



3. Religious Synthesis

Diversity of languages and religions is an important characteristic of the Indian society. Considering this feature, the Indian Constitution has adopted the principle of secularism. In medieval India, too, attempts to bring about religious synthesis in social life were made on the basis of this principle. Among these efforts, the Bhakti movement, Sikhism and the Sufi sect have a significant place. These different streams of thought arose in different parts of India. They emphasized harmony between the different sects and religions along with devotion to God. We shall study them in this chapter.

Initially, rituals and *brahmadnyan* were greatly emphasized in the Indian religious life. In the medieval period, they gave way to *Bhakti Marg* – the path of devotion. *Bhakti Marg* did not give undue importance to hierarchies, which further facilitated religious synthesis. In the different regions of India, we find different forms of the path of devotion, according to the local situation there. The Bhakti movement used the common people's language instead of Sanskrit. This helped the development of regional languages.

Bhakti Movement : It is believed that the Bhakti movement originated in South India. The Naynar and Alawar Bhakti movements emerged in this region. The Naynars were devotees of Shiva, while the Alawars were devotees of Vishnu. There were also attempts to consider Shiva and Vishnu as one and the same and bring them together. 'Harihar' idols which depict half Vishnu and half Shiva were produced in this period on a large scale. People belonging to all social strata had participated in these Bhakti movements. They preached values like love of God, humanity,

compassion, mercy, etc. Ramanuja and other *Acharyas* strengthened the base of the Bhakti movement in South India. They told people that God is for all. God does not discriminate. The teachings of Ramanuja had a great impact in North India also.

Sant Ramanand strengthened the *Bhakti* movement in North India. Sant Kabir is a



Sant Kabir

well-known sant in the *Bhakti* movement. He did not attach any importance to places of pilgrimage, *vratas* or idol worship. For him, Truth was God. He taught that all human beings are equal. He did not believe in any differences based on caste, creed, sect and religion. He wanted to bring about Hindu and Muslim unity. He criticized the extremely orthodox people in both Hindu and Muslim religions in strong terms.

In Bengal, Chaitany Mahaprabhu underlined the importance of *Krishnabhakti*. Due to his teachings, people joined the *Bhakti* movement in transcending the boundaries of caste and creed. Under his influence, Shankaradeva spread the *Bhakti* movement in Assam. Narsi Mehta was a renowned Vaishnawa Sant in Gujarat. He was an ardent devotee of Krishna. He gave the message of equality. He is known as the first poet of the Gujarati language.

Sant Mirabai stressed the importance of devotion to Krishna. She belonged to the royal family of Mewad. She renounced all pleasures of the royal family and immersed herself in devotion to Krishna. She composed devotional verses in Rajasthani and Gujarati. Her devotional verses give the



message of devotion, tolerance and humanity. Sant Sena was an influential Sant. Sant Rohidas was a great Sant. He gave the message of equality and humanity. Surdasa, a great poet of Hindi literature, composed the poetical work 'Sursagar'. Devotion to Krishna (Krishnabhakti) is the subject of his work. The verses on Krishnabhakti composed by the Muslim Sant Raskhan are melodious. 'Ramcharita-Manasa' of Sant Tulshidas is a beautiful composition expressing devotion to Rama.

In Karnataka, Mahatma Basaveshwar spread the *lingayat* stream of thought. He opposed the caste system and stressed the dignity of labour.



Mahatma Basaveshwar

'Kayakave Kailas' is his well-known saying which means 'Work is Kailas' (Work is worship). He encouraged women's participation in his movement. Men and women belonging to all castes began to participate in the religious discussions conducted in the hall 'Anubhava Mantapa'. Mahatma Basaveshwar conveyed his teachings in the language of the people, i.e., Kannada, through the medium of 'Vachana' literature. His work had a great impact on society. His followers have composed their work in Marathi also. Of these compositions, 'Paramarahasya' composed by Manmath Swami is very well-known. Great sants in Karnataka include Pamp, Purandardasa and others. They composed many devotional verses in Kannada.

Mahanubhav Panth : In the thirteenth century, Chakradhar Swami founded the 'Mahanubhav Panth' in Maharashtra. This sect preaches devotion to Krishna. Shri Govind Prabhu was the Guru of Chakradhar Swami. The followers of Chakradhara included men and women belonging to all



Chakradhar Swami Marathi language. Many works were composed in Marathi.

This sect mainly spread in the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra. Riddhipur in Vidarbha is an important place for people of this sect. This sect had reached up to faraway regions like the Punjab and Afghanistan.



Do you know?

Some of the main compositions of the followers of the Mahanubhav Panth are : The treatise 'Leelacharitra' compiled by Mhaimbhat describing the deeds of Chakradhar Swami; 'Dhavale' of the first Marathi poetess Mahadamba, 'Sutrapath and Drishtantapath' compiled by Keshobas, 'Vacchaharan' of Damodar Pandit, 'Shishupalvadha' of Bhaskarbhat Borikar and 'Rukmini Swayamvara' of Narendra.



Do you know?

A conversation between a Hindu and a Muslim written by Sant Eknath is important from the viewpoint of religious harmony. The famous quote of Sant Shaikh Mohammad 'शेख महंमद अविंध । त्याचे हृदयी गोविंद ॥' is an example of this religious harmony.

Guru Nanak : Guru Nanak was the founder of Sikhism and the first guru of Sikhs. His work has to be mentioned as a great attempt at religious synthesis. He visited the holy places of both Hindus and



Guru Nanak

Muslim unity. He emphasized chaste behaviour.

Many people were influenced by the teachings of Guru Nanak. The number of his followers increased day by day. The followers of Guru Nanak are known as 'Sikhs' (*Shishyas*) meaning 'disciples'. The 'Aadigrantha', also known as the 'Guru Granth Sahib' is the Holy Book of the Sikhs. The Aadigrantha includes compositions by Guru Nanak, Sant Namdeo, Sant Kabir and other Sants. Guru Nanak was succeeded by nine Gurus of the Sikhs. Guru Gobindsingh was the

Muslims. He had also visited Mecca. He realised that the feeling of devotion is common everywhere. He taught that all persons should be treated equally. His teachings aimed at achieving Hindu-Muslim unity.

tenth Guru of the Sikhs. After Guru Gobindsingh, Sikhs regard the 'Guru Granth Sahib' as their Guru, as per the orders of Guru Gobindsingh.

The Sufi Sect : This is a sect in Islam. The Sufi saints believed that God is full of love and the only way to reach him is through love and devotion. Their main teachings are love for all living beings, meditation and simple living. Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, Shaikh Nijamuddin Avaliya were great Sufi Saints. The teachings of Sufi Saints led to unity in the Hindu and Muslim communities. Sufi music has made valuable contribution to Indian music.

The path of *Bhakti* taught by the Sants was easy to follow for the common people. The *Bhakti* movement was open to all men and women. The Sants expressed their thoughts in the language of the people. The common people found them close to their heart. The *Bhakti* movement has contributed greatly to the making of the Indian Culture.



Exercise

1. Write the related word.

- (1) Mahatma Basaveshwar : Karnataka
Sant Meerabai :
- (2) Ramananda : North India
Chaitanya Maha Prabhu :
- (3) Shri Chakradhar :
Shankaradeva :

2. Make a chart to show the people and works related to -

- (1) *Bhakti* movement
- (2) Mahanubhav Panth
- (3) Sikhism

3. Write about it in your own words.

- (1) Sant Kabir became a renowned Sant in the *Bhakti* movement.
- (2) The impact of Mahatma Basaveshwar's work on society.

4. Complete the following names.

G _ _ _ G _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
S _ _ _ _ S _
G _ _ _ N _ _ _ _
M _ _ m _ _ _ _ _ m _
M _ _ _ _ _ i
R _ _ _ n _ n _
K _ _ i _
P _ _ p

Activity

Obtain a devotional song in the tradition of Sufi music and present it in a cultural programme.

