

7th Social Science Lesson 16 Notes in English

16] New Religious Ideas And Movements

Introduction:

Medieval India saw an extraordinary production of devotional poetry, which were not restricted to one particular religion but inspired by different religious movements. The exponents of these movements held the view that total devotion (bhakti) to God could save man from the pitfalls of life and earn him salvation. It was also believed that one does not have to go to temples or perform rituals, for God is omnipresent and resides inside every human. The Bhagavad Gita proposed that the path of bhaktimarga (the path of bhakti) is superior to the two other religious approaches, namely, the path of knowledge (jnana) and the path of rituals and good works (karma), providing inspiration to the exponents of Bhakti cult.

Bhakti Movement: The Beginnings:

The Bhakti movement, or the resurgence of devotional practices, started in Tamil Nadu around seventh century A.D. It included reciting the name of the God or Goddess, singing hymns in their praise, wearing religious marks or carrying identity emblems, and undertaking pilgrimages to sacred places associated with the deity. It emphasised the mutual emotional attachment and love of a devotee towards a personal God and of the God for the devotee.

This view was also preached by Sufism, which appeared as a reaction against worldliness of the early Islam. Sufis believed that realisation of God can be achieved only through passionate devotion to God and intense meditation. Sufis were of the view that this type of meditation would enable the devotee to understand the true nature of God. They argued that doing so would liberate the devotee from all worldly bonds and help them become one with God. Several mystical religious movements, in both Hinduism and Islam, had no hesitation to freely include elements of different faiths in their teachings. 'There is only one god, though Hindus and Muslims call him by different names', stated Haridasa.

1. Devotional Movement in Tamizhakam (Azhwars and Nayanmars):

The Azhwars, the Vaishnavite Bhakti sages and the originators of Bhakti cult, and the Nayanmars, the worshipers of Siva or the Saivites, composed devotional hymns in Tamil language, dedicated to their respective gods. Siva-bhakti is associated with Siva's manifestations on earth. Poems to Siva and Vishnu, particularly to Krishna, were composed in Tamil and other South Indian languages such as Kannada and Telugu. These poet-saints criticised caste-based social status and advocated gender equality in order to make it good to stand the onslaught of Buddhism or Jainism.

Vishnu-bhakti or Vaishnavism is based on Vishnu's avatars (incarnations), particularly Krishna and Rama. The 12 Tamil Azhwars are chiefly known for their immortal hymns. Two Azhwars stand

out distinctly for their contribution to the promotion of the Bhakti movement. Nammazhwar's fame lies in his 1,102-stanza Tiruvaimozhi. Nathamuni collected the 4,000 poems of Nammazhwar, in the form of Divya Prabandham. Andal, the only female Azhwar, is another. Periyazhwar, who was earlier known as Vishnu Chittar, made lots of songs on Krishna putting himself in the place of mother Yashoda. Periyazhvar is said to have found Andal as a baby in the tulsi garden at Srivilliputhur temple and adopted her. She grew up in the temple town of Srivilliputhur and became known as Andal-she who ruled. The Thiruppavai (The Path to Krishna) and the Nachiyar Thirumozhi (The Sacred Songs of the Lady) are her celebrated works. Her poems expressing her love for Ranganatha, the incarnation of Vishnu worshiped at a temple at Srirangam, are used in Vaishnava wedding ceremonies in Tamil Nadu.

a) **Adi Shankara:**



Adi Shankara

Adi Shankara or Shankarachariar (c. 700–750 A.D.) preached the Advaita philosophy. The essence of this philosophy is that the soul (atma) unites with the universal soul (brahma) through the attainment of knowledge. He set up mathas (mutts), centres of learning and worship, at Badrinath, Puri, Dwarka and Sringeri. These places have become prominent pilgrim centres today. Shankara enthusiastically endeavoured to restore the orthodox Vedic tradition without paying attention to the Bhakti movement of his time. His masterpiece is the commentary on the Brahma-sutra, which is a fundamental text of the Vedanta school. His commentaries on the principal Upanishads are also considered equally important.

b) **Ramanuja:**



Ramanuja

Ramanuja, a 11th century Vaishnava saint, was the most influential thinker of Vaishnavism. His philosophy, known as vishistadvaita, proclaims that the soul retains its identity even after

uniting with brahma. After a long pilgrimage, Ramanuja settled in Srirangam. Ramanuja articulated ideas of social equality and condemned caste-based restrictions on entering the temples. He established centres to spread his doctrine of devotion, Srivaishnavism, to God Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Vaishnavism spread across India. The Vadakalai Vaishnavism originally flourished around Kanchipuram, which was a popular centre for Sanskrit learning. Thenkalai Vaishnavism centred on Srirangam. Vadakalai sect focused on Vedic literature, which is written in Sanskrit. The Thenkalai sect stressed the importance of Divya Prabandhams, written by the 12 Azhwars in Tamil.

2. Bhakti Movement in North India:

While dealing with the religious movements of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in northern India, one has to keep in mind the two very different attitudes which Hindu religious leaders had towards Islam. One group accepted what was best in Islam; the other adopted a few elements in order to prevent conversion to Islam. Both reacted to Islam, but one was sympathetic while the other was hostile. Kabir and Guru Nanak, and other founders of new sects are included in the first group, while the movement in Bengal, associated with Chaitanya deva, or Chaitanya Mahaprabu, belongs to the latter tendency.

a) Exponents of Bhakti Movement:

It was Ramananda who spread the Bhakti ideology in northern India where it became a mass movement. Vallabhacharya, a Telugu philosopher, built a temple for Lord Krishna on the Govardhan Hills near Mathura. Surdas, a blind poet and musician, was associated with this temple as well as that of Agra. His famous collection of poetry is called Sursagar. Meera Bai, wife of the crown prince of Mewar, was an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna. She was a disciple of Ravidas. Meera Bai gained popularity through her bhajans. Chaitanyadeva popularised Krishna worship through ecstatic songs and dancing that had a profound effect on Vaishnavism in Bengal. In the 16th century, in Tulsidas's Hindi retelling of the story of Rama in the Ramcharitmanas, the sentiment of friendship and loyalty is stressed. Many of those poems continue to be recited and sung often at all-night celebrations.



3. Sufism in India:

The advent of Sufis to India dates back to the Arab conquest of Sind. It gained prominence in the 10th and 11th centuries during the reign of the Delhi Sultans. Sufism adopted many native Indian concepts such as yogic postures, music and dance. Sufism found adherents among both

Muslims and Hindus. Sufis in medieval India were divided into three major orders. They were Chisti, Suhrawardi and Firdausi. Moinuddin Chishti made Chisti order popular in India. He died in Ajmer (1236) and his resting place is in the Ajmer Sharif Dargah in Ajmer, Rajasthan. The best known Sufi sage of the early medieval period was Nizamuddin Auliya of the Chishti order, who had a large number of followers among the ruling class in Delhi. Poet Amir Khusru was one of its distinguished followers. Suhrawardi order was founded by an Iranian Sufi Abdul-Wahid Abu Najib. The Firdausi order was a branch of Suhrawardi order and its activities were confined to Bihar.

4. (a) Kabir:



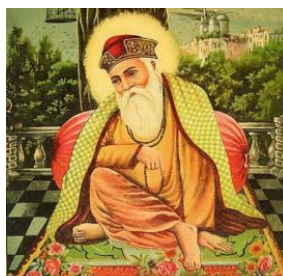
Kabir

As a Muslim, Kabir came under the influence of Varanasi-based Saint Ramananda. He accepted some Hindu ideas and tried to reconcile Hinduism and Islam. However, it was the Hindus, and particularly those of the lower classes, to whom his message appealed. Kabir believed that God is one and formless, even though different religious sects give him different names and forms. He opposed discrimination on the basis of religion, caste and wealth. He also condemned meaningless rituals. Kabir's verses were composed in Bhojpuri language mixed with Urdu. The Kabir's Granthavali and the Bijak contain collections of Kabir's verses.

b) Guru Nanak:

Early Life:

Guru Nanak, born in a village near Lahore in 1469, showed interest in religious discussions with other saints right from his early childhood. His parents were keen to involve him in worldly life. But he was inclined towards spiritualism. He visited many holy places and finally settled in Kartarpur near Lahore. He died there in 1539. To mark the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, a corridor is being constructed by the Indian government that will link the Nanak shrine in Gurdaspur with Gurudwara Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur in Pakistan.



Guru Nanak



Gurudwara Granth Sahib, Kartarpur

Guru Nanak's Teachings:

Guru Nanak preached that God is without form and wanted his followers to practice meditation upon the name of God for peace and ultimate salvation. He is considered the first guru by the Sikhs. Guru Nanak had great contempt for Vedic rituals and caste discriminations. The teachings of Guru Nanak formed the basis of Sikhism, a new religious order, founded in the late 15th century. His and his successors' teachings are collected in the Guru Granth Sahib, which is the holy book of the Sikhs. Guru Nanak's teachings were spread through the group singing of hymns, called kirtan. The devotees gathered in (rest houses), which became gurudwaras in course of time.

Guru Nanak nominated his disciple Lehna to succeed him as the guru. Following this precedent, the successors are named by the incumbent Sikh Guru. At the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the custom of pahul (baptism by sweetened water stirred with a dagger) was introduced. Those who got baptised became members of a disciplined brotherhood known as the Khalsa (meaning the pure). The men were given the title Singh (lion). Every member of the Khalsa had to have five distinctive things on his person. These were kesh (uncut hair), kangha (comb), kirpan (dagger), kada (steel bangle) and kachera (underpants). After Guru Gobind Singh, the holy book Guru Granth Sahib is considered the guru and its message is spread by the Khalsa.

5. Impact of the Religious/Bhakti Movement:

- Vedic Hinduism was regenerated and thus saved from the onslaught of Islam.
- The Islamic tenets – unity of God and universal brotherhood – emphasised by the saints promoted harmony and peace.
- Bhakti was a movement of the common people; it used the language of the common people for its devotional literature.
- Bhakti movement opened up space for Indian languages to grow. It stimulated literary activity in regional languages.
- What sustained Sanskrit, despite its decline during this period, was the support extended by the rulers of Hindu kingdoms.
- Tamil was the only ancient Indian language remained vibrant during this period. But the ethos of Tamil literature in medieval time had changed. In the classical period, it had secular

literature depicting the everyday life, its joys and sorrows, but under the influence of devotional cults, its emphasis shifted to religion and religious literature.

- Caste system and social disparities came to be criticised.

Summary:

- ❖ The Bhakti movement is explained. Azhwars' initiatives followed by Nayanmars in Tamil country are described.
- ❖ Adi Shankarar's advaita philosophy and Ramanujar's vishistadvaita philosophy are explained.
- ❖ The devotional paths of saints, notably Tulsidas and Meera Bai, in northern India and Chaitanyadeva in Bengal are examined.
- ❖ Mutual influence of Islam and Hinduism and birth of Sufism, Sikhism and mystical Hinduism are discussed in brief.
- ❖ Radical versions of Bhakti Movement: Contribution of Kabir and Guru Nanak are detailed.
- ❖ The essential features of Bhakti Movement are highlighted.
- ❖ The impact of the Bhakti Movement on the medieval Indian society is analysed.

Glossary:

1.	Salvation	A way of being save from danger, loss or harm	நிவர்த்தி, விமோசனம்
2.	Omnipresent	Present everywhere at the same time	எங்கும் நிறைந்திருக்கின்ற
3.	Incarnation	A living being embodying a deity or spirit	அவதாரம்
4.	Hostile	Showing enmity or dislike, unfriendly	விரோதமாக, பகைமையுள்ள
5.	Prominence	Importance	முக்கியத்துவம்
6.	Adherent	Supporter (of a person, cause or belief)	ஆதரவாளர், பின்பற்றுபவர்
7.	Stringent	Severe, harsh	கடுமையான, கெடுபிடியான
8.	Ulema	Islamic scholar trained in Islamic law	இஸ்லாமியப் பேரறிஞர்
9.	Hermitage	The dwelling of persons living in seclusion	ஆசிரமம், துறவி வாழிடம்
10.	Akin	Similar	ஒத்த இயல்புடைய
11.	Dagger	Short, pointed knife that is sharp on both sides	குத்துவாள், குறுவாள்
12.	Depicting	Showing, portraying	சித்தரிக்கும், விவரமாக விளக்கும்
13.	Disparity	A great difference, the state of being unequal	வேறுபாடு, சமமற்ற

Do You Know?

Vaishnavite Saints (12 Azhwars):**Three Muthal Azhwars:**

Poigai Azhwar, Bhoothathu Azhwar and Pei Azhwar.

Other Azhwars:

Thirumalisai Azhwar, Periyazhwar, Thondaradippodi Azhwar, Thirumangai Azhwar, Thiruppanazhwar, Kulasekara Azhwar, Nammazhwar, Mathurakavi Azhwar and Andal.

Saivite Saints (63 Nayanmars):

There are 63 legendary Nayanmars. Among them, Gnanasampandar, Appar, and Sundarar (often called "the trio") are worshipped as saints through their images in South Indian temples. Nambi Andar Nambi (1000 A.D.) is said to have compiled the songs of all of the Nayanmars that form the basis of Tirumurai, the basic Tamil Saivite sacred canon. It consists of 12 books, and 11 of them were assembled by Nambi. The 12th book is Sekkizhar's Periyapuranam.

Tukaram, a 17th century saint poet of Maharashtra, is known for his spiritual songs (abangas or kirtanas), devoted to Vitthoba, an avatar of Krishna. There is a Vitthoba/Panduranga temple at Pantharpur or Pandaripuram in Sholapur district, Maharashtra. What is Chaitanyadeva to Bengal is Tukaram to Maharashtra.



Tukaram

Panduranga Temple,
Pandaripuram**Sufism:**

The word Sufi takes its origin from suf, meaning wool. The Sufis wore coarse garments made of wool and hence they were called Sufis. Sufism was basically Islamic but was influenced by Hindu and Buddhist (Mahayana) ideas. It rejected the stringent conduct code of the ulemas. Sufis lived in hermitages akin to monasteries and functioned outside society. Five distinctive things of the Khalsa members

