CHAPTER -II

Socio- Religious Studies during the Times of

Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi and Kabir
Socio-Religious Study of Rumi’s age

The thirteenth century which brought, with the invasion of the Mongols, the most tremendous shock to Asia and Europe also a great period of mysticism, not only in Islam and in Christianity, but also in India where the Bhakti movement had made great studies. Ramanuja, a southern Brahmin of the twelfth century, recognized Vishnu as identical with Brahma, the supreme spirit, animating material world as well as the individual souls which have become estranged from God through unbelief, and can attain conscious union with Him again only through devotion or love, i.e. Bhakti.

By the middle of the 13th century mystic thought both in prose and verse, had reached its final. Since this development, in the mystic thought had taken place in Muslim lands in the same generation which saw the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, mystic ideology was imparted into India bodily in its development from India. India had much to contribute by developing the mystic silsila.

The Spiritual Silsila (orders) were effectively organized to meet the situation and khanqas, which henceforth became an integral part of the mystic discipline, were established on an extensive scale.

1. The Christi order: Khawaja Abu Ishaq Shami Chisti is regarded as the founder of this order. He migrated from Asia Minor and settled at Chisti in Khurasan and in consequence was called Chisti. He was a disciple and a vicegerent of Mimshed 'Ali Dinwari'.

1. Life and Work of Muhammad Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, by Afzal Iqbal, p. 13
The devotees of this order practice Chilla, i.e. they shut themselves up for forty days in some room or pass the time in mosque. During this period they eat little food and spend the greater part of the night and day in prayer and meditation, nor do they talk with others more than is absolutely necessary. Another characteristic of the followers of this order is their fondness for music. They hold musical festivals, and pass into ecstasy while listening to singing.1

2. The Qadiri Order: the order, as we have seen, sprung from Khanwada Tartawsiyya, and traces its origin to Abdu'l- Qadir Gilani or Jilani. Abdu'l Qadir is also called Hasanu'l- Husayni, on account of his descendant of his descent, on his mother's side from Husayn and his father's side from Hasan, Muhammad's grandson.2 He had forty nine sons, who carried on his work after his death. His most devoted followers went so far as to ascribe to him powers almost divine. This order has separate Zawiyas (cleisters), and a central institution in Baghdad. These dervishes are known for their philosophic principles and main order of the Qadiriya has produced many subsidiary branches and dervishes of this school are to be found spread over Islam from Morocco to Malaysia.3

3. Suhrawardi Order: This order is founded by Shihab al Din suhrawardi, a persian by birth, and well known as a writer of Sufism, who died in A.H. 632 (A.D.

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2. Ibid, p.81
3. Rabiya Basri, The Mystic and Her Follow saints in Islam, by Margaret Smith, p, 18
1234-35). He represents the pantheistic development of Sufism, and his teachings are purely mystical. The adherents of this school are found chiefly in Persia and India.¹

4. Maulavi Order: an order which had its origin in Asia Minor is that of the Maulavi, founded by the great Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi, born in Balkh, who died at Konya in A.H. 672 (A.D. 1273). They are known as the 'Breathem of Love'. Because the whole principle of the order has been the love of God, the headship of the Mevlevi order is still in the family of Jalal-al Din and it still has its headquarters at Konia.²

5. Khalwatiyya order: an order of considerable importance found mainly in the east of the Islamic world is that of the Khalwatiyya, who derive their name from their practice of going into threat. This practice was undoubtedly derived from the Christian recluses, and was adopted by the leaders of the mystic orders for themselves and their disciples as being mere adopted than any other means for releasing complete sanctification in this life, and the absorption of the individuality of man in the Essence of God. Junayd, who died at Baghdad in A.H. 198 (A.D. 910-11), is said to have founded an order in these lines, but the real founder of the existent order was one 'Umaral-Khaluti, also a Persian, who died A.H. 800 (A.D. 1397). The adherents of this order are ascetics and mystics, practicing retreats and great austerities. they have spread beyond Persian into Asia Minor, European Turkey, the Hijaz and the Indies.³

¹ Rabiya Basri, The Mystic and Her Follow saints in Islam, by Margaret Smith, p, 187
² ibid, 187
³ ibid, 187
6. The Naqshabandi Order: the origin of this order is generally ascribed to Khawaja Baha'ud-Din Naqshaband, who died in Persia, in 1389 A.D. The word naqshaband literally means an embroiderer or printer on cloth, and as applied to Bahau'd-Din, probably refers to his ancestral profession. Another explanation, however, is given by a Muslim writer whom Rose quotes: "this people (ta'ifa) polish the exterior of their minds and intellects with pictures, and being from the rust and wiles of life are not of those who are captivated by vain colouring of the world as varied as those of the changeful chameleon; and as Naqshaband drew incomparable pictures of the Divine Science and painted figures of Eternal Invention, which are not imperceptible, his followers became celebrated by little of the Naqshbandies, 'The painters'.

1. An Introduction to Sufism, Origin, Philosophy and Development, Masood Ali Khan, S. Ram, p. 87
Socio-Religious Studies of Kābir’s Age

The religious climate of North-India during the early medieval period was characterized by the predominance and popularity of three major factors, namely the precepts of the Advaita Vedanta, tantricism, and Yogic practices with high concentration of Hatha-Yoga). The Advaita Vedanta had acquired a unique status in the eight century and after. Besides finding general acceptance within the Brahmanic fold, its influence had penetrated deep into the Buddhist and Jaina traditions as well. The tantrika beliefs and practices were imbibed by Hindu as well as Buddhist groups. Hatha yoga had assumed a popular form and had led to the formation of important sects which were predominantly yogic in character. Out of the three factors mentioned above, the first shows continued vitality, whereas the other two show signs of either decline or transformation, caused by some form of extremism or another. The licentiousness that had crept into tantricism affected the measures of its popularity, leading to its final decay. Too much emphasis on the physical aspects of yoga caused the need for a reversal to its meditative aspects, and also for the transformation of the yogic sects which had initially concentrated most on Hatha-Yoga. During the later medieval period, the two forces that finally retained their popularity in North-India were the ideology of the Advaita Vedanta and the contemplative aspects of the Yogic tradition. 1

A unique and significant development of the medieval period was the meeting of the Astika and the nastika traditions on a large scale. Kabir's Nirguna School was very much the product of this trend also. Although there had been much interaction between the two earlier, and although there is evidence of mutual assimilation of precepts and practices on both sides, the two had followed separate courses till then, without any instance of one merging or getting transformed into the other. Such a merger and transformation is first seen in the emergence of the Natha-Pantha, and later, in the Nirguna school of Bhakti. The Natha was an offshoot of nastika tradition of the Buddhist Siddhas. But it had upheld many astika values as well. The transformation of the Buddhist Siddha tradition into the Natha pantha come about when Gorakshantha tried to cleanse the former of the tantrika elements by replacing them with the Yogic. His preference for yoga was coupled with astika beliefs in the existence of an eternal Reality (which was clearly rejected in Buddhism) and a broad acceptance of the monistic philosophy. Gorakshanta had also incorporated the cult of siva-worship in his sect which brought the natha-Pantha close to the Saivite sects. These features of the Natha-Pantha, gave it the character of an astika sect in spite of the fact that it had stemmed from the Nastika Buddhist Siddha tradition. Nevertheless, it had retained certain residues of its nastika background as well. The heterogeneous character of the Natha literature is a good indicator of this sect. On the one hand, we have the Natha texts in Sanskrit (the orthodox literary medium for religious writings), and on the other, a sizeable number of verses composed in the different vernaculars of the North. The former must have been for the consumption
of the Brahmins and for giving the sect an honourable status; the later were obviously meant for the means and for popularizing the Natha teachings. 1

The schools of Kabir presents a similar kind of phenomenon of a dynamic combination of the astika and nastika elements. His religion was based on monistic ideas and an impersonal concept of God which had been part and parcel of the astika tradition from the Upanisadic times. But his attitude of questioning the established religious norms and mores, and of rejecting them by the use of reason, shows the influence of the nastikas. His severe attack on the caste system, idol-worship, and ritualism were possible only by adopting the unorthodox spirit of the nastikas. Similarly, his use of the spoken language for communicating ideas, which were conveyed earlier only through the medium of Sanskrit, was also in keeping with the nastika tradition.

There is correct link between the medieval school of Nirguna Bhakti and Natha Pantha. The connecting link is Kabir. The influence of the Natha Pantha on Kabir is generally recognized fact by now. Nevertheless, further exploration is still required regarding the interconnecting between the Buddhist Siddhas and the Natha-Pantha, and between the Natha Pantha and Kabir's movement, for determining the antecedents of the one mentioned last. A clearer understanding of the process of transformation and transmutation of the first two; and of the points of differentiation

of all three, is important in this regard. Gorakshatha had caused the transmutation of
the Siddha practices by launching a religious movement in a new direction; Kabir
had served a similar purpose in relation to the Natha- Pantha. If the Siddha tradition
had lost its vigour because of the preponderance of tantrika practices, the Natha-
Pantha had faced a similar crisis on account of its extreme emphasis on the Hatha-
Yoga. The Natha-Pantha, in its decadent stages, had turned into a sect in which the
physical aspects of Yoga and the external life style of a yogi had become ends in
themselves. Such a development could undermine the importance of the attitude of
the mind and heart in religious pursuits. Kabir replaced the importance of Hatha-
Yoga with that of the emotive element of Bhakti in his school. Since Kabir have
been under the influence of the Natha Pantha, he did use the terminology of Hatha-
Yoga in his verses. But if a total view is taken of his ideas on Yoga, they are related
more to the discipline of the mind than that of the body. He concentrated more on
the state of the Dhayana or constant remembrance, in achieving which, the Yoga of
the body is meant to serve only as a help- mate.1

Kabir lived in the fifteenth century after Christ which was a time of great
political upheaval in India. As is true of many contemporary religious teachers, very
little reliable information concerning Kabir's life is available, though there is no
dearth of legend gathering around him. Kabir's life was centered around Kashi, also
called Banaras (Varanasi). Legend has it that he was actually the son of a Brahmin
widow

1.Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement, A New Perspective, A Study in the History of
Ideas, by Krishna Sharma, p. 21
who abandoned him and that he was found by a Muslim weaver named Niru, he adopted the boy and taught him the weaver's trade. It is not clear whether he ever married, but tradition gives him a wife named Loi and two children. His cast was that of Julaha and from his sayings his caste's hereditary occupation of weaving. On the basis of modern research, it seems probable that Kabir belonged to a family of non-celibate Yogis converted, not long before into a considerable degree superficially to Islam. From the writings of Kabir it seems that his knowledge of Islam was slight rather in his poetical utterances (Bani) a wealth of Hatha Yoga terminology and although structure which bears obvious resemblance to Nath Yogis. Nath yogis in addition to the Yogic conception that all truth is experimental, i.e. to be realized within the body with the aid of psychophysical practices, concentration, control of breathing thus making the body incorruptible and the Yogis immortal.

In fifteenth century Banaras was the seat of Brahmin orthodoxy and their learning center. Brahmins had strong hold on all the spheres of life in this city. Thus Kabir belonging to a low caste of Julaha had to go through immense tough time of preaching his ideology. Kabir and his followers would gather at one place in the city and meditate. Brahmins ridiculed him for preaching to prostitutes and the low castes. Kabir satirically denounced Brahmins and thus won hearts of people around him. There is no doubt that single most famous important person from the city of Banaras today is none other than saint Kabir.

Kabir through his couplets not only reforms the mindset of common villagers and low caste people but give themselves confidence to question Brahmins. It was hundred years after him that Tulsidas broke the hegemony of Brahmins by writing
Ram Charitra Manas, a poem of Ramayana at Banaras which went against the tradition of Brahmin. Kabir was in fact the first person to get against Brahmins and be so successful. Banaras was devastated by an attack by Muslim invader Tamur Lang or Tamur the dame during his time. Kabir also denounced Mullahs and the rituals of bowing towards Kaba five times a day. Because of open condemnation of a established popular religion, Kabir became an object of the wrath of both Hindus and Muslims in and around Banaras to preach his beliefs.¹

In the early medieval period there is hardly any place for jyana and karma in Bhakti in the orthodox sense. Among the followers of the Bhakti form of worship, highest bliss centres round the attainment of the personal God. In the Bhagavata and post Bhagavata period there is emotion of awe in the devotee. It is passionate devotion for personal God which becomes characteristics of Bhakti in India religious Radha appears in the north Indian inscriptions. Her emergence carries further the intrinsic energy. Vaishnava devotees gained the satisfaction of blissful enjoyment of the divine spots. The Saivities too expressed the unqualified devotion for Siva.

During the period under review a few dominant characteristics of Bhakti in Indian religious thought may be noted. The Brahma Sutra was commented upon by Ramanuja, Madhava, Nimbarka and Vishnusvamin (Vallabhacharya) to expound the philosophy of love and piety or Bhakti. Vigorous efforts were directed against the idealistic monism of Sankara, who postulated the sole reality of an attribute less and

unconditional Brahman. In their efforts they succeeded in making a distinction between the devotee and the deity. All of them believed in the Saguna of Brahman. The logic of Madhava can be followed from his statement in the Karma-Nirmaya. He says, "Reason also be adduced to show that Brahman should be conceived as Saguna. It should possess attributes like omniscience in so far as it is creator of everything in the universe. Creatorship pre-supposes full knowledge of the effect to be, its accessories, nature of effort, the expected result, and the putting forth of necessary will and effort to accomplish the word. It follows that the all-creator must be all-knowing, all powerful and capable of accomplishing whatever the wills. This is what "Sagma" stands for "Vaishnavas" of north and south India held Jnana as a constituent of Bhakti. They also were not in favour of the caste system. Devotion, and not caste, was necessary for earning the love of God. Bhakti egalitarianism is the characteristic of Saivites, Vaishnavites, Nath-Yogis and the non-Smarta followers of northern India. ¹

Ramananda did away the insular social behavior of the Hindus by throwing his spiritual door wide open for members of all castes. The observance of caste rule was not necessary for devotion to God. Religion now became a question of faith, emotion and devotion. As a result of his teaching a member of the despised class could reach his God without an intermediary. Ramananda called his disciples avadhuts (the emancipated ones), as they had liberated themselves from the fetters of social disciples. But Anantatnada, Kabir, Pipa, Ramananda, sukha, Sursura,

¹. Society and Culture in Medieval India. By A. Rashid, p.240
Padmavati, Naravari, Ravidas, Dhanna, Sadhna and the wife of Sursura were the famous twelve disciples.

Some of his disciples belonged to lower caste. Dhanna was a jat peasant of Rajputana. Sadhna was a barber at the court of the king of Bandhangarh, modern Rewa. Ravidas was a choonar (shoe maker). Ramananda broadened the intellect of inequality. He counted among his disciples a Rajput queen. The origin of the Nagas, who were ascetics and practiced seclusion, and the Samyogis, who married and lived together. They mostly belonged to the Sudra caste, but some wore the triple cord of the high classs Hindu, and styled themselves as Gour Brahmans.

According to the Bhaushya Purana, Ramananda took back into the Hindu fold many people who were converted to Islam. These re-converts were called Samyogis (the reunited). Some historians hold that Ramananda did give up caste-distincetion altogether. But others opine that "it was only certain of the religious restrictions of caste that were relaxed." Ramananda in his Ananda Bhashya does not recognize the right of Sudra to read the Vedas. "And in matters of social concern, he could not be expected to caste off the sense of superiority of a Hindu over a Mohammadan and of one belonging to regenerate classes (dwijas) over a Sudra. It was left to Kabir, a Muslim disciple of Ramananda, in whom the new thought found its full expression."

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 fight took place between Muslims Sultans and Hindu kings, as a result 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 land-lords 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.¹

With the emergence of Islam in India, Hinduism received a rude shock. The Muslim ruler not only crushed a number of religious movements and temples of Hindus, but also tried to convert people to Islam by extending them certain concessions. 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 religion. They were unable to protect themselves and even their self-respect.

The Hindu rulers of Rajasthan and Vijayanagara seeing a serious threat to the existence of Hinduism turned champions of the Hindu Dharma. With a view to

¹. Society and Culture in Medieval India. By A. Rashid, p.244
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 Bhakti Movement.

At the time of Kabir, there were a number religious, preaching different dharmas, traditions and methods, but they were contradictory and inter twisted. In those days every religion was divided into different branches. The followers of each religion considered their religion unique and superior to other religions. Nath panth, 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.

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.

Before Kabir, Sufism was in a good position in Iran. The famous mystic poet Jalaluddin (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 Suhruvardhee. The Chistee was propagated by Quaja Moinuddin Chistee in the 12th century A.D. and the second sect by Bahauddin
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 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 or praying to many Gods. Muslims believed only in ekeswaropasana of the Muslims. There were other differences also. Hindus believed in caste system, whereas Hindus called Muslims opposed it. From the Islamic point of view, Hindus were kaphirs, whereas Hindus called Muslims mlechchas. Political power was in hands of Muslims; so they oppressed Hindus in different ways. The clash and enmity between these two religions painted Kabir much. He tried for unity and harmony between Hinduism and Islam, throughout his life.