Chapter - 3

POLITICAL SET UP OF MEDIEVAL PERIOD AND KABIR'S IDEAS ON IT
Kabir came to life in the closing period of Afghan rule (1350 - 1325 A.D.). This was the period when Sultanate of Delhi had grown extremely weak. The provincial rulers had revolted and established their own free rules in their territories. Bengal had declared its freedom during the very rule of Mohammed Tugluk. Subedar of Bengal, Fakruddin had revolted against the domination of Delhi and founded his own free kingdom. Though Firoj Shah Tuglak tried his level best to bring Bengal under the rule of Delhi, yet he could not succeed in his attempt.

The period of Firoj Shah Tuglak saw the emergence of the free state of Jaunpur. In the fifteenth Century Sultan of Jaunpur had made them very strong. The successors of Malik-Us-Shark (the ruler of the east) were well known for their prosperous state. Even Behar was under the rule of Jaunpur Sultanate. Politically the rule of Jaunpur might have not been significant in the history of India, but culturally its role cannot be ignored.

Malwa was ruled by a Khilji Subedar who declared his independence in 1409. Hunsh Shah became the first ruler of Malwa. He made Bhawaddo his capital, but Malwa
could get a place of significance till Sultan Mohmood.

In 1401 Jafar Khan, the subedar of Gujrat declared his independence and sat on the throne with title of Shah. Ahmad Shah (1411-1441 A.D.) founded the city of Ahmadabad which was also made capital later on. Every possible effort was made to decorate it richly.

The Bahmani dynasty had already founded its kingdom in the south. The role of Hasan Gangoo in the history of its foundation, is vital. The capital of this state was Daulatabad1.

Indian people ever apprehended new invasion. The age of Tuglak rule was like a deep wound in the heart of Indian people. The memory of change of capital, wish to win Iran, currency of copper coins, senseless massacre etc. was still fresh in their minds, and Firoj Shah Tuglak was an object of criticism among the people for his narrowness and religious orthodoxy. The imposition of Paul Tax on the Brahmins not only frightened Brahmins, but it also struck common Hindus with terror. He put countless Hindus to sword2. His daily routine included demolishing of temples3 and erecting mosques:

3. S.R. Sharma - The history of Muslim Rule in India, p. 93.
on the sites of temples, breaking religious idols to pieces, striping Hindus of their skins and senseless bloodshed\(^1\). It is said that a Brahmin was reduced to ashes only for his negligence to Islam\(^2\).

Scourge of misfortunes increased on the people. In the tradition of cruelty Taimur's invasion (1398) was the foretelling of imminent Doomsday. The cruelty of the kings of Tuglak dynasty broke the back bone of Hindus and bloody battles and loot and plunder of the time of Tamur's invasion completely ruined the remaining prestige of Hindus. This thing also gave shattering blow to Hindureligion and economy. He himself writes in autobiography: "All once Hindus were made prisoners. There was no way out except to put them to sword...when this order reached Islamic warriors, they drew their swords and slew their respective prisoners\(^3\).

\begin{enumerate}
\item Same, p. 93
\item P.D. Gupta - Medieval India, p. 78.
\item S.R. Sharma. The history of Muslim Rule in India, p. 159.
\end{enumerate}
A wave of terror spread in all directions. Besides heavy destruction of wealth, lives and honour, a mighty wave of frustration and disappointment swept over the people. Taking his clues from the statement of Yazadi, the famous historian S.R. Sharma writes: "Delhi was plundered thoroughly. Several places of Jahan Panai and Siri were demolished. Heads of Hindus were slain and trunks were left for wild feasts and birds."\(^1\)

A true picture of how cruel politics had become on account of Taimur's religious orthodoxy can be obtained from his own words: "My aim of invading India was to punish infidels (Kafirs) and it was also aimed at destroying adoration of multi Gods and idol worship, for making Gazi and Mujahid"\(^2\). How much he succeeded in his aim can be seen in the words of a historian: 'while returning from India every soldier of his army carried with him one hundred women, one hundred men and one hundred children as slaves'\(^3\).

In brief it may be said that invasion of Taimur

\[\text{References:}\]

1. S.R. Sharma - The history of Muslim Rule in India, p. 159.
2. Eliat and Darshan Granth III, p. 337.
3. Dr. Ishwari Prasad - Medieval India, p. 337.
was a bolt from the blue not only on Hindus but also on all the inhabitants of the country. It spread poverty, anarchy and frustration in the country. It struck a severe blow on the head of Hindu religion. Delhi lost its grace and glory. The city that remained as a chief centre of glory for about two centuries, was now reduced to humble state of provincial capital.

It was an extremely narrow period for the country. In such a period the rule of Delhi passed to the hands of Lodi dynasty. Bahlol Khan Lodi left no stone unturned to bring the whole country, under one rule once again. But all in vain. Those days Delhi was weak and Bahmani state, Gujrat Malwa, Jaunpur and Bengal had become more powerful, several Rajput states of Rajputana were increasing their power and strengthening their fortification. The Rana of Mewar was more powerful than any Mohamdan Sultan in northern India.

Hindu Kings lying between Malwa and Gujrat were taking part in the battles going on between the rulers of Gujrat and Malwa. The area lying between these two Muslim states was ruled by Rajput kings. Kings from Abu to Ranthambhore were in one military alliance which was
headed by Rana (of Guhilot dynasty) of Mewar - Gujrat had often to face the on slaught of Rana. The fort of Ajaigarh built on the hill of Abu had put a limitation to Muslim power on one side\textsuperscript{1}.

Once again the old royal dynasties of India organised (them-selves in the leadership of Rana of Mewar, and waged war against Sultans of Delhi, Gujrat and Malwa. This conflict was successful to a great extent. In the beginning of 16th century Rana Sanga sat on the throne. His chivalry and generalship, gave new courage and inspiration to Rajputs. This brave Rajput warrior snatched Bayana, Daupur and Gwalior from Lodi sultan of Delhi and extended his kingdom upto Piliakhal near Agra. Rana also annexed in his kingdom northern Malwa and Chanderi after defeating Muslim Sultans of Malwa and Gujrat. After this he invaded Gujrat and occupied the whole area adjoining Idar, Ahmad Nagar and Badgaon. In the beginning of 16th century when Kabir died Rana Sanga fully established himself in northern India. At this time Muslim rule was waning away\textsuperscript{2}.

\begin{itemize}
  \item 1. Satya Ketu Vidyalankar - Indian culture and its history, p. 467.
  \item 2. Same, p. 467-468.
\end{itemize}
Military leaders and Kazis were in high regard among Muslims. It was the duty of every 'phamdan to destroy in-fields. If in this pious work they die, they are sure to go to heaven. In this way Ulemas were filling Muslim soldiers with feeling of fanaticism.

Afgan rulers were sole monarchs. There was no body to question their sovereignty, yet at time they used to consult military leaders and nobles. Sabhas like Ghare khasand Ghare Aam' were in existence then. They were on par with "Deewane Khas and 'Deewane Aam' of Mugal period. In Ghare Khas' the king, the nobles and other important persons used to participate, and Ghare Aam was meant for the common people Ghare Aam' was the court of Justice, and it was here where Sultan gave his decisions and issued his orders of justice. There was also a special kingd of Sabha called 'Majlise Khatnat' in which important officers, military commanders and nobles used to take part. The Sultan consulted them on important issues of the state. Sultan used to select some particular persons to consult. But to follow or not to follow the advice and suggestion depended on the will of the King.

References:
1. Same, p. 471.
In this connection there must be some mention about Sultan Sikandar Khan Lodi whose relation with Kabir is established on the evidence of popular myth and other internal evidences. When Sikandar Khan took the charge of the state after Bahlol Khan, a new wave of tyrannical oppression was started on Hindus who began to be slain and slaughtered like animals. His religious fanaticism was so violent that he use to slay fifteen hundred Hindus every day\(^1\). He might have attempted to kill Kabir.

Major portion of Sikandar's time was spent in fighting against rebels. His fanaticism completely destroyed the grace and glory of Delhi.

The shape of sovereignty or administration:

All the Muslim Sultans of the age of Kabir were absolute monarchs and wire tyrant. There was no power or organisation which can keep their absolute monarchy and tyrannical power within prescribed limit of humanity. The command of Sultan was the law of the Kingdom, and his decision in cases of Justice unquestioned and supreme. All the sultans were of the opinion that they

were representative of God, and like Supreme Authority they were not ready to accept any control over them.

Only military commanders, Ulema and Kazis were given high regard. "To destroy 'Kafirs' was the prescribed duty of every Mohamdan. Ulema used to inspire Mulsim soldiers with this feeling."¹

Though Afgan Sultans were quite absolute monarchs, yet they consulted nobles and military commanders on important issues. There were two Sabhas called 'ghare Khas' and 'ghare Aam' which had the status of 'Deewane Khas' and 'Deewane Aam' of the Mugal period. 'ghare has was meant for the chief of the state, nobles and military commanders, while 'ghare Aam' was intended for the common people. Suit for justice were field in 'ghare Aam' and in it Sultan took decisions of them. There was also a special kind of Sabha called 'Majlise Khatant'. This was attended by the chief officers of the state, military commanders and other big bugs, but there was no prescribed rule for the membership of 'Majlise Khatant'. Sultan used to select a particular person of his own choice to consult, but he was not bound to follow advice and suggestion.

¹ Satya Ketu Vidyalankar - Indian culture and its history, p. 471.
It is needless to say that Kabir was not destined for politics, and at the same there was no chance for such a pigmy sized man of society to take part in political conflicts. But he was not blind to happenings that were taking place daily in his surroundings. He had a sharp mind and kind heart. He had no care for any 'Sultan' or Vazir, Yet their tyranny was great source of trouble to him. Bad effect of their policy on the masses and degradation of social life pained him very much.

Perhaps the rulers of that time never cared for the welfare of the masses. But the falling standard of the subject people was a great shock to Kabir. The partiality and tyranny\(^1\) of the sovereign power had its worst on the people. The representation of the subject was contained in the hands of Muslims\(^2\) who were made for the destruction of 'Kafirs' Hindu rulers were attacking Muslim rulers in relation. The attacks of Hindu kings on Gujrat and Malwa were for the betterment of the public life.

\[\text{\underline{\text{\ref{footnote}}}:::}\]
\[1. \text{ Nahar - Ex Medieval India, p. 769.}\]
\[2. \text{ Same, p. 707.}\]
The country was frequently invaded even before the Muslim rule in India, but religious fanaticism played no part in the massacres that took place here. In fact religious fanaticism of the rulers of the period was only for political gain. The nature of Hindu invasion was meant for retaliation, and fanatical cruelty was contained in the nature of the Muslim rules.

Political cruelty was a thorn in the flesh of Kabir. The rulers either thought of the protection of their sovereignty only or led by the desire of extending the boundaries of their kingdoms and Islam. Often they passed their time in fierce struggle. There was no reign to their absolute power. They could sacrifice the subjects without a moment's thought to satisfy their rash demands. Their desire for luxurious life had no thought of the good for the people. Their avarice could permit them for rash action. Bloodshed was their pastime, cheating, deception, swindling, cruelty, false pride and luxury etc. are the prominent trends of the period. A wave of mad excitement was sweeping throughout the whole.

country lashing the people severely. People earning their bread through hard labour were afraid of their cruel gestures.

Special kind of taxes imposed on the people was a bolt from the blue on social unity. Religious fanaticism was serving as an intoxicant in politics. Kabir, too, was an organ of the society. He was brought up in a Muslim family, but he could not remain indifferent to the sufferings of the people. His sensitive heart felt pinch of their pain, and it was this that gave utterance to his inner feelings of pain. In his Bani we find outpourings of bitter criticism towards sultans and Ranas. In Kabir's criticism we find the general discontent of the people and frustration and disappointment of the age.

Fear, criticism and devotion were the implements which were used remove social disparities. He also showed that bloodshed and tyrannical oppression in the mad rush for worldly gain are foolish and meaningless, because worldly gain is not lasting. Physical body of man too, is in constant, and any time it may return to dust. Every body will have to part from here Life on this earth is not permanent. Death will put his icy hand
on the rich and the poor and on the king the poor slave alike. Worldly gain and grandeur will not keep company while leaving this earthly sojourn.¹

Through these 'Viraktoktis' Kabir has made several attacks on pomps and shows of the political life of the period. On one side Kabir saw such people as were crushed hard under the heavy load of wants, and on the other he saw people rolling in wealth. Big, elephants stood in front of their palaces spreading smell of their affluence. They were quite free from all kinds of cares and batherations of this world.

Kabir Bani is the mirror of the age. It has already been stated that the taste and temper of sultans and Ranas of the period was beneficial to social life. They were filled with fanaticism and false pride. Kabir has made no mention of the conflicts between Rana and Sultan. He felt no need of it, because he was neither doing works of history nor was he composing an Epic. His Bani has no description of the historical events, but it rather presents a faint picture of that age. Instead of depicting historical facts about sultans, Rana, Kings,

¹ Kabir, Page 21-sakh 5.
Nobles etc. he had indicated towards those facts and trends that had deep impact on social life. The only weapon that had the historical truth to Kabir, Bani to bring these supermen on the path of virtue, was to remind them of transitoriness of their power and self. If sultan prided himself on his sovereignty, Rana was proud of his might and chivalry. Kabir roused both Sultan and Rana from their slumber. It seemed to Kabir that the mighty kings probably think that they are safe in strong forts and fortresses. So he asked—"Do you think that you destroy fortification of others and your forts and fortification cannot be ruined? Have you forgotten the Rana of death called 'Yama'? It is he who will destroy the fort of your body, so banishing your pride remember your creator."¹

One can imagine from this that the sultanate of Delhi had grown extremely weak and Rana had made himself considerably strong. During the period of Ranas of Kabir's age many fortresses were built. These forts won country wide popularity. Besides this Ranas established their power by occupying many other forts. This gives the historical truth to Kabir Bani.

¹ K. br. Page. 21-3.
The rulers of the age of Kabir had their own categories. The sultan of Delhi was considered the greatest among them. But Rana was more famous for his power and prestige. Besides this small rulers known as Kshatrapati Raja, Rao etc. also were in existence. Perhaps Raja and Rao were the title of the rulers. Generally the Muslim rulers liked to be called 'Badshah' and Hindu rulers wore the title of 'Kshatrapati, Raja, Rana, Rao etc.

The age of Kabir was a period of struggles and conflicts worst fanaticism had entered into politics. In the country every day a fresh battle was in the offing. The chief causes that led to frequent battles were the desire to extend the boundaries of the dominion, protection of the state and the desire to spread religion in other provinces and states. Then, Islam enjoyed the honour of being the state religion. Hinduism being the religion of infidels was looked down upon by Muslims. Muslim rulers inspired their soldiers with such word:- He is a true warrior who fights for cause of his

own religion and is sacrificed on the alter of religion. Kabir had broadened the narrow feeling of religion by defining warriors in these words:–

"Sura so pahachaniye ju larai dina ke heta,
Puraja puraja kati marai tabahun na chhare khet

Like today those days, too, attack and defence were the two aspects of a battle. At the time of attack scattered soldiers were assembled on one place. The soldiers meant for defence assembled inside the fort, and those who were intended for attack surrounded the fort. Horses and elephants were used as a means of transport. Iron saddles were put on the backs of the horses and on the backs of elephants both saddles and 'hauda' were kept. Warriors rode on such horses and elephants.

Swords, lances, arrows and bows were the main weapons of soldiers. Cannons and cannon balls have also
been mentioned in Kabir bani, some critics think that explosives had not been invented by the time of Kabir. So it is treated as an interpolation. But this reference of Kabir is not spurious and is proved by history. Explosives were in use by the time of Kabir.

Both the age and the literature are dominated by the social consciousness. So in literature both prominent trends and self expression are found. Great men of a particular period are born according to the need of that age, and it is they who bring the social life in order. It is this that established the importance of human values in the society.

In every way Kabir was the product of his own age that badly scourged the lives of Hindu masses. Different cults and sects that harped on their own string had put the people in great dilemma. Kabir came in a difficult period to guide the masses caught in a strange mess and gave shattering blow to ill practices and false shows.

To understand properly the literature of the age in which Kabir was born to do important services to Hindu masses, needs a cursory glance over diverse trends and strands of the period, because literature mirrors every aspect of the age.
Here it is important to know that History differs from literature, though a faint picture of history can be seen in literature. Literature has deep relation with human life since the very time of its creation and it will keep this relation till it lasts. Every aspect and values can be seen in it. The study of literature opens the mystery of its age, because artist can keep himself aloof from the current tendencies of his age. To understand properly the works of a particular creative artist requires through study of the political, social, religious and literary streams of his period.

Political condition:

The middle of the 14th century had seen the rule of Tuglak dynasty. Before Tuglaks the country had groaned pitiously under the iron heel of the slave dynasty. The rule of Mohamad Tuglak was the period of sorrows and sufferings for the subject people of the country. His ambition to win world, change of capital, currency of copper coins and cruel massacre of Hindu lives had posed great danger and hardship to the subject people. Famine epidemic, thoughtless bloodshed had fear and frustration among the people. The frequent scourge of famine had made life unbearable. Firoj Shah Tuglak
was a narrow minded man who was notorious for his orthodox belief and cruelty.

A religious tax called 'Doli Tax' was imposed upon Brahmins. This nonsense fanaticism put many innocent and pious Hindus to sword. Those who ascended the throne after Firoj, were also cruel, unjust, fanatic and lover of luxurious lives. As such a dark period of the country the sudden invasion of Tamur came upon the people like a bolt from the blue. This invasion not only destroyed completely the peace and prestige of Hindus, but the cruelty of its hastry massacre crossed all human bounds. Men, women, children—all fell victim to his soldiers. Anarchy and poverty prevailed over the country. Tamur accepted clearly that his invasion meant for punishing Kafirs, destroying worship of multi gods and idol worship and the establishing 'Gazi' and yuwahic.

Prominent historians think that the soldiers of Tamur's army killed lacs of innocent persons, raped thousands and thousands of women, put countless orphans to sword and razed innumerable temples to ground. When they returned they carried with hundreds of beautiful

1. Alius and Dausan Page 337.
women, men and children as slaves. Perhaps the army of Tamur did the same despicable work that was recently repeated by Pak army in Bangladesh. Which recently emerged as a sovereign state.

After this ruinous invasion the reign of Delhi went into the hands of lodi dynasty. Bahlol lodi during his short rule, tried again to bring the whole country into one rule, but his efforts of uniting the country was made useless by the lack of foresight, foolishness and fanaticism of his heir Sikandar lodi. It is said that to propagate his religion he killed 1500 Hindus per day. The famous historian S.R. Sharma writes in his Crescent in India that Hindu temples were demolished and inns were erected on their sites. Idols and images of temples were sent to slaughter houses. Restrictions were imposed on the religious festivals and functions of Hindus.

In such a difficult political situation such a leader was needed, as can ably guide the people and protect the honour and religion. The age for this difficult work, inspired Kabir who saved the bark of Hinduism from drowning into the deep sea of evil. These
political conditions had their impact on Indian social life in different ways.

1. From the degraded state of religious life of Indian people emerged the strong current of reformation that produced Gorakh Nath who started the cult of 'Nath Panth'. In south Lingayata' and 'Siddha pantha' came into being. They aimed at bringing harmony between Hinduism and Islam. Latter on Kabir and Jayasi completed this work with their immortal literature.

2. In social life Purda system was striking deeper root. It was on account of Muslim impact and the fear that Mohamdns might not indulge into lustful atrocity with Hindu ladies. In such an atmosphere a strong wave of frustration swallowed the Hindu Social life. Stone made gods and Goddesses were unable to help them. So the general tendency of the people was diverted towards 'Nirgunopasana'.

3. The people began to live life of poverty in deep frustration. So the general mentality turned from politics to 'Nirgunopasana'.
The political atmosphere of the country being unfavourable Kabir became pivotal point of guidance to the people. Hindus were swept by a strong current of frustration. In such a narrow time the need of a guide was felt by the people. It was Kabir who filled this vacuum and served the purpose of guidance. There was no other alternative for Hindus. Their temples were razed to ground in broad day light, holy images and idols were broken to pieces and they were powerless to do anything. So their confidence in God, too, weakened. Their faith in Nirankar Bramha was growing more and more. There was none to guide Hindus. Kabir was true to his faith. When ever his faith was in danger he raised his voice against it. But he bore no malice either to Hindus or to Mohamdnans. His heart was always filled with the welfare of the society. Kabir always wished that everybody should be happy and prosperous. Kabir chose the path of truth. Ahimsa and love long before Mahatma Gandhi. So it is not wrong to call Kabir a leader of the people. It the people had lost their ways in the thick darkness he showed the light. Thus kabir won the general confidence and love of the people. To call Kabir people's leader is not an exaggeration.