
UNIT 1 BHAKTI MOVEMENT

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

Bhakti Movement brought about revolutionary changes in moral, social, political perspectives of people of India. It is important to realize that Bhakti Movement unfolded the uniformities existing among the various religions. Once again, it is important to note that it played a significant role against the divisive and destructive forces in society. Bhakti Movement through Bhakti Yoga asserted itself as a method / pathway, to God on par with Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga.

The objectives of this unit are:

- To make the pupil acquire knowledge about Bhakti Movement in ancient and medieval India.
- To enable the pupil understand the aims and services of the leaders of the movement.
- To motivate the pupil appreciate the work of the leaders of the Bhakti Movement.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The term Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit root “**Bhaj**” means to serve. Dharma means the natural internal characteristics of a thing. The meaning of “movement” is the practice that influences a large section of a society.

In the early beginning, the word Bhakti is first mentioned in Rig-Veda as worship to Indra and Surya Devata. It is also noted in the famous discourse on Bhakti by Narad in Narad Bhakti Sutra. Similarly it also appears in Vishnu-sookta.

Later, Upanishads emphasized Para Bhakti. Bhakti and Upasana of Vishnu, Shiv, Roodra, Narayan, Surya is also indicated in Upanishad. The great epic Ramayana emphasized Pitra Bhakti and Guru Bhakti.

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.

1.2 HISTORY OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

The term bhakti is defined as “devotion” or passionate love for the Divine. Moksha or liberation from rebirth was not in the following of rules, regulations or societal ordering, but it was through simple devotion to the Divine. Within the movement at large, useful distinctions have been made by contemporary scholars between those poet saints who composed verses extolling God with attributes or form, namely, “saguna” bhaktas, and,

Those extolling God without and beyond all attributes or form, “nirguna.”

As mentioned above, the feeling of Bhakti or devotion can be traced back to the Rig Veda. It is the very first hymn of Rig Veda, which gives expression to a feeling of intimacy with the highest God. In the Katha Upanishad it is said that the divine help, which is the reward to Bhakti, is necessary before one can be saved. The Sveta – Svataara Upanishad speaks of the highest devotion to God. Panini refers to the object of devotion in the Astadhyayi. The earliest God connected with Bhakti is Vishnu – Krishna. In the Bhagwad Gita there is emphasis on Love and devotion to God. The attitude of love to the supreme God continued to be recommended in the Bhagwat Purana.

Causes for the birth of Bhakti Movement

Prior to the coming of Islam to India, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism were the dominant religions. Hinduism lost its simplicity. Many philosophical schools appeared. Two different sects, i.e., **Vaishnavism** and **Saivism** also appeared within Hinduism. In course of time **Sakti** worship also came into existence. Common people were confused on the way of worshipping God. When **Islam** came to India, the Hindus observed many ceremonies and worshipped many Gods and Goddesses. There were all sorts of superstitious beliefs among them. Their religion had become complex in nature. Added to these, the caste system, untouchability, blind worshipping and inequality in society caused dissensions among different sections of the people. On the other hand Islam preached unity of God and brotherhood of man. It emphasized monotheism. It attacked idol worship. It preached equality of man before God.

The oppressed common people and the people branded as low castes were naturally attracted towards Islam. It only increased the rivalry among religions.

Fanaticism, bigotry, and religious intolerance began to raise their heads. It was to remove such evils religious leaders appeared in different parts of India. They preached **pure devotion called Bhakti** to attain God.

Origin of the Bhakti Movement

Bhakti means personal devotion to God. It stresses the Union of the individual with God. Bhakti movement originated in South India between the 7th and the 12th centuries A.D. The **Nayanmars**, who worshipped Siva, and the **Alwars**, who worshipped Vishnu, preached the idea of Bhakti. They carried their message of love and devotion to various parts of South India through the medium of the local language. They preached among common people. It made some of the followers of the Vedic faith to revive the old Vedic religion. Saints like **Sankara**, **Ramanuja** and **Madhwa** gave their concepts of God and the individual soul.

Bhakti Movement in the North

The Bhakti movement in North India gained momentum due to the Muslim conquest. The saints of the Bhakti Movement were men and women of humble origin. They came from all castes and classes. They had visited from place to place singing devotional songs. They had also preached the Unity of God and brotherhood of man. They had stressed tolerance among various religious groups. Their preaching was simple.

The Hindu tradition has generally been divided into a number of important historical and religious periods through its long development. The formative time frame from 2500—400 B.C.E. is highlighted by what are known as the sacred texts, the Vedas, and a nomadic people known as the Indo-Aryans; this period is classified as the Vedic Period. Central to the Vedas was the visionary figure of the rishi, or seer, one who was able to communicate with and about the various gods of the Vedic pantheon through a complex system of rituals that could only be conducted by an increasingly powerful priesthood. Liberation, or moksha, was to be found through the precise performance of ritual.

The Epic and Classical Periods, from 400 B.C.E.—600 C.E. are so named because of their focus on important texts, namely, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. These epics are concerned with heroes and heroic battles, kings, queens and ideal roles of individuals. Also of central importance to this time frame were Law Books concerned with the ideal nature of society. Social order and stability were to be found in a hierarchical ordering of people as well as specific roles assigned to each individual's life stage (ashrama) and position in society (varna) or caste.

On the upper rung of this system was the Brahmin priesthood, followed by Kshatriyas (warriors) and Vaishyas (merchants), also known as twice-born classes. Only these groups were enabled to take part in an initiation ceremony known as the "sacred thread," study the Vedas and take part in Vedic rituals. Beneath these three groups were the Shudras, those who were servants to the upper three varnas. Underneath this rung came another subsection, the Untouchables, those whose occupations were so polluting that they did not even qualify to fit within an ordered society. The way to liberation from rebirth or moksha was in a true understanding of dharma, recognition and maintenance of the good of the social order, as exemplified and regulated by the Epics and Law Books.

NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

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 the vigorous monotheism of Islam. All Bhakti cults are essentially monotheistic. It is immaterial whether he is called Shiva, Krishna or Devi. They all symbolize 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. 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. 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.

FACTORS THAT HELPED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT

There were a number of factors which contributed to the rise and growth of the Bhakti Movement during the Medieval Period. The first important factor can be presumed as the persecution of Hindus by the Muslim rulers, who tried to convert

them to Islam and imposed Jaziya if they were not prepared to become followers of Islam. This led to the very strong reactions of Hindus leading to preservation of their religion through Bhakti Movement. Secondly, the ill-treatment of the lower classes in Hindu society by the persons of upper castes, the people of the lower caste had to suffer injustice and cruelties. So the teachings of the Bhakti saints who preached equality of castes as far as the devotion to God was concerned appealed to the people of lower castes. Thirdly, the elaborate rituals and rigor in religion was not liked by common man. The Bhakti saints preached the path of devotion and discarded all rituals hence it appealed to the common man.

Next, was the enthusiasm and the inspiration of the Bhakti saints. They tried to remove the evils of Hindu society and gave it a new vigor and vitality. Last, factor was the inner vitality of the Hindu religion that resulted in an intellectual and a moral revival of Hinduism. This Hinduism affected every aspect of thought and generated new moral forces, which helped to revitalize Hindu life and gave it the dynamism. In the sphere of religion and normal thinking in law, in literature and even in political ideals, a new life came into being in India by the middle of the 16th century.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What do you understand by Bhakti Movement?

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2) Explain the factors contributing towards development of Bhakti Movement.

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1.3 TORCH BEARERS OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Torch Bearers of Bhakti Movement

Ramanuja

Ramanuja was one of the earliest reformers. Born in the South, he made a pilgrimage to some of the holy places in Northern India. He considered God as an Ocean of Love and beauty. His teachings were based on the **Upanishads** and **Bhagwad Gita**. Whatever he taught, he had taught in the language of the common man. Soon a large number of people became his followers. **Ramanand** was his disciple. He took his message to Northern parts of India.

Ramananda

Ramananda was the first reformer to preach in Hindi, the main language spoken by the people of the North. He was educated at Benaras. He preached that there is nothing high or low. All men are equal in the eyes of God. He was an ardent worshipper of Rama. He

welcomed people of all castes and status to follow his teachings. He had twelve chief disciples. One of them was a barber, another was a weaver, the third one was a cobbler and the other was the famous saint **Kabir** and the fifth one was a woman named **Padmavathi**. He considered God as a loving father. He lived in the 14th century A.D.

Kabir

Kabir was an ardent disciple of Ramananda. It is said that he was the son of a Brahmin widow who had left him near a tank at Varanasi. A **Muslim** couple **Niru** and his wife who were weavers brought up the child. Later he became a weaver but he was attracted by the teachings of Swami Ramananda. He wanted unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. He preached that both the Hindus and the Muslims are the children of a single God. He had no faith in idol worship, religious rituals and ceremonies. He taught that **Allah** and **Eswar**, **Ram** and **Rahim** are one and the same. They are present everywhere. The devotees of Kabir were known as **Kabir Panthis**. Thousands of people, both Hindus and Muslims became Kabir's followers. He probably lived in the fifteenth century A.D.

Namdeva

Namdeva was a waterman by birth. He hailed from Maharashtra. He composed beautiful hymns in Marathi. They are full of intense devotion to God. He worshipped Vishnu in the form of Lord Vithoba. Some of his verses are included in the **Guru Granth Sahib**, the holy book of the Sikhs. A large number of people from different Castes became his followers.

Guru Nanak. (A.D.1469 -A.D.1538)

Guru Nanak was the founder of the Sikh religion. From his childhood, he did not show any interest in worldly affairs. At the age of 29, he left his home and became a **Sadhu**. He went to **Mecca** and **Medina**. He had travelled far and wide to spread his teachings. Guru Nanak had finally settled at Karthpur. He laid emphasis on pure and simple living. He preached the Unity of God and condemned idolatry. He was against the caste system. Guru Nanak's followers are called the Sikhs. He started the **Langer** or the common kitchen, where people belonging to all castes or religions could have their meals together.

Nanak's teachings were in the form of verses. They were collected in a book called the **Adi Granth**. Later Adi Grantham was written in a script called **Gurmukhi**. The holy book of the Sikhs is popularly known as '**Grantha Sahib**'. It contains verses from Kabir, Namdeva and other Bhakti and Sufi saints.

Chaitanya (A.D.1485 - A.D.1533)

Chaitanya, a great devotee of **Lord Krishna**, was a saint from Bengal. From his very childhood, he had showed great interest in education and studied Sanskrit. He married the daughter of a Saintly person. Later at the age of 24, he renounced

the worldly life and became a sanyasin. He travelled all over the Deccan, Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. His followers regarded him as an incarnation of **Lord Vishnu**. He helped the old and the needy. He was opposed to the inequalities of the caste system. He emphasized the need for tolerance, humanity and love. He spread the message of Bhakti in Bengal. He popularised '**Sankritan**' or public singing of God's name. His songs are still very popular in Bengal. He was addressed '**Mahaprabhu**' by his followers.

Tulsi Das

Goswamy Tulsidas was a devotee of Rama. His work gives the story of Rama in Hindi. He was the foremost in popularizing Rama cult. His other works in Hindi are **Janaki Mangal** and **Parvathi Mangal**. In his writings he insists the duty of a son to his parent, duty of a student to his teacher and duty of a king to his people.

Guru Ramdas

He was a famous teacher. He was born in A.D. 1608. Chatrapati Shivaji, the great Maratha ruler, was a follower of Ramdas. He stressed upon the equality of all men before God. He said that anyone could attain God's favour by means of Bhakti. Guru Ramdas was not merely a religious preacher but also a Nation Builder.

Tukaram: was a saint who lived in Maharashtra. He composed a large number of verses called **Abhangas** or devotional songs in praise of Panduranga or Krishna. He believed in one God who was kind, merciful and protective. He wrote all his **abhangas** in Marathi.

Jnaneshwar: He is one of the greatest saints of Maharashtra. He worshipped Vishnu in the form of Vithoba or Krishna. At the age of fourteen, he translated the **Bhagawad Gita** into the Marathi language. This book is called **Jnaneshwari**.

BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN SOUTH INDIA

Nayanmars

In South India, the **Nayanmars** and **Alwars** were the noted saints of the Bhakti movement. The Nayanmars, the devotees of Siva, were **sixty three** in number. The most famous among them were **Appar, Sundarar, Thirugnana Sambandar** and **Manickavachakar**. These saints composed many verses in praise of Lord Siva. A saint named **Nambiandar Nambi** collected the devotional songs of Nayanmars. Appar, Sundarar and Thirugnana Sambandar composed the **Thevaram** hymns. Manickvachakar's songs are known as **Tiruvachakam**. **Periyapuranam**, written by **Sekhizhar**, tells us the life stories of the Nayanmars.

Alwars

The **Alwars** were the worshippers of **Lord Vishnu** who were twelve in number. Among them **Nammalwar, Tirumangai Alwar, Andal** and **Perialwar** were famous. The songs of the Alwars were compiled in a book called **Nalayira Divya Prabandham** by **Nadamuni**. The devotional songs of **Andal** is called **Thiruppavai**.

Basava

Basava lived in Karnataka. He founded the **Virasaiva** or **Lingayat** sect. According to Basava, Siva was the supreme God. Basava opposed child marriage and idol worship.

Women Torch Bearers

Many of the bhakti poet-saints rejected asceticism as the crucial means toward liberation; some bhaktas were instead householders. As well, themes of universalism, a general rejection of institutionalized religion, and a central focus on inner devotion laid the groundwork for more egalitarian attitudes toward women and lower caste devotees.

Women and shudras, both at the bottom of the traditional hierarchy ordering society, became the examples of true humility and devotion. Female poet-saints also played a significant role in the bhakti movement at large. Nonetheless, many of these women had to struggle for acceptance within the largely male dominated movement. Only through demonstrations of their utter devotion to the Divine, their outstanding poetry and stubborn insistence of their spiritual equality with their contemporaries were these women reluctantly acknowledged and accepted within their ranks. Their struggle attests to the strength of patriarchal values within both society and within religious and social movements attempting to pave the way for more egalitarian access to the Divine.

The imagery of bhakti poetry is grounded in the everyday, familiar language of ordinary people. Women bhaktas wrote of the obstacles of home, family tensions, the absent husband, meaningless household chores, and restrictions of married life, including their status as married women. In many cases, they rejected traditional women's roles and societal norms by leaving husbands and homes altogether, choosing to become wandering bhaktas; in some instances they formed communities with other poet-saints. Their new focus was utter devotion and worship of their Divine Husbands.

Caste status and even masculinity were understood as barriers to liberation, in essence a rejection of the hierarchy laid out by the Law Books of the Classical Period. Male bhaktas often took on the female voice calling to her Beloved, utterly submissive to His desires. However, while male bhaktas could engage in this role playing on a temporary basis, returning at will to their privileged social status as males, women bhaktas faced overwhelming challenges through their rejection of societal norms and values, without having the ability to revert back to their normative roles as wives, mothers and in some cases, the privileges of their original high caste status.

While it is tempting to see women's participation within the bhakti movement as a revolt against the patriarchal norms of the time, there is little evidence to support this perspective. Injustices and the patriarchal order itself were not a major focus of these poet-saints. Women bhaktas were simply individuals attempting to lead lives of devotion. Staying largely within the patriarchal ideology that upheld the chaste and dutiful wife as ideal, these women transferred the object of their devotion and their duties as the "lovers" or "wives" to their Divine Lover or Husband. Nonetheless, that their poetry became an integral aspect of the bhakti movement at large is highly significant and inspirational for many

who look to these extraordinary women as ideal examples of lives intoxicated by love for the Divine. Further, it would appear that with the movement's northward advancement (15th through 17th centuries), its radical edge as it pertained to women's inclusion, was tempered. Greater numbers of women took part in the movement's earlier development (6th to 13th centuries); it is largely male bhaktas and saints that are today perceived as the spokespersons for the movement in its later manifestations. The poetry of women bhaktas from this latter time period is generally not indicative of a rejection of societal norms in terms of leaving family and homes in pursuit of divine love. Instead, some of the later poet-saints stayed within the confines of the household while expounding on their souls' journeys, their eternal love for the Divine, as well as their never-ending search for truth.

Female Bhaktas

The poets outlined below represent a panorama of female poet-saints within the Bhakti movement. Some were extraordinarily radical in their rejection of social norms and values, leaving husbands, families, and society behind in order to extol their love for God. Others attempted to fit into more traditional roles in society by maintaining their responsibilities as wives and mothers. All wrote exquisite poetry that has been passed on through bards and singers throughout India.

Akkamahadevi, also known as **Akka** or **Mahadevi** was a bhakta from the southern region of Karnataka and devotee of Shiva in the 12th century C.E. Legends tell of her wandering naked in search of her Divine Lover; her poetry, or *vacanas* tell of her frustration with societal norms and roles that restricted her. They also bear witness to her intense, all-encompassing love for Shiva, whom she addresses as Chennamallikarjuna. Through Shiva and Shiva alone is her love fulfilled; through separation from her "lord White as jasmine" is her heart broken.

Janabai was born around the 13th century in Maharashtra in a low caste sudra family. As a young girl she was sent to work in the upper-caste family of Namdev, one of the most revered of the bhakti poet saints. While within this household, she continued to serve Namdev, both as a servant and as his devotee. Janabai wrote over three hundred poems focusing on domestic chores and the restrictions facing her as a low caste woman.

Mirabai, or **Mira** is said to have been born into a ruling Rajput family. Mirabai's poetry tells of her vision of Lord Krishna when she was a child; from that point on Mira vowed that she would forever be his bride. Despite her wishes she was married into another princely family at a young age. Yet the numerous legends surrounding Mira tell of an undying devotion toward Krishna, her true husband. Central to these accounts are Mirabai's struggles within the family she had been married into, including unsuccessful attempts made by her jealous husband to kill her. Others focus on her sisters-in-law's efforts to obstruct Mirabai in her desires to join the company of wandering saints, actions deemed utterly improper for a woman of her high-caste status. Eventually, Mirabai left her husband and family in pilgrimage to various places associated with "her Dark Lord," including Brindavan, Krishna's holy city. There she was initially rejected because she was a woman. Yet Mirabai's reputation of devotion, piety, and intellectual astuteness eventually led to her inclusion within the community of the saints of Brindavan.

Mirabai’s poetry portrays a unique relationship with Krishna; in it she is not only the devoted bride of Krishna, but Krishna is ardent in his pursuit of Mira. Because of Mirabai’s singular focus and intense devotion of her Husband, the “lifter of the mountain,” she can be perceived as simply upholding the “wifely” duties of women and patriarchal norms in general. On the other hand, she remains for many a symbol of resistance of social order of the day.

Bahinabai or **Bahina** was a poet-saint from 17th century Maharashtra, writing in the form of abangas, women’s songs that accompanied their labours, especially in the fields. Her writings are particularly autobiographical, recounting her childhood, puberty and married life. Despite having obvious conflicts with her husband due to her overarching and ecstatic love for her Divine Lover in the form of Lord Vithoba, another name for Krishna, she took her role as wife and responsibilities to her earthly husband seriously. Her husband was also critical of her allegiance to the Bhakti poet-saint Tukaram. Nonetheless, her poetry reflects an attitude of duty and respectful empathy toward both her marriage and her spouse. This becomes clear through her writings on the responsibilities of women toward their husbands. Though highly unusual, it is believed that Bahinabai received some classical training from her father, a Brahmin scribe. Her poetry recounts visions she experiences of the low-caste poet-saint Tukaram; despite her high caste status, she became his devotee, thus choosing the path of devotion over brahmanical norms of ritual purity.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
- b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.
- 1) Bring out the contribution of Saint Kabir and Saint Tukaram to Bhakti Movement.
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- 2) Explain the role played by women saints in Bhakti Movement.
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1.4 ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

With reference to the early beginning of Bhakti Movement in southern India, on the philosophical side the most important fact is the new interpretation of the ancient philosophical texts given by Ramanuja, who in the eleventh century provided an intellectual foundation for bhakti, which the monistic philosophy had done so much to undermine. It was this influence which was most powerful in what has been called the Hindu Reformation, and in the ‘ Four Churches of the Reformation we have evidence of the new strength and vitality which had been imparted to the spirit of bhakti. These Churches are known respectively as (1) the Sri-sampradaya of Ramanuja, (2) the Brahma-sampradaya of Madhva, (3) the Rudra-sampradaya of Vishnuswamin, and (4) the Sanakadi-sampradaya of Nimbarka. These Churches are based on different theological foundations. The first held a qualified monism—visishtadvaita, the second a dualism on the lines of the Samkhya-Yoga, the third a pure monism—suddhadvaita, and the fourth a philosophy which is a curious blend of monism and pluralism. Yet all agree on certain points. They hold to the belief in God as in some way personal. They also agree in holding that the soul is essentially personal and possessed of inalienable individuality. It is also immortal, finding its true being not in absorption in the Supreme, but in a relation with him of inextinguishable love. All agree accordingly in rejecting the doctrine of Maya.

Sir R. G. Bhandarkar has well summarized what is to be said regarding the relations of the various Vaishnava systems to each other in the following paragraph:

The points of contact between these various Vaishnava systems are that their spiritual elements are essentially derived from the Bhagavadgita, that Vasudeva as the name of the Supreme Being, stands in the background of all, and that spiritual monism and world-illusion are denounced by them equally. The differences arise from the varied importance that they attach to the different spiritual doctrines; the prominence that they give to one or other of the three elements that were mingled with Vasudevism ; the metaphysical theory that they set up; and the ceremonial that they impose upon their followers. The Bhagavadgita was supplemented in later times by the Pancaratra Samhitas and the Puranas such as the Vishnu and the Bhagavata, and other later works of that description. These occasionally elucidated some of the essential doctrines, laid down the ceremonial, and brought together a vast mass of legendary matter to magnify the importance of their special teachings and render them attractive.

The Bhaktiratnavali, a work, dating from about A. D. 1400, which consists of extracts from the Bha-gavata Purana, shows how this influence wrought in one of its lines. It commends the bhakti-marga as the only way of deliverance. Neither charity, nor asceticism, nor sacrifices, nor purificatory rites, nor penances and religious vows please him. He is pleased with pure devotion. Everything else is futile, mere mockery.

Effects of Bhakti Movement

The Bhakti movement had brought the Hindus and the Muslims closer to each other. The equality concept preached by the leaders reduced the rigidity of the

caste system to a certain extent. The suppressed people gained a feeling of self-respect. The reformers preached in local languages. It led to the development of Vernacular literature. They composed hymns and songs in the languages spoken by the people. Therefore there was a remarkable growth of literature in all the languages. A new language Urdu, a mixture of Persian and Hindi, was developed. The Bhakti movement freed the common people from the tyranny of the priests. It checked the excesses of polytheism. It encouraged the spirit of toleration. The gap between the Hindus and the Muslims was reduced. They began to live amicably together. It emphasized the value of a pure life of charity and devotion. Finally, it improved the moral and spiritual ways of life of the medieval society. It provided an example for the future generation to live with the spirit of toleration.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Mention some ethical implications of Bhakti Movement.

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2) Explain the effects of Bhakti Movement

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

The social significance of Bhakti Movement was remarkable. It also attempted to do away with all the distinctions of caste and creed. It is well known fact that in Maharashtra saints like Jnanesvara, Eknath, Tukaram and others tried to overcome the evils which were meted out to women and lower caste people.

Bhakti Movement brought about a kind of “reformation” in India with reference to the attitude of people belonging to variety of religions. It also led to respecting other religions.

Following a religion and achieving salvation was made more simple for all down trodden people. The divisive and destructive forces from various religions were

also checked. This led to the change in the mind sets of Indian people. To certain extent it contributed towards strengthening of spirituality of people belonging to various religions.

1.6 KEY WORDS

- Bhakti** : The term Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit root “**Bhaj**” means to serve. The term bhakti is defined as “devotion” or passionate love for the Divine.
- Alvars** : The **Alvars** were the worshippers of **Lord Vishnu** who were twelve in number

1.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) The term Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit root “**Bhaj**” means to serve. Dharma means the natural internal characteristics of a thing. The meaning of “movement” is the practice that influences a large section of a society. In the early beginning, the word Bhakti is first mentioned in Rig-Veda as worship to Indra and Surya Devata. It is also noted in the famous discourse on Bhakti by Narad in Narad Bhakti Sutra. Similarly it also appears in Vishnu-sookta.
- 2) There were a number of factors which contributed to the rise and growth of the Bhakti Movement during the Medieval Period. The first important factor can be presumed as the persecution of Hindus by the Muslim rulers, who tried to convert them to Islam and imposed Jaziya if they were not prepared to become followers of Islam. This led to the very strong reactions of Hindus leading to preservation of their religion through Bhakti Movement. Secondly, the ill-treatment of the lower classes in Hindu society by the persons of upper castes, the people of the lower caste had to suffer injustice and cruelties. so the teachings of the Bhakti saints who preached equality of castes as far as the devotion to God was concerned appealed to the people of lower castes. Thirdly, the elaborate rituals and rigor in religion was not liked by common man. The Bhakti saints preached the path of devotion and discarded all rituals hence it appealed to the common man.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) Kabir was an ardent disciple of Ramananda. It is said that he was the son of a Brahmin widow who had left him near a tank at Varanasi. A **Muslim** couple **Niru** and his wife who were weavers brought up the child. Later he became a weaver but he was attracted by the teachings of Swami Ramananda. He wanted unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. He preached that both the Hindus and the Muslims are the children of a single God. He had no faith in idol worship, religious rituals and ceremonies. He taught that **Allah** and **Eswar**, **Ram** and **Rahim** are one and the same. They are present everywhere. The devotees of Kabir were known as **Kabir Panthis**. Thousands of people, both Hindus and Muslims became Kabir's followers. He probably lived in the fifteenth century A.D. **Tukaram** was a saint who lived in Maharashtra. He composed a large number of verses called **Abhangas** or devotional songs in praise of Panduranga or Krishna. He believed in one God who was kind, merciful and protective. He wrote all his **abhangas** in Marathi.
- 2) Many of the bhakti poet-saints rejected asceticism as the crucial means toward liberation; some bhaktas were instead householders. As well, themes of universalism, a general rejection of institutionalized religion, and a central focus on inner devotion laid the groundwork for more egalitarian attitudes toward women and lower caste devotees.

Women and shudras, both at the bottom of the traditional hierarchy ordering society, became the examples of true humility and devotion. Female poet-saints also played a significant role in the bhakti movement at large. Nonetheless, many of these women had to struggle for acceptance within the largely male dominated movement. Only through demonstrations of their utter devotion to the Divine, their outstanding poetry and stubborn insistence of their spiritual equality with their contemporaries were these women reluctantly acknowledged and accepted within their ranks. Their struggle attests to the strength of patriarchal values within both society and within religious and social movements attempting to pave the way for more egalitarian access to the Divine.

Check Your Progress III

- 1) With reference to the early beginning of Bhakti Movement in southern India, on the philosophical side the most important fact is the new interpretation of the ancient philosophical texts given by Ramanuja, who in the eleventh century provided an intellectual foundation for bhakti, which the monistic philosophy had done so much to undermine. It was this influence which was most powerful in what has been called the Hindu Reformation, and in the 'Four Churches of the Reformation we have evidence of the new strength and vitality which had been imparted to the spirit of bhakti. These Churches are known respectively as (1) the Sri-sampradaya of Ramanuja, (2) the Brahma-sampradaya of Madhva, (3) the Rudra-sampradaya of Vishnuswamin, and (4) the Sanakadi-sampradaya of Nimbarka. These Churches are based on different theological foundations. The first held a qualified monism—visishtadvaita, the second a dualism on the lines of the Samkhya-Yoga, the third a pure monism—suddhadvaita, and the fourth a philosophy which is a curious blend of monism and pluralism. Yet all agree

on certain points. They hold to the belief in God as in some way personal. They also agree in holding that the soul is essentially personal and possessed of inalienable individuality. It is also immortal, finding its true being not in absorption in the Supreme, but in a relation with him of inextinguishable love. All agree accordingly in rejecting the doctrine of Maya.

- 2) The Bhakti movement had brought the Hindus and the Muslims closer to each other. The equality concept preached by the leaders reduced the rigidity of the caste system to a certain extent. The suppressed people gained a feeling of self-respect. The reformers preached in local languages. It led to the development of Vernacular literature. They composed hymns and songs in the languages spoken by the people. Therefore there was a remarkable growth of literature in all the languages. A new language Urdu, a mixture of Persian and Hindi, was developed. The Bhakti movement freed the common people from the tyranny of the priests. It checked the excesses of polytheism. It encouraged the spirit of toleration. The gap between the Hindus and the Muslims was reduced. They began to live amicably together. It emphasised the value of a pure life of charity and devotion. Finally, it improved the moral and spiritual ways of life of the medieval society. It provided an example for the future generation to live with the spirit of toleration.