the members of the lower Hindu castes. It not only keeps them away from the turmoil of their own caste-practices but also brings them a new identity of solace. Spiritualism's main focus is to promote an individual's personal experience with God. It may also refer to the philosophy, doctrine, or religion pertaining to a spiritual aspect of existence.<sup>3</sup> It is also a term commonly used for various psychic or paranormal practices and beliefs recorded throughout humanity's history<sup>4</sup> and in a variety of cultures.<sup>5</sup>

throughout the subcontinent tended to adapt their religious and social life to Brahmanic norms. This development resulted from the desire of lower-class groups to rise on the social ladder by adopting the ways and beliefs of the higher castes. Further, many local deities were identified with the gods and goddesses of the Puranas. The process, sometimes called "Sanskritization," began in Vedic times and was probably the principal method by which the Hinduism of the Sanskrit texts spread through the subcontinent and into Southeast Asia. Sanskritization still continues in the form of the conversion of tribal groups, and it is reflected in the persistence of the tendency among some Hindus to identify rural and local deities with the gods of the Sanskrit texts. Sanskritization also refers to the process by which some Hindus try to raise their status by adopting high-caste customs, such as wearing the sacred cord and becoming vegetarians.

## II. MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SANSKRITIZATION

Sanskritization is a particular form of social change found in India. It denotes the process by which castes placed lower in the caste hierarchy seek upward mobility by emulating the rituals and practices of the upper or dominant castes. This term was made popular by Indian sociologist M. N. Srinivas in the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> Srinivas defined sanskritization as a process by which "a low or middle Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently twice-born caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant class by the local community"<sup>2</sup> One clear example of sanskritization is the adoption, in emulation of the practice of twice-born castes, of vegetarianism by people belonging to the so-called "low castes" who are traditionally not averse to non-vegetarian food.

According to M.N. Srinivas, Sanskritization is not just the adoption of new customs and habits, but also includes exposure to new ideas and values appearing in Sanskrit literature. He says the words Karma, dharma, paap, maya, samsara and moksha are the most common Sanskritic theological ideas which become common in the talk of people who are sanskritized.<sup>1</sup> M. N. Srinivas propounded his theory of Sanskritization in the book titled Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India. Published in 1952, the book was an ethnographical study of the Kodava community of Karnataka. Srinivas writes in the book:

**Index Terms-** Sanskritization, Uchawal Chandrahaas , Shaktipeeth, Coorgs

## I. INTRODUCTION

The development of Hinduism can be interpreted as a constant interaction between the religion of the upper social groups, represented by the Brahmins, and the religion of other groups. From the time of the Vedas , people from many strata of society

"The caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible, and especially in the middle regions of the hierarchy. A caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by Sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins, and adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden. This process has been called 'Sanskritization' in this book, in preference to 'Brahminization', as certain Vedic rites are confined to the Brahmins and the two other 'twice-born' castes."<sup>2</sup> The book challenged the then prevalent idea that caste was a rigid and unchanging institution. The concept of sanskritization addressed the actual complexity and fluidity of caste relations. It brought into academic focus the dynamics of the renegotiation of status by various castes and communities in India.

### III. CAUSES OF THE SUCCESS OF SANSKRITIZATION IN INDIA

- Political and Economic Factors; The establishment of British rule in India gave more opportunities to lower castes to sanskritize themselves and raise their social status.
- Expanding means of transport and communication too have contributed to the process by the way of new avenues and opportunities of cultures contracts.
- However, lower castes aspiring to climb upwards in caste hierarchy have to face hostility from the castes of middle strata. The same from higher castes too when the lower castes try to start using shoes or wear neat and clean clothes.
- Lower castes are more liberal, permissive and progressive despite their lower status. They have liberal and positive attitude especially towards the position of women but tend to become conservative by the process of sankritization.
- However, the lower castes beside restoring to sankritization to acquire higher status in the society, they are also struggling fiercely to retain their backward status for taking advantage of educational concessions and government job.

### IV. RESULTS OF THE PROCESS OF SANSKRITIZATION

- Erosion of cultural autonomy of the woem folk includes erosion in the freedom to choose life partner.
- Changes in family structure include a movement towards the orthodox Hindu joint family.
- Stronger authority to father, monogamy, a stronger caste organisation with increased tendency of out casting.
- Change in food habits include outlawing beef and pork eating and consumption of liquor.
- Acquisition of higher education. Adoption of dowry practices instead of the token bride price.

- Change in religious practices include donning of sacred thread, giving up of sacrifice of pigs at the time of wedding and increased emphasis on pilgrimage.

### V. MEANING & SIGNIFICANCE OF SHAKTIPEETH

The Shakti Peethas (holy places of cosmic power) are places of worship consecrated to the goddess Sati, the female principal of Hinduism<sup>1</sup> and the main deity of the Shakta sect. They are sprinkled throughout the Indian subcontinent. This goddess Shakti, the Goddess of power is the complete incarnation of Adi Shakti, has three chief manifestations, as Durga, Goddess of strength and valour, as Mahakali, goddess of destruction of evil and as Goddess Gowri, the goddess of benevolence. As the legend goes, Sati and Shiva got married against the consent of Sati's father Yaksha. Once, Daksha performed a yajna with a desire to take revenge on Lord Shiva. Daksha invited all the deities to the yajna

Fuller, Christopher John (2004). The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India except Lord Shiva and Sati. The fact that she was not invited did not deter Sati from attending the yajna. She expressed her desire to attend the yajna to Shiva, who tried his best to dissuade her from going. Shiva eventually relented and Sati went to the yajna. Sati, being an uninvited guest, was not given any respect at the yajna. Furthermore, Daksha insulted Shiva. Sati was unable to bear her father's insults toward her husband, so she immolated herself. Enraged at the insult and the injury, Shiva destroyed Daksha's yajna, cut off Daksha's head, and later replaced it with that of a male goat as he restored him to life. Still immersed in grief, Shiva picked up the remains of Sati's body, and performed the Tandava, the celestial dance of destruction, across all creation. The other Gods requested Vishnu to intervene to stop this destruction, towards which Vishnu used the Sudarshana Chakra, which cut through the Sati's corpse. The various parts of the body fell at several spots all through the Indian subcontinent and formed sites which are known as Shakti Peethas today.

### VI. SHAKTIPEETHS

In the listings below:

- "Shakti" refers to the Goddess worshipped at each location, all being manifestations of Dakshayani (Sati), Parvati or Durga;
- "Body Part or Ornament" refers to the body part or piece of jewellery that fell to earth, at the location on which the respective temple is built.

Sr. No.	Place	Body Part or Ornament
1	In <u>Puri</u> , <u>Odisha</u> (inside Jagannath Temple complex)	Pada <u>Bimala</u>
2	ShawajPur Near <u>Forbesganj</u> , <u>Bihar</u>	kati Pradesh (Waist) <u>Maa Chhinnamashika</u>
3	Guwahati-Assam	Yoni khanda

		Kamakshya
4	Kolkata- <a href="#">West Bengal</a>	Mukha khanda <a href="#">Dakshina Kalika</a>

Apart from these four there are 52 other famous Peethas recognised by religious texts. According to the Pithanirnaya Tantra the 52 peethas are scattered all over [India](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Bangladesh](#), [Nepal](#), [Tibet](#), [Bhutan](#) and [Pakistan](#). The Shivacharita besides listing 52 maha-peethas, speaks about 26 more upapeethas. The Bengali [almanac](#), [Vishuddha Siddhanta Panjika](#) too describes the 52 peethas including the present modified addresses. A few of the several accepted listings are given below. One of the few in [South India](#), [Srisailam](#) in [Andhra Pradesh](#) became the site for a 2nd-century temple. Then there are other 51 famous Shaktipeeths located in the various parts of India and 18 Maha Shaktipeeths. According to the manuscript Mahapithapurana (circa 1690-1720 CE), there are 52 such places. Among them, 23 are located in the [Bengal](#) region, 14 of these are located in what is now [West Bengal](#), [India](#), 1 in Baster (Chhattisgarh), while 7 are in what is now [Bangladesh](#).

## VII. KATYAYANI SHAKTIPEETH, VRINDAVAN

Katyayani shakti peeth also known as Uma shakti peeth located in Vrindavan is one of the 51 Shaktipeethas where the 'Ringlets of Hair' of Devi Sati have fallen. Here the worship idols are – Devi as Uma (also known as another name of Goddess Parvati) and Lord Shiva as Bhootesh. The Katyayani Devi present here has a sword named Uchawal Chandrahaas in her hand and is sitting on a throne. The Katyayani Devi temple is situated in Radhbag near Yamuna in Vrindavan and is a very renowned Siddhapeeth. Katyayani is the 8th from of Durga. It is said that the girls of Braj worshipped Mata Katyayani in this Siddhapeeth to get Shri Krishna.

## VIII. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To observe the behavior, activities and attitude of the members of the upper and lower Hindu castes at the Shaktipeeths
- To observe ways of living and rituals through which the members of the upper Hindu castes attract the members of the lower Hindu castes towards them.
- To find out the causes of this attraction.
- To explore the changes in the behavior and life style of the members of the lower Hindu castes.
- To observe and explore the occasions at the Shaktipeeths which allow both the members of the upper and the lower Hindu castes to join each other.
- To study and observe the attitude of the members of the high castes at the point of time and on those occasions when the members of the lower castes join them at the time of the worship and rituals.

## IX. HYPOTHESIS

- The past of the lower Hindu castes in India is the history of struggle, exploitation, humiliation and injustice.
- The members of the upper Hindu castes have always kept themselves away from the members of the lower castes for several reasons.
- The members of the lower castes are now conscious of the fact that their own culture is responsible for this detachment.
- Now the members of the lower castes are ready to give up their own culture and to imbibe the culture of the members of the upper castes.
- Religious centres are open to all.
- The Shaktipeeths and Durga temples in India present a beautiful scenario of Sanskritization which reveals a tremendous change in the members of the lower castes.
- Katyayani Shaktipeeth at Vrindavan (U.P.) witnesses itself to be a platform of Sanskritization on certain occasions throughout the year, and particularly in the month of Chaitra (March) and in the month of Kwar (October) every year.

## X. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The work is an empirical study of 100 units selected randomly at Katyayani Shaktipeeth, Vrindavan. All the steps of scientific method of research including participant observation, collection of data through schedule technique, classification, analysis, interpretation, re-testing and tabulation of data and generalization were followed. Both the primary and the secondary data were used for the study. In the interview schedule, in addition to the other questions relating to the other aspects, 10 questions were included about the scenario of Sanskritization at Katyayani Shaktipeeth, Vrindavan. The investigator has tried his best to make his work scientific. He followed all the steps of scientific method.

## XI. FINDINGS

- The members of the lower Hindu castes are conscious of their caste-evils like eating non-vegetarian food, drinking, gambling, odd-wearing, insanity, unhealthy surroundings etc.
- They are forced to believe of themselves that they are inferior to the members of the upper castes.
- They find the ways of living, customs, traditions, ways of worship of the members of the upper class much better than their own ways of living.
- They are eager to lead a normal and respectable life, i.e. the life which is led by the members of the upper castes.
- For the sake of their betterment, they are ready to give up their evils and to imbibe the cultural modes of living of the members of the upper castes.
- They believe that ritualistic and spiritualistics at the temples and at home can change their destiny and bring them closer to the members of the upper castes.

- Religious centres provide the members of the lower castes opportunities to practice rituals with the members of the upper castes.
- The shaktipeeths and Durga temples are playing a dominant role in enabling the members of the lower castes to learn the culture of the upper castes.
- The process of Sanskritization is bringing about a tremendous change in the life of the members of the lower castes.
- Many of the members of the lower castes have stopped eating non-vegetarian food, drinking wine, gambling, abusing in public etc.
- As a result of it, they have started eating vegetarian food, wearing holy thread around their wrists and necks, using surnames of the upper castes before their names, and having clean and healthy surroundings.
- Many of them have started worshipping deities at home and performing rituals like arti, offering bhog, singing hymns at their home-temples.
- During the nav-ratra in the months of March and October, they not only observe fast but also attend the arti at Shaktipeeths and Durga temples.
- Sanskritization is benefitting women, young girls and young men more than aged men and women.
- Katyayani Shaktipeeth at Vrindavan (U.P.) becomes a perfect place of Sanskritization every evening at the time of Arti and during the navratra in the months of March and October when the members of the lower castes as well as of the higher castes are seen together in the temple campus performing various rituals to please the goddess Katyayani.
- Sanskritization is a revolutionary socio-cultural process which is changing the destiny of the members of the lower castes and which is allowing them to lead a respectable life.

## XII. SUMMING UP

Change is inevitable, and the same is true of the Indian society. Of the various ongoing associative social processes, the process of sanskritization is probably the most important one, as it has brought about a tremendous and incredible change in the ill-destiny of the members of the lower Hindu castes. It has brought rays of new hopes in their life ensuring them equality, security and indiscrimination. Like M. N. Srinivas, there are

several optimists who strongly believe that the day is not very far when there shall be no discrimination between man and man in the name of caste, class or creed, and that the process of sanskritization will play a dominant role in bringing about this change in the Indian society.

In the ongoing social process of Sanskritization, the Katyayani Shaktipeeth is playing a dominant role. It recognizes neither any caste- hierarchy nor any personal reputation. Once in the campus of the Shaktipeeth, all the people become the same. They throw themselves in the mood of spiritualism religiosity. They forget the identity of their castes and are overpowered by spirituality and brotherhood. Their participation at the ritualistic activities like parikrama, darshan, garland and prasad offering and spiritual meditation reveal their sameness which makes them forget the discrimination often found in the society in the name of caste, class and creed. Here, the members of the lower Hindu castes can be seen in large numbers practising rituals and spiritual meditation. Some of the glimpses of sanskritization at Katyayani Shakti Peeth are- bringing prasad, flowers, garlands and other gifts for the goddesses; offering them with the members of the upper castes; joining them in the queues at the time of darshan and parikrama; spiritual meditation with them; staying with them in the temple campus for the sake of worship, vigils etc. Indeed, all this witnesses a positive social change in the Indian social system.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Spiritualism in Answers.com, retrieved February 14, 2008.
- [2] Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur (1926). *The History of Spiritualism*
- [3] Lang, Andrew (1995). Myth Ritual & Religion
- [4] [Encyclopaedia Britannica](#)
- [5] N. Jayapalan (2001). Indian society and social institutions.
- [6] Srinivas, Mysore Narasimhachar (1962) Caste in Modern India: And other essays
- [7] Srinivas, M.N. (1952) Religion and Society Amongst the Coorgs of South India

## AUTHORS

**First Author** – Dr. Rajesh Kumar Sharma, Head- Department of Sociology, Government P.G. College, Dholpur (Rajasthan)

**Second Author** – Sandhya Dixit, Project Fellow- UGC Major Research Project on Sanskritization