The Guru, the Community and Environmental Ethics

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Abstract: The present paper seeks to explain the role of guru in making the community that relates the formation of environmental ethics. India has a long tradition of spiritual leaders who acted as gurus in their own field. These leaders were Nanak, Kabir, Namdev, Tikaram, Shankar Dev, Shri Chaitanya Dev and others who had appeared on different occasions. In the proposed presentation the name and activities of Sri Jambheshwarji mentioned who was born in 1451 A.D in the village Pipasar in Nagour district of Rajasthan. Besides religion, Jambheshwarji like other religious leaders played an active role in diverse aspects covering the various matters related to human life. It was Jambheshwarji who had twenty-nine principles, which are also important today. He not only preached twenty-nine principles, but also circulated another one hundred twenty sermons combining his ideology and religious thoughts among his followers. This principle is popularly known as ‘Shabdabani’. Being inspired by Jambheshwarji’s principles and ideology, three hundred sixty three Bishnoi led by Amrita Devi scarified their lives in and around Jodhpur to prevent de-forestation in 1730 A.D. The Bishnoi community is known as a lover of the environment and priest of nature. They are ready at any time to sacrifice their lives to preserve environment and protect wild species. However, at present, many changes have taken place in social, political, religious and economic structure in the life pattern of the Bishnoi. The present research intends to focus on the problems faced by the Bishnoi community in following Guru’s ideology. It was due to the changes that had taken place in the society, which disturbed the daily lives of the Bishnoi community.

Keywords: Bishnoi, Environmental Ethics, Jambheshwarji, Shabdovaani, Pahal

Introduction

India has a long tradition of spiritual leaders who acted as gurus in their own field. In this presentation the activities of Sri Jambheshwarji are described. Jambheshwarji preached his twenty-nine principles and one hundred twenty Shabdovaani preached religious sermon as well as the discourses about environment. The ethics and principles as preached by Jambheshwarji can make us lovers of the environment as well as lovers of wildlife like the Bishnois community.

Birth of Guru Jambheshwarji

Guru Jambheshwarji was born on 8th August in 1451 A.D in a Panvar Rajput family in the village Pipasar. The village Pipasar is located 50 km north of Nagour district, close to Bikaner. The local people considered the birthday of Lord Krishna to be birthday of Jambheshwarji. His childhood was not as like other children. The poets like, Vilhoji, Gakulji who dealt with the Bishnoi community, have spoken about the early life of Jambheshwarji, where it was mentioned that he led his early life without sufficient food and spent the first seven years of his life without talking with anyone. The villagers called him Gahlo means dumb and mute that led his parents to be more anxious about him. There is a story current among the Bishnoi orders that Jambheshwarji spoke at the age of seven. Thus he engaged himself in grazing cattle for the next twenty-seven years. Jambheshwarji’s supernatural powers helped the deposed king Rao Duda of Merta to gain his lost power. Thus Jambheshwarji’s parents made abortive attempts for his marriage but failed. After the death of his parents Jambheshwarji donated all his paternal property to the village people of Pipasar and proceeded to Somrasthal Dhora, a neighboring village.

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1 Vikram Samvat 1508
2 Western Rajasthan
3 Gahlo is a Rajasthani Word
4 Prithwi Raj Bishnoi, Guru Jambhoji and Sabadvaani, Jambhani Sahitya Akademi, Bikaner, 2018, p. 10
5 Dr. Sahiram Bishnoi, Sant Jambhoji Thata Bishnoi Darshan, Anang Prakashan, Delhi, 2020, p. 9
In Somrasthal Dhora Jambheshwarji dedicated himself in complete meditation for gaining a spiritual way of life. The year 1484-1485 A.D was a turning point in his chequered career because that area had suffered due to the ensuing draught and for which the rural people decided to migrate elsewhere. But it was he who advised the local people not to seek elsewhere as he already arranged sufficient food for them for the coming three years. Thus Jambheshwarji announced his famous twenty-nine principles in 1485 A.D in addition to with his other advice known as Jambhovani or Shadadvani.

**Twenty Nine Principles**

Guru Jambheshwarji established a new community by announcing his famous principles. The people who carried out the principles call Bishnoi. Jambheshwarji had a desire that his disciples should follow not only his way of life but also the basic concepts of twenty-nine principles. Out of these 29 principles eight relates to the protection of wild animals and preservation of environment, seven principles to social conduct and behavior, ten principles to personal health and hygiene and the rest four principles relate to the worship and meditation of Lord Vishnu. Prithwi Raj Bishnoi has divided these twenty-nine principles into five parts in his book entitled *Guru Shri Jambhoji and Sabadvaani.* These five parts are mainly relates to religious aspects of the Bishnoi communities, including their behavior based on ethics, ecological preservation of biodiversity, concept of non-violence, personal health and hygiene, and behavioral practices of Women and their health. The present research tends to focus the concept of preservation of biodiversity in the backdrop of non-violence.

**Ecological Preservation of Biodiversity and Non-Violence**

It means to be kind and compassionate to all living beings and unnecessarily not to hunt or kill animals. Another objective was not to cut and fell green trees, to keep the old helpless goats or other animals in well-proven shelters in order to avoid them from butchers, and not to castrate the bulls. The Bishnoi followers were also instructed to use water, milk and fuel after proper scrutiny, so that no insects are carried with them. It also upholds the view not to kill any living being even by accident.

**Bishnoi Community Hindu or Muslim**

As the Bishnois did not worship idols and they used to bury their dead bodies, a controversy prevails in the common mind regarding their identity. This confusion began to take shape when they were classified as Muslim in the *Census Report of Marwar of 1891* A.D. It is assumed that the British Government in order to make a confusion or division among the Bishnois intentionally considered them as Muslims. Thus when the Bishnois understood the British motivation strongly protested against it. It is evident from the available sources that the Bishnois are considered a very much part of the Hindu community. According to Singh and Saxena, the Bishnoi cult originated when a Rajput warrior married a Muslim girl. According to Dominique-Sila Khan, Jambhesvara had claimed that he was neither Hindu nor Muslim since he had raised himself above all castes and sects. Traditionally, his tomb was referred to as *Samadhi* by his Hindu devotees and *Mukam* by his Muslim devotees. His shrine was likewise viewed as a temple or dargah (Jain, 2020).

**Shabdovaani**

In addition with twenty-nine principles, Jambheshwarji preached so many messages to his disciples, which are commonly known as ‘Jambhovaani’ or ‘Shabdovaani’. It includes one hundred twenty three speeches. There is a difference of opinion as with to the regard the total number of speeches delivered by Jambheshwarji. There are some writers who are of the opinion that total numbers of speeches were not more than one hundred twenty. However, Dr. Hiralal Maheshwari has mentioned one hundred twenty three speeches delivered by Jambheswarji. He also criticized the practices of killing animal in the name of

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6 Neekee Chaturvedi, Cultural Tourism and Bishnois of Rajasthan, Department of History & Indian Culture, University of Rajasthan & Rajasthani Granthagar, 2018, p. 137
7 Vikram Samvat 1542, Kartik month, Krishna 8th
8 This community is also called the Prahladpanthi community based on their reverence for Prahlad, the mythical son of Hiranyakasyapu in Hindu Puranas who had invoked the Narasimha incarnation of Vishnu.
9 Ibid
10 P. 42
11 P. 212
Prophet Muhammad in his tenth Vaani. There is a story that Prophet Muhammad himself neither kill animal nor instructed to kill\textsuperscript{12}. Jambheshwarji appealed to the common people not to kill the animal, which reflected in his tenth speech. It may be argued why the practice of killing animals is being found in the whole universe. Jambheshwarji in the course of his one hundred twenty speeches wanted to make the people more conscious and alert in this field. The speech in the form of Vaani delivered by Jambheshwarji is quite relevant even today.

**Guru Jambheshwarji and the Ruling Power**

Guru Jambheshwarji came in touch with many Kings, Maharaja, Samanta, feudal lords throughout his life. He not only advised but also guided them in various ways. Thus there is evidence to show that so many ruling powers ruled out cow slaughter in their respective regions. Ruler of Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Bikaner not only became a devotee of Jambheshwarji but also was a great patron of him. Many rulers went to their kingdoms and waived the taxes of the Bishnoi. In this context it is to be mention that Subedar Mollu Khan of Jodhpur banned the cow slaughter in his region\textsuperscript{13}. Mohammad Nagouri, the ruler of Nagour district became a disciple and interviewed him in various ways\textsuperscript{14}. Being influenced by Guru Jambheshwarji Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517 A.D), the sultan of Delhi released two prisoners\textsuperscript{15}. Rao Budaji, the son of Rao Jodha, captured a Bishnoi\textsuperscript{16} tenant\textsuperscript{17} to examine Jambheshwarji. When Motiram prayed Jambheshwarji, Jambheshwarji rescued him. 1469 A.D Jambheshwarji gave a Nagara to Rao Jodha, the king of Jodhpur as a gift.

**Rituals**

Bishnoi generally followed the ritual and practices commanded by their Guru Jambheshwarji. These rituals are being followed in Bishnoi even today. These practices are birth ceremony, death ceremony, marriage ceremony, Havan (fire ceremony), Kalas, Pahal (enchanted water) etc.

**Life Style of Bishnoi**

It implies that the rituals and livelihood of the Bishnoi are mainly based on twenty-nine principles formulated by their Guru Jambheshwarji. Every Bishnoi male or female starts their day by waking up very early in the morning and taking a bath in the morning before sunrise. The male and female belonging to the Bishnoi order performs their daily activities after completing morning bath. It is the usual practice of Bishnoi groups of people to feed the birds. Every village has a separate place for birds called ‘Baadi’. Animals and birds roam freely without fear in the habitant of the Bishnois. Another striking activity of the Bishnoi community is planting trees and for which they bring water from distance places. Havan (fire ceremony) is performing in any auspicious function on a certain day of the year.

**Havan or Yajna**

Yajna, a Sanskrit word commonly called by Bishnoi Havan. Yajna is popularly meaning religious sacrifice on an oblation. This is like a burnt offering performed by the Bishnoi. Havan is performs in the house of every Bishnoi at a specific time of the year. It is generally held either on the birthday or death ceremony of Jambheshwarji. There is a close similarity in performing the religious sacrifices with the Vedic. But after a close look at the ritual performed by the Bishnoi some new elements are found. For example the Bishnoi used to provide coconut husks in performing their rituals. In order to protect the trees, The Bishnoi never preferred wood in their religious sacrifices which were commonly known as Havan. They generally observe this ritual on the day of *Amabasya* (new moon).

**Pahal**

\textsuperscript{12} Prithwi Raj Bishnoi, Guru Jambhoji and Sabadvaani, Jambhani Sahitya Akademi, Bikaner, 2018, Sabadvaani no. 10\textsuperscript{th}, pp. 55-58
\textsuperscript{13} Dr. Sahiram Bishnoi, Sant Jambhoji Thata Bishnoi Darshan, Anang Prakashan, Delhi, 2020, p. 18
\textsuperscript{14} Pankaj Jain, Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities: Sustenance and Sustainability, Routledge, London & New York, 2020, p. 55
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, pp. 57-58
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 17
\textsuperscript{17} Motiram
Their religious ceremony starts with Pahal\(^{18}\). Pahal means a special type of ceremony which brings all the community in the common platform to perform their ritual in an enchanted way. By observing this ceremony the water is generally purified. Guru Jambheshwarji has introduced the Pahal mantra. In Bishnoi religion drinking Pahal water is compulsory during initiation. Bishnois believe that all kinds of impurities, sin etc are removed by Pahal. Pahal is the symbol of purity, determination to perform rules and staging in remembrance of Lord Vishnu. After five hundred years later Pahal is equally important to the Bishnois.

**Birth Ceremony**

After the birth of a child in the Bishnoi community he/she is highly welcomed by the Bishnoi group’s people. A Sutak\(^{19}\) is celebrated for thirty days after the birth of a child in the houses of every Bishnoi. Out of twenty-nine principles the Sutak is considered first and foremost. After the birth of a child in a Bishnoi family the mother is not allowed to perform any work including any ritual. The food of the mother of a newborn baby is cooked separately. On the thirty-first day the Pahal ceremony was performed with an observance of religious sacrifice, the entire ceremony presided by a priest. In the absence of a priest the elderly person of a particular family has to complete the entire ceremony. The entire village community is invited on the particular day for the feast.

**Balak Mantra**

Balak Mantra is considered to be the first step in entering the Bishnoi order. Initiation ceremony generally takes place after the shaving of the head of the newborn child. The primary duty of the priest is to recite Shabdovaani, which is aware of Balak Mantra.

**Marriage Ceremony**

The marriage ceremony is very joyful and pleasant among the Bishnoi community and it can take place at any moment in the calendar year. The Bishnoi community never follows any almanac like other Hindu communities for fixing up the day of marriage. The marriage ceremony takes place as per conveniences for either bride or bridegroom. There is a tradition among the Bishnoi; they can marry any one excluding their parent’s lineage. The marriage takes place without pomp and splendid and does not follow the Hindu ritual. Kalas Stapan or Kalas Puja\(^{20}\) and Pahal are very much important in marriage ceremonies.

**Mortuary Rites**

Generally Bishnois buried their dead bodies. The mortuary rites followed by them suit both environment economies. The Bishnoi generally perform the Pahal and other religious practices on the third day after death, any people belonging to the Bishnoi order. All the rituals related to it are complete within twenty-nine days.

**Festivals**

The Bishnoi communities practice in various kinds of festivals. Out of which them Holi is very much popular with the Bishnoi order. Bishnoi claim themselves Prahladpanthi (follower of Prahlad) for which they never participate in the festival like Holika Dahan. Though it is a part of the festival Holi, according to Puranic tradition it is said that father of Bhakta Prahlad made an abortive attempt to burn his son for which follower Jambheshwarji considered the day as the ‘day’ of mourning. There is a tradition or prevalent notion among the Bishnoi that on that day they take Khichuri (An Indian dish consisting chiefly of rice and split pulses) as one of their main food. The day of Amabysa (new moon) is considered by the Bishnoi as a holy day. On that very day observe religious sacrifice and recite Brata katha. The Bishnoi used to bring a handful of soil as a vow to the temple. On the birthday of Jambheshwarji his followers organized religious fair in different places out of which the fear of Mukham Dham is remarkable.

**Some Sacred and Important Places of Bishnois**

\(^{18}\) The word Pahal has originated from the Rajasthani word Pala.  
\(^{19}\) Sutak is first principles of Jambheshwarji’s twenty-nine principles.  
\(^{20}\) A plain clay-pot is filled with pure filtered water and is placed on sand or grain near the Havan-altar at a prescribed time. Then the Havan is performed methodically with chanting of the Shabdas of Jambheshwar.
The Bishnoi communities have eight places of pilgrims, which are popularly known as Astdham (A holy place). It is mention either Jambheshwarji came or settle in places. Religious fair organized all holy places of pilgrims. Among these holy places Guru Jambheshwarji was born in such a holy place that is commonly known as Pipasar Sathri. Besides, there is another place, which is acquainted Samrasthal Dhora where Guru Jambheshwarji attained spiritual knowledge or divine wisdom. Jambheshwarji also constructed a lake, which is versed as Jambholav or Jambhosagar. In addition, Jangu Sathri, Rotu Village, Mukam, Lodipur are considered as sacred places of the Bishnoi communities.

Conclusion

In view of the above, it may be said Jambheshwarji preached his twenty-nine principles and one hundred twenty Shabdovaani preached religious sermon as well as the discourses about environment. This concept was the main pillar of environmental ethics. The ethics and principles as preached by Jambheshwarji can make us lovers of the environment as well as lovers of wildlife like the Bishnoi community. It implies that everyone has to be careful about the preservation and protection of wild animals, their environmental surroundings. Being inspired by Jambheshwarji`s principles and ideologies three hundred sixty three Bishnois sacrificed their lives. The principles followed by the Bishnois are followed by the people throughout the world.

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