

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPIRITUAL HEALING THROUGH LITERATURE ON BENGALI DALITS OF PARTITION VICTIMS

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ABSTRACT

This study shows the significance of spiritual influence on the traumatised Bengali Dalit refugees from present day Bangladesh to India as individuals as well as communities due to the partition of India. They had to flee from their homeland to escape from political violence, social injustice and communal riots. Incidentally, the Bengali Dalit victims were double victims-victims of partition as well as victims of caste. Their traumatic experience of crossing the border desperately required a spiritual healing to cope with their losses and make new meaning toward healing and recovery. Spiritual healing played a pivotal role on these disoriented, terrified migrants to understand their existential importance. Religious books and teachings helped them to mediate their relationship between spiritual needs and wellbeing. The study shows how the teachings of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and Sri Guruchand Thakur of 'Matua Mahasangha' strengthened the spiritual needs to unite in order to improve mental health among Bengali Dalit refugees. Many among these Dalit migrants took spiritual asylum for two reasons. On the one hand, the congregational nature of the 'Matua Mahasangha' helped these Namasudra refugees to reinforce and construct a sense of unity which gave them a sense of honour and voice their demands as 'Namashudras' to the higher social authority and on the other hand, the spiritual healing helped the traumatised victims of partition to improve their mental health to some extent.

The researcher, through this study, shows how the spiritual healing through literature helped the lives of survivors of forced displacement, rooted in a new country for resettlement, helped them sustain and survive. For many survivors, it took years to overcome the effects of the violence, dislocation and trauma they experienced during their migration journey whereas for some, it took a lifetime to overcome the miasma of despair.

Keywords: violence, trauma, partition, victim, Bengali, Dalit, spiritual, healing, Namashudra

Many people are compelled to flee to other countries mainly to escape from poverty, abuse, political violence, religious riots or war. Unfortunately, most of these immigrants are forced to leave behind almost everything they own, carrying only their hope and courage for a better future. But sadly, they also carry the trauma they have been forced to endure. While they try to assimilate in a new country, seldom unable to be understood by the language barrier or mocked for their thick accent, are compelled to take up menial, low-paying jobs not only to survive but also because of their low caste. These immigrants are not taught how to cope with trauma. Therefore, the men try to suppress it while the women cry secretly, try to pretend strong in front of other family members but both have no idea that by suppressing it, it comes out in other forms- none of them good.

The word "spirituality" is derived from the Latin word "spiritus", meaning "breath". According to D. J. Benor:

Spirituality encompasses experiences in which people find their consciousness extends outside their physical bodies. This may be as simple as a vague, intuitive awareness that there is something vast than yourself, in which you participate in an undefined manner. It may be much more specific, manifesting in intuitive or psychic perceptions; out-of-body; near death, pre death or deathbed experiences; reincarnation memories, seeing or hearing apparitions (ghost and other visionary figures), nature spirits and angels; mediumistic(channeled) phenomena; deep meditative and mystical experiences; awareness which transcends present time- to past, future; and more.(Benor, Introduction 9).

So, spiritual means some transpersonal awareness that arises spontaneously or through meditative and other practices, beyond any ordinary explanations. Thus, spirituality is believed to be a power which is superior to human beings which elevates the mind to higher consciousness and directs even the common, illiterate man to transcend himself into some other world where he can find utmost peace. It is a holistic approach that addresses the problem from the root and treats it thoroughly to fight against all anomalous situations.

Spiritual healing is connected with a transformative power that reaches to the depth of an individual. It crops up over time and continues throughout an individual's journey of life. Psychologically, healing suggests that it is a process towards the evolution of men towards achieving a whole personality. People require spiritual healing so that they can get back to the normal pattern of life and regain the social status that is accorded to them.

Healing mechanisms for the holistic development of the mind can be achieved through religious and spiritual involvement.

Reading spiritual literature is a simple healing mechanism to alleviate stress. In times of deluge, even the illiterate people listen to religious teachings in order to have a deeper understanding of the soul. It decreases anxiety as well as improves emotional stability which leads to greater amount of creativity among individuals, gains clarity, develops intuition, increases contentment among the people and provides serenity to the mind.

The Namashudras constituted the second largest Hindu caste group in the British province of Bengal mainly lived in the low-lying marshy areas of its six districts, i.e., Bakarganj, Faridpur, Dacca, Mymensingh, Jessore and Khulna. A large number of Bengali Dalits, after the partition of India in 1947, had to migrate to India from the present day Bangladesh to survive. They had to flee from their homeland to escape from political violence, social injustice, and communal riots. Namashudras- the untouchable community of India, oppressed and insulted for thousands of years, had begun to experience new light in the beginning of the nineteenth century. A great social reformer, Sri Sri Hari Chand Thakur was born in the untouchable Namashudra community in 1812 with an alternate vision of uplifting this community through spiritual and social consciousness. Sri Guru Chand Thakur, son of Sri Hari Chand Thakur also tried to carry forward his father's ambition of developing the Namashudra community by spreading formal education and fighting against the prevalent social evils. How the spiritual teachings of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and Sri Guruchand Thakur in simple yet lucid language influenced this traumatised Dalit Community are revealed from the autobiographies of the Bengali Dalit writers who also happen to be victims of partition.

Manohar Mouli Biswas, in his autobiography, *Surviving in My World: Growing up Dalit in Bengal* (2015), has mentioned how the teachings of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and his son Sri Guruchand Thakur influenced their life to unite and construct their voice and identity. As he writes- "A large section of namas considered Sri Sri Harichand Thakur as a god. Sri Sri Harichand was born within this community... Since my childhood I have always seen my mother dedicated to the Matua faith propagated by Harichand and Guruchand. As children during our illness or sufferings Mother used to run the flowing end of her saree all over our bodies and say, 'I beg you Hari Guru, heal such and such of mine...' On the strength of intense prayers of a compassionate mother we got healed without medicines," (Biswas, 51).

He also writes:

Harichand and Guruchand were father and son. Their joint inspiration had created the Matua religion, which I have mentioned that my mother considered to be her own. The poor and illiterate people of our area had developed a familiarity with Matua religious thought. (Biswas, 82).

Throughout his autobiography it is mentioned in several places that-

Guruchand Thakur's thoughts spread widely among our people by word of mouth. It was discussed in every neighbourhood. It was discussed even in our illiterate village (Biswas, 82).

This autobiography is a document of growing up amidst deprivation. It has documented the tales of almost losing in life; touching the margins and then again stepping back among humans.

"Jonmo hok jotha totha-kormo hok mohot mohan" (*Ak Richshawalar Atmakatha*, Atmakathar prakkathan) (wherever you might have born, your work should be great) -this simple teaching of Sri Harichand helped them re-establish to get success in life.

Even in the book, *Ak Rickshawalar Atmakatha*, the autobiography of Bengali Dalit writer Raju Das, Matua influence is clearly visible from the conversation below:

Sudhu bhalo laga noy, kheyal kore dekhben, Matua bhoktora ashrusajal nayane- nobo anonde mete eke oporer dukhyo-anondoke bhag kore ney. Asun, amra sudhu anondotukukei onubhob kori (Das, 45) (not only feeling good, it is also noticeable that the Matua disciples in teary eyes feel good to share their happiness or sorrow. We should choose only the happier part to console ourselves).

The Matua influence is also depicted in *Ami Keno Charal Likhi*, the autobiography of Kalyani Thakur Charal. She writes:

Amader atmyiora sobai mane baba ebong babar mamato bhaira sobai podobi palte Thakur bone jay. Eo chhilo samajik chap theke o jatibadi hinomonyota theke mukti paoar podhyoti (Charal, 45) (Our relatives, I mean my father and his cousins changed their surname to Thakur. This was another instance to get rid of the caste system).

She also writes:

Amader jana dorkar je edeshta ki chhilo, manushgulo ki bhabe tader arthyo-samajik protikulotake otikrom korechhe ebong ekta unnoyoner chintay jagroto hochhe nijeder moto kore (Charal, 88) (we need to know that what was the condition of this country, how they have tried to overcome the socio- economic condition in their own way).

In fact, there is anger in her tone. She is surprised why only people of the Matua community are familiar with the names of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and Sri Guruchand Thakur. Even the history of Bengali literature also never felt the necessity to include the books of Sri Harichand and Sri Guruchand. She laments that the upper caste Bengali 'bhadralok' still don't feel the need to include the books written by the so called 'Namashudra' community.

CONCLUSION

When the body consciousness is shifted to soul consciousness that helps the common man to liberate himself from mental as well as emotional stress is the success of spiritual healing. It has a transformative power to heal the wound and elevate the mind. It is a holistic approach that addresses the problem from the root and treats it thoroughly. Therefore, it can rightly be said that spirituality and healing do have a connection with each other. It was *Sri Sri Harililamrito* and *Sri Sri Guruchand Chorit*- two spiritual books where the teachings of both of them are later compiled, helped to pull this community who lived in the marshy land, discarded by the so-called upper caste 'Bhadralok', and had to flee from their country to survive, desperately needed spiritual healing to come out of the miasma of despair and survive.

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