

Bhakti movement

'Bhakti' means devotion to god. It means you give yourself completely to the devotion of god. Complete surrender to the god was considered necessary for a 'Bhakt'. The 'Bhakt' movement finds its roots in the Bhagwad gita and the Upanishads. But it gained momentum in the 15-17th century. According to the preaching of Bhakti movement, they said that 'God is one'. They did not belong to a particular sect or culture. They also did not believe in the concept of religion. Their motto was simple. They preached that 'God is one' but he used different forms to eradicate the evil going on the surface of the earth. The saints of Bhakti movement strongly believed in the concept of monotheism. It meant surrender to one god. They did not propagate any religious belief. But they did propagate philosophies related to their bhakti to their idol. The most fascinating part of 'Bhakti' movement was that it could be followed by everyone. But when the time Bhakti movement was spreading, especially in Hindus; at the same time Sufism gained ground. Many Muslims were attracted to take up the path of bhakti while the others supported Sufism.

This movement finds its origin as a rebellion against the caste division, social exclusion, untouchability and ritualism in India. People wanted to fight off these malpractices because they had been oppressed and suppressed for so long. Especially, the lower castes or 'Shudras' were the most affected by this system of caste distinction and hence they wanted freedom from it. Shudras thought that by embracing 'Bahkti', they would get rid of the clutches of social exclusion.

This movement advocated the union of the god and these Bhakt's soul into one. Devotion was the sun around which all the principles of Bhakti revolved. Without devotion, to bhakti was possible. The foundation of the Bhakti cult was present in the Vedas and the gita but were not followed or practiced by the masses. This movement started from south India under the guidance of Vaishnaa Alwar and Shaiva Nayyar. This movement then spread to other parts of India.

This cult established that no person was superior or inferior to other and they treated all people as one. There was no division of castes and no social hierarchy. Thus this cult looked very attractive to shudras especially who had never been given their rights before. For the first time they were

being treated as human beings who had actual rights. This system reinstated tolerance in all and established that man had to be tolerant of each person. They said that it was necessary to indulge in the worship of 'one' and only 'one' god. Only then can you redeem yourself and fall into heaven. They also said that it was important to follow a true leader or Guru and not someone who did not have any cosmic powers. According to them, all the caste distinctions were useless and they did not lead you anywhere. They did not believe in idol worship. Also they believed that there was no use of performing rites and sacrifices as the concept of rites and sacrifices sounded materialistic and vain to them.

Effects of Bhakti movement

1. It helped in removing the animosity between the Hindus and Muslims which had been prevalent for a long period of times. It actually lessened the bitterness in their relationship. We should remember that one of the principles of Bhakti movement is 'tolerance'. This is what made Hindus and Muslims tolerant to each other because if they wanted to embrace Bhakti, they had to accept all others without any hitch.

2. Bhakti to God taught the society about how all the ceremonial rites and sacrifices were hollow and fake. They showed the path to a new way of worshiping the god. They wanted people to give up evils like beliefs, malpractices and superstitions. This showed the Brahmans that they were in no way superior to other beings as everybody was equal.

3. Bhakti movement also kept a tab on forceful conversions. This was because the people who embraced Bhakti openly thought and said that they had no religion. They were all the children of god and hence, they could not be forced to convert in a particular religion.

4. Also, the reformers of the bhakti Movement taught their subjects in the mother tongue of that era. This was done so that everybody could hear, listen and understand their view points, they did not want it to make difficult for anybody to understand their ideologies. This led to the development of regional languages more than it had ever been seen before. Under Guru Nanak Dev, Punjabi was developed. Vernacular languages such as Gujarati, Marathi and Bengali took new

avatars. Rahim and Kabir developed the Hindi Literature through their Doha's and Chanda's.

5. Bhakti movement gave the women the status they yearned for in the society. Women had been tagged as weak and looked down upon for a very long time in the history. They were tired from the male chauvinism prevailing in the society. They were always dominated by others and were never given the status they deserved in the society. They wanted freedom from this oppression which the Bhakti movement gladly offered them. They accepted it wholeheartedly. Now women were allowed to be a part of ceremonial rights and proceedings. They were no longer considered impure or subordinate to the male society.

Bhakti movement was like the voice of rationale behind all the superstitions clouding the judgment of people. It came in as a ray of hope for the society. This movement was initially given shape by liberals but when the movement started dying down, it had already converted the minds of many staunch and rigid people. Also, the movement is said to have fought the gruesome malpractice of sati also. This is because it, considered that all men and women were equal; and therefore it was wrong to burn a lady on the pyre of her

husband. The bhakti movement brought a lot of changes in the society and the way people perceive things. Saints of Bhakti movement likes Mirabai, Sri Chaitanya, Kabir Das, Rahim; all left a very deep impact on the minds of people, society and literature.

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