

The Impacts Of Individual's Tapasya On A Society

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Abstract

Hinduism is categorized an ancient religion among world religions. From start to nowadays, a lot of changes have been occurred to get modernity. Its beliefs and ritual practices have been revolutionary changed with the passage of time. For spiritual purification, people adopt different ascetical activities. Tapasya is a renowned ascetical activity of Hindus. In a Hindu society, people do Tapasya to enhance their spiritual levels. This activity is practiced both in moderate as well as in extreme forms. Tapasya affects a body in different ways. It leaves deep impacts (positive / negative) on an individual directly and indirectly on a society. After studying the available data, it was felt that there was need to point out the effects of Hindu Tapasya. This paper is to highlight the impacts (social) of Tapasya on a society. The main objective of this study is, to elaborate the benefits of moderate nature of Hindu asceticism. A descriptive research method has been used for this study.

Key Words: Asceticism, Tapasya, Sociability, Moderation, Spirituality .

Hindu Asceticism and Social Impacts of Individual's Tapasya on a Society

I. Introduction to Hindu Asceticism

Among world religions, Hinduism holds a valuable position. Historically, its origin as well as originator is unseen. This religion is attributed toward a specific region (valley of Sindh or Indus River valley) as Manly Palmer (1901-1990), a Canadian writer mentioned in his book: World Religions, "Hinduism is regarded as the most ancient living world religion, being over 5,000 years old."¹ Some historians do not accept it (Hinduism) as a religion but as a set of

philosophical thoughts and superstitions. Actually, Hinduism is the combination of ancient civilizations, theories and regional customs of people living in the specific area in which it took birth. Dr Lloyd Ridgeon (an expert of mystical studies), expressed his point of view, "The name Hindu was first a geographical name, not a religious one, and it originated in the languages of Iran, not of India."² The word 'Hindu' has multiple backgrounds. A sacred person, a black colored man and a person belong to Indus Valley. But historically, Hindus are the people who settled in the valley of Sindh. Their sacred

literature and cultural values named as Hinduism. This is an authentic view point of most historians.

Actually, the letter 'S' was altered with 'H' in Persian literature. So, Sindh was pronounced as Hind and Sindhu as Hindu. The beliefs, ritual practices and philosophical theories of those people invented Hinduism. This complex point has also been discussed by Dr Lloyd Ridgeon in his book, "The word Hindu is derived from the name given to the people who settled on the banks of the river 'Sindhu' (Indus in northern India). The name was corrupted to Hindu over the course of time, and so their system of beliefs was given the name Hinduism."³ Brahmins had been enjoying higher class in Hindu society and lower-class Hindus (Shudras) were being exploited by the higher classes. So, against the orthodoxy and unequal treatment, many lower-class Hindus rebelled and made a new religious setup. This phenomenon caused the birth of new religious orders in that area. Buddhism and Jainism came in to existence in that way. Renunciation and monasticism were introduced after rejecting the social setup. It was sixth century BCE when people started to make revolt against Brahminic system. "This century saw the rise of breakaway sects of ascetics who denied the authority of the Vedas and of the Brahmins."⁴ Gautama Buddha (founder of Buddhism born in 5th century BCE and died 4th century BCE) popularly known as Buddha, also known as Siddhartha Gautama founded Buddhism around this period. He was the person who introduced renunciation in ancient India. In his teachings, there were no social classes as were in Hinduism. So, many lower-class people (those who were being deprived or brutally dealt by high class Hindus in their own societies) were attracted by Buddha's teachings. When Brahmins felt that people were being attracted by Buddha's teachings, they showed some leniency and introduced some social reforms in their system. They also added renunciatory attitude in their new teachings and social setup. Four stages of life were introduced

by Brahmins in the reaction of Buddha's setup. These four stages of Brahmins have been discussed by Walter O. Kaelber (a professor of religious studies at Wagner College New York), "The brahmacarya asrama of the student, the Grihastha asrama of the Dikshitayajamana, the later Vanaprastha and Sannyasa Asramas of the ascetic are each in their own way a heated passage, a Tapta Marga."⁵ From both sides (Buddha and Hindus), ascetical activities (asceticism) were introduced in India. In India, Hindus were responsible for introducing renunciation. The early followers of Buddha's teachings were actually Hindus who separated themselves from their social setup and rejected many worldly pursuits. Brahmins who introduced Brahmacharya stage. This was also a kind of renunciation. So, from both sides, Buddha's followers and Brahmins followers introduced renunciation in their setups.

In Hinduism, the basic purpose of every ritual or spiritual activity is to get Mukti (Moksha or Nirvana) which holds the meaning of liberation of soul from the detention of the body. To get this condition, Hindus adopt different kinds of practices. Some of them are normal but some are very complex. This is the same philosophy which was introduced by Greeks. "It is necessary to suppress bodily desired so that soul can be free to search for knowledge."⁶ For this purpose, Hindus adopt different painful activities to purify their souls or to minimize the intensity of their sins. To adopt some painful activity for spiritual causes is called 'asceticism'. "Ascetic/adj/ self-denying; austere: leading a life of severe self-discipline. A person (often for religious reasons) leads a severely simple life without ordinary pleasures."⁷ From old time to nowadays, ascetical activities have been adopted by Hindus those are being practiced even in this modern age. This reality was elaborated by James Hasting (1852-1922), a Scottish United Free Church Minister and Biblical Scholar, "In India, ascetic practices have been very widely prevalent

from the earliest times.”⁸ The lord Shiva has been attributed to asceticism. Many Sadhus and Sannyasis claim that they are following the life style of Lord Shiva. This truth was revealed by an American writer: Robin Rinehart (1856-1958) in her book: Contemporary Hinduism, “Shiva is often represented as a celibate ascetic, renouncers, sadhus, and Sannyasis invoke his symbols, his name, and his austere example in pursuing rigorous ascetic exercises.”⁹ In modern period, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), a Hindu renowned personality, writer and politician, in his book; “The Discovery of India” with the reference of old Hindu sacred literature, he tried to explain the Hindu asceticism, “The Mahabharata is a rich storehouse in which we can discover all manner of precious things. It is full of a varied, abundant and bubbling life, something far removed from that other aspect of Indian thought which emphasized asceticism and negation.”¹⁰ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), a renowned Hindu personality of India and founder of present India, is also responsible for asceticism in modern Hinduism. He adopted many ascetical practices, in his life. He is said to be the responsible of renaissance of modern asceticism in a Hindu society. “Gandhi’s synthesis of pravṛtti and nivṛtti was not a static political strategy; rather it was an organically evolving and dynamic program based on the ascetic disciplines of sat, ahimsa, brahmacharya, aparigraha, Mauna, and fasting.”¹¹ In different ways, asceticism has been practiced by Hindus from start to nowadays. In some situations, extreme level of ascetical activities is being practiced by Hindus in different areas. Mostly, the core points of the teachings of M. K. Gandhi are being promoted in modern Hinduism.

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3. Statement of the Problem

All religions hold some kind of beliefs and ritual practices. A religion or a part of a religion is respectable and worthy of love. The very common and absolute aspect among all religions is spiritual purification. Hinduism is an old religion and refers many practices to adopt for spiritual purification. Tapasya is pure religious practice of Hindus. It is an ascetical activity and used by Hindu ascetics and Sadhus to gain spirituality. This practice is not only beneficial to enhance spirituality but to get physical strength. So, on an individual as well as on whole the society, this practice leaves deep impacts individually and socially. This study to highlight the social impacts of Tapasya on a society.

4. Literature Review

The work on this topic “The Social Impacts of Tapasya on a Society” has not already done. But many books have been written on Hindu asceticism particularly on Tapasya, its related issues and its kinds, have been written. A lot of research papers and discussion are there on online sources. General nature, kinds and background of Tapasya have been elaborated in these literatures. Martin Palmer is an international writer who wrote a book titled, “World Religions”, in this book, the basics of Hinduism have been discussed historically. Lloyd Ridgeon compiled data on world religions. He titled his book, “Major World Religions”. In this book, major world religions especially, main features of Hinduism have been discussed briefly. “The Encyclopedia Britannica” contains a brief data on Hinduism, its origin, revolution and basics. Walter O. Kaelber wrote a book on Hindu asceticism and Hindu Tapasya named “Tapta Marga: Asceticism and Initiation in Vedic India”. This book reveals the Hindu ascetical activities, their nature and changes with

the passage of time. James Hastings wrote "Encyclopedia of Religions and Ethics" different religions and their basic practices have been discussed in this book. This book contains a brief data on Hindu ascetical practices and particularly on Tapasya. Robin Rinehart wrote a book on modern Hinduism with title; "Contemporary Hinduism". This book reveals the current features of Hindus, their ritual practices and social customs. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote a book on Hinduism in which he described different features of Hinduism and India historically. He titled his book as, "The Discovery of India".

Veena R. Howard elaborated the nature of ascetical approach of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in his book. She titled her book as, "Gandhi's Ascetic Activism". Bulent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen wrote a book on different forms of yoga. He titled his book as, "Yoga in the Modern World". Swami Gambhir Ananda translated the Bhagavad Gita into English language. He titled his translation as, "Shrimad Bhagavad Gita" this book was retrieved

from <http://estudentdavedanta.net/Bhagavad-Gita-with.the.Commentary.of.Sri.Shankaracharyan.pdf>. David Smith wrote a book on Hinduism, its society and main features of its social system. He titled his book, "Hinduism and Modernity". The harmony and clashes have been discussed. A. C. Bhakti Vedanta Swami translated "Bhagavad Gita" into English with commentary of different phrases. He mentioned the three types of Tapasya in his book. He named his compilation, "Bhagavad Gita, as it is". This book got more selling award all over the world.

5. Tapasya, an Ascetical Activity

Different ascetical activities are being practiced by Hindus in these days. Some of these practices are very old and some have been invented in later period. Some old activities have been modified according to present requirements. Tapasya is a renowned ascetical activity of Hindus that is

being practiced to get some spiritual goals. This is an old ascetical activity but with the passage of time, many changes have been occurred in it because the change of fundamental social values of Hindus. The word 'Tapasya' is actually derived from 'Tapas' or 'Tap'. This word is usually used in Hindi as well as in Sanskrit languages but after getting fame, this word or term has become a part of English literature. The literal meaning of 'Tap', 'Tapas' or 'Tapasya', is 'hot' or 'heat', in some ways to burn something with high temperature is called Tapasya. Tapasya is performed in different ways and for different purposes. The ultimate purpose of Tapasya is to get spiritual purification. Many types have been mentioned in Hindu sacred literature. "A man retired from household life must practice austerities of the body, mind and tongue. That is Tapasya."¹²

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1868-1948) explained this word in very beautiful ways. "The three essential pillars of truth force are: Satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence) and Tapasya (self-sacrifice and voluntary suffering)."¹³ People (Hindu ascetics) adopt this activity to gain some spiritual ends. This is a painful activity so it is categorized as an ascetical activity which is mostly used for religious purposes by Hindus. "Tapas, however is also pain, suffering, voluntarily endured."¹⁴ Hindu ascetics use this activity to waive out their sins and to enhance their spiritual level. In Hindu literature, Tapasya is used to refer to a body condition in which a man (or woman) has to meditate in open environment where sun rays can easily reach to his (or her) body. The movements of body are controlled. Sometime, for hours, a man keeps his body in specific position. A man who performs Tapasya is called Tapasvi. In some conditions, a yogi does Tapasya to get some specific goals. In this way, an ascetic (Hindu) becomes Tapasvi as well as Yogi at same time. "It is the heat of tapas that leads toward the perfection of the body and the sense organs and onward toward the final goal of

yoga.”¹⁵ Both Tapasya and Yoga are Hindu ascetical activities. Both these activities are being practiced by Hindus in these days. Both, these are as old as Hinduism is. In some ways, these are similar. While doing Yoga, some yogis do Tapasya. “Ancient orthodox yogis used to sit surrounded by five fires under the noonday Sun in order to absorb the heat and gain spiritual power.”¹⁶ Both these activities are categorized under Hindu asceticism. Because both are painful and Hindus use them to get a spiritually purified condition. There is slightly difference between these two activities. Tapasya is pure religious practice. But Yoga is a Hindu ascetical practice which is also practiced by Hindus in different countries practiced by non-Hindus in different countries for physical fitness. When Tapasya is compared to yoga exercise, yoga is more preferred by people (Hindus and non-Hindus). Even most Hindus adopt yoga instead of Tapasya. Socially, the fame of Tapasya is decreasing day to day, in Hindu societies. “In recent decades, Western culture has been shaped by the manifold emergence of asceticism. More and more Westerners attend yoga classes, practice mindfulness is interested in different meditation techniques and other ways of cultivating their inner self.”¹⁷ Yoga is getting fame in the people related to different religions and societies day to day. It is being practiced normally, as some kinds of exercises are practiced by people for physical fitness. This practice is being practiced not only for physical purposes but for mental relaxation. So, there is need to highlight the impacts of Tapasya on individual directly as well as on a society indirectly.

6. Social Impacts of Tapasya on a Society

In different ways, Tapasya impacts on an individual’s body directly and indirectly on whole the society. Under this activity, many physical as well as spiritual goals are achieved. In some ways both positive or negative effects have

been seen under Tapasya. In some ways, unsocial Tapasya has been seen when somebody totally renounces whole the worldly pursuits and devotes himself for this cause. So, in different ways, Tapasya leaves impacts. Some of them are here.

6.1. Tapasya for Body Fitness

Basically, Tapasya is to absorb heat and to burn the calories of human body. This process holds a lot of benefits hygienically. Wasted particles and unnecessary fates are removed by this process. For an ideal and healthy body, it is necessary to remove all unnecessary burdens which are present in a body in the shapes of lipids. “But ascetically produced within the human being tapas, saturates the body, making it a reservoir of hot power.”¹⁸ After removing fatty particles from a body, a lot of changes occurred. Body becomes active and healthy in this way. Many heart diseases are recovered and chances of cardiac disorders become at low level. “The Tapasya or discipline of beauty will lead us, through austerity in physical life, to freedom in action. Its basic program will be to build a body that is beautiful in form, harmonious in posture, supple and agile in its movements, powerful in its activities and robust in its health and organic functioning.”¹⁹ For better physical performance, one has to achieve strong body and mind. To face the challenges or to solve the upcoming issues, it is also necessary for a person to hold a strong will power. A man cannot be able if he is physical weak or he has not already faced any kind of odd situation.

Through Tapasya, not only physical strength can be gained but also mental power can also be achieved. If a man has high level of lipid and fats in his body, he has actually the foods of diseases. Tapasya minimizes the food of diseases in one’s body. An individual, if has healthy body, obviously, he has healthy and creative mind. In a society if the ratio of such persons increases, it means a society has creative people who can uplift a society and can face every kind of

challenge internal and external. So, Tapasya is not just to kill the fats by absorbing the heat but to kill the germs which are not beneficial for hygienic purposes. Even Tapasya is a ritual practice but while performing Tapasya, a highly concentration of mind and soul is required. The power of thinking and intellectual ability is increased. "A Tapasvi soul is one who is a complete renunciate and has the ability to perform actions and yet remain in the remembrance of God. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to attain all the powers of the soul, however the power of concentration is the most important."²⁰ While performing Tapasya, body is given special pose and mind is kept concentrated on a single point. Not only body is cleared from purities but also mind is cleared from different types of evil thoughts. The action of concentration of mind and body holds a lot of physical as well as spiritual benefits. Meditation occurs according to this process by ignoring the materialistic sources. What is the purpose of creation of human being, universe and other animates? All these queries can be solved by this type of meditation. Wasteful thoughts are rejected and positivity enhances in this way. Ultimately, in a state or in a society, if there are a number of people living and getting such conditions after performing Tapasya, obviously, that society would have thought provoking personalities who are able to resolve any issue in every situation.

6.2. Tapasya Minimizes the Social Crimes

An activity which burns the body's calories if it is adopted by an individual or collectively by a group of people, must leave positive impacts on a body directly and on whole the society indirectly. All types of physical games in which a player is sweated or exhausted physically, are useful for his body. Many dangerous germs and bacteria are killed by this process. The risk of many fatal diseases becomes at low level. The level of

tolerance increases because of minimizing the stress and depression. Many unsocial and unlawful activities are controlled by an individual. "As many health benefits of sport are related to the level of physical activity, separation of sport and physical exercise may be problematic."²¹ After decreasing the level of depression, anxiety or stress one can control himself from different antisocial activities. "Most crimes also occur, at least partly, as a result of stress."²² If such personalities are there in a society or a society is producing such people then that society would be a crime free. The low level of unsocial activities of people means the low level of crimes in a society. "Studies of associations between broken homes and crime provide explanations within a stress model when they compare life experiences, personal characteristics and social and economic circumstances of criminals."²³

People (Hindus) who burn their calories by Tapasya hold low level of depression, anxiety and mental stress. Their behaviors are attractive, charming and lenient as compared to the people of those who don't adopt physical Tapasya. A Tapasvi is strong physically and psychologically, if he is compared to a person who don't involve such like activities. In real Tapasya, physical body, mental focus and routine behavior are controlled. "But to keep the passions under control and not allow them to make an impression upon the mind that is real Tapasya."²⁴ Even, Tapasya is a pure ritual (ascetical) practice of Hindus but it leaves multiple physical as well as psychological impacts on a person. When somebody does Tapasya with wholeheartedly, he (or she) is actually, minimizing his (her) mental stress and is getting mental relaxation. Most of his time is spent in this practice and no time spent for spare other illegal activities. So, for a Tapasvi, he suffers himself and feels the pain of the people who are in some difficult situation. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) promoted the nonviolence theory in modern Hinduism. He also

used Tapasya to feel the pain of people and to see the pain in physical form. A Tapasvi is physical form of pain. “Gandhi uses Tapasya as a tool to make the suffering visible by undergoing it openly. Gandhi wants to demonstrate that the injustices people face is afflicted on them by other humans.”²⁵ Feeling the pain of others or to have a sense of feeling of pains of other people. This phenomenon creates an environment of peace in which nobody will try to hurt other. An environment of nonviolence is promoted by common people. Society becomes peace loving and harmonious to one another. This is just because of promotion of Tapasya and feeling the sacrificial attitude of others. “It is characterized by a transcendence of the wavering mind, focused and enlightened awareness, complete equanimity of thought, and true peace. This is simultaneously the goal of yoga, of tapas and of bhakti.”²⁶

6.3. Tapasya at Extreme level

On extreme level every activity even, it is ritual or non-ritual has no benefits for an individual or whole the society. Proper diet is beneficial for human body and also for basic needs. One cannot survive without proper food or vitamins. But excessive form of food is dangerous for a body and leaves dangers impacts. Like this, with moderation, every activity gives benefits to a body. Excessive affiliation to religiosity is also harmful socially as some sociologists have their point of views. “In Durkheim’s structural-functional analysis, religion represents the collective life of society. The major weakness of this approach is that it downplays religion’s dysfunctions, especially the fact that strongly held beliefs can generate social conflict.”²⁷ A man, after ignoring the social duties and responsibilities cannot get any fruitful result from a religious practice. He has to pay social duties with spiritual devotion then he becomes adjustable in a society. Tapasya also becomes beneficial if a Tapasvi pays his social duties and holds a family. But for the sake of Tapasya, if

somebody renounces all worldly pursuits or don’t marry then it becomes fruitless for a society. The concept to live an austere life, has also been found in Hindus. “We often use the word “austerity” (Tapasya) when speaking of renunciation. “Austerity” means voluntarily accepting trouble for spiritual advancement.”²⁸ It is also an accepted belief among Hindu devotees that one’s devotion for a spiritual mission depends upon nature of worldly detachment or renunciation. If one rejects more material life and worldly pursuits then one would be more purified and more able to get his spiritual goals. If one is engaged more in worldly matters then he (or she) cannot achieve his (her) goals rapidly. This concept has been discussed by Brindaban Das (1507–1589) “Tapasya (denial of material activities) is the first principle of spiritual life.” If we purify our existence by Tapasya, we can also do wonderful things by the grace of the Lord. Indeed, nothing is possible without Tapasya. The more we engage in austerity the more we become powerful by the grace of the Lord.”²⁹ This concept reveals that if somebody involves himself into worldly matters then he has short time to do spiritual activities. Consequently, one cannot get desired objects in this way. On the other hand, if one renounces necessary social duties or worldly matters and devotes himself for a spiritual mission then might be he would get his determined goals. In this way only spiritual mission can be completed but for his society, he would not be productive in any direction. An extreme level of devotion to religiosity (in which social duties are ignored) is not beneficial for an individual as well as for whole the society. If asceticism is performed in this way, then it will not give fruitful results. Many Hindu devotees or ascetics adopt ascetical activities on extreme level and reject the worldly duties this technique is dangerous for a society. This reality was highlighted by James M. Nelson (an American author and psychologist), “Hindu ascetics are often known as renouncers because they

frequently choose a life style of homelessness, depending upon alms and eschewing possessions. Specific ascetical practices can involve fasting, lying on a bed of nails, or holding unnatural positions for long length time.”³⁰ He explored the Hindu ascetical activities which are being practiced on extreme level. These practices are unnatural as well as unsocial in some ways. He highlighted the activities of Hindu ascetics which show their ultimate behavior in a society.

7. Concluding Points

Hinduism is an old religion of the world. It is attributed toward a specific region (Indus valley), not toward a personality. Its origin or originator is unseen. Asceticism is found in this religion in different forms. Tapasya is an ascetical activity of Hindus and it has been practicing by Hindus from old time to now a days. Tapasya is a pure Hindu religious activity. This activity is adopted both in moderate as well as in extreme forms. This practice impacts on an individual directly and indirectly on a society. For physical fitness, this practice helps to kill germs and finally improves one’s health. Many social crimes can be controlled by Tapasya after enhancing the level of tolerance and suffering. Tapasya is beneficial for human being when it is performed in moderate ways. But if somebody practices it at

extreme level then it does not give fruitful results. So, Tapasya leaves deep impacts on a society positive and negative.

8. Recommendations

Tapasya is a pure Hindu religious activity. It is practiced by most Hindu ascetics to get spiritual goals. There is need to improve this activity so that it becomes only beneficial for human being. For this purpose, there is need to give awareness to people to highlight the benefits of real Tapasya which is performed after paying the social duties. Positive aspect of Tapasya should be promoted by religious scholars as well as by ruling body. Mass media should play its worthy role in preventing the extreme level of ritual practices (Tapasya) by highlighting their dangerous and negative consequences. Religious scholars should play their role in determining the moderate type of Tapasya after mutual consideration. For human welfare, the positive side of Tapasya should be taught to the students at their early ages. What is actual Tapasya? what are the main purposes of Tapasya? Why Tapasya is necessary? all these points should be elaborated by scholars. A religion is for the facility of man, not man is born for a religion, this concept should be promoted by religious scholars and researchers.

Refereces

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