

RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS OF KABIR'S PERIOD

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Authentic historical records confirm that Kabir lived between 14th and 15th centuries A.D. Kabir's age was full of struggles and confusion. Politically, Muslims clashed with Hindus and established their own kingdoms. Intense fights took place between Muslim Sultans and Hindu kings as a result of which there was no peace in the country. Owing to the different traditional, cultural and religious customs, there arose enmity between Hindus and Muslims and they were fighting each other. In that critical situation Kabir struggled for the unity between Hindus and Muslims, in which he faced many difficulties.

At the time of Kabir, a kind despair spread throughout the country. Owing to the unstable political conditions violence spread all over the country. Small kings and the landlords were acting according to their own will. There was no limit to their atrocities. Due to the famine and scarcity, people suffered a lot. In those circumstances, the idea of religious reformation occurred in the minds of the people, as a result of which a number of new religious traditions emerged. The philosophy of "Nirguna Brahmopasana " was an important trend then. Which spread among the people.

With the emergence of Islam in India, Hinduism received a rude shock. The Muslim rulers not only crushed a number of religious movement and temples of Hindus, but also tried to convert people to Islam by extending them certain concessions.[1] Due to this , Hinduism started losing its importance in the society and on the other hand people belonging to the lower castes were attracted to Islam. Hindus were unable to follow and perform their religious customs. They were not in a position to express their devotion to their own religion. They were unable to protect themselves and even their self-respect.

The Hindu rulers of Rajasthan and Vijayanagar seeing a serious threat to the existence of Hinduism turned champions of the Hindu Dharma. With a View to saving Hinduism and modifying it to the changed circumstances, the Hindu saints and philosophers took upon themselves the task of reforming Hinduism. These saints and reformers tried to purify Hinduism of all evil practices, particularly caste system and image worship and thereby started a movement which is popularly known as Bakti Movement.

At the time of Kabir, there were a number or religions, preaching different dharmas, traditions and methods, but they were contradictory and intertwined .In those days every religion was divided into different branches. The followers of each religion considered their religion unique and superior to other religions. Nathpanth, Saivism, Vaishnavism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sufism and Islam were the important religions of those days. No religion was tolerant towards other religions. According to Dr. Govinda Trigunayat's analysis, in those days there obtained two trends among the people: (i) Theism and Atheism, and (ii) Bhakti Marga proposed by different religious teachers. [2]

Theism and Atheism

Adi Sankara was a boon to Hinduism. He established a logical monistic system and laid emphasis on attaining salvation through knowledge. Buddhism was in a

state of decline at the time of Sankaracharya, unable to stand the might of the logical-philosophical theory of Sankaracharya and it witnessed a number of branches like Sahajayana, Vajrayana and Niranjnanpanth. They were following modes of atheism. From 6th century A.D. to 11th century A.D. atheism spread in the country gaining much popularity. The siddhas were atheistic in their outlook. The sway of these faiths started waning with the invasion of the Muslims. It was in such an environment that in North India Nath traditions and in South India Nathpanths, Ramananda and Kabir accepted some tenets of atheism, and Kabir established a new religion called Sahaja Dharma (Nirguna Sant Panth).

Bhakti Marga

According to Dr. Govinda Trigunayat, the second trend that came into being in that period was Bhakti Tarwa. Basing themselves on the Vedas and Upanishads, the religious teachers of that time propagated Bhakti. It started with Sankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madvacharya, Nikumabacharya and Vallabhacharya were among the other religious teachers whose propagation of spiritual knowledge lay at their core. In support of their religious philosophies, they wrote commentaries on prastana trayam. Sankaracharya gave importance to gnana sadhana whereas others stressed on devotion.

Sufism

Before Kabir, Sufism was in a good position in Iran. The famous mystic poet Jalaluadin (1207 A.D.) of Iran preached mysticism and sacred life among the Muslims. The greatness of mysticism propagated by Jalaluddin attracted many people. As a result many new traditions and sects took birth in this faith. The chief sects of Sufism were Chistee and Suharavardhee. The Chistee was propagated by Quaja Mayuddin Chistee in the 12th century A.D. and the second sect by Bahaddin Zakaria. Before Kabir, Sufi tradition had spread all over the country and influenced the people of India. Kabir also came under its influence.

Religious enmity

The enmity between Hinduism and Islam was also one of the reasons for religious instability during that period. Muslims invaded India chiefly attracted by her wealth, but later on they established kingdoms and started religious propagation. Religious tolerance was marked little between Hindus and Muslims. Philosophically, and culturally these religions were different. All Muslims were to adhere to the Quran. Those who disobeyed its codes were called Kaphir (atheist). According to their view, Islam was the only true religion in this world. Muslims rebuked idol-worship of the Hindus and the custom of praying to many Gods. Muslims believed only in ekeswaropasana. Brahama vada of the Hindus was different from ekeswaropasana of the Muslims. There were other differences also. Hindus believed in caste system, whereas Muslims opposed it. From the Islamic point of view, Hindus were kaphirs, whereas Hindus called Muslims mlechchas. Political power was in the hands of Muslims; so they oppressed Hindus in different ways. The clash and enmity between these two religions painted Kabir much. He digested the philosophies of these two religions and condemned the defects in them. He tried for unity and harmony between Hinduism and Islam, throughout his life.

REFERENCES

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2. Kabir ki Vicharadhara, p.74.

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