

BHAKTI MOVEMENT (PART-2)

B.A (HONS) PART-3 PAPER-5

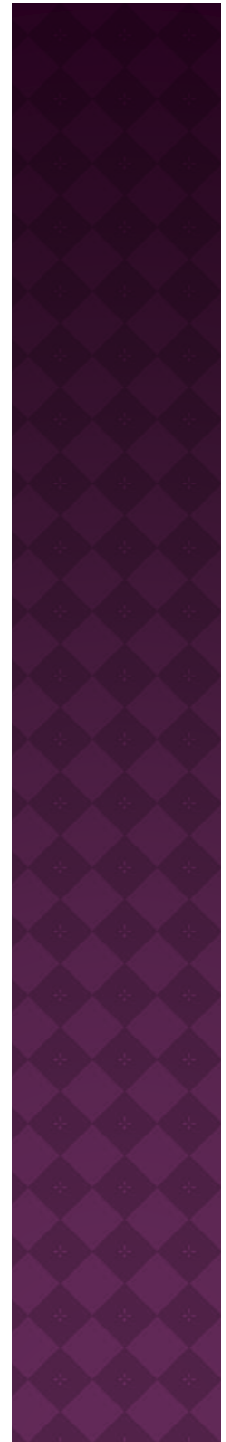
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TWO STREAMS OF BHAKTI MOVEMENTS

Since the latter part of the 15th century, Bhakti religion in North India had been divided into two major streams or currents — *nirguni and saguni* —based on the theological difference in the way of conceptualizing the nature of the divine being. Those belonging to Saguna school (“with attributes”) worshiped the anthropomorphic manifestations of the divine being (usually the trilogy of Brahma-Vishnu-Mahesh). This school of thought remained committed to the scriptural authority of the Vedas and emphasized the need of a human guru as religious mediator between God and man. The conformist saints like Ramananda and Chaitanya, espoused the doctrine of incarnation and worshipped the Saguna Ram and Krishna respectively.

TWO STREAMS OF BHAKTI MOVEMENTS

Those who followed nirguna school (“without attributes”) worshipped a divine being who remains unmanifested, formless (nirakara) and extends beyond the three gunas (nirguna). This Supreme Being is conceived as Ishvara, the personal and purely spiritual aspect of godhead, beyond all names and forms (nama-rupa), and is to be apprehended only by inner (mystical) experience. This radical non-conformist group, headed by Kabir, Nanak and Dadu, created a re-school which rejected the scriptural authority and every form of idol worship and institutionalized rites and fought against social discrimination and strove for Hindu-Muslim reconciliation.



PRINCIPLES OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

The main principles of Bhakti movement are:

- (1) God is one,
- (2) To worship God man should serve humanity,
- (3) All men are equal,
- (4) Worshipping God with devotion is better than performing religious ceremonies and going on pilgrimages,
- (5) Caste distinctions and superstitious practices are to be given up. The Hindu saints of the Bhakti Movement and the Muslim saints of the Sufi movement became more liberal in their outlook. They wanted to get rid of the evils which had crept into their religions. There were a number of such saints from the 8th to 16th century A.D.

NATURE OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

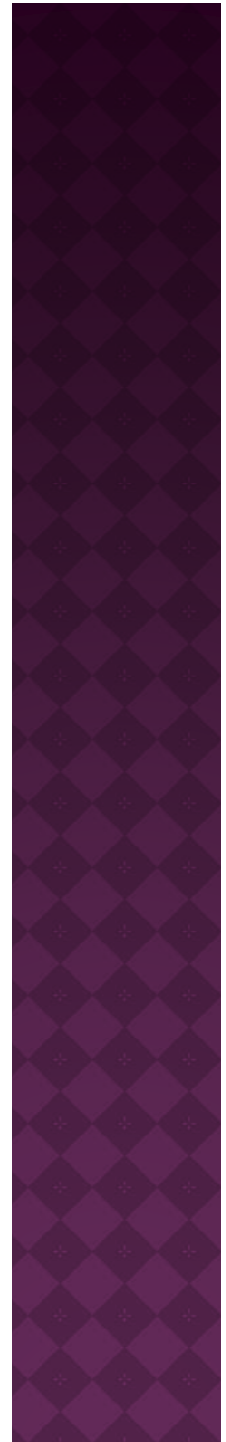
Generally speaking the religious movement of this period lies between 1300 – 1550 A.D. It was non ritualistic and mainly based on Bhakti. It emphasized a religion or faith, which was essentially Hindu but reflected a vigorous monotheism of Islam. All Bhakti cults are essentially monotheistic. It is immaterial whether he is called Shiva, Krishna or Devi. They all symbolizes the one and the eternal. It is the religion, philosophy and social thinking that were created during this revival, which enabled Hinduism to reassert itself in the following period. In the religious life of India the glory of period is most resplendent. Ramanand, Kabir, Mira, and Vallabhacharya in the north, Chaitanya in Bengal, Madhava, Vedanta Desika and numerous others in the south give to the religious life of the period a vitality that Hinduism never seems to have enjoyed before.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

One chief characteristic of the Bhakti Movement can be mentioned as *belief in One God*. Devotee could *worship God by love and devotion*. The second characteristic of Bhakti Movement was that there was *no need to worship Idols or to perform elaborate rituals* for seeking his grace. The third feature on which the Bhakti Saints laid stress was the *equality of all castes*. There was no distinction of high or low as far as devotion to God was concerned. The fourth feature was the emphasis, which these saints laid on *the Hindu – Muslim Unity*. According, to these saints all men, irrespective of their religion are equal in the eyes of the God. The *saints preached in the language of the common people*. They did not use Sanskrit, which was the language of the cultured few.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

These saints laid stress on purity of heart and practice of virtues like Truth, Honesty, Kindness and Charity. According to these saints, only virtuous man could realize God. These saints considered God as Omnipresent and Omnipotent. Even a householder could realize God by love and devotion. Some regarded God as formless or Nirguna while others considered him as having different forms or Saguna. The basic principles of Bhakti Movement namely love and devotion to one personal God and the Unity of God were mainly Hindu.



CHARACTERISTICS OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

But as a result of contact with Islam, more emphasis was laid on these principles than performance of outward rituals such as Yjnas, fasts, going to sacred places, bathing in the Ganges or worship of images. The movement had two main objects in view. One was to reform Hindu religion to enable it withstand the onslaught of Islamic propaganda. And the second was to bring about a compromise between Hinduism and Islam.

(To be continued)

