

BHAKTI CULT

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INTRODUCTION

- From the 7th century onwards, the Bhakti cult spread throughout India, and especially in south.
- Bhakti meant that people made all kinds of offerings to the god in return for which they received the *prasada* or the favour of the god. This implied the total surrender of the devotees to their god.
- According to R.S. Sharma this practice is comparable to the complete dependence of the tenants on the landowners. Just as the tenants offered and provided various services to the lord and then received land and protection as a kind of favour from him, a similar relation came to be established between the individual and his god. As elements of feudalism persisted in the country for a very long time, Bhakti became deeply embedded in the Indian ethos.

Shaivism

- During 6th to 8th c. Shaivism especially in South India flourished through the activities of Shaiva saints popularly called as Nayanars. Their poetry in Tamil was called and compiled as Tevaram.

Branches of Saivism :

- **Pasupatas** : Probably the earliest known Saiva cult which was flourished in Orissa and in Western India from the 7th to 11th centuries. It was founded by *Lakulisa*, said to be an incarnation of Siva himself. According to this sect the end of misery can be done through Yoga and Vidhi. The cult's main text was Pasupata Sutra.
- **Kapalikas** : An extreme Tantrik cult which flourished from 11th to 13th c. In Karnataka, probably an off shoot of Pasupata cult.

- **Kalamukhas** : Similar to Kapalikas, flourished in Karnataka during same time period.
- **Kanphata Yogi's or Gorkhnathis** : Gorakhnath reorganised the earlier teaching of this movement. He synthesised the Pasupata teachings with those of Tantrism and Yoga and is identified with Shiva by his followers. According to this cult the ultimate aim of the devotees is to attain eternal union with Shiva by means of Yogic techniques.
- **Kashmiri Shaivism** : Two schools of Shaivism flourished in this area Pratyabhijna (Vasugupta), and Spandasastra (Somandaka) in around 9th c. AD.
- **Agamantas or Shaiva Siddhantas** : They based their tenets mainly on 28 Agamas said to have been composed by the various aspect of Shiva himself. The philosophy of this school was dualistic, and one of its ablest exponents, Aghora Sivacharya, belonged to the 12th c. AD. This was the main Shaiva movement in South India.

- **Shuddhashaivas** : According to Shuddhashaivas, the Supreme Siva is identified with Brahmana- the material and the operative cause of the world. It was influenced by Vishishtadvaita philosophy.
- **Virashaivas** : A South Indian devotional cult , also called as Lingayat cult. This was founded by Basavanna, who later became a minister of the Chalukyan King Bijjala of Kalyani. He used his political power and position in furthering the cause of the movement which was as much a social reform as a religious one. In the the tenets of this school Vishishtadvaita played an important part. The main scriptural text of the Virasaivas was the Sunyasampadane. And the teachings of Basavanna was compiled as 'Vachana'.

Vaishnavism

- It is the popular theistic religion, of which Vishnu is the object of worship and the devotion as the supreme god. The Bhakti movement based around Vaishnavism grew in South India, in the leadership of Alvar saint poets. This popular movement was based on social and religious equality. The Alvar saints represented the emotional side of Vaishnavism through collective songs called Prabandhas. It declined after 10th century.
- ***Various branches of Vaishnavism are :***
 - i. **Bhagavatas** : The Bhagavata is a theistic devotional cult which originated several centuries before the Christian Era. It is based mainly on Bhagavata Gita, but later Bhagavata Purana and Vishnu Purana became its primary texts. When Bhagavata sect peaked during the 2nd century AD, it came to known as *Pancharatra Agama*.

- ii. Pancharatra** : According to tradition, the Pancharatra teachings were 1st systematised in about 100 AD by Sandilya, who stressed the need of total devotion to Vasudeva Krishna. The Pancharatra postulate a supreme Brahmana, who reveals himself as Vishnu, Vasudeva and Narayana and whose power gives birth to the Universe.
- iii. Vaikhanasas** : This ritualistic cult was founded by the legendary Vikhanas whose teachings were decimated by 4 ancient sages : Atri, Marichi, Bhrigu and Kashyapa. Vaikhanasa ritual theory is based on the 5 -fold conception of Vishnu as Brahmana (the supreme god), as Purusha, as Satya , as Achhyuta (immutable), and as Aniruddha (the irreducible aspect). Image worship is important in this movement and is said to be a development of symbolic Vedic rituals. The main text is : Vaikhanasa Sutra (3rd c. AD)

- Vaishnavism was revived as a philosophical and ideological movement by 'Acharyas' (who represented the intellectual side of the Vaishnavism in the 11th century). Most important among them was Ramanuja, whose disciple Ramananda took it to North India.

Main Features :

1. Discarded ritual and sacrifices.
2. Emphasised purity of heart and mind, humanism and devotion
3. Monotheistic in nature
4. God is Saguna or Nirguna.
5. Knowledge was a constituent part.
6. An egalitarian movement
7. Best form of worship is singing Bhajans and realisation of God by personal effort. No need of priestly class.
8. Saints, preached in local languages.

Achievements Of Bhakti And Sufi Movements

- Influenced each other and inherited from each other.
- Bhaktism reformed Hinduism and Sufism liberalised Islam
- Both put breaks on Orthodoxy
- Both encouraged social reform measures
- Atmosphere of inter-religious fraternity was created.
- Development of regional languages
- A cultural synthesis took place which transformed a Muslim rule in India to a national govt. Under Akbar.

THANK YOU !