

Key Notes

Chapter-06

Bhakti Sufi Traditions

- From 8th to 18th century striking feature was a visibility of wide range of gods & goddesses in sculpture & text.
- There was integration of cults - composition, compilation & presentation of puranic texts in simple Sanskrit verses.
- Explicitly meant to be accessible to women and shurdas who were generally excluded from vedic learning.
- Tantric forms of worship - more prevalent among women. Often associated with the goddess were forms of worship that were classified as Tantric. Tantric practices were widespread in several parts of the subcontinent they were open to women and men, and practitioners often ignored differences of caste and class within the ritual context.
- Bhakti traditions classified into saguna (with attributes) and nirguna (without form attracts worship of abstract form).
- The Alvars and Narayanars of Tamilnadu - The worshippers of Vishnu and Narayanars - devotees of Shiva - common features - traveled singing hymns in Tamil.
- Alvars & nayanars initiated movement against caste system & dominance of Brahmins. Nalayiradivya Prabandam - important composition of Alvars equal to four Vedas.
- Status of women - composition of Andal (a women Alvar) popular, songs of Karaikkal Ammaiyar - were widely sung.
- State patronage in south for Vedic gods rather than Jainism & Buddhism, Cholas patronized brahminical tradition, making land grant as to Lord Shiva at Gangaikonda Cholaapuram bronze sculpture of Shiva.
- Singing of hymns under royal patronage were encountered - Chola ruler Parantaka I consecrated metal image of Appan, Sambandan and Sundarar in Shiva temples.
- Karnataka saw a new movement under Basavanna a Brahmin in court of Chalukyan ruler - his followers Virashaivas (heroes of Shiva) or Lingayats (wearers of Linga) - important community to this day - who worship Shiva in form of a linga. Of the group of Sufis who migrated to India in the late twelfth century, the Chishtis were the most influential.
- By the sixteenth century the shrine had become very popular, in fact it was the spirited singing of pilgrims bound for Ajmer that inspired Akbar to visit the tomb.
- He went there fourteen times, sometimes two or three times a year to seek blessings for new conquests, fulfillment of vows and the birth of sons. He also had a mosque constructed with the composer of the dargah.
- Lingayats challenged idea of caste and questioned the theory of rebirth. They encountered remarriage of widows. North India saw the emergence of Rajput states which patronized Brahmins - performed secular & ritual function. The Naths, Jogis, Siddhas also.
- Through guidance by ulema, rulers followed a flexible policy granting religious tax exemptions to Non-Muslims sometimes.

Key Notes

- Those who accepted Islam in India accepted in principal the five pillars of faith but these were overlooked with diviation in practice derived from local customs & affiliations (summi, shia) some like in Malabar court adopted local language Sufism - Sufis were critical of dogmatic definitions & scholastic method of interpreting - Quran.
- They emphasized interpretation of Quran on basis of personal experiences. Chishtis - were a part of Sufis - hospices of khangah were small room & hall for students to live & pray.
- Life in chaisti khangah was like the life of a monastery & catered to all travellers rich or poor. Shaikh Nizamuddin chishti had many followers.
- The practice of visits to dargas gained prominence by 14th century - shrines became very popular.
- Also music & dance & mystical chants were performed to evoke divine ecstasy. The Bhakti movement saw the emergence of poet saint like kabir where poems written in form in which every meaning are inverted.
- The message of Baba Guru Nanak is spelt out in his hymns and teachings. These suggest that he advocated a form of nirguna Bhakti.
- Guru Nanak's Hymns in the Adi Granth Sahib called "Gurubani", are composed in various languages.
- Mirabai (c. fifteenth – sixteenth centuries) is perhaps the best known woman poet within the Bhakti traditions.
- She defied her husband and did not submit to the traditional role of wife and mother, insisted recognizing Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu as per lover.
- Historaians draw on a variety of sources to reconstruct histories of religious traditions.
- Virtually all these religious traditions continue to flourish to date.