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Vaishnavism

History of culture is the history of the progress of humanity, and religion had been an important aspect of culture. Indian culture influenced religion and philosophy by its free thinking. This gave birth to several religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism.

Origin of Vaishnavism: 1. This cult is associated with the worship of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu was first discussed in Rigveda. In the latter Vedic period, whole community worshipped Vishnu.

2. According to Dr Bhandarkar, Vaishnavism originated in the 6thc, Vasudev was regarded as the real originator, so when Vasudev Krishna was discussed.

3. In the Panini's Ashtadyayi", in the 5 thc ,BC Vasudev Pooja was accepted.

4. 200 year BC in Ghosundi Inscription of rajputs, there are incarvings of Vasudev worship.

5. 2nd BC in the Basenagar Inscription, Heliodorus described himself as the worshipper of Vasudev.

6. In Megsdthenese descriptions also it was made clear that Vaishnavism existed before Mauryan period.

There are several other inscriptions that proved the existence of Vaishnavism.

Growth of Vaishnav religion: Original principles of Vaishnavism are based upon Bhagwat Gita. Krishna delivered complete loyalty principles towards Lord Vishnu. He preached Gyan and Karma both. Bhagwat Gita depicted Vaishnavism ultimate aim to salvation, through Bhakti.

Different phases of the growth of Vaishnavism

1. First phase establishes the association of Lord Vishnu, Vedic God. Bhagwat Gita explains the relation between the two. When Lord Krishna displayed the whole universe to Arjun's, it proved Krishna as a part of Lord Vishnu. This Vasudev Dharma, Bhagwat Dharma or Vishav Dharma became synonymous.
2. **Association of Lord Krishna-Vishnu to Narayana:** in Bodhayan Dharmasutra Narayana was associated with Lord Vishnu. Taitreya Aranyak also explains Narayan, Vasudev and Vishnu are the same. In Mahabharata also Nar and Narayana are worshipped together. In Vanparv, Krishna tells Arjuna- 'hey Shreya tum nar ho Narayana hum! Hey Parth tum mujhse alag nahi aur mai tujhse alag nahi hun'.
3. **Gopal Krishna to Vasudev:** in Hariwansh Puran, Vayu Puran, Bhagwat Puran, Krishna had been associated with Lord Krishna for killing demons and assassinating Kans. Krishna was also regarded as Govinda as Rigveda says Govind is used for Indra as the saviour of views. Later on this Govind word was associated with Krishna.

Principles of Vaishnavism religion: Its principles are extracted from Bhagwat Gita. Bhakti with complete dedication along with Gyan and Karma were the chief principles of Vaishnavism. These are the measures to attain salvation:

1. **Chaturvyuh or Vir Pooja:** The principle of Chaturvyuh is related to Vir Pooja. An inscription was found close to the city of Mathura, which described the worship of five Vir. In Vayu Puran-Vasudev (Devki's son), Sankarshan (Vasudev's son from Rohini), Samv (Vasudev's son from Jamvanti), and Anirudha (Pradum's son). Here Vasudev is God and others are good vyuh. Sankarshan, Aniruddh, and Pradunn are regarded as living being, proud, heart and head, since they were born by Vasudev so they are regarded as vyuh.
2. **Panchratna Opinion:** Bhagwat Gita professes concentrated meditation. Panchratna accepted the worship of Vasudev and his different versions. Inscriptions and literary evidences proved that panchratna was existing in 3rd century BC. And in this worship five elements were- Eternal factor, Salvation, Methods, Yoga and World.
3. **Brahamcharya:** Vaishnavism believed in idol worship. So temples were constructed for different incarnations of Vishnu. Gupta period

witnessed the golden period of Vaishnavism. Idol worship came into Vogue. Om namo narayana and Om namo bhagwate vasudevay.. These mantras were recited to worship Vasudev Krishna Vishnu. Besides singing verses, pilgrimage, and observing festivals, were also the part of Vaishnavism.

4. Incarnation: Vaishnavism accepted the importance of incarnation, incarnation was accepted as chiefly for public welfare. In Bhagwat Gita, Arjun said, **Hey Bharat whenever religion is in crisis, and corruption increases then to re-establish religion, the incarnation of Vishnu takes place.**

In Narayan's Mahabharat, there are 6 incarnation of Vishnu and in agnipuran,12 incarnations, in Bhagwat Puran 22 incarnations of Vishnu are mentioned. Major ten incarnations are-1.Matsyavtar,2. Kurm,3.Varha,4.Narsimha,5.Vamana,6. Parasurama,7. Rams,8. Balram,9.Krishna,10. Kalki

1. Matsya(fish),2. Kurma(Tortoise),3. Varsha(boar),4. Narsimha (half man/half lion)-they all belong to **Satyuga.**
5. Vamana(dwarf),6. Parasurama (warrior with axe) 7. Rama(Prince of Ayodhya)-they belong to **Tretayug**
8. Balrama(philosopher and guide),9. Krishna (philosopher)-they belong to **Dwaperyug**
10. Kalki(eternity/white horse)-it will be seen in **kalyug,** still awaited.

Expansion of Vaishnavism: Neither in Rock or pillar addict of Ashoka, nor in Buddhist texts any great details are found about Vaishnavism. By the third c BC Vaishnavism was localised close to Mathura, and North West area. By the time of **Panini, Vasudev** had been identified as Good but his worship was limited to Yadav and few castes only. But later in the post **Mahabharat period**, when Vasudev was equated with Lord Vishnu, he was identified and was worshipped as a God. Gradually Vaishnavism gained momentum.

Foreign ambassador Haeiliodorus, became a disciple of thif cult. GarundhwajH Rock Edict confirmed the existence of Bhagwat

Religion in Gwalior. Ghosundi pillar inscription of the rajputana, confirmed the same.

Evidence proved that the migration of Yadav's from North to south helped spreading this religion.

During **Gupta period** Vaishnavism was declared the state religion. In South the followers were known as **Alvars**, several Tamil books mentioned this religion

Dasavtar temple of Devgadh, of the Guys period is a fine example of Vaishnavism. Sooner Krishna and his activities also became the part of this religion. Ramanand, Ramanuj, Kabir, Vallabh, Chaitnya promoted this religion in North, and Namdev and Tukaram in Maharashtra.