

Indian Sadhus, with Special Reference to Braj Bhumi-A Sociological Study

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India is a religious country where old traditions are dying hard. In spite of all scientific advancement and material progress, the old ideals of charity and Philanthropy have still a great attraction for the India people. In the Brahadaranyaka Upanishad, Prajapati gives a message to mankind in three words Dan, Daya and Dharma, meaning charity compassion and self-control respectively there have been three reasons for recommending charitableness (dana) to mankind:-

- (a) To relieve the suffering of others,
- (b) To share the suffering of others, and
- (c) To make one's own salvation easy by providing relief to the destitute, the lowly and the suffering humanity.

Braj Bhumi has been called a land of salvation. It is the land where lord Krishna was born to relieve the sufferings of the people. The holy and sanctified places like Mathura, Vrindavan, Barsana, Jatipura, Goverdhan, Gokula, Baldeo, Nandgaon etc have a great attraction not only for the Indians but also for the foreigners who come in large numbers at the time of different fairs and festivals. The sacred river Yamuna, the numerous sacred shrines, the august hermitages of not able saints and the charming places associated with the antics and pranks of Lord Krishna and Balrama have a magnetic charm for the peoples.

Sadhus also find these places most suitable for gaining spiritual satisfaction as well as for doing their business at the temples, at the ghats of the sacred river Yamuna and also on the occasion of numerous festivals and fairs of the holy Braj Bhumi.

In order to examine the actual position of the Sadhus in the social fabric of Braj Bhumi a research project was undertaken. 500 sadhus were chosen by Random Sampling. Each sadhus was asked to respond to a Questionnaire Schedule prepared for the purpose.

It has been found that Sadhuism has now-a-days degenerated into a profession and many anti-social elements have sought refuge in the garb of asceticism to hoodwink the police and the general masses. Such people of dubious integrity have defamed the whole lot of sadhus with the result people do not give them due regard. People generally keep a cold attitude towards them. To the question whether

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people have a sympathetic attitude towards you, 56% Sadhus admitted that they had a cold and unsympathetic attitude towards them.

Under the impact of modern materialistic values, pilgrims and citizens are not so liberal towards the sadhus as they were in the recent past 62% beggars said that seeking alms had become an art. Young beggars were being trained by the old and seasoned once in the art of duping the masses. This they had to do to face the challenge of the hard realities of the present day. They had found organizations and adopted new techniques of hypocrisy to show themselves as miserable as possible.

78% Sadhus under this study, admitted that in this age of competition and scientific advancement when prices were soaring high, they had a dark future. The destitute, old, unfirms handicapped and miserable beggars got more alms than others for the reason they evoked more sympathy, specially of the ladies.

There have been several reasons to prompt a person to become a sadhu. It has been found that person (i) without a family or with (ii) maladjusted family, or with (iii) families having a nagging sponse or (iv) quarrel some daughter-in-law or a father in law or a mother-in-law have usually prompted them to disregard family ties and renounce all worldly attachments . Deformity of eyes or ears or any other handicap was also responsible to push people on the path of beggary.

When the sadhus were asked to tell the age of embracing asceticism, they generally told that they become sadhus in old age 52% of the sadhus in this study, embraced asceticism in the age group of 48-57 years and even beyond that besides old age, poverty, unemployment ill treatment by kinsmen and frustration were some of the important factors which pressed them to renounce family ties 64% sadhus in the sample were found to be illiterate and unemployed. Those who were starving, found in beggary a convenient expedient to satisfy their hunger 85.6% beggars came from family life.

When the sadhus were asked to disclose their precious employment, 55% of them reported that they were unemployed, 25% were retired person and 10% were destitute windows, 10% had unwholesome family atmosphere, 94% of the sadhus under this study were of the opinion that begging was a convenient device of (I) earning a living and (II) leading a carefree life.

The tor turned, destitute, humiliated widows without any refuge anywhere came to the holy Braj Bhumi (especially Vrindavana) to have a darshan of their beloved deity and also to get some solace from frustration. But in the absence of any suitable support from the government or any other private agency they had to take recourse to begging. However, a few Bhajanashramas are working in Vrindavanan to help such unfortunate women. They engage these Keertan day and night. But the payment that they get is insufficient to meet their material needs.

The old values of 'parental obedience' and 'respect for elders' have lost their force these days. Children generally care for their parents so long as their own purpose is served. Infirm, weak, and old parents are neglected because children generally feel that they are a liability on them. Selfishness seems to be the dominant value which governs all human activity these days. There is no affection of earlier times. It highly mortifies old their children's parents, who need their children's care and

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affection of in old age.

It has been found from this study that Sadhus have little interest in politics 96.2% Sadhus, under this study, did not know whether they were voters or not 70% of the respondents had faith in their favourite deities like Sita Rama, Shiva, Hanumana and Vishnu. But it is interesting to note that 26% of the baggers either did not believe in the existence of god or were indifferent towards him. 63% of the beggars did not take regular baths. 38% had a Machiavellian attitude towards life. They had no faith in the karma theory. 88.4% did not observe fasts. 95.6% did not wish their children to follow the profession of begging. They wanted to educate them and see them settled in some suitable employment but grim poverty crushed all their cherished ambitions under its iron heel.

The findings of this study show that

- (i) Faith of sadhus in god is declining day by day,
- (ii) Their faith in pooja, arti and Darshan is also gradually cooling down
- (iii) Their faith in fasting, untouchability and the caste system is also gradually fading away
- (iv) They wish to consider present gain to be more important than the achievement of heaven hereafter.
- (v) Their faith in opportunistic and Indian ideology has made them individual, unscrupulous and callous,
- (vi) They have no real sympathy for the world at large
- (vii) They fail to provide spiritual enlightenment to others because they themselves are ignorant, unlettered, and narrow minded people.
- (viii) Their extreme poverty, starvation and misery have made them stoic.

With inflationary trends in price level life of an average man has become tortuous and difficult. People do not have spare money to give in charity. The cold attitude of the people has made their existence miserable. The entry of several anti-social element into their fold with a view to duping the police department is defaming their whole lot. The common man fails to distinguish between a hypocrite, a cheat a murderer or a real beggar. Police atrocities sometimes make their life hellish.

The following suggestions may be made to improve their condition:-

- (i) No able bodied beggar should be allowed to beg. Men must learn to earn their living by the sweat of their brow. Legal enactments should be made more stringent to check begging
- (ii) The government should open new avenues of employment. The destitute and the disabled should be given adequate work to suit their liking
- (iii) Beggar homes should be opened in sufficient numbers to rehabilitate these unfortunate person. They should be provided training in some craft to help them settle suitably in life. The

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Beggar homes should also inculcate in them the qualities of honesty, truth, mutual regard, sympathy and self respect.

- (iii) Banks should provide loans to beggars who acquire training in some craft. This will enable them to engage themselves in some trade or business on a small scale.
- (iv) Begging should be strictly banned for children. Education upto high school standard should be made free and compulsory.
- (v) There should be sufficient Family Guidance Bureans to check family maladjustments. Psychologists in these bureaus should advise nagging kinshmen to behave properly and respectfully.

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