

SPIRITUALITY YOGA AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROCESS

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Abstract

Women empowerment is a process and contextual in situations. There are two approach of women empowerment. Agency approach focuses only on agency and structure approach on structure; however, both approach are incomplete. My argument is agency and structure both approach is inseparable. Structure and agency come together in structuration. This article is based on the Brahma Kumaris World spiritual university (BKWSU) as structure and Brahma Kumaris (BK, Daughter of Barhma) as agency in women empowerment process. BKWSU is a women led largest organization in the world. The objective of the study is to explore the process of empowerment and contribution of spiritual organization in the area of women empowerment. The qualitative descriptive approach with intensive literature review method the study has been conducted in Rajyog centers of Kathmandu. In conclusion, BKs have strong belief that self-confidence is the most powerful means of empowerment. They do not have the sense of male or female but they think that they all are soul. It ca be taken as spiritual empowerment or inner empowerment which is prerequisite for further empowerment.

Keywords:

Empowerment, Meditation, Spirituality, Structuration, Yoga,

Background

“Yatra naryastu pojyantay ramantay tatra Devta”

(where women are honored, there gods are pleased) (Manu, Manusmriti, 3/56).

Brahma Kumari World Spiritual University (BKWSU) was established in 1937, before that it was as “Om Mandali”. The founder of the BKWSU, Dada Lekhraj (Brahma Baba), chariot of the Shiva Baba (God Shiva, however, it is different from Shankar, according to Brahma Kumari (BK) God Shiva means tiny point of light which dwells above all in supreme abode) was a rich diamond merchant. He was quite familiar about the status of Sindhi women. Sindhe family were rich. There was dual standard for women and men. Men often remain in foreign land due to their business; however,

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women were kept in their house, from outer society contact.

According to BKs, after getting envision, Brahma Baba, started teaching God's word. Sindhe women started following him. At the beginning almost 400 women started following him. That micro spiritual family later became the macro global Socio-Spiritual- Education organization. The Headquarters is based at Mount Abu Madhuban (forest of honey), Rajasthan State, India. It has more than 10000 branch study centers over 142 countries of the world. It is affiliated to the United Nations Organization as an NGO, has consultative status with the UNICEF. BKs movement often taken as new religions movement which is reformative and re-written many religious texts. BKWSU believes that they are spiritual organization not a religious.

Spirituality is multiple concept having many perspectives. And it has been perceived powerful or larger than ourselves. The dictionary meaning of spirituality is the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things. The working definition of the spirituality is believing and accepting the existence of soul or spirit. However, my article is about mostly feminist spirituality. Feminist spirituality means worships, mediation, and magical practices (Eller, 2000). And sociology sees everything is socially constructed. That is why we need to understand sociology of spirituality.

Sociology of spirituality says that sociological studies of spiritual things. Founding fathers of sociology also brought their important theory from the study of religion and spirituality, however, often it was mentioned that religion was taken as ghost of sociology. In this article, the term spirituality has been taken as spiritual practices, practiced by the Raj yoga meditation center (BKWSU) and their teaching. Spiritual practices are particularly focused on listening Murli and yoga meditation.

BKWSU often claims that their very core function is to liberate women. Because by establishing spiritual community, founder of BKWSU, has focused on women empowerment. He has revised terminology 'women are the door to hell' into women are the door to heaven. That is why he named this organization after female name, Kumaris.

Review

Empowerment is a process. Women's empowerment as enabling women to take an equal place with men, and equally participate in the development process in order to achieve control over the factors of production on an equal basis with men (Longwe, 1990). Freire (1994) has used the term 'empowerment' in a formal way for the first time in 1970. After that, many scholars discussed it as human potential especially for women empowerment.

Meditation and Women Empowerment

Yoga is formed by Sanskrit root yuj which means connection or yoga is the way to Yog. According to yogsutra, '*yogau samadhau*' means yoga means samadhi, liberation, Nirvana, the knowledge of truth or *sakshatkar* (true knowledge). Empowerment is also liberation. According to Hindu philosophy, this world is made by Prakrit (nature) and Purusha (consciousness). Prakrit means *jad* or unconscious Purusha means consciousness. *Prakarti* is made by the *tri-guna* (three virtue) sat, raj and tamas. And *Prakriti* makes *mahat* (ego) and *mahat* makes ahamkara and ahamkara creates mind and mind, five sense organs, five actions organs and *pancha mahavut* (five things) eg Akash (ether), Tej (fire) Jal (water) vayu (air) and *Prithivi* (earth) and all substances having all virtue, however, is divided as per the excessive amount. And *Mokshaya* means true knowledge and if you are able to understand true knowledge that is the ultimate pleasure and no sorrow. And yoga is the way to know that true reality. According to Patanjali yogsutra, (Swami Saraswathi 2002) there are eight limb of yoga namely, *Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana Dhyana and Samadhi*. There are different types of yoga such as hath yoga, *Bhakti yoga, Karma, yoga Laya yoga, Mantra yoga, Gyan yoga and Rajyoga*. In the past there was some rivalry between hath yoga and Rajyoga, however, Swami swatmarama (2002) (in his hathyogapardipika, made balance and both are complementary of each other.

Yogastha kuru karmani sangam tyaktva dhananjya sidhhy asiddhyoh samo bhutva samatvam yoga uchyate (Gita 2/48). Perform your duty and leaving all attachment to success or failure and such equanimity is called yoga. Similarly, in another chapter, *Yoga Karmashu Kausalam* (Gita 2/50) which means working without any attachment, and perceiving that performing duty is the core duty and no any desire of fruits is yoga. Similarly, *yogascha chittavirti nirodha* (Patanjali Yogsutra Samadhipad 2). Controlling and depletion of our mental activities is called yoga. In sum it can be said that yoga is connection with supreme and to be able to know reality.

Yoga is ancient Hindu philosophy. It was compiled by the Patanjali and he is the 11th contributor of yoga and 1st contributor is taken Hiranyagarbha which is mentioned in Vagawat Gita (Gita verse 4 Chap 3)

In Patanjali yog sutra there are four chapters' one Sadana pad, Bibhuti pad, kaybalya pad and samidhi pad. Similarly, there are two types of yoga external and internal yoga, Yam, Niyame, Asana, Pranayam Parthara, Dharana Dhyana and samadhi. First five are external yoga and last six seven and eight number Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi are internal yoga. So here, we can say that Meditation is called Rajyoga. There are 8 limbs of yoga and this yoga in its own step are completed. Pranayama is itself full, you can practice pranayama (breathing exercise) (Swami Saraswathi 2002).

In doing so, Rajyoga mainly focused on meditation is a complete and way to Samadhi.

Yoga means controlling mental activities. *Britaya panchatathya clista aclist (Yogsutra 5)* there are five activities which make mind fluctuation and they are easy and hard or good and bad. Are Pramana (right knowledge) *Vipryaya* (misconception) *vikalpa* (imagination or feeling) *Nidra* (sleep) *Smiriti* (memory). Where *praman* is collected by the five sense and five acting organs with close relation with mind, similarly, misconception or *Vipryaya* should be removed first, it is very difficult to remove and rest of the four are in the easy categories, however, this is not included and it lies only on difficult mode, however, rest of the four have both feature easy and difficult.

Objectives

The objective of the study is to explore the process of empowerment and contribution of spiritual organization in the area of women empowerment.

Methods

This study is mostly qualitative in nature. Qualitative research normally seeks to find out the central phenomenon. It was conducted on BKWSU. Respondents were Brahma Kumaries (BKs). Among BKs there are two types of BKs. dedicated BKs who permanently lived in center and non-dedicated BKs those who follows the norms and rules of center, however, they are living with their family. For the sample size 5 dedicated and 5 non dedicated BKs were purposely selected as informants. Qualitative research mostly follows value-laden. There are multiple realities. Real is relational and contextual. Data were collected from different Raj yoga meditation centers of BKWSU of Kathmandu valley. Unit of analysis was individual because data were collected mostly in individual level. Those data collected from center level were supplementary information for the individual purpose.

Discussions

Qualitative data were analyzed based on qualitative data analysis technique. Description of the data are presented in the following themes. Spirituality and women empowerment are associated with each other. Women were subjugated, suppressed, oppressed due to the most of religious text those created to control women. However, BKWSU re-write the religious text and re-defined to motivate women.

Structure VS Agency and structuration theory

In sociology, it is most debated that structure vs agency debate, those who were structure extremist

undermine the agency and those who were agency extremist undermine the structure, thus there is needed to structuration theory. Giddens (1984) puts historical, processual and dynamic way of integration. He says that structuration theory focuses on social practices, is a theory of the relationship between agency and structure. Bourdieu (1985) focuses on structuring the structure. For him, in his field theory, individual is capable to change the field based on his capital or occupied by the structure. According to him structure are not the permanent however agent can change the structure but he changes the structure based on his discrepancy of social capital or position. However, in this research, Giddens's structuration theory is near to my research thus, it is used as the theoretical approach because in BKWSU's both structure and agency are playing important role for women's empowerment

Brahm Kumaris World Spiritual University teaches every day and they have fixed ashram. They teach even Saturday. Researcher has assumed that there is empowerment related with feminist approach because feminist argue patriarchal norms are not women friendly however, BKWSU claims that those patriarchal norms are changed and established equal norms for both male and female (BKWSU, 1981; Chandra, 2000). This study has been mainly focused on women empowerment and participation, control and conscientisation out of five indicator of Longwe was taken and to assess, how BKWSU providing women's empowerment there are new types of indicator which were used to women empowerment indicator for example: Leadership, decision making, participating, Raj yoga meditation, knowledge of soul, way of getting power from supreme soul, and advocacy of their rights, to be able to decrease gender inequality and women's empowerment however, the entire indicator were not included among them raj yoga meditation (knowledge of soul and supreme soul) participation and leadership indicators were used.

BKS

In BKWSU's philosophy, all BKs are dedicated those become the child of the supreme. BKs teach about soul and supreme soul. First anyone who wants to be student or member of BKWSU has to take seven days' course. Everybody who takes the course, follows the norms of the BKWSU becomes the member of the organization. However, those who have totally left their previous residence or home or in their terminology old world, started to living in new world or ashram permanently, are called dedicated or surrendered. Old world in that sense, those evils behaviour such as being full of vices and new world in the sense that become Supremes' child and follow his *shrimat*, practice peace, purity and prosperity. Dedicated BKs follow all the practice as more as possible and their behaviour should be matching to divinity. Those BKs who are living in their house, however, they have accepted all the norms and values of the BKWSU are called non dedicated BKs.

Activities of the BKWSU

Firstly, BKs ask the question, “who are you?” They let us know our true identity. We are not the male and female but we are the soul. It does not matter whether male or female which provokes that we are the soul. Soul means we have to forget male and female which possess the body consciousness the root cause of all vices. Having the soul consciousness means equality between man and women. Soul consciousness provides strong empowerment for women because they were treated as female or weak but soul hides that and makes empower, women were not weak but made.

Training and seminars

BKWSU aims to change and transfer society through values virtues. It is conducting VVIPs seminars for doctors, professors, judges, engineers, militaries, bureaucrats, health workers and many more. Those who can manage time can join the BKWSU’s regular classes after getting seven days’ course. For those who are busy due to their profession, are invited in special seminars.

Yoga Bhatti

Yoga Bhattis (meditation camps) are continue meditation. In that yoga camp, they continuously seat days and weeks. This is the unlike *vipasana*, for beginner and practitioner. Mainly, there are five types of yoga. Which are taught by the Shiva to Parbati. Four yoga (Raj, Hath, Laya, Mantra yoga) were publically taught, however, fifth yoga Shiva Shakti yoga was kept secret. Raj yoga for mind, Hath yoga for the Body and Laya yoga for awakening Kundalini energy, Kudalini accepts that there is famine and masculine power. And the Mantra yoga, chanting installs software into human being to lead Samadhi. There are step by step yoga which are serially followed such as first cleansing the body through Hath yoga. There are some different school of thought, one supports that to get Raj yoga one has to practice Hath yoga, and another school of thought says that those who are *Satguni*, *sattvics* can practice directly Raj yoga. BKWSU is teaching directly Raj yoga because they follow pure vegetarian and *sattwik* way of life. BKs practice *Yoga Bhatti* to discipline and refreshment. It helps to practice intense meditation which is the major part of BKWSU and BKs.

Teachers training (TOT)

BKWSU provides teacher training for in-service and whole timer as well as regular members who are involving since long time. In this training, certification also made. Counselling, Raj yoga meditation, soft skills, life skills, and many more training are provided. Due to this types of training,

BKs empower and upgrade themselves.

Exhibition and art glary

BKs philosophy and concept about God is dot or shining point of light which is formless, bodiless, however, powerful. However, Samkhya and Yoga philosophy on the concept of God is omnipresent and the prime source of everything it is smallest particle and seed of all. However, BKs reject the notion of God that omnipresent and their own argument, they do not disprove the scriptures; however, they elaborate or made arguments differently, they argue that God is not omnipresent; however, can be remembered from everywhere. God is dot; however, other deities are with their body that is why BKs present idol, statue and printed pictures of Laxmi, Narayam and Krishna. Similarly, they present Baba, Mamma (Ma Radhe), seniors Dadis and other in class room and in their walls. Visualization has more impact on mind that is why BKs adhere badge of Laxmi and Narayan. Their classroom, their teaching hall, seminar hall and other rooms are clean neat and well decorated. Those who are new in that place can be attracted by the decoration as well as maintaining peace. Their yoga hall is peaceful. Every Wednesday, there is food offering to God, their food is very simple, however, delicious. BKs believe that they remember God while cooking food and that good vibration makes food Prasad. BKs demonstrate pictures during the huge festival such as Shiva Ratri, Rakhi day etc. And they also demonstrate during some celebration if there is mass people gathering.

Meditation

Meditation is the central activities of the BK which is the life style. Practice of Raj yoga meditation, inculcation the spiritual values. Spiritual is personal, individual in doing so person goes to inner and inner to gain natural power through yoga or connection with supreme. It is distinct form hath yoga, to be BK or raj yogi, means to maintain state of soul consciousness and to establish and sustain a union with supreme soul (Shiv Baba). They practice yoga meditation with eyes open and teach practice to others to do same. *I just begin by making my mind quiet and I finish all my thoughts and slowly I unite with supreme.* In doing so BKs listen Murli (the flute of knowledge). BKs regularly participate in meditation centre and interaction with others BKs those who are senior and experienced since long time participation. BKs participation in meditation is mandatory and cent percent BK participate in Murli classes. Knowledge is simply the exploration of the relationship of the study of variables in contemporary research culture (Badal, 2019).

Life style of BKs

Reading Murli, practicing the word of the Murli, practicing the meditation, practicing the purity, peace and divine family rule and regulation is the style of BKs. They have taken themselves as divine and messenger of supreme. They always do *purusathra* (doing courage continuously) to be a number one. They have sense that, they are equal neither male nor female however soul in soul consciousness no male and no female. They practice leadership, *yoga bhakti* (special time period for full meditation). All the activities are the process of empowerment. In the process of empowerment, even equal participation, knowing difference between sex and gender simple indicator were developed by Longwe however the BKs are more than that. The central phenomenon of the BKs is they know themselves they have confident, self-realization, self-empowered, self-motivated, being powerful through knowing their real self. BKWSU is affiliation in UN as consultative status, observer status and associate status has been made. Similarly, flagship member of education of rural people shows that importance of BKWSU. BK.

They are very lovely people. They respect each others gently. They share their love by hug and offer sweet meal. They all follow the same values and norms. They think that they are different from outer world. They are here because they have done good work in their past life. They fully believe on birth and rebirth. According to them, the new world is establishing and old world going to be destroy soon. There are some rumors that BKs are close to Christianity. BKs are mostly criticized since its birthday. One side, this patriarchal society do not want to women's progress and BKWSU is wonderfully led and fast growing organization. Another side, BKWSU has rewrite different scriptures in their own way. They have challenge the old pattern of mental set. Their core value and strength is transformation. Each and every member saying that self-transformation is social transformation. One person mentioned that BKs counselling made him to overcome from drugs and similarly, their mediation technique is mostly appreciated and followed. BKWSU is a structure and having certain norms. BKs are motivating because of BKWSU. It is university that teaches not only meditation, however, life skills, soft skills, driving, cooking, leading, public lectures and many more. BKs are fast learner because one side they practice Yoga which gives strength and another is they have full faith on Brahma Baba and Shiva Baba.

They response the question asked, how it is possible to talk with dead person like talking with Brahma baba, they simply argue that they can share their experience only and you are also able to share your own, not others. Those who practice yoga and remain pure can talk with. For that you need to practice and remember only one thing. Reading only one thing, listening only one thing remembering only one thing, and even dreaming one thing that makes you to talk with what you want. I have seen that those who were just literate, within one year started to teaching Murli in front of the mass. And giving public lecture. It was not only through the Raj yoga, however, she

stared reading the Murli day again and again. She got help from others BKs. Senior BKs taught her how to teach. They also teach her to accomplish all the work. They make rehearsal. Lastly, she was matured enough to teach Murli. I asked her 'How can you do that?' she took a pause and replied *'I have full faith on Baba' I practice again and again' those having degree from outer university might be championing in their field, however, in this university, we are the champion. I have knowledge about the spiritual energy, because I have practiced it, day and night.*

BKs share their affection deeply. Their love among themselves is exemplary. The feed Tolee a sweet. BKs always share their experiences, mostly their talking with subtle or incorporeal Bap Dada. Not only one but all BKs talk, confess if they have committed any mistake. They work continuously by saying doing work, in their terminology, *Sewa* (service) is pious work like worshiping. Regarding their fasting, they have their own logic, BKs say they do fasting not of food but bad thinking and vices. They read, they practice, they remember and they retain it continuously and sound while seating and standing the only word *Baba, Mera Baba, Pyara Baba* (Father, and my father lovely father) makes them real and for others that might be illusion but for BK, that is real, they claim that they can share real experience and as sociologist say that was due to their relation and interaction. Their thinking and perceiving makes so because they are overwhelmed by the norms, values and practices of the way they believe.

And another *vikalpa* imagination is which is not existed in reality and lies only in words it is also harms our mind and the fourth is *Nidra* and *Nidra* denotes the state of mind, there are three state of mind are active, dream, sleep and *turya*. There is contradictory at the stage of *Nidra* because *Samadhi susuptimokshyash Brahmarupata (Samkhya 5/116)* which means *Nidra/susupta* is the state of gaining Brahman or bless. However, in yoga sutra it is claimed that in some stage we can get bless, however, we can recall or remember that we were in good or bad position during our sleep. For the further, according to *yog sutra*, there are five suffering *pancha clasha* namely are *Avidya* (ignorance), *Ashmita* (egoism), *Raga* (attachment) *dosha*, (hostility) and *Avanivesh* (fear) among them, ignorance and fear are the very core because rest are the by-product of that two. Yoga simply knowing the truth through the self-practice and it is the way to know truth in its real state or as it is. BK (Brahma Kumaris, those who are following the BKWSU's norms and values and practice Raj Yoga.

Raj yoga empowers women. My mother is almost 70s still she looks fit and fine. My wife also yoga practicenor. Yoga give inner power, confident, calmness, keeps stress free. Due to absence of tension and disease, human being gets confident to tackle with. Before practicing yoga, I was shy, scarred and low self-esteem and time to time suffering from disease, however, after the practicing

yoga, I got confident, health, peace prosperity and now I am a yoga teacher. I am teaching yoga.
BK

Meditation is the central activities of the BK which is the life style. Practice of Raj yoga meditation, inculcation the spiritual values. Spiritual is personal, individual in doing so person goes to inner and inner to gain natural power through yoga or connection with supreme. It is distinct form hath yoga, to be BK or raj yogi, means to maintain state of soul consciousness and to establish and sustain a union with supreme soul (Shiv Baba). They practice yoga meditation with eyes open and teach practice to others to do same. *I just begin by making my mind quiet and I finish all my thoughts and slowly I unite with supreme.* In doing so BKs listen Murli (the flute of knowledge). BKs regularly participate in meditation centre and interaction with others BKs those who are senior and experienced since long time participation. BKs participation in meditation is mandatory and cent percent BK participate in Murli classes. BKWSU and BKs are practicing women empowerment process. BKWSU as a structure and BKs as agent are able to change the norms and motivated by the structure, so doing, they are empowered. Their spiritual empowerment leads to use their agency in further way.

Conclusion

Women empowerment is a contextual process. This article argues, BKWSU's norms and regulations are empowering. BKs are empowered because they do not discriminate such as caste, sex and religion. They believe in soul consciousness, however, that promotes equality. BK represents unique forms of women empowerment because they interact together with the structure and agency. Their main structure is you are not the body, means you all are equal such as male female, rich poor, upper cast lower cast, Hindu Muslim. BKs have perceived that they all are equal and "self-change is world change" with the structure of that their agency shaped and all the structure also change through BKs agency. None dedicated BKs improvement in control, participation in household and community means due to their participation in BKWSU. BKWSU and BKs contributing structuration theory of women empowerment. BKs have strong belief that self-confidence is the most powerful means of empowerment. They do not have the sense of male or female but they think that they all are soul. It can be taken as spiritual empowerment or inner empowerment which is prerequisite for further empowerment.

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