

Chapter 12 Making of Composite Culture

In this chapter we will study about two religious reform movements that spread across India during the medieval period. These were Bhakti and Sufi movements. Let us first study about the Bhakti movement.

A number of factors resulted in the rise of the Bhakti movement. Meaningless rituals, complex nature of society had crept in to Hinduism. The domination of the priestly class and increasing rigidity of the caste system alienated a large section of people.

Bhakti means devotion. It glorified Gods through bhajans. It spread both in North and South India. In South the alvars and the nayanar saints travelled from place to place singing hymns in God's praise. The alvars were the worshippers of Lord Vishnu and the Nayanars the worshippers of Lord Shiva. Shankaracharya and Ramanuja played a major role in spreading bhakti in South India. Shankaracharya believed that there is no difference between the soul of God and the soul of human beings. Ramanuja taught people to surrender themselves to God.

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Kabir was an important Bhakti saint who preached that there is only one God and Ram, Rahim, Hari, Allah are different names of same God. He also criticized rituals and superstitions, idol worship and the caste system.

Guru Nanak was the founder of Sikhism. He emphasized the worship of one God (Ik Onkar). He too rejected class and caste differences. He started the practice of langar. He attracted a large number of followers.

Other bhakti saints were Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who popularized Krishna-bhakti in Bengal. Mirabai was a devotee of Lord Krishna. She composed numerous bhajans expressing her love and devotion for the Lord Krishna. Sant Jnaneshwar popularized the worship of Vithoba, the incarnation of Vishnu.

The bhakti saints taught selfless devotion to God. Purity of heart and mind is important. All human beings are equal. Helping fellow human beings is the true test of bhakti. Knowledge, which is an essential part of bhakti can be obtained through a teacher.

The bhakti movement helped revive and reform Hinduism and helped in uniting the Hindus and the Muslims.