

Bhakti and Sufi Movement in Medieval India

Bhakti Movement

Development in South India

- The development of Bhakti movement took place in *Tamil Nadu* between 7th and 12th CE.
- It was reflected in the emotional poems of the *Nayanars* (devotees of Shiva) and *Alvars* (devotees of Vishnu).
- These saints looked upon religion not as a cold formal worship but as a loving bond based upon love between the worshipped and worshipper.

Features

- Discarded rituals and sacrifices
- The emphasized purity of heart and mind, humanism and devotion
- Monotheistic in nature
- God has either **Saguna** or **Nirguna** form
- An egalitarian movement, they denounced casteism
- These saints preached in local languages
- They rejected the austerities preached by Jainism and Buddhism. These religions saw a decline in their growth due to Bhakti movement
- Social reforms:
 1. Disregarded caste system
 2. Attacked institutionalized religion, Brahminical dominance, idol worship, methods of elaborate rituals etc
 3. Opposed Sati and female infanticide
 4. Women were encouraged to join Kirtans
 5. They aimed at bridging the gulf between Hindus and Muslims

Philosophical schools

| Philosophy | Founder |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| Vishishtadvaita | Ramanuja |
| Dvaitadvaita / Bhedabhed | Nimbarka |
| Dvaita | Madhava |
| Shudadvaita | Vishnu swami |
| Advaita (non-dualism) | Sankaracharya |

Significant Facts

- Appar, Sambandar, Sundaramurti, and Manikkavasagar were prominent Nayanars. The hymns of the first three are mentioned in *Thiruvagam* was written by Manikkavasagar.
- *Tirumurais* is the collection of works of Nayanars which is called as the fifth Veda.

- *Andal* was a women Alvar saint. There were 12 Alvars and 63 Nayanars. *Periyapuranam* by Shekkihizar traces the life history of Nayanars
- *Divya Prabhandam* was the collection of hymns by Alvars

Development of Bhakti movement in North India

- The saints wrote in local languages, Tamil and Telugu and were, therefore, able to reach out to many people. They also translated Sanskrit works in local languages. Few saints are
 1. Jnanadeva – Marathi
 2. Kabirdas, Surdas, Tulsi das – Hindi
 3. Shankaradeva - Assamese
 4. Chaitanya and Chandidas - Bengali
- Sanskrit, which was prevalent in the north, was given a new form as the movement moved to North. Bhagavata Purana was a significant work in 9th century and an important component of Bhakti movement
- Kabir, Namdev and Guru Nanak had preached devotion to a *Nirankar* form of god. The followers of Guru Nanak identify themselves as Sikhs.

The Vaishnavite movement

- Devotion on *Sakar* form of god. Rama and Krishna were seen as avatars of Lord Vishnu. The main exponents were Surdas, Mirabai, Tulsidas and Chaitanya who espoused the path of salvation through the medium of Poetry, songs, dance, and kirtans.

Sursagar by Surdas, Ramacharitmanas by Tulsidas were important works during this period.

Bhakti Saints

- **Ramananda** – first great saint in North India
- **Kabir** – the disciple of Ramananda, Nirguna saint, sought Hindu-Muslim unity, his followers are called Kabir Panthis
- **Guru Nanak** – founder of Sikhism, social reformer and Nirguna saint
- **Chaitanya** – Krishna bhakti cult and founder of *Gaudiya* or Bengal Vaishnavism
- **Purandara das** – laid the foundations for modern Carnatic music
- **Vallabhacharya** – propounded the principle of *Pushti Marg*

Bhakti saints of Maharashtra Dharma

- **Jnanadeva** – founder of Bhakti movement in Maharashtra; *bhavarthadipka* – Marathi commentary of Bhagavad Gita
- **Namadeva** – founder of the Vithoba or Vithal cult which was known as *Varkari* sect
- **Eknath** – Wrote *Bhavartha Ramayana* – commentary on Ramayana
- **Tukaram** – Wrote devotional poetry known as *Abhangas*
- **Ramdas** – *Dasabodha* – Compilation of his writings and sermons

Sufi Movement

The origins of Sufi movement can be traced to Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111 AD) who belonged to the Ashari school which reconciled orthodoxy with mysticism and led a sufi life. His influence led to the setup of Madrasas (schools) and Ulemas (scholars).

Sufis

- The Sufis were mystics
- They opposed the degeneration of religion, vulgar display of wealth, orthodoxy etc.
- They emphasized free thoughts and liberal ideas
- They were against formal worship, rigidity, and fanaticism in religion
- They practiced meditation. They interpreted religion as 'love of god' and service to humanity. Sufis absorbed various ideas and practices from Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism etc.
- They worked towards Hindu-Muslim unity and cultural synthesis
- The Sufis were divided into different *Silsilahs* (orders) with each silsilah having its own *Pir* (guide) called *Khwaja or Sheikh*. The Pir and his disciples lived in a *Khanqah* (hospice). A Pir nominated a successor or *Wali* from his disciples to carry on his work. The Sufis organized *Samas* (a recital of holy songs) to arouse mystical ecstasy

Sufism in India

- The Sufis came to India via Afghanistan. In the beginning, the main centers were Punjab and Multan which later spread to Kashmir, Bihar, Bengal, and Deccan.

Abu Fazl in *Ain-i-Akbari* speaks of fourteen silsilahs. They were divided into

1. Ba-shara: Orders which followed the Shariat and its directives such as Namaz and Roza. Chief of them are Chisthi, Suhrawadi, Firdwasi, Qadiri and Naqshbandi
2. Be-shara: They were not bound by Shariat. The Qalandars belonged to this group

Silsilahs

- **The Chishti Silsilah:** Founded by Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti who made Ajmer as the center of learning. His disciples were Sheik Hamiduddin and Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. Baba Farid, the disciple of Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya made Delhi as an important center. Sheik Nasiruddin Mahmud, famously called Nasiruddin *Chirag-i-Dilli* was also the famous Chisthi saint
- **The Suhrawadi Silsilah:** founded by Sheik Shihabuddin Suhrawadi, it was established by Sheik Bahauddin Zakariya in India. He set up Khanaqa at Multan and received the title Shaikhul Islam.

Importance of Sufi movement

- The Sufis believed in the concept of Wahdat-ul-Wajud (Unity of Being)
- The hatha-yoga treatise Amrita Kunda was translated into Arabic and Persian.
- The Sufi saints maintained close contact with the common people
- The Sufi saints were poets who chose to write in local languages. Amir khusrau wrote in Hindi and developed a new style of sabaq-i-hindi.

- The liberal views of Sufis influenced the Din-i-Ilahi of Akbar

Thus, we see that Sufi and Bhakti movements created a new spirit in the religious life and took on social reforms in creating an egalitarian society. They worked for the poor and downtrodden and believed in the personal devotion as a tool to experience god.

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