



Mains Practice Question

Q. Examine the contribution of Bhakti movement to ethics along with its impact on society. (250 words)

05 Sep, 2019 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce by giving a brief idea on bhakti movement
- Examine how it impacted the society and ethical principles it has contributed
- Conclude by showing the relevance of bhakti movement in contemporary world

Introduction

- Bhakti movement started developing in **South India** from **7th century** with the travels of **Nayanars** (devotees of Shiva) and **Alvars** (devotees of Vishnu) who sang hymns in tamil about the bond of love between the worshipped and worshipper and reached its peak by the **16th century** after the teachings of **Kabir, Guru Nanak and Chaitanya** covering almost all the parts of India.
- The **two major forms** in which it flourished were **Sagun Bhakti** (devotion and prayer to a form and with attributes) and **Nirguna Bhakti** (devotion and prayer to formlessness without any attributes). Centuries of **self proclaimed supremacy** of the brahmins, their **hatred, pity and exploitative behaviour** towards the 'lower castes' became the cause for the rise of the Bhakti movement.

Impact on Ethics and Society

- Bhakti itself means **attachment, devotion to, fondness for, homage, faith, love, worship, piety to something as a spiritual, religious principle or means of salvation**, so it has the capacity to **sow the seed of rational and moral behaviour in human minds** enabling us to challenge the evil immorality of society.
- The message of devotion and prayer to God and the easy way to seek **salvation just by following a simple and ethical life**, was conveyed to the masses by the bhakti saints on **personal levels** in the **vernacular language without any institutional mechanisms and organised hierarchy**.
- **Kabir** inspired those who questioned entrenched religious and social institutions, ideas and practises in search for Divine. **Guru Nanak** rejected sacrifices, ritual baths, image worship, austerities, and both Hindu and Islamic scriptures. His ideas of **Absolute (Rub)** had no gender or form. **Mirabai** (a rajput princess) and her preceptor **Raidas** (a leather worker) questioned caste and gender issues. Dadu Dayal spread the message of non violence (**Ahimsa**) and social equality.
- The **continuous, conscious and ethical efforts** of these saints loosened and eventually broke the grip of Brahmanism and the social evils and immoralities it had generated. The exponents of this movement **raised voices against immoral acts like infanticide, sati, adultery, sodomy, untouchability, indulgence in material pleasures, consumption of alcohol and tobacco etc.**
- Salvation became available to women and lower castes, society became **more inclusive**, education and religious texts were readily available in people's own language which made them more aware and conscious, overlooking the upper castes' interference.

- The **unity of Bhakti and Sufi saints** was a remarkable achievement of this time who **equally believed in the message of friendship, amity, tolerance and peace** among all. The spirit of **tolerance, harmony and mutual respect** prevailed. People became more **empathetic, hopeful, optimistic, believed in mutual cooperation and development** for the betterment of all.

Conclusion

Bhakti movement took us on a journey from the state of unawareness, inequality, dependency and exploitation to the bright, self aware and ethical path, eager to help others and seek salvation in everyone's happiness and growth. The learnings and message of Bhakti movement continues to guide us, forming an essential tenet of our society and religion.

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