

CHAPTER – 3

RELIGIOUS REFORMERS OF INDIA



We learn about the following in this chapter,

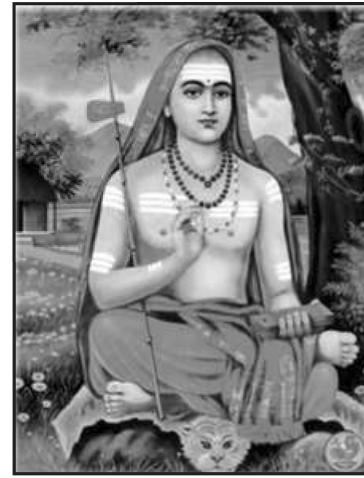
- India's religious reformers and their philosophy and teachings.
- The life and teachings of Shankaracharya, Madhvacharya, Ramanujacharya and Basavanna.
- The principles of Adwaita, Vishistadwaita, Dwaita, and Shakti Vishistadwaita.

During the 9th century, there were many castes, traditions and philosophies in India . Famous religious reformers propagated the ancient Hindu way of life in their own ways. As a result of this, Bhakti Panth or the Path of Devotion came into existence. Religious reformers are a proof of the abundant religious philosophical wealth and freedom of expression among Hindus. Between 9th to 14th century, religious leaders like Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhwacharya and Basaweshwara instituted religious reforms which led to an intellectual revolution.

Shankaracharya

Shankaracharya was born in the village Kaladi in Kerala in a Namboodari Brahmin family. His father was Shivaguru and mother Aryamba. Shankara was very intelligent. At the age of seven, he had mastered all the Scriptures. He learnt Vedas and the Puranas from his teacher, Govinda Bhagavatpada.

Shankaracharya studied the Upanishads and Brahmasutras in depth and propagated the Advaita philosophy. According to this, Brahma is the absolute truth, the rest of the world is false. The soul is one with Brahma, and life is not separate from Brahma. The world is maya, an illusion; Brahma is the absolute truth. People are ignorant; they are not aware of the illusionary nature of the world. They are



Shankaracharya

also not aware that Brahma is the only Truth. Hence we should go on the path of knowledge, and realize the nature of the world. Ultimately, we should merge our ‘atma’ (soul) with the absolute truth, Brahma. Only then we can attain moksha (liberation). In this manner, Shankaracharya taught the path of knowledge.

The human soul has no separate existence and he expressed this fact in the phrase ‘Aham Brahmasmi’. He declared that Brahma is Truth. It has no qualities, no features and no shape (nirguna, nirakara, nirvikara).

The works of Shankaracharya : Shankarabhasya, Anandalahari, Soundaryalahari, Shivanandalahari, Vivekachoodamani, Prabuddasudhakara and Dakshinamurthy stotra. His hymn Bhajagovindam is world famous.

Shankaracharya travelled from Kanyakumari to Kashmir on foot and propagated his Advaitha philosophy. In order to spread the message of his philosophy, he established peethas (institutions) in all the four directions.

The four mutts or peethas are :

- 1. Badarinath - Jyotirpeeth
- 2. Dwaraka - Kalikapeeth
- 3. Puri - Govardhan Peeth
- 4. Sringeri - Sharadapeeth

Shankaracharya gave Indian thinking a new direction and inspiration.

Ramanujacharya

Ramanujacharya was born in Sriperumbadur near Chennai. His father was Keshavasomayaji and mother Kantimati. He learnt the Vedas and Upanishads from Yadavaprakasha in Kanchi – the famous educational center in South India. Subsequently, he travelled to Srirangam and became the Peethadheesha of that mutt. The Shaivite Chola king troubled Ramanujacharya



Ramanujacharya

repeatedly. At that time, the Hoysala king of Karnataka, Vishnuvardhan invited him to Karnataka. Ramanujacharya travelled to Melukote and established the Cheluvanarayanaswamy temple.

Ramanujacharya showed keen interest in teaching the mukti marga to common people. After settling down at Sriranga, Ramanujacharya studied the Scriptures and wrote many books. He wrote Vedanta Sangraha, Vedantasara, Vedanta Deepika, Shribhasya and in his famous work ‘Geethabhashya’, he emphasized the importance of devotion.

Ramanujacharya’s philosophy is called ‘Vishitadvaita’ and the religion he propagated is called ‘Srivaishnavism’. Hence, his followers are called Srivaishnavites.

Ramanujacharya taught that life and nature were controlled by Brahma. Atma and Paramatma cannot exist at the same time. Devotion and surrender (prapatti) were essential for attaining moksha. Ramanujacharya condemned casteism and taught the path of devotion to people of all castes. He advised that we should give up our desires and surrender to God. He advocated attainment of nirvana through the path of devotion.

Saint Ramananda and Rayidasa of North were influenced by his philosophy. As a result, the path of devotion or Bhakti marga became popular in North India too. The Tuluva kings of Vijayanagar and the Araveedu kings became the followers of Srivaishnavism.

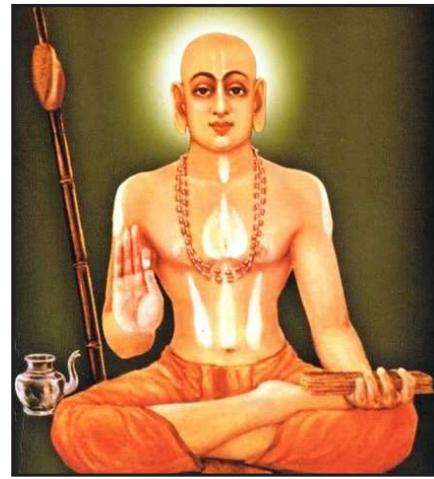
Do you know this?

Famous Amnaya mutts of Srivaishnavism in South India :

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Yatiraja mutt | - Melukote and Sriperumbadur |
| 2. Parakala (Brahmatantra) mutt | - Mysuru |
| 3. Ahobala mutt | - Ahobala (Guntur, Andhra Pradesh) |
| 4. Aandavan mutt | - Srirangam |
| 5. Vamaimalai mutt | - Suchindram |

Madhwacharya

Madhwacharya was born in Pajaka village near Udupi in Karnataka. His father was Nadilleya Narayana Bhatta and mother Vedavati. Lord Vishnu was their family deity. It is said that at a very tender age, he displayed abundant knowledge. He had his education in Vedas and Upanishads from Achyutapreksha. The same teacher later inducted Madhwacharya into sanyasa. While studying under his guru, Madhwacharya independently gained great knowledge about the religious scriptures and defeated his guru in debate. He advocated Dwaitha philosophy. According to this philosophy, the human soul and the Divine soul are separate.



Madhwacharya

In order to propagate his philosophy, Madhwacharya took to travelling to various places and participated in debates. He brought Lord Krishna's idol which was hidden in a muddy hillock called Gopichandana and installed it in Udupi. Further, to enable regular worship of Lord Krishna, he nominated Yathis and later 8 mutts called the Ashthamaths were formed.

Do you know this?

Ashtha mutts : Palimaru, Adamaru, Krishnapura, Puttige, Shirur, Sode, Kaniyoor and Pejawar mutts.

According to Madhwacharya, the world is not maya or illusion. It is as true as Paramatma or the Divine Soul. Between these, the Divine soul is independent and the rest of the world is illusionary. The Divine soul and the human soul have a Lord and Servant relation. Lord Vishnu or Narayana alone is supreme. Worship of Lord Vishnu can elevate the human soul and thus enable it to attain moksha.

Works of Madhwacharya : Geetabhashya, Geetatatparya nirnaya, Mahabharata tatparya nirnaya, Vishnutatva nirnaya, Bhagawata tatparya nirnaya, Sutrabhashya, Mayavadakhandana etc.

Prominent among the disciples of Madhwacharya who propagated the Dwaitha philosophy are Padmanabhateertha, Narahariteertha, Vijayendrateertha and Vadirajateertha.

Basavanna – The Vishwa Guru

Basavanna is the most prominent religious, social, political, economical and cultural reformer of 12th century in Karnataka. His father was Madarasa and mother Madalambike. He was born at Basavanabagewadi in the present district of Vijayapura. As per the custom of Brahmins, there was no upanayana ceremony for his mother, sister and friends, Basavanna rejected the sacred thread during the upanayana ceremony in his childhood and went towards Kudalasangama. He got education at Kudalasangama and became the Finance Minister under the king Bijnala of Mangalawade. Later he became the Prime Minister of Kalyana state owing to his honesty, dedication, dutifulness, farsightedness and concern for the public. He condemned the rituals, superstition and blind beliefs which was in practice then. He was instrumental in bringing economic, social and religious reforms in the society. He established ‘Anubhava Mantapa’ known as the world’s first parliament at Basava Kalyana of present Bidar district. Basavanna worked for the reformation of the soul along with the reformation of the society.

Basavanna propounded the idea of one God in the form of Istalinga with the concept of ‘body as temple’, and ‘Awareness as Guru’.

He believed that compassion (daya) is the base of Dharma and stressed non-violence. He brought out new concepts like work (Kayaka), charity (Dasoha) and Istalinga. Through these concepts, Basavanna established equal and secular society devoid of discrimination of gender in Kalyana.

‘The eternal shall perish, the transient will stay on’, “Body is abode of Lord Shiva” (Kayave Kailasa), thus said Basavanna, stressing on ‘Kaya’ and upheld the principle of work culture. He also declared there is no superiority or inferiority in work. He always wished good to all human beings as he believed that there is no one younger to him and



Basaveshwara

no one elder to Shivabhaktas. He removed hoarding culture through the principle of ‘Dasoha’. His socio-religious thoughts and the way he brought them into practice were unique. He propagated women’s freedom and equality. Basavanna proclaimed that the people of the entire world are equal and no one is untouchable by birth.

Vachanas were written in the backdrop of spiritual growth and welfare of the nation. These are his unique contributions to Kannada literature. In other words, Vachanas can be considered his contribution to the world as “constitution”. Through vachanas, Vachanakaras tried to show the loopholes of the society and created awareness among people.

Vachana movement united the followers of Basavanna irrespective of their caste, class, colour and gender. Prominent Vachanakaras are Satyakka, Aydakki Lakkamma, Siddarama, Channa Basavanna, Molige Maraiah, Ambigara Chowdaiah, Madiwala Machaiah, Madara Chennaiah, Samagara Haralaiah, Kinnari Bommaiah and others.

You Know this: (one of his vachanas)

Do not steal, do not kill, do not lie.
Do not rage, do not loathe the other,
Do not brag of yourself, do not revile the opponent,
This itself is inner purity, this itself is outer purity,
This alone is the way to please our Koodala sangamadeva.

ನಿಮಗೆ ತಿಳಿದರಲ್ಲಿ :

ಕಳಬೇಡ, ಕೊಲಬೇಡ, ಹಸಿಯ ನುಡಿಯಲು ಬೇಡ
ಮುನಿಯಬೇಡ, ಅನ್ಯರಿಗೆ ಅಸಹ್ಯಪಡಬೇಡ
ತನ್ನ ಬಣ್ಣಿಸಬೇಡ, ಇದಿರ ಅಳಿಯಲು ಬೇಡ,
ಇದೇ ಅಂತರಂಗ ಶುಧಿ, ಇದೇ ಬಹಿರಂಗ ಶುಧಿ
ಇದೇ ನಮ್ಮ ಕೂಡ ಸಂಗಮದೇವನೋಲಿಸುವ ಪರಿ.

EXERCISES

I. Fill in the blanks with suitable words :

- Shankaracharya was born at _____ in Kerala.
- “The world is an illusion, Brahma alone is the Truth”. This was propounded by _____
- Ramanujacharya’s disciples are called _____.
- Proponent of Dwaita philosophy is _____.

II. Answer the following questions by discussing with your group :

1. Who is the proponent of Advaita philosophy?
2. Which is the philosophy advocated by Ramanujacharya? What is their sect called?
3. Name the books written by Ramanujacharya.
4. Which are the tenets advocated by Madhwacharya?
5. Name the books written by Shankaracharya.
6. Why did Basavanna leave Basavanabagewadi?
7. What were some of the welfare measures of Basavanna?
8. Which followers were with Basavanna during the Vachana movement?
9. What is the meaning of 'Kayave Kailasa' propagated by Basavanna?

III. Activities :

1. Collect all types of vachanas, sing and interpret them.
2. Collect pictures of vachanakaras like Basavanna.
3. Conduct Vachana Singing competition.

IV. Projects :

1. With the help of your teacher, write an essay on Dwaita and Adwaita philosophy.
2. Invite the local vachana singers and have them sing and explain various vachanas.

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