



HISTORY OF BADRINATH TEMPLE

Critical analysis of the contribution of power for making Temples a significant aspect of Cultural History - A case study of Badrinath Temple in Colonial India-1815-1941.

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Abstract: This paper is designed to study rural space, especially the religious context is prone to social and cultural biases. The perception of this rural space has a lot in common with the historical perspective which has often been dominated by the colonial narrative of progress and development. However, from the present perspective, the works of anthropologists, ethnologists and other sociologists have largely contributed to the understanding of rural space and the folk cultural practices. Once the focus shifted from the colonial perspective towards rural areas and people, the public landscape of the region started to become visible. The cultural history of a region captures both the popular and official perspectives. In order to get an understanding of this process, the focus of this paper is on the religious architecture of Uttarakhand and depends on the temple structure, the place where the temple is situated, and the ways these structures are interpreted. The Uttarakhand region is one of the best examples of a land where the public space is culturally permeable. The city of Haridwar is located on the banks of the Ganges River and is endowed with many religious structures and popular religion. The presence of the Ganga River and the presence of many sacred caves around the city are the main culprits of the region, which compel the people to visit these places and worship. Thus, the region of Uttarakhand is a place where the popular and official expressions of culture co-exist. When we look at the temples of Uttarakhand, it becomes more visible that the folk culture, while passing through various stages, always maintained the centrality of the deity and their relationship to space. Every one of these temples plays a significant part in defining the cultural identity of the people who eavesdrop on the presence of deities, deities, their cults, and religious symbols. The temple is always the representation of a local perspective.

Keywords- Cultural History, Temple, Power, Badrinath and Uttarakhand.

INTRODUCTION

The study of culture history is attaining much attention among the historians. As it reveals the public past by analyzing their activities and events continuously occurring over the period. However, seeing the historical monuments as a source for understanding the culture history is very important. To illustrate this, point the best example is India, where religious testimonials especially Temples are considered as a part of historical method of cultural history. In the context of Himalayan Region, Religious edifices play a crucial role. Neelmani Upadhyaya (2008) also supported this view by mentioning in her text that, “*the temples in this region are not merely the religious shrines but also the centers of vibrant social life resulting in peace, harmony and dignified spiritual life*”. In other words, it’s not the only center for representing the folk religious perspectives but there are also other notions. Even while observing temples during the Kumbh Mela, Atkinson said that Religion is not the sole incentive that draws these crowds together; trade and amusement are as much a part of it. In fact, it had real connection with power and authority and during the colonial rule this relation reached to zenith when British officers got attracted towards the mountain areas. The Uttarakhand also known as Dev Bhumi is a land where large number of divine shrines and temples built over a time, present lot of information about the surrounded space as source. Temples in this region show that how the state machinery had played a pivotal role in determining the importance of sites. The case study of Badrinath Temple reveals clearly how the power works in the concern of temples and determines the connection between the Temple and the folk. After the Anglo- Nepalese war of 1815, Badrinath Temple came into the focus and caught the attention of colonial legislation as many issues over its management continued to arise in the following decades which further led to raise major changes in relation to power with temples.

BACKGROUND

The Badrinath Temple popular as one of the chota char-Dham of Uttarakhand located in the area where there was a time when human presence was scarce, the mountainous terrain and the dense forest of Himalayas invoked a fear of supernatural powers among its denizens. As a result of that, the Himalayan geography is replete with divine shrines and temples which were built over the time by worshippers of many faiths. In the beginning natural elements like trees, mountains water bodies were considered as divine spaces but with the passage of time, these spaces converted into temples by constructing structure with the help of power. In simple words, the foundation of the connection between these two goes back to the fourth – fifth century when the establishment of different small kingdoms begun, and large number of temples began to be built under the patronage of local rulers- Rajans. During the pre-colonial period relationship between medieval states and religious institutions is characterized by their mutual inter-dependence on each other. While the state seeks divine legitimacy for its rule, the religious institutions acquire patronage in return. Although, the extent of their dependence varies in individual context. Badrinath Temple also one of those temples which had its origin because of royal patronage and had been continuously influenced by the state power and authority since its origin. The hill kingdom of Garhwal which was formally established around 7th century AD by Kanakpal, who was supposed to have come from Gujarat (Ahmadabad), succeeded Raja Bhanu Pratap the last Katury ruler of Garhwal by marrying his daughter and thus establishing the Panwar dynasty. It was with the establishment of this dynasty that the Badrinath temple acquired the Royal patronage, as the rulers of Panwar dynasty began to worship Badrinath as their Kula-devta. Legends say that Shankaracharya who was believed to be the original founder of the Badrinath shrine was the contemporary of Kanakpal. Rai Bahadur Chakra Dhar Juyal, the home member of the Tehri Raj pointed out that in AD 683, Kanakpal, the founder of the Panwar dynasty of Garhwal accompanied Shankaracharya to drive out Buddhism from Uttarakhand and reinstated the Badrinath idol at its proper place.

With the passage of time, this shrine attained more reputation in the public imagination and people from different parts of India began to believe it's as scared site. Till the last decade of the 18th century, Panwar continued to hold the position of massager of God but after that the adjoining Gurkha rulers of Nepal began to raid their Garhwal kingdom and conquered it. During the Panwar High period, the relation of authority with the temple had reached a point where it could never be taken apart. But losing the power at the hands of Gurkha led to the transfer of their rights related to Badrinath Temple. No doubt, Badri's shrine was managed by the Gurkha rulers only for a short interregnum, which finally came to an end with the treaty of Segauli in 1815, when the EIC's army defeated the Nepalese forces. This battle resulted into the division of the hill state which further complicated the connection of temple with authority. East India Company carved out the Hill state into two different zones. One was the Kumaon division, including British Garhwal and Kumaon, the other was the hill state of Tehri Raj. Since the battle was entirely won by the Company but to pacify the local residents, the company agreed Sudarshan Shah to rule over the territories of Tehri Raj. But this action only increased tension and created an un-balanced power relation between the two. As a result of this, the EIC was able to sign the treatise with Tehri court that gave them rights over the Parganas of Nagpur (containing Kedarnath) and Painkhanda (Badrinath).⁵ But the problem didn't end here, as the Tehri Raja was upset and reluctant to concede this territory as it meant losing his rights over the Badrinath shrine. Though he protested proclaiming that that was the seat of his ancestral deity. Though Madan Mohan Malviya (1934) writes that the EIC assured the Raja of Tehri that the financial and religious control of Badrinath Puri will be left in his hands.

Since the colonial records remained silent over this alleged agreement its authenticity is difficult to attest. While the land over which Badrinath temple was built remained in the colonial possession but the Tehri Raja continued to exercise many religious rights over it. It was their intimate relations with the shrine that gave the Raja epithet of Bolanda Badri (literally the speaking Badri). This step introduced new form of power and temple connection in which two parties enjoying the rights over the temple. With the passage of time, the colonial government began to realize the importance of this site from economic point of view and introduced new legislation in the region which changed the relations of Tehri Raja vis-a-vis the Temple. Initially, when the region came under British domain, the commissioner exercised more power than its counterpart (BB Mishra, 1977). However, later in 1874 the Scheduled district act was passed in the region of British Garhwal and Kumaon under which these areas were exempted from legislation applicable, and the commissioner powers also reduced but the interference by the Raj remained as usual. During the whole 19th century, raj continued their struggle to get legitimate authority on the basis of their ancestral claims but this wouldn't work for long time because in 1915 Britishers brought this area under the same regulation as that of the United provinces (henceforth U.P). With the beginning of 20th century the colonial government began to discuss the issues of the temple management more freely with the legislative assemblies. Due to this a new problem emerged as the civil procedure code was extended to Garhwal in 1908 which made the Tehri Raja sleazy, as he could now be legally sued by anyone in the Temple cases under the British colonial jurisprudence. For an independent princely ruler to be sued in British Indian courts the matter was that of utmost importance for the Tehri Raja as it meant to compromise on his sovereignty. Hence, he, on suggestions of many of his court officials declined to take the position of a trustee in the Temple management committee. Throughout this period the Darbar continued to make a demand for transferring the territory of Badrinath under its control. Darbar's claim was based majorly on its ancestral rights and how the folk who visited the shrine saw the visit to Raja as a compulsory part of the pilgrimage. Even Madan Mohan Malviya also issued a press statement in favor of the Tehri Raj, for showing his inclination for the transfer of temple to Tehri court. He (1934) writes "If the British government cedes the necessary territory to Tehri Garhwal, and I consider it ought to do so, the temple can very efficiently be managed by the Darbar. I am assured by pandit Brijnath Sharga, who has made a study of almost all the laws on the public endowments that the Tehri act I of samvat 1981 is the best. If the temple stands in British India, the sole control of the Darbar might lead to complications. It is therefore essential that the territory on which the temple stands and sufficiently large tracts around it should be made over to the Darbar". Moreover in 1927, Butler committee under the chairmanship of Sir Harcourt Butler reached the Tehri Raj to investigate the relationship between the paramount British power and the Princely states. Then Darbar pointed out to the commission that it had a deep connection with the Badrinath shrine that is why it was important for the Tehri Raj to exercise the sole authority over its management.

The power politics behind temple management became so important issue during the 1930s, the colonial government could no longer ignore the discussions on the same. Many debates were come about and the statements of people like Mathura Prasad Mehrotra and RH Williamson show us that the transfer of Badrinath temple was not merely about changing hands between the two powers namely the British Raj and the Tehri Darbar but also demonstrated that the Tehri Raj cared less about the temple affairs and more about the royalty that it received from the Temple's possession. While quoting the Fraser (1913) "the local Raja used to control the Toskhana (temple treasury) of

Badrinath shrine. Although he had diverted the funds of some villages for the maintenance of temple in the name of the Gunth and Sadavart taxes, but their revenues amounted much less than what he obtained from temple funds". No doubt the struggle of the Darbar was not easy as the contribution of the Rawals who officiated the worship of deity in the Badrinath temple and were of a distinct priestly caste from South India i.e., Nambudiri had created the problem for Darbar claim. When Darbar was busy petitioning the government on transfer of Badrinath land, many charges were denounced against them by the Rawals. The Rawals had accused the Tehri Raja of misappropriating the temple revenues for their own use. However, the Raja was frivolous and made the same accusation against the Rawal who had failed to produce the account of details against the Darbar or claiming their rights. Their fight against each other over the temple management not only limited to the religious purpose but for the embezzlement of the Temple funds which help them to increase their control over the entire temple. Thus, the controversy over the Badrinath should not be understood only as the colonial takeover of Hindu religious institutions, but also as a means through which the sanctity being combined with local power. Although the colonial government or colonial state who had gained it in the battle with the Gorkhas and rightfully occurred the space, tried to find a solution.

In 1939 they even introduced a bill called Badrinath temple bill, which was meant to resolve the impending dispute over the temple management. But despite of knowing the fact that the bill proposed a committee to manage the temple administration and the Tehri Raja was to be appointed the patron of the Badrinath temple. This means the order was taken in the support of traditional state authority, bill faced huge criticism from the Darbar's quarters for limiting the practice of keeping their authority over the temple. For instance, Sir Jwala Prasad Srivastava, who was an MLA and an owner of a sugar mill, in a note of dissent (1939) said, 'the effect of the bill would be to deprive the ruler of an Indian state of his ancient rights and powers which he has exercised from time immemorial over the Badrinath temple'. But regardless of all criticism, the bill was passed, and the temple was managed accordingly till the end of colonial rule with slight changes that were introduced in the amendments to the bill in 1941. Thus, Temple is an institute which had deep relation with power and can be considered as a vital source for Historical method which along with cultural life provide the knowledge about both social and political life of different periods. 'Power' is often understood to be emanated from above. But it has varied manifestations that also needed to be looked at, in order to understand its flow and association. While the power play over temple management is much evident from above it is seldom approached from the subaltern's perspective. The Shilpkar community located in the Kumaon and Garhwal areas had played very important role in the construction of Temples. But instead of giving them due recognition for their contribution they were forced to face wrath behaviour of powerful man. As they were considered as 'lower caste' groups in the social order of the hill society. That's why, even for getting Darshana of Badri they had to fight long. Before the 20th century, the caste injunctions were followed to the extent that even the Dimris who enjoyed the hereditary rights of preparing food for the idol were not allowed to enter into the sanctum sanctorum, and when they tried to do so in 1938, the orthodox Hindu community along with the Tehri Darbar considered it as an act of sacrilege. However, their struggle created a new discourse of subaltern's claims over the shrine of Badrinath. The claims made by the Shilpkar or other lower community challenged the contemporary social structure and re-negotiated their rights vis-a-vis the Hindu Temple. The first half of 20th century was a time when a Dalit consciousness began to emerge in the colonial Garhwal. Local newspapers like Almora Akhbar (1871), Garhwali (1905), Samta (1905) et.al, began to write on the discrimination suffered by the shilpkars on a daily basis in the hilly areas. Hari Prasad Tamta, one of the leaders of the Shilpkar community, who later became the first Dalit MLC in United Provinces legislature from his region, founded a society of coppersmiths (shilpkars) named Tamta Sudhar Sabha in 1905 which became Kumaon Shilpkar Sabha in 1913. It was to raise his voice against the caste oppression that he started the newspaper Samta, which sowed the seeds of Dalit identity. By getting inspiration from the movements started by Ambedkar and Gandhi in other regions of India. In 1923 they organized Dola Palki movement to make dent in caste hierarchy.

The leadership of the movement was taken up by Jayanand Bharti, another nationalist leader and Arya samajist from Garhwal. Although this movement just seeks to end caste discrimination and let the lower class use the palanquins in the marriage procession which the 'upper castes' were denying (Negi, 2011). But it resulted into worst as large number of Dalits were mercilessly beaten up while trying to break this tradition and also led to increase the disenchantment of the Dalit leadership with the congress. Even in 1931, Hari Prasad Tamta who was addressing a meeting at Dwarahat called upon the Dalits to support the British and went on to denigrate Gandhi (Joshi, 2000). The untouchability eradication day was observed on 19th December 1932, and several functions were held all over Kumaon. Seeing the anger of the Dalits in Garhwal the Upper caste reformers began to come to their support just in order to save the former from becoming the allies of the British. Even Gandhi went to the extent of calling out Satyagraha in Garhwal in 1941 on the pretext of increasing cruelty against the 'Doms' in Garhwal (Pathak, 2003). Moreover, Mr. CS Ranga Iyer and MC Rajah tried the best to find solution and introduced the Hindu temple entry disabilities removal bill and Untouchability abolition bill in Central legislature on 24th March 1933. It was also discussed by the Garhwali intelligentsia of the times and received tons of criticisms. Even Hari Prasad Tamta also argued that the depressed classes would not gain much by entering into the temple as Shilpkars and Demris were not allowed to choose the new professions that came their way even during the colonial rule. In simple words the elements of power and authority always tie up with temple ethics. For instance, the viewpoint of orthodox groups were against the bill and considered it as an infringement on the Hindu religious beliefs and practices and wrote that it goes against the Queen's proclamation of maintaining religious neutrality. Even, the Tehri Darbar also thought that bill disturb the traditional caste hierarchy of the Garhwali society (Malviya, 1934).

Game of power always run parallel to the viewpoint of people belong to upper class. This was proved when the bill was rejected by the colonial government as they were only concerned about maintaining their own safe position in the empire. No doubt, during the movement for creation of pan- Indian identity, some people shared the interest of this community but that was only for religious purpose and could not break the narrow regional boundaries. Strong hold of power on the policy of temple leads to the decline of the movement as struggle for temple entry was not successful in opening the doors of temples for the shilpkars in Garhwal. All this suggests how with the help of the power, the caste disabilities in the Hindu temples were deeply adhered to. Even Appadurai's also described this and said that the nature of authority and hierarchy in the Hindu temple cannot be entirely divorced from considerations of power of the deity and the ranks of its human worshippers (Appadurai,1981). Indeed because of this the 'lower castes' were kept outside the groups of temple worshippers for the long period even after years of independence. Thus, the fight of shilpkar community becomes an event of utmost importance for thoughtfully examine the temple as a basis for historical method.

CONCLUSION

So, after going through the various available materials, I want to finish on the note that in the method of Indian historical study, Temples play a crucial role by unveiling the hidden facts and information. Through the case study of Badrinath, I have tried to critically analysis the contribution of power in making Temple significant aspect of Cultural History and have not only found the deep connection between power and temple but also see how the elements of power manipulated the local culture. As Clifford has also mentioned in his work that culture history is referred to the study of the daily activities performed by a person in his daily routine. So Temples being a part of culture not only help historians to gain knowledge about religious history but also inform us about the daily practices and activities carrying out by the folk and their civilization from generation to generation or in the past. That is a reason, through the lens of the Badrinath Temple, I am able to touch the part of that history which shed the light on events (like shilpkaar movement and struggle of Darbar under the British rule) that were hidden and dejected by the many writers due to strong influence of state authority and creating the glorifying the culture history.

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