



Mains Practice Question

Q. What are the reasons that led to the rise of Bhakti movement in India and what was its impact? (250 words)

13 Feb, 2019 GS Paper 1 History

Approach:

- Write in brief about the Bhakti Movement in the introduction.
- Give the reasons that led to the rise of Bhakti movement.
- Elaborate on its Impact on the society.

Introduction

- The development of Bhakti movement took place in Tamil Nadu between the seventh and twelfth centuries. It was reflected in the emotional poems of the **Nayanars (devotees of Shiva)** and **Alvars (devotees of Vishnu)**. These saints looked upon religion not as a cold formal worship but as a loving bond based upon love between the worshipped and worshipper.
- Originally began in South India in the 9th century with **Shankaracharya** spread over all parts of India and by the 16th century was a great spiritual force to reckon with, especially after the great wave made by Kabir, Nanak and Shri Chaitanya.

Body

Reasons that led to the rise of Bhakti movement:

- **Evils in the Hindu Society:** Hindu society was full of many social anomalies like rigidity of caste system, irrelevant rituals and religious practices, blind faiths and social dogmas. Common men in general had developed an aversive attitude towards these social evils and were in need of a liberal form of religion where they could identify themselves with simple religious practices.
- **Complexity of religion:** The high philosophy of the Vedas and Upanishads were very complicated for the common people. They wanted a simple way of worship, simple religious practices and simple social customs. Alternative was Bhakti marga—a simple way of devotion to get salvation from worldly life.
- **Role of Religious Reformers:** The chief exponents of the movement were Shankara, Ramanuja, Kabir, Nanak, Shri Chaitanya, Mirabai, Ramananda, Namdev, Nimbarka, Madhava, Eknath, Surdas, Tulsidas, Tukaram, Vallabhacharya and Chandidas. They were the propounders of Bhakti movement and gave a call to the people to worship in the simplest possible way of devotion and love.
- **Challenge from Rival Religion:** the impact of the Muslim rule and Islam put dread in the heart of Hindu masses. The Hindus had suffered a lot under some of the fanatic rulers. They wanted some solace to heal their despairing hearts.
- **Influence of Sufism:** The Sufi saints of the Muslim community also inspired the movement. Some similar chords in the two evoked resonance.

Impact of Bhakti movement:

- The Bhakti exponents raised their powerful voice against different types of immoral acts like infanticide and sati and encouraged prohibition of wine, tobacco and toddy. Adultery and sodomy were also discouraged. They aimed to set up a good social order upholding high moral values.
- Another remarkable impact was bringing about a unity among the Hindu and Muslim communities. The movement tried to reduce the growing bitterness between the two and bridge the gap. The saints of Bhakti movement and the Sufi saints spread message of friendship, amity, tolerance, peace and equality among all.
- The method of worship and belief in God took a new turn during the movement. Henceforth, importance was given to devotion and love for God who is the God of all-God of both Hindus as well as Muslims. Bhakti or devotion for the Almighty was the central theme of this movement.
- The spirit of tolerance, harmony and mutual respect which was inaugurated by the Bhakti saints had another everlasting impact – the emergence of a new cult of Satyapir. It started under the initiative of King Husain Shah of Jaunpur which later paved the way for the spirit of liberalism adopted by Akbar.
- The Bhakti movement promoted the growth of vernacular language and literature in different parts of the country. Kabir Nanak and Chaitanya preached in their respective vernacular tongues – Kabir in Hindi, Nanak in Gurmukhi and chaitanya in Bengali.

Conclusion

With such long-lasting impacts, the religious depression of the medieval society was set aside. The teachings acted as a healing balm to the suppressed classes. A deep-rooted change came about to lay the foundations of a liberal and composite Indian society.

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