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Bhakti Age : Religious Sects and Saints

An important event in the medieval cultural development of India includes the Bhakti and the Sufi movement. This movement was not aimed at gaining any political advantage against Monarchy, but its main purpose was to show a simple religious path to those suffering from ignorance, falsehood, distress and torture. The teachings of the saints therefore, had a profound effect on them.

Emergence and Development

Bhakti and Sufi movement originated and developed in India. Due to this, barriers of discrimination of religions, beliefs, superstitions were ignored and doors were opened for devotional path to all. Bhakti and Sufi movements gave birth to Hindu-Muslim cultural harmony and a new era began. Most of the saints were 'Nirgunvadi' (Monotheist). They were advocates of unity. All these saints and fakirs believed in unity of religion and sect. They were advocates of social equality. According to them God is, 'Nirgun', formless and undescribable. They opposed idol worship and rituals. They preached the people in a simple language. They composed literature and verses in the language of the people. These literature, verses and simple speeches were composed in the local dialect of the people to spread unity in the society. They said that the essence of all the religions is the same. There is only one God and He is everywhere. All religions have the same path ie. devotion to God.

Activity

Organize a prayer meet of all religious in your school and prepare a prayer book.

The Main Saints and their Ideology

Shankaracharya began religious reform activities in India. After him Ramanujacharya gave inspiration about devotion. At this time Alwar and Nayanar saints in South India propagated religious movements. The Vaishnava saints were known as Alwar and the Shaiva saints were known as Nayanars. Followers of the path of devotion believed in monotheism. They believed in the unity of all religious and sects and opposed to idol worship as well as rituals.

Some great teachers were also there among saints and philosophers. Shankaracharya was one of the Hindu preachers. Shankaracharya was followed by Ramanujacharya in the South. It is generally believed that the Bhakti movement started with Ramanujacharya. He gave a simple sermon on the path of devotion and showed the path of God's attainment. Bhakti movement opened the



Alwar and Nayanar Saints



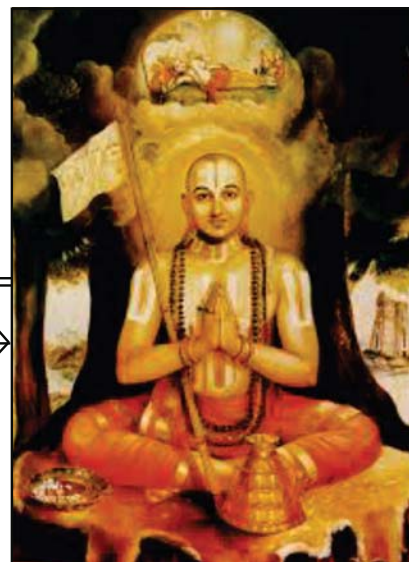
door to self-realization for all. The saints and thinkers of the devotional path preached in the language of the common people.



Adishankaracharya

- ← Shankaracharya
- Birthplace : Kaldi
 - Father : Shivguru
 - Mata : Ambabai (Aaimba)

- Ramanujacharya →
- Birthplace : Sriperumbudur
 - Father : Keshav
 - Mother : Kantimati



Ramanujacharya

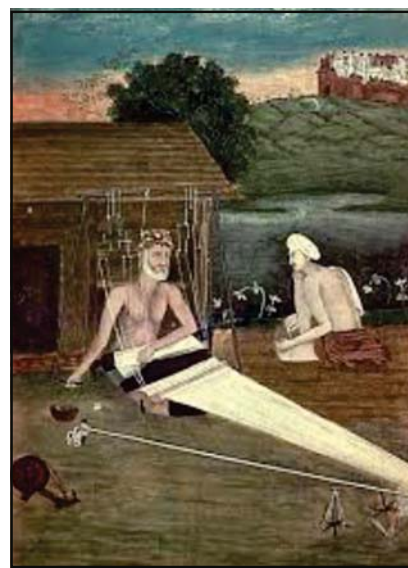
Think

Why do we respect Dharmacharyas, Devotees, Saints, Fakirs ?

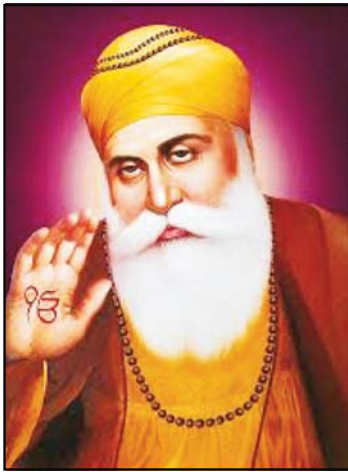
Great saints like Jaydev and Chatinya were also born in Bengal. Chatinya Mahaprabhu composed Krishna bhakti songs and chanted the mantra of 'Haribol' in Bengal. Great saints like Ramananda started Bhakti movement in North India. Kabir was the important saint of monotheism. He was a weaver by profession. 'Bijak' is his collection of poems. His poems are included in the sikh holy book "Guru Granth Sahib". Saint Raidas was his guru brother. Like Kabir, he was also a saint of the Nirguna branch.

Sadhu esa chahiye, jesa soop subhay
Saar-Saar ko gahi rahe, thothe dei udaay

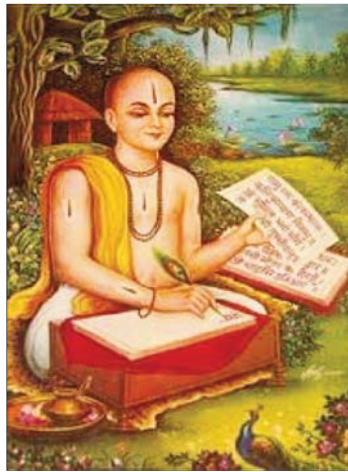
Guru Nanak was the founder of the Sikh religion. He was a saint of the Nirguna branch. His disciples were called Sikhs. "Guru Granth Sahib" is their holy book. Tulsidas, Surdas and Mirabai were important saints of Vishnav Bhakti movement in Rajasthan and North India. Tulsidas became a sage in his youth. He composed popular texts like "Ramcharitmanas" and "Vinayapatrika". Tulsidas's epic 'Ramcharitmanas' is very popular even today. Saint Narsinh Mehta's contribution is immense in immersing people of Gujarat in 'Bhakti ras' in Bhakti in the fifteenth century is unique. Narsinha Mehta (1412-1480) is an early Gujarati poet. He is originally from Talaja (Bhavnagar) and then settled in Junagadh. His verses and 'Prabhatia' were knowledgeable, devotional and had profound



Kabir



Guru Nanak



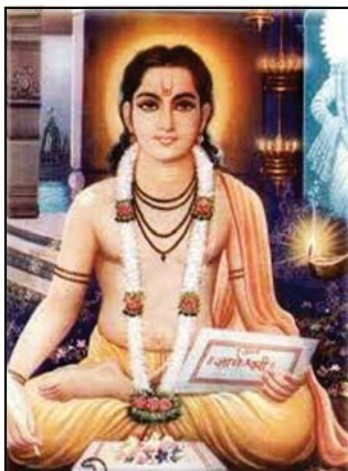
Tulsidas



Narsinh Mehta

effect on society. Narsinh Mehta's bhajan "Vaishnavjan to tene kahiye..." is popular even today. Though he was a worldly human being, yet was away from worldly affairs. He opposed untouchability and casteism. He went to everyone's home to sing bhajans. Whoever sang bhajans of Hari, was God's person to him. 'Pakshapakshima nahi parmashwar, samdrasti ne sarv samaan.' Singing in the glory of Lord Krishna, he said that with the help of Lord Krishna, human beings can overcome any adversity. His life was an excellent example of this. His verses are known as 'Prabhatia.'

Rajput princess Mirabai was the daughter of Medta king. She was married to the Royal family of Mewar. She was a devotee of Krishna from her childhood. She worshipped Lord Krishna in the form of Giridhar gopal. Mirabai was a devout poetess who composed verses in Gujarati and Hindi. Her verses are as popular as the verses of Narsinh and Kabir. One such saint was Surdas. He was a disciple of Vallabhacharya. Living in Vraj, he composed the verses of Lord Krishna.



Gyaneshwar

Akhil Brahmandma ek tu Shri Hari
Jujve roop anant bhas
Dehma dev tu, tejma tatva tu,
Shunyama shabd thai ved vase.

Bhakti Movement in Maharashtra was going parallel with North India. Vithoba temple of Pandharpur was their main center. Gyaneshwar started bhakti movement in

Maharashtra. At the age of only 15 years, he wrote a criticism, 'Gyaneshwari' on Bhagwad Gita. Namdev was on a sinful path in his youth.



Mirabai

Muj ablane moti Miraat Bai
Shyamlo gharenu maru sachu...re...
Mirabai ke prabhu Giridhar Nagar,
Harine charane jashu...re...muj.

But realizing the truth, he turned to religion and was considered a great saint of Maharashtra. Eknath was also a great saint of Maharashtra. He opposed discrimination on the basis of caste and creed. He considered all as equal. Tukaram was a saint poet of Maharashtra. His 'Abhangas' are very popular. Samarth Guru Ramdas was Shivaji's guru. He tried to amalgamate spiritual and worldly life. To preach the people, he composed a book called 'Daasbodh'.

Activity

Create a collection of works of medieval saints like Kabir, Rahim, Narsinh Mehta, Mirabai, Tukaram which include Sakhi, doha.

Know This

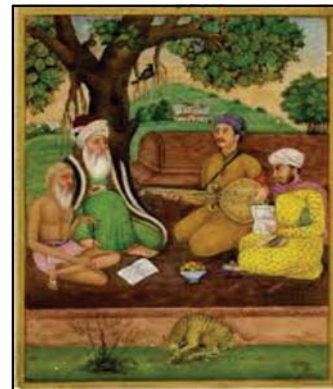
Time-period of Medieval Saints

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| ● Guru Nanak : Birth 1469 A.D, Death 1539 A.D | ● Gyaneshwar : Birth 1276 A.D, Death 1296 A.D |
| ● Tulsidas : Birth 1532 A.D, Death 1623 A.D | ● Namdev : Birth 1270 A.D, Death 1350 A.D |
| ● Mirabai : Birth 1498 A.D, Death 1546 A.D | ● Eknath : Birth 1533 A.D, Death 1599 A.D |
| ● Surdas : Birth 1483 A.D, Death 1563 A.D | ● Tukaram : Birth 1608 A.D, Death 1650 A.D |
| ● Raidas : Birth 1450 A.D, Death 1520 A.D | |

Sufi Movement

The Sufi movement is one of the religious movements that took place in medieval India. This social and religious movement gave birth to Hindu-Muslim harmony. India has been a confluence of different cultures. The word sufi expresses the religious idea of Islam. Its main objective is to establish a relationship of love between God and Man. There were four main traditions which spread sufism in India : (1) Chishti (2) Suhrawardy (3) Qadri and (4) Naqshbandi.

The Chishti and Suhrawardy traditions became very popular in the Sufi movement. Shiabuddin Suhrawardy of Baghdad founded the Suhrawardy tradition. In Ajmer, Moinuddin Chishti established the Chishti tradition which is an excellent example of communal harmony even today. After his death he became a famous Sufi saint. Apart from Moinuddin Chishti, Qutubddin Bakhtiyar, Baba Fariduddin-Ganj-e-Shakar, Nizamuddin Olia, Khwaja Baki Billah and Sheikh Ahmed Sarhindi were the chiefs. Sheikh Burhanuddin was popular Chishti saint in South India.



Chishti Saint

Think

Why should we have equal importance and respect for every religion ?

Activity

Prepare a collection of different religious prayer book in the school. Collect and write information about the founder and saints of each religion and make a hand-written copy.

Effects of Bhakti and Sufi movements :

The Bhakti and Sufi Saints, Acharayas, Thinkers, Chishti Saints etc. had an impact on pretentiousness,

discrimination of high and low, superstitions and many other social evils. The true meaning of religion was not understood by the common man. Now he began to understand that God belongs to all and they can attain Him. Due to the efforts of saints and Chishti saints, the discrimination among religions was reduced. Among the disciples of saints like Kabir, Hindus as well as Muslims were included. This movement had an effect on the discrimination of the high and the low. During this time many of the saints forgot the religious differences and made everyone their disciples. Mirabai, Raidas, Raskhan etc. are the excellent examples of this. Saiyad Mohammad Chaus of Gwalior lived at isolated places in Vindhyaachal with Hindu saints for many years. A number of Hindu mystical actions and prayers have been added to the Muslim mystical ideology. The Sufi's adopted some of the Hindu rituals. For example, shaving the head of a person accepting sufism, holding a zanbeen (Bhikshapatra), offering water to the visitors, holding musical mushairas etc.

Thus, Bhakti and Sufi movement transformed the society. Speaking of uniting Hindu and Muslim society, each saint spoke of equality, righteousness and brotherhood. India has been the abode of many forms of culture and religions. Medieval saints made it true with their simple teachings.

Exercise

1. Answer the following questions in one sentence :

- (1) Name the saints who led the religious movement in South India.
- (2) Who chanted the mantra 'Haribol' in Bengal ?
- (3) Which texts were composed by Tulsidas ?
- (4) Who was the first Sufi saint in India ?

2. Answer the following questions as per requirement :

- (1) Write a short-note on : Sufi-Movement.
- (2) Why did the Bhakti movement become popular among people ?
- (3) Give short introduction of saints of Maharashtra.
- (4) Give introduction of Kabir, the most important believer in Ekeshwar (Monotheism) tradition.

3. (A) Choose the appropriate answer from the options given below and write the correct answer :

- (1) Guru Nanak was saint of which branch ?
(A) Alwar (B) Nayanar (C) Nirgun (D) Ekeshwar
- (2) Criticism on Bhagwad-Geeta written by Gyaneshwar is known by which name ?
(A) Bijak (B) Gyaneshwari (C) Ramcharitmanas (D) Vinaypatrika
- (3) Abhangas of which saint of Maharashtra are very well known ?
(A) Gyaneshwar (B) Vithoba (C) Namdev (D) Tukaram
- (4) How many traditions, spreading sufism were there in India ?
(A) One (B) Two (C) Three (D) Four

(B) Recognize me :

- (1) My Guru was Samarth Ramdas.
- (2) I was the main center of Bhakti movement in Maharashtra.
- (3) I was the founder of the Chishti tradition in Ajmer.

