RELIGION
AND
PHILOSOPHY
Chapter Ten
RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

Religion was a great regulator of life during our period as it was in Ancient India. It has been the motive force behind most of the activities of the age. It provided the pantheon, prescribed the paths of salvation, gave the state its moral foundation and the society its organisation, it inspired the poets to create and the philosophers to think, it kept the ascetic wandering and the sculpture busy with the stone. It could elevate the mind to altitudes of enlightenment and also take it to the depths of degradation. The religious faith served as a source of hope, inspiration and strength, and could also prove a barrier for progress.

The Puranic Hinduism:

Hinduism of our period had come to be accepted as a religion based on Sruti, Smrti, and Puranas. Though often termed as the Vedic religion it had undergone considerable change. The Vedas were believed as devinely ordained and only the belief was vital as an emotional bond. The Smritis prescribed the social organisation. Three Smriti commentators have been law-givers of our period—Vijnanesvara the author of Mitaksara (11th century), Apararka the commentator on Yajnavalkya smrti (12th century) and Hemadri the author of Caturvarga Cintamani (13th century). Out of the three pillars of Dharmasastra, Hemadri is a true product of the Yadava period.

The impact of Puranas has been tremendous during the times. In fact Hinduism now could be called a Puranic religion. The innumerable deities, temples, mythologies, pilgrimages and vratas
were all a product of the Puranas. They could make Hinduism popular but also developed fantastic beliefs which became barriers for real enlightenment.

**Deities and Temples:**

A number of ancient deities were worshipped in the society but along with them certain new ones also developed during our period. The ancient deities represented in various forms are mainly three—Siva, Vishnu and the Goddess. Shiva temples of the times are found in majority. The Sthana Pothi and the inscriptions testify to this. Shiva and Linga worship was popular especially among the masses. The goddess figures under the names of Durga, Amba, Camunda and Kali. The Ambabai of Kolhapur was famous during our period. The antiquity of her temple at Kolhapur goes back to 10th century.

Vitthala and Mailar or Khandoba can be regarded as the deities of the Yadava period. An inscription of 1217 A.D. refers to Vitthala (App.Insc.no.74). The earliest inscriptive reference to it is of 1209 A.D. Pandharpur the abode of Vitthala was living centre during our period, and the pilgrimage to Pandharpur known as Vari is also referred to. (App.Insc.no.270). But Vitthala temples were not widely constructed. Sthana Pothi refers not a single Vitthala temple. This deity was worshipped solely for spiritual progress and not for material gain. Though a form of Vishnu, Vitthala became a new deity due to its association with one place and one cult. Mailar, a form of Shiva was a popular folk deity of the period and is referred to in the Mahanubhava literature.

Construction of temples has been a special religious activity of the Yadava period and marks the growth of Puranic religion. The temples constituted centres of public worship, philanthropic and
cultural activities, and also of festivals and recreation. They obtained land grants and some of them developed into wealthy institutions.

**Ignorance:**

But the multiplicity of deities and rituals could not solve the spiritual problem of the people and ignorance loomed large among the masses. Jñānesvara gives a penetrating account of this condition, and describes how a person was unsteady in his worship. He installed a domestic image but went in search of God from temple to temple. He would fast on Ekadasi and with the same devotion worship the serpent on Nagapancami. Then he would surrender before Ganapati and later say to Durga 'Mother I am thine' and at the same time would seek if Navacandi could do something for him. On Sunday he would beg for help before Bhairava and on the following day run to Samkara. Jñānesvara points out how such people created gods for the fulfilment of their desires and deserted them when they could not do the needful. The religion of the rituals had become merely materialistic and useless for salvation. This situation constitutes the back-ground of the rise of new movements.

**The Religious Movements:**

The main cults of the period are the Natha, Varakari, Mahanubhava and Virasaiva. They sum up the main currents of the religious thought of the age and they brought out a considerable transformation of the Puranic religion.

1. **Nathism:**

The early history of this cult is full of legendary account but its impact upon our period is outstanding. It has inspired some of the greatest thinkers of the Yadava age, like Mukundaraja
and Jnanesvara who belonged to the Natha tradition. This Yogic cult believing in Siva and Sakti as inseparable, insisted on internal purification of mind and treated the external means of rituals, pilgrimage etc. as unimportant. This fundamental teaching considerably influenced the other cults of the time, like Mahanubhava and Virasaiva. Thus Nathism rendered valuable service to society through some of its cults later showed debacement and decay.

2. Varakari:

This cult of Vithoba was a new type of Vaishnavism. It taught devotion for the sake of spiritual enlightenment and not material gain. It stood for the salvation of all irrespective of caste, but with due respect to Caturvarnya. So it remained perfectly conformist, and yet brought out a great social transformation. The cult produced great many spiritual leaders, mystics and poets whom we have already discussed. They established equality of all before God and selfless devotion as the path of salvation. Jnanesvara's teachings formed their philosophical foundation though Jnanesvara is historically no founder of that cult. The 'Vara' of Pandharpur an essential of this cult is referred to as early as 1248 A.D. (App.Insc.no.270).

3. Mahanubhava:

This is a non-conformist cult founded by Cakradhara who hailed originally from Gujarat. He denied Caturvarnya and the Vedas as divine, and advocated the principles of non-violence, good conduct, detachment and devotion. He considered Gita as the only source of all knowledge and disliked the Puranas and multiplicity of deities. So actually he was a free-thinker and a great humanitarian. Without enlightened qualities he could not have brought some of the best
minds under his impact (during c.1262 and 1274 A.D.) and become a father of one of the greatest literary activities, already discussed. His cult flourished after his death.

But Cakradhara ultimately proved a failure. His non-conformism was not tolerated by the society and later the Mahanubhavas themselves confirmed it Caturvarnya. By asking his followers to believe in him as God Cakradhara degraded himself and undermined his own free thinking. Blind faith in one man and extreme principle of Sanyas made the Mahanubhavas a class separated from the society. Yet by presenting his bold thesis of asceticism as a challenge to the materialistic religion, Cakradhara did invaluable service. He is non-Vedic in the sense that he was a non-conformist.

4. Virasaiva:

What Mahanubhavas did in Maharashtra, the Virasaiva or Lingayat cult did in Karnatak. It is also a non-conformist cult organised during the Kalacuri period by Basava in c.1160 A.D. It disliked idoltry and pilgrimages and insisted on good conduct. It denied Caturvarnya and the sanctity attached to Brahmans. It recognised Sivalinga as the only God. Virasaivism was a reaction against Jainism in Karnatak. Basava adopted Ahimsa but denied sanyasa and tapa. He taught that every one must live by his own toil, and never beg. So thus Basava definitely did a great service to the cause of the masses. Atleast ten Yadava inscriptions refer to this cult.

5. Jainism:

The Jains lived as a small minority during our period. They could not flourish before the rise of Mahanubhava, Varkari and Lingayat cults. But certain principles of Jainism like Sanyasa
and ahimsa had their impact upon the new cults. Jainism seems to have influenced the early Yadava rulers like, Dridhaprahara and Seunacandra. Jain attempts to secure some foothold at Devagiri are reflected in the Jain work Sukruta-sagara of Ratnamandanagani. References to Jainism occur in at least 14 Yadava records. Buddhism was almost wiped out during the period.

Main Currents of the Religious Thought:

This survey helps us to bring out the main currents of the religious thought during the Yadava age. The Puranic Hinduism of Vratas for the fulfilment of desires was materialism in religion. It constituted one dominant trend of thought. It was challenged by the asceticism of the Mahanubhavas who reasserted the basic truth of Indian thought that detachment alone can give ultimate happiness. The struggle between these two forces of materialism and asceticism is the main theme of Indian thought throughout history. It was seen sixth century B.C. and the compromise between them was struck in the 'Varnasrama Dharma', wherein the Varnas standing for materialism of society and the asramas for the gradual detachment of the individual. But the balance between the two opposite forces was often disturbed and every age was required to find its own solution to it.

During the Yadava period these struggle is reflected in the conflict between Hemadri and Cakradhara. The bold non-conformist was treated with intolerance but the truth he asserted prevailed in spite of his own failure. The balance between the two forces of materialism and asceticism was struck by Jnanesvara.
Jnanesvara saw all the evils in the society as Cakradhara did. But he sought to remove them without disturbing the social order. He did dislike the inequality in Vedic religion but expressed it in such a restrained and intelligent way as would be acceptable to all and hurting to none. He represents an eternal balance of thought.

Jnanesvara's path of salvation could be termed as mysticism which implies a direct and personal experience of Reality. It means a silent enjoyment of God or Reality as fully discussed by R.D.Ranade. Jnanesvara's mysticism was intellectual one but Namdeva started his devotional mysticism which could be practised by larger number. Thus salvation through knowledge and devotion without renouncing the world could make a happy synthesis of materialism and asceticism. It was the solution of the Yadava age.

The success of this solution could be seen in the great achievement of the saints of Maharashtra and the inspiration they can provide even to modern intelligentsia. Thus the religious thought of our period could be explained as a struggle between materialism and asceticism resulting in mysticism as the synthesis of the two. The solution was the greatest contribution of the Yadava age.
References

2. Khare, G.H., Maharashtrak Car Daivate, p.76.
4. Sthana Pothi, p.22.
6. Jn.XIII:

7. Jn.IX:

8. Jn.XIV:


12. Cakradhara is said to have been put to death by Hemadpant, though the whole problem is controversial. V.B.Kolte's arguments are refuted by V.V.Mirashi. Their articles are referred to in the Bibliography.

13. Jn.XVIII: