

BHAGVAD SAPTAH: RELEVANCE AND SCOPE IN DIGITAL AGE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract:

Bhagvad Saptah, in general is considered and practiced as religious activity in Indian culture. This religious activity has now reached almost in all corners of the world. Most of the countries under the globe have realized its relevance in the life of human-being. In this paper, an honest effort has been done to focus on the nature and form of its organization rather than discussing its content. The objective is to prove how religious activity acts as an effective medium of community development and brings changes in the lives of common man discussing few important aspects: Personality development, social and national integrity, ways of exercise; expression of joy and enthusiasm; Gopalkala and Mahaprasad and society oriented activities.

Keywords: Bhagavad Saptah, Haripath, Mahaprasad, Kirtan, Shramadan Saptah, Ramdhun, Personality Development etc.

Introduction:

Indian culture is proud of organizing different types of Bhagavad Saptah in the past such as Shiva Puran, Bhagavat Puran, Ganesh Puran, Shrimad Bhagavad, Bhagavad Katha and few others. These are as old as the history of Indian culture. Shrimad Bhagwat Katha is the utmost holy book for the Hindus that gives a great insight and a completely new outlook to the person who hears it. On hearing, a person is never the same. It is said that Shrimad Bhagavad provides that light which enables Jeeva (human being) to experience the wonderful freedom of liberation. Shrimad Bhagavad Katha expresses this philosophy through the narration of the life stories of 24 incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Amongst these, the tenth volume of the Shrimad Bhagavad narrates in infinite detail, the story of Lord Krishna. It is an extremely important scripture for the Vaishnavas because it contains all 24 incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Till the date Bhagvad Saptah has been organized at various places in India and overseas in today's Modern Age, focusing on its relevance in religious and spiritual matters but no substantial work on how it assists in the development of community has been found in spite of its worldwide importance. Hence this topic has been selected and honest efforts have been done to highlight those aspects of Bhagvad Saptah that are yet unexplored.

Discussion:

What is Bhagavad Saptah?

'Bhagavata' (or 'Bhagavatam' or 'Bhagavat') means 'follower or worshipper of Vishnu.' 'Bhagavan' means 'Blessed One', 'God', or 'Lord'. 'Saptah' means week. Bhagavad Saptah literary means celebration in the name of Lord Vishnu for a week.

Its Form and Nature:

Generally any Bhagavad Saptah is organized for seven days. With the advent of the date of Saptah, the members of the organizing committee plan well in advance and accordingly start the activities required for the feasibility of its organization. It includes meticulous planning of each day; collection of fund; consent and dates of important stakeholders such as Bhagavatkar (Reader of Bhagavad); host (the authorized person to hold); various bhajan mandals; preacher(kirtankars) etc. The hall or open space where the Saptah is to be organized is well decorated with mango and banana leaves and the ambiance is pleasant and comfortable, well ventilated and easy to accommodate a large gathering. In Hindu religion, these leaves have special importance on auspicious occasion and are considered as blessed one. The entire work of the Saptah is divided among few committees: Welcome Committee, Collection Committee, Mahaprasad Committee, Decoration Committee, Cleanliness Committee, Haripath Committee etc. On the First day of the Saptah, the procession is carried out keeping the sacred scripture of Bhagavad Katha in palanquin with idols or images of god and goddess. It is beautifully designed and decorated and is followed by a large number of community people including men and women; boys and girls and children too in their traditional attire. It is matter of pleasure and happiness for all of them to involve in this activity. Everyone gets the satisfaction that they are involved in their god's work and remain submissive in the name of Supreme Soul that He is watching all these and controlling the activities. Those who have not dared to dance yet start dancing, singing bhajans. There is no discrimination of ladies and gents here.

After the procession is over, the real Bhagavad Katha starts continually for next seven days. The day starts with Ramdhun (chanting of god/goddess name by number of people) at the dawn, followed by Kakad Aarti (Invocation and prayer to god). During day time, the Bhagavad Katha is read and in the evening Haripath (chanting of god's name in a particular rhythm and motion by ladies and gents) is organized in which large number of followers is involved. It's an act of chanting and exercise. Throughout the day, people get exertion from their work. So the intension is that the people should get little exercise and at the same time remember His name. In the late evening, most of the times Kirtans (Sermon) are organized to counsel the community. The subjects of these sermons may vary from person to person. The same process is carried out throughout the whole Saptah. On the last day to mark the end of the activity, a special Kirtan (sermon) called Kala Kirtan is organized followed by Mahaprasad. Kala (mixture) is the combination of different food items stored in curd. It is symbolic and represents different types of people in the society. The aim is to unite all types of tendencies in the society and work together for the betterment of the community in the name of god. People with great faith swallow it and experience the satisfaction of getting god's Prasad. They even do not miss the Mahaprasad. They think that the Mahaprasad is blessed by god and has healing power. So no one waits for invitation.

Bhagavad Saptah – Effective Medium of Personality Development:

Development is an enduring process of fostering, shaping and enhancing individuals' skills, knowledge and interests to ascertain their maximum efficiency and obedience. Development covers collection of activities that builds self-confidence, enhances self-esteem and improves overall personality of the participants. It aims at grooming the participants through sensitizing them about proper behaviorsocially and professionally, in formal and informal circumstances. Personality development affects mind physically and mentally. It improves definite qualities of human being. Good personality assists in improved social and professional life. Improved personality helps an individual

to have a positive attitude towards life. It deals with strengthening one's skills and strong points. Personality makes a person confident and boosts his self-esteem. It also helps one with knowing themselves better. It is very important for humans of all ages from students to adults and leaves its impact on that person in the best way. Thus the objectives of Personality Development are to project the Right First Impression; polish manners to behave appropriately in social and professional circles; enhance the ability to handle casual and formal situations in life with grace, style, and professionalism. The general pedagogy for Personality Development is to involve in interactive sessions, individual and group exercises, role plays, situation-handling, and experience-sharing. It, thus, helps us develop impressive personality and makes us stand apart from the rest.

In Bhagavad Saptah we have genuine scope for all the requisites of personality development through various activities since start to end. Saptah comprises different activities, various committees whom different responsibilities are assigned to be completed within time-bound period. It is the center of value education through day-to-day activities as different activities related to value-education are carried out during its organization. Cleanliness activity is one of those during Bhagavad Saptah which has to be carried out with the help of community members in order to keep the surrounding fresh and pleasurable. In order to accomplish these activities, it needs capable heads and hands and their performance decides the effectiveness of the Saptah. At every stage while performing individual's role, one has to act precisely and intelligently sharing and caring with other team members and always putting human society at the center. All these activities during the organization of the Saptah give chance to leadership qualities. In order to be an effective leader, one has to keep oneself away from vices. Then and then only he would become an effective leader. Many a times we get the scope to exhibit our hidden talent during various phases that reflects the identity of the person. If the person shouldering this responsibility is groomed properly, it makes a lot of difference. Even a small mistake in this Saptah may create a hue and cry and puts a stain on its organization.

Bhagavad Saptah encourages Social and National Integrity:

National Integration is the tie and intimacy among public in general irrespective of their gender, class and religion. It helps to keep the country unified and strong from within despite the diversities. This gives an equal opportunity for each citizen and also offers an equal platform in terms of social, cultural and economic development. National integration also helps to unite the minorities as well as promises them the freedom to live their life in their way without any interference. It also aids to bind multi-racial and multilingual country like India, which has people with diverse culture and tradition and multiplies the union of brotherhood amongst communities, societies and the people. It not only helps in keeping the stability of a country but adds to its whole development. National Integration mends the feeling of fidelity and community towards the nation and ties the people in case of any national disaster.

It is important to develop the feeling of national integrity among its citizens as it is a crucial part in the development of a country. Open-mindedness and reverence for other caste or religion also help to encourage national integrity. Because of this, it makes the people of a country be present in harmony. This characteristic of any nation aids to unite people of different race, caste, creed or thoughts and makes the country as a single entity to strengthen the country and make it powerful on the international platform. It is a well-known fact that the country which is united will always have fewer problems as compared to the country which is socially unstable. National integration authorizes reliability of the citizen for the country and makes people join hands and stand for the progress of the country neglecting their trivial problems. It has key role in modern times. Any country in modern time is facing challenges

like communalism, regionalism, linguism, etc. National integration helps to ignore these situations. It makes people intellectually mature and tolerant. Hence national integration is very significant for a country because it is seen many times in the history of mankind that the nation has confronted major challenges from within and also become a victim of foreign assaults when its national integrity is in danger. Thus national integration plays a crucial role in making of a nation keeping it alive in history with sustained development.

Bhagvad Saptah encourages social and national integrity through various activities uniting people of different caste, creed and sect irrespective of their economic status through various sermons preached by saints and Bhagvad story-tellers. It hints at the social binding which is the fundamental need for the creation of any ideal society. Bhagvad Saptah acts as a magnet to unite people for particular motive in the name of god whom they trust. Being a project of good management, it arouses a sense of responsibility and belongingness.

Ramdhun and Haripath- Way of Exercise and Expression of Joy and Enthusiasm:

Workout helps people dropload and lessen the threat of some diseases. Exercising regularly lowers a person's risk of developing some diseases, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and keeps our body at a healthy weight. Joy or enthusiasm is a state of happiness or felicity. Expression of joy and enthusiasm is the exhibition of nature's form. All these are seen at every step in Bhagvad Saptah. In this religious celebration, Ramdhun and Haripath are scheduled activities and the part and parcel of saptah. Ramdhun is carried out at dawn in which people gather at one place and take errand around the colony reciting the names of gods and goddesses irrespective of class and sect. It is some sort of morning walk reciting the names of gods and goddesses. There is no restriction on age and sex for Ramdhun. Person of any faith can be a part of this activity. This it helps community to maintain integrity of people. In Ramdhun many sing bhajans and devotional songs. People keep their premises and surrounding neat and clean putting rangoli in the yard and staging decorated photographs or idols of their home-gods. They are emotionally and spiritually involved in this activity. All these make the surrounding pleasant and enjoyable. It gives them a chance to express joy and enthusiasm. Haripath is carried out at the end of the day. It is nothing but a form of prayer offered to god to get blessing against the deeds they commit throughout the day. It gives solace to their heart. Haripath is completed while singing and dancing in tune with god. Here also people get chance to exhibit joy and enthusiasm. Generally each day of saptah is marked by kirtan/ pravachan. Kirtan is a sort of religious activity that helps in narration, recitation and description of an idea or story explicitly in Indian religions. This activity is native to Indians. It is a sermon preached to the society in order to mend their behaviour for ideal human being and for universal welfare. In Bhagvad Saptah a large number of people gather without any invitation, it becomes easy for the preacher to imbibe moral values in them. Since these teachings are related to gods, people easily trust on it and follow them. It helps for the community development that in turn leads to nation's unity and integrity. It is one of the effective medium to address the society.

Gopalkala and Mahaprasad:

Generally Dahikala/ Gopalkala and Mahaprasad is prepared to mark the end of any Bhagvad Saptah. It is more than a meal. The legend behind the Gopalkala can be found in Puranic scriptures. It dates back to the time when Lord Krishna as a child used to take the cattle for grazing. Many of his friends would accompany him and all of them carried lunch pocket or shidori with them. Lord Krishna was

very fond of butter and dairy products, they are included in the offerings. Lord Krishna used to combine all the foodstuff and hand out it among the boys. Dahikala is a mixture of Beaten Rice (popularly known as poha in India), Murmura (puffed rice), Jowar Lahi (puffed sorghum), finely chopped cucumber, apple, pomegranate, green chillies, curd, pickle, sugar, salt and few others. Each item represents particular traits of human nature in the society. These food items have different taste but when they are mixed it becomes homogenous and very tasty liked by everyone for which everyone is eager to have it. So this kala is prepared by mixing different foods. The intension of Lord Krishna was that the rich and the poor in the community should come together, sit and enjoy together. This union of all people in the society was needed to fight against demons in the way of humanity. Lord Krishna alone could have done this but he wanted to get it done by his beloved friends. That was possible only after the union of his beloved friends. So he used to mix all lunch pockets so that no one should feel that they were unimportant and underestimated. He united the rich, the poor, the suppressed and the depressed and became their mentor and leader. Krishna proved that everyone has equal importance in the creation of healthy society and hence he maintained unity and integrity of the society to fight against any odds and keep the society safe. Being religiously attached community people flood to get at least the morsel of this Gopalkala / Mahaprasad. It creates in them the importance of unity and democracy as it is performed by the people for the community. More than food, it is a way of uniting people for particular motive in the name of god.

Platform to organize society oriented activities:

People of all communities contribute, support and participate in the Bhagvad Saptah. Hence it becomes the activity of masses and not of particular class. It aims at the development of society and provides the platform to organize such activities that are healthy for the community development. This saptah is open to all and hence there is no discrimination among the rich and the poor; the higher and the poor. Everyone feels that it is our activity and accordingly they are attached with it. During the period of week, many healthy society-oriented practices can be organized such as mass-marriage, health check-up and blood donation camp for the poor, needy and senior citizens. Counseling programs for empowerment of women through Self-help Groups, counseling of community people for modern farming, entrepreneurship, experts' guidance to youngsters for career and placement. All these activities help the people to build their personalities economically and mentally also. Exhibition of books related to community can be arranged as there is always flooding of people. It will not only give them chance to visit these books but they will utilize their time properly. The community people can arrange get-together of community in which all the relatives out of their places for employment may come on that particular occasion at their native place and meet all. It will give an access to everyone to share and care for one another and everyone will be charged with pleasure and enthusiasm. The community will be seen as the center of mass-celebration to avoid depression and loneliness that has become one of the constraints in happy human life. Hence it is the need of the hour.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it is clear that Bhagvad Saptah should not be seen merely as a religious activity of masses. Considering its nature, relevance and scope in Indian culture and world-wide spread, it should be considered as one of the platforms for the community development and should be promoted and preserved as the part of cultural heritage for posterity.

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