

KABĪR'S CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS HARMONY

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Religion is derived from the Latin words 're' and 'legere or ligare' which means to 'bind back'. It is the binding of human beings to each other in bonds of love and sympathy and also to God. Religion forms the most important component of human social life. It is an almost universal phenomenon in all human societies, whether primitive and simple or advanced and sophisticated.

Religion has been the healing balm of people for centuries. It has been a binding force that unites people together. Radhakrishnan says, "Religion is a social cement, a way in which men express their aspirations and find solace for their frustrations." But at the same time one cannot overlook the fact that there is no vice or crime that has not been committed in the name of religion. Religion has created a lot of hostility and intolerance in human beings. It has divided people into various groups and sects thereby giving rise to oppressive and exploitative socio-economic order. Mass massacres and gruesome acts have been done in the name of religion. For example, The Anti-Sikh Riots of 1984 after the assassination of Indira Gandhi led to a huge amount of chaos and bloodshed in Delhi as well as other parts of India and most of the violence was directed against the Sikhs, the partition of India in the name of religion, the Bombay Riots of 1992-93 due to the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh triggered religious conflicts between the Hindus and the Muslims and many more.

From time immemorial India has been a land of diverse culture, traditions, language and Religion. It has witnessed great many saints, thinkers and reformers like Tukaram, Guru Nanak, Mira bai, Saibaba, Kabīr, Swami Vivekananda and many more. They have been instrumental in delivering the message of peace, harmony, brotherhood and co-existence that is so well rooted in our culture.

Among these saints, Kabīr seems to be the most prominent revolutionary saint who tried to unite the Hindus and the Muslims. He is associated with the Bhakti movement of North and Central India which started around 14th century. According to a prevailing legend he was the son of a Brahmin widow but was adopted by a Muslim weaver Niru and his wife Nima. Kabir was a disciple of Ramanand and the most liberal medieval reformer. He

considered all religions as one and aimed at bringing about harmony among all communities specially the Hindus and Muslims. He often joined in the theological and philosophical arguments that his master held with Brahmans and Sufis at Banares. However he had no desire to attach himself to any organized religion be it Hinduism or Islam. Thus the only identification given by him was that of a "weaver of Benaras" and a "son of Rāma and Allāh". He was not interested in formulating any system of thought but emphasized the religion of bhakti without connecting to any particular incarnation. He was against all types of rituals, rites, and ceremonies. He rejected the outward signs of Hinduism, e.g. the sacred thread, the distinction of caste, the ritual observances of temple worship, etc., and his references to Muslim authorities and institution (e.g. the Qur'an, circumcision, pilgrimage, the Mulla, the Qadi, etc.). From Sufism he assimilated the concept of deep personal love for the impersonal absolute and from Vedanta the concept of Nirguna Brahman-the unconditional absolute, Atman, maya and oneness of Brahman and Atman were assimilated by him. Thus he tried to seek the supreme being as 'Nirguna Rama' through personal devotion. Thus he represented God as the omnipresent reality and the human soul can attain union with God by way of loving devotion. Mere knowledge or ceremonial observances are of no use. His doctrines were accepted by many of whom the unlettered persons formed the majority.

Unity of God, Omnipresence and Humanity

Kabīr adopted the strong monotheism of Islam and under the influence of Sufism rejected idolatry, image worship and polytheism. As a result, he at first taught and emphasized the unity (tawhid) of God. Hence Kabīr says:

He is one: there is no second (**Bijak Śabda 43**); also cf. **Q.2.255; 3.2-4, 6; 112. 1; etc**) Rama, Khuda, Sakti, Siva, are one: tell me, Pray, How will you distinguish them? (**Bijak, Śabda 48**).

Kabīr tells us that though God is referred by different names like Rama, Hari, Shiva, Allah, He is essentially one and the same truth. It does not matter much by what name we call Him.

Kabīr also elaborates the theme of God's omnipresence and criticizes the narrow-mindedness of two communities who try to keep God confined to their respective places. Kabīr asserts that God is universal and is present everywhere especially in the human heart.

Hari's dwelling in the east: Allah's abode is in the west. Seek Him in your heart: there see Him: there is Karim and Rama. . (Bijak, Śabda 97)

The second great principle of Islām which Kabīr accepted under the influence of Sūfism is Egalitarianism that is the principle of equality of all men. God resides in the heart of every human being and therefore the distinction class, caste and religion does not hold good. All human beings are equal.

Karma, Samsāra and Māyā

Kabīr adopted the two fundamental doctrines of Hinduism, namely, *Karma* (actions : good or bad) and *samsāra* (transmigration of the soul). According to him, man is bound by his actions, and every action produces good or bad consequences. As a punishment for evil deeds man is born in a lower state of life in his next birth. This weary rounds of births and rebirths goes on till the chain of *samsāra* is cut through the results of good actions, and thus salvation is achieved. Thus Kabīr says:-

I was in immobile and mobile creatures,
in worms and in moths;
I passed through many births of various kinds.
In this way I occupied many bodies,
But when, O God, I assumed *human* birth,
I was a yogī, a jaī, a penitent, a Brahmachārī,
Sometimes a king, an emperor, and sometimes
a beggar (**Ādi Granth, Gaurī 13**).

Kabīr also adopted the concept of Māyā from Hinduism. Māyā is an evil force which alienates man from God. According to Kabīr, this world is a fact but it is not permanent. It is transitory. So one should not get attached to it. It is because of māyā one is deluded and hence considers this world as real and permanent. Consequently men are not released from the toils of *Karma*. God alone is permanent and the only reality.

Man can unite with God only when he obtains release from the grip of Karma and Samsāra. The external ceremonies and observances of the religious systems of the Hindus and the Muslims will not help one to get rid of the Karma and Samsāra. It is only by worshipping God with whole hearted devotion and pure heart one can be liberated from the shackles of Karma and Samsāra.

Bhakti, Submission to God, Fate and Guru

Kabīr preached the bhakti marg without referring to any specific religion. This bhakti marg or the path of devotion can be followed by any person irrespective of class, caste, and religion. It consist of repeatedly chanting the name of God. For this one has to purify ones heart by driving out all the negative emotions for God resides in every human heart. Not only this but to receive the grace of God, one has to surrender every action good or bad to God. Here Kabīr introduces the concept of guru which is common to both Hinduism and Sūfism. He says that the guidance of guru is important in order to reach the absolute. Like Sūfis he believes that man does not have the power to do anything. All power belongs to God. Man is only an instrument through which God gets his work done.

Conclusion

Kabīr demonstrated to the world that one can live harmoniously by assimilating certain basic principles from Hinduism and Islam. No religion is superior. Infact there is harmony between both the religions. One has to receptive, open-minded and must have a positive attitude in order to understand the harmony. All religions are equally important and have been preaching to live in harmony with ones fellow-being. The Divine being is called by different names in different religion but He is essentially one and the same. Thus the religious quarrels that go on between Hindus and Muslims are absolutely futile. One must not have ill feelings towards our fellow beings but must fill ones heart with divine love and devotion. His main aim was to unite the two communities. So he preached the path of Bhakti, a religion based on personal experience. He discarded idol and temple worship, rituals, rites, ceremonies, scriptures, incarnation and many more things and also rejected the social evils like the sati system and animal sacrifices. Even Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in a letter addressed to Emperor Aurangazeb, said, "Hinduism and Islam are both beautiful manifestations of the Divine spirit. The call for prayer is given in the mosque; the bell rings to the Divine glory in the temples. Anyone bearing fanaticism and religious hatred must be acting against the commands of God."

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