

Keertan in Pushtimarg Sampradaya

Abstract

Pushtimarg is an integral part of Hinduism. Thus it has given that one must follow the covenants of Hinduism. Pushtimarg is the path shown by Shri Vallabhacharyaji. Pushtimarg is spontaneous, selfless and motiveless love for Shri Krishna. It is expressed only through service of Shri Krishna - "Seva". This Sewa based on pure love for Krishna. All the worldly desires are diverted towards Shri Krishna, they are then not required to be suppressed. In the state of liberation the entity of the devotee merges into Shri Krishna's blissful form, but in Bhakti (especially Pushti bhakti) the devotee does not seek liberation but he enjoys Shri Krishna's bliss by participating in it as a separate divine entity.

Pustimarg bhakti dhara was also in the main stream in that movement in which the philosophy existed to remember Lord Krishna through KEERTAN and the Lord is accessible only through His own grace. Keertan is based on RAGA and PADA in Pushtimarg devotional sect. The Keertan system is an asset to the Hindu religion and philosophy and one should try to preserve this system.

Keywords: Pushtimarg Sampradaya , Pustimarg bhakti dhara

Introduction

Pushtimarg is a sect of the Hindu religion which is considered as the path to attain bliss. It was founded by Shrimad Vallabhacharya (known as Mahaprabhuji.) Shri Vallabhacharya is one of the five major Acharyas of the Hindu Religion namely Shrimad Vallabhacharya, Shri Shankaracharya, Shri Ramanujacharya, Shri Madhavacharya and Shri Nimbarkacharya. These acharyas have made remarkable contribution in the bhakti movement and led to the medieval rise in popularity of the Hindu Religion. The devotional movement is based on the idea that love of God should be seen as an end in itself, not as a means to something else.

The word "Pushtimarg" is made up of two small words "Pushti" and "Marg". The word Pushti has two meanings, it means *divine grace*, it is also a synonym for *love* and Marg means *path*. This path known as "*Pushtimarg*".

Pustimarg bhakti dhara was also in the main stream in that movement in which the philosophy existed to remember Lord Krishna through KEERTAN and the Lord is accessible only through His own grace. The Lord cannot be attained by a given formula - He is attainable only if He wants to be attained but keertan is till date an integral part of Bhakti.

Keertan is based on RAGA and PADA in Pushtimarg devotional sect. For padas of the main tenets of Pushti Marg as envisioned by Shri Gusaiji (the younger son of Vallabhacharya ji) is "Raga". Raga means, "attachment" and "musical modes" as well. Since the time of Shri Vallabhacharyaji, music was seen as one of the key components of daily worship. The original padas and Keertans were written by the devotees who were initially converted to Pushti Marg by Shri Vallabhacharyaji and Shri Gusaiji. They were inspired by the visions inspired by their conversion and were blessed enough to experience and indeed "see" the lilas of the Lord. The joy of this insight into the Lord's Lila sprouted forth as poetry. The sublime nature of this has inspired countless devotees and literary greats throughout the last 500 years.

Of the true "greats" amongst Pushti Poets, Surdas commands a special place of honour. He is well known for his wide range of poetry and his ability to express the most complex of human emotions in the most simplest of terms. His language was simple yet full of multi-layered meanings that delighted the ordinary and intelligent alike. As a result, Surdas's poetry is well known outside the sect and his padas are sung throughout India.

Though born blind, he was a gifted child and was a revered saint even before he met Shri Vallabh. Upon his conversion, he renounced his own status as a "guru" and became a disciple of Shri Vallabh. He wrote a

Payal Sharma

Research Scholar

Dept. of Music

Dayalbagh Educational

Institute (Deemed University),

Agra, (U.P.)

payalsharma@gmail.com

huge number of padas and kirtans and is reputed to have written 125,000 poems. His "Sur-sagar" - literally an "Ocean of Music", is a vast collection of Surdas's works. Unfortunately, some are now lost, but through the efforts of many vaishnavs and scholars, many are now published in various languages. The aura of the great saint is such that many tales have grown up around him. One such tale is that once, Surdas was upset at the thought that he was now too old to write any more and will not be able to reach his goal of 125,000 poems he wanted to write. Ever compassionate, the Lord and Shri Radha came to his rescue and wrote padas to help him complete the Sur-sagar for him, writing many padas in Surdas's name. For an example a pad from Sursagar is given below:-

चरण—कमल बंदौ हरि राई ।
जाकी कृपा पंगु गिरि लंघै, अंध को सब कुछ दरसाई ।।
बहिरौ सुनै मूक पुनि बोलै, रंक चलै सिर छत्र धराई ।।
'सूरदास' स्वामी करुणामय, बार बार बन्दौं तेहि पाई ।।
—सूरसागर : विनय (प्रथम स्कंध)

[This pad (structure) shows that A person who is being blessed by God, every impossible task turns into possible, disabled jumps over the mountain, blind is empowered to see all hidden and visible things, deaf starts listening, dumb get speech and poors get crowned as emperor. No one would like to be so unfortunate not to bow his the lotus feet of Almighty.]

Others have continued the tradition of the poet saints of Pushti Marg and these have been preserved in the collections of various have lies around India. Written in Vraj-bhasha - the language of the people of Braj, the padas retain the original feel of how the Lord and his friends might have communicated. It is a very sweet dialect of Hindi and is full of raw beauty. Some of the padas were written in Sanskrit and much later, some were written in Gujarati, Rajasthani, Punjabi and other regional languages of the Vaishnavs. These are often known as dhaul and kirtans.

In his own time of Vallabhacharya, Kubhandas, Surdas, Paramanandas and Krishnadas wee initiated into the sect and entrusted the work of writing new devotional songs to them. As true visionaries, these great poet saints sung the lilas of the Lord as they witnessed them. These were no flights of fancy or imagination, but factual descriptions of what they saw the Lord doing in the wonderful world of spiritual Braj. Simple, yet powerful, words of their poetry speak of this "eye-witness" nature of the padas. Rarely do kirtans and padas express sadness at being alive, or express a complaint against the Lord for the woes of life. Even when there is a complaint, it is about the Lord stealing their hearts, or butter - never about being poor or less fortunate than others. This is what really sets padas and keertans apart from the conventional bhajans.

Shri Gusaiji added four more poet saints to the original group of four (Nanadadas, Chitswami, Chaturbhujdas, and Govindswami) and created the celebrated "Ashta chhap" group of 8 divine poets and singers of ShriNathji's court. Mirroring the equally celebrated gems of Akber's court, the Ashta Chhap

was well known and respected by all their contemporaries. Emperor Akbar was known to have invited a number of them to sing at his court. Indeed, one of the sons of Shri Gosaiji was a permanent member of the Imperial court and helped win a number of farmans (Imperial Proclamations) in favor of Pushti Marg and Hindus in general.

The Ashta Chhap singers wrote truly inspirational devotional poetry. They mostly wrote in Braj Bhasha and composed in traditional, classical ragas. The poetry composed by the Ashta Chhap is known as "pada". "Drupad" was favored mode of their music, hence "Drupad" style of singing is often considered to be synonymous to the "haveli" style of music. Traditionally, all darshans of Lord Krishna in main Havelies of Pushti Marg are accompanied by poetry composed by the Ashta Chhap. At least one pada from the Ashta Chhap is sung at each darshan. Sadhan Dipika (by Shri Gopinathji), clearly states that all expressions of joy - singing and dancing included, should accompany seva and especially seva during festivals and special functions. Keertan Padas are written in accordance with seasons, moods, times of day, bhavas etc. Each Nidhi svarup has padas written for it by the Ashta Chhap in accordance with the bhavas relating to the svarup. Various, they saw the Lord's lilas as a friend, parent or a lover. Many wrote about the gopi bhava that Pushti Marg instilled in them. Of all the various bhavas that a bhakta can have, gopi, dasa and vattsalya bhava are the most popular in Pushti Marg. For example, at one time one of the Astachap left the pada incomplete. Shri Gausaiji asked him the reason for doing this. With due respect, the devotee said, Shri Krishna is too fickle and ran away before I could complete the pada. Shri Gausaiji was pleased with the honesty of the astachap. Having had the full darshan, Shri Gausaiji completed the pada for him.

For this reason, Keertan padas are usually short and sharp. In haveli sangeet, here is no elaborate alap (long, slow build up). Start of the pada is made from a little way in the first line and the full line is only revealed later on. Last line of the pada is repeated three times (signalling end of the pada).

Poetry sung in Pushti Marg's havelies is a reflection of the wonderful literary achievements of its poets of a bygone era. By the grace of the Lord and their Guru, these great devotees wrote down the lilas of the Lord that they actually saw and experience it. Hence their words are still capable of evoking the divine mood in us all. Often their words stir the deepest spiritual emotions in us and help lift us off this mundane world into a divine world full of divine play of the Lord.

Sung in classical ragas appropriate to the moods, seasons, settings and situations, the padas of Pushti Marg made a very valuable contribution to the literary movement of their time. Reading and listening to these padas of Pushti Marg is a highly spiritual experience.

Pushtimarg Seva Prakar (devotional worship in Pushtimarg)

Seva is a key element of worship in Pushti Marg. All followers are expected to do seva to their personal icon of Krishna. In Pushti Marg, the temple

where communal worship takes place is called a "haveli" - literally a "mansion". There is a daily routine of allowing the laity to have "darshan" (adore) the divine icon 8 times a day. The priests adorn the icon in keeping with Pushti traditions and follow a colourful calendar of festivals.

Some of the important aspects of Pushtimarg Seva are:

1. *Raag* (playing and hearing traditional Haveli music)
2. *Bhog* (offering pure vegetarian saatvik food that does not contain any meat or such vegetables as onion, garlic, cabbage, carrots, and a few others)
3. *Vastra* and *Shringar* (decorating the deity with beautiful clothes and adorning the deity with jewellery)

All of the above three are included in the daily *seva* (devotional service) which all followers of Pushtimarg offer to their *Thakurji* (personal Krishna deity), and all of them have been traditionally prescribed by Goswami Shri Vitthalnathji almost five hundred years ago. Shri Vitthalnathji is also called Gusainji (Vallabhacharya's second son). The *raag*, *bhog*, and *vastra* and *shringar* offerings vary daily according to the season, the date, and time of day, and this is the main reason why this path is so colourful and alive.

Seva is the most important way to attain *Pushti* in Pushtimarg and has been prescribed by Vallabhacharya as the fundamental tenet. All principles and tenets of Shuddhadvaita Vaishnavism chasing the beloved! True beauty of the padas is just this - that it is a jhakji - an intense glimpse of GOD. For this reason, the padas are usually short and sharp. In haveli sangeet, here is no elaborate alap (long, slow build up). Start of the pada is made from a little way in the first line and the full line is only revealed later on. Last line of the pada is repeated three times (signalling end of the pada). Rarely do kirtans and padas express sadness at being alive, or express a complaint against the Lord for the woes of life. Even when there is a complaint, it is about the Lord stealing their hearts, or butter - never about being poor or less fortunate than others. This is what really sets padas and kirtans apart from the conventional bhajans.

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tradition of the poet saints of Pushti Marg and these have been preserved in the collections of various havelies around India making Haveli sangeet.

Basically, Haveli Sangeet is another name for Hindu temple music practiced by the followers of Vaishnavism of Nathdwara in Rajasthan, Gujrat, India, and considered a part of a rich historical tradition. Having its origin in Rajasthan and Gujarat, the Haveli music is believed to have an edge over dhrupad (the core of Indian classical music) for the common belief that the music has none other than Lord Krishna himself for an audience. Essentially, a tribute to Krishna, its form includes, devotional renditions like, kirtans, bhajans and bhava nritya, all related to religious cult worship. Although a mix of classical and folk music, the style is inherently borrowed from the dhrupad and Dhamar (music). Haveli sangeet is commonly played at the many temples of India like the Radha Vallabh of Vrindaban, Krishna of Nandgaon, Uttar Pradesh and Sri Nathji of Nathdwara, to name a few.

With the passage of time, the haveli sangeet in India lost its importance and is no longer in practice as the general audience tends to take it for granted that all haveli music simply fall under the devotional stream but now it is revived in Pushtimarg in Keertan style. Written in Braj-bhasha - the language of the people of Braj, the Keertan padas retain the original feel of how the Lord and his friends might have communicated. It is a very sweet dialect of Hindi and is full of raw beauty. Some of the padas were written in Sanskrit and much later, some were written in Gujarati, Rajasthani, Punjabi and other regional languages of the Vaishnavs. The Keertan system is an asset to the Hindu religion and philosophy and one should try to preserve this system to the utmost.

Reference :

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