



BHAKTI MOVEMENT: A MEANS OF SOCIAL WELFARE

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Abstract:

This research paper highlights Bhakti movement's contribution to the social development in India. It covers the following points - Definition of Bhakti, its main features, it's impact on Indian medieval society, efforts of the saints, social, moral impact of Bhakti movement, result of fanaticism, Bhakti in practice ...etc. Bhakti is the soul of the Indian society. In ancient India, Bhakti was used as a means, a remedy for salvation and emancipation. It was believed that salvation can be made possible only due to Bhakti. All sects have different aims& objectives, but all try to pursue Bhakti. At present anarchy can be seen everywhere. Whole human world is facing grief, uneasiness. Many clashes have become frequent. Everyday thousands die due to many trifle reasons. To form balance of all this and to make modern human life worth living, we must think of Bhakti Movement. Reading of holy books, listening to sermons & following the proper ways, the Saints followed is the main teaching of the Bhakti Movement. Bhakti is spiritual, a love and devotion to religious concepts or principles, that engages both emotion and intellect. Bhakti is greater than karma, greater than Yoga, because these are intended for an object in view, while Bhakti is its own fruition, its own means and its own end. The saints of the Bhakti movement rejected the difference of caste. They were social reformers also. They condemned several social evils and practices. Bhakti movement developed a humanitarian attitude. It has pointed out the virtues of contentment and self control. It drew attention to the evils of anger, greed and vanity. Due to it, a spirit of harmony among different sections of society and religion received impetus. Now, people are becoming ready to help and donate for the poor, shelter less & support less people. It is the positive result of the Bhakti Movement. It can be seen in many religious cults. Many are now ready to donate for charity, food and other things. Such donations have been used for social welfare schemes in different forms like-education, hospitals, etc. It is the sign of improvement. We notice that it is happening in 20th century modern world only due to the Bhakti Movement. All this shows that at social level, the Bhakti movement has succeeded to in realizing, implementing & practicing its two-fold objective i.e. bringing about social reforms in Hinduism and developing harmonious relations between the Hindus and the Muslims.

Keywords: Bhakti Movement, Means, Social Welfare, Salvation, Devotion Spiritual, Humanitarian, etc.

Focus of this national seminar is on the importance of Bhakti movement for social, cultural& economic development of India. This research paper highlights Bhakti movement's contribution to social development in India. Bhakti is the soul of the Indian society. In ancient India, Bhakti was used as a means, a remedy for salvation and emancipation. It was believed that salvation can be made possible only due to Bhakti. All sects have different aims& objectives, but all try to pursue Bhakti. At present anarchy can be seen everywhere. Whole human world is facing grief, uneasiness. Many clashes have



become frequent. Everyday thousands die due to many trifle reasons. All nations have been spending thousand crores for self protection & others destructions. Whole scientific advancements are misused. To form balance of all this and to make modern human life worth living, we must think of Bhakti Movement. Reading of holy books, listening to sermons & following the proper ways, the Saints followed is the main teaching of the Bhakti Movement.

Bhakti preaches,

“May be in any form
God is everything.
Don't hurt others
Don't deceive others,
Don't hate the rich,
Don't underestimate the poor,
Follow the Maxim,
I can adjust anything.
One who is ready to live such life,
He will not face any problem in life.”

Definition of Bhakti:

The Sanskrit word bhakti is derived from the root bhaj, which means "divide, share, partake, participate, to belong to". The word also means "attachment, devotion to, fondness for, homage, faith or love, worship, piety to something as a spiritual, religious principle or means of salvation".

Bhakti is spiritual, a love and devotion to religious concepts or principles, that engages both emotion and intellection. Karen Paschalis states that the word Bhakti should not be understood as uncritical emotion, but as committed engagement. Bhakti movement in Hinduism refers to ideas and engagement that emerged in the medieval era on love and devotion to religious concepts built around one or more gods and goddesses. One who practices bhakti is called a bhakta.

"Bhakti is greater than karma, greater than Yoga, because these are intended for an object in view, while Bhakti is its own fruition, its own means and its own end." Bhakti has been the one constant theme of our sages. All the weak and undeveloped minds in every religion or country have only one way of loving their own ideal, i.e. by hating every other ideal. The Bhagavad Gita, a post-Vedic scripture composed in 5th to 2nd century BCE, introduces bhakti marga (the path of faith/devotion) as one of three ways to spiritual freedom and release, the other two being karma marga (the path of works) and gyana marga (the path of knowledge). In verses 6.31 through 6.47 of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna as an avatar of deity Vishnu, describes bhakti yoga and loving devotion, as one of the several paths to the highest spiritual attainments. Bhakti was the movement which emphasized single-minded intense devotion to God. It was a complete surrender of oneself to God the Bhakti movement—devotion to God. Bhakti to God was accepted as salvation.

Main Features of the Bhakti Movement:

- Unity of God or one God though known by different names.
- Bhakti, intense love and devotion, the only way to salvation.
- Repetition of the True Name.
- Self-Surrender.
- Condemnation of rituals, ceremonies and blind faith.
- Rejection of idol worship by many saints
- Open- mindedness about deciding religious matters.



- No distinction of different castes, higher or low
- Need of a guru for guidance advocated by some.
- Preaching's through local or regional languages and travelling from place to place for spreading the religious message.

Many doctrines of the Bhakti cult may be found in the Bhagavad-Gita. The idea of the unity of God is reflected in the words, "Even those devotees who worship other gods worship me alone" (IX 23). Bhakti is not the way of worship but the love of a selfless devotee of pure heart.

Survey shows that the real development of Bhakti took place in South India between the 7th and the 12th centuries through the teachings of poet saints known as Alvars and Nayanar whose hymns were collected and compiled in the 10th century. The Sufi saints of the Muslims also emphasized devotion to Allah (God). The spiritual yearning made Kabir, Guru Nanak, Mirabai, Surdas, Tulsi Das, Chaitanya and others, the great exponents of Bhakti movement.

Impact of the Bhakti Movement on the Medieval Indian Society:

With a view to understand the impact of the Bhakti movement, we have to consider the background under which the movement gained momentum. Under the impact of the Muslim rule, the Hindus had suffered a lot materially, morally and spiritually. The Muslim rulers in general wanted to enforce the Islamic laws on the Hindus. The Muslim rule had put dread in the hearts of the Hindu masses. They wanted some solace to heal their despairing hearts. The Bhakti movement brought them hope and support and inner strength to save themselves. Several evil practices had crept into the Hindu society. There was a lot of caste and class distinction. Several divisions had occurred. At this time, some healing touch was needed. Fortunately, with the foreign invaders, some Sufi Muslim saints had also come to India and settled here. They were very liberal minded. They emphasized the virtues of love and devotion, brotherhood and equality. This helped to bring the two communities nearer. It also helped to harmonize the conflicting interests.

Efforts of the Saints:

The saints of the Bhakti movement rejected the difference of caste. An important factor which led to the popularity of Bhakti movement was that most of the promoters of this movement attempted to reconcile the differences between the Hindus and the Muslims by stressing that Rama and Rahim were one and the same. They condemned the hatred of the fanatic Pandits and Mullas alike.

The Hindus realized that it was difficult to drive away the Muslim rulers and Muslims from India. On the other hand the Muslims also appreciated that the Hindus were in absolute majority and it was impossible to force all of them to embrace Islam. So under the impact of the new movement both sides started making efforts for coming closer to each other. For the Hindus the effort was initiated by the Hindu saints of the Bhakti movement and for the Muslims by the Sufi Saints. These saints emphasized the religious simplicity. They stressed human qualities and moral attitudes. They stressed that a true religious man is one who is pure in thought and action.

The Bhakti saints believed in equality of man and man. According to them there was no distinction and consideration of high and low on the basis of birth. Their doors were open to all classes. The Bhakti saints tried to generate an environment of good will between the Hindus and the Muslims. The Bhakti saints were social reformers also. They condemned several social evils.

Social impact of Bhakti Movement:

The most important social impact of the Bhakti movement was that the followers of the Bhakti movement rejected the caste distinction. They began to mix together on the basis of equality. They took their meals together from the common kitchen. The movement tried to loosen the bond of caste. A spirit



of harmony among different sections of society and religion received impetus. The evil practice of 'Sati' received some set back. The status of women received more importance. Communal harmony can be seen today also in celebrating the festivals like Mohram together. e.g. in Sangli dist.(Kadegaon) & at many other places the Tabut presents communal harmony. Many religious places now have become sacred places for all communities. Provision of shelter in the form of Dharmshala & food is made available. At many places, we notice provision of 'Langarkhana'. All this caters to the needs of the poor, shelter less & support less people. It is the positive result of the Bhakti Movement. It can be seen in many religious cults. Many are now ready to donate for charity, food and other things. Such donations have been used for social welfare schemes in different forms like-education, hospitals.....etc. It is the sign of improvement. We notice that it is happening in 20th century modern world only due to the Bhakti Movement.

Moral Influence:

The movement attempted to infuse a spirit of piety in the daily life of the people. It emphasized earning of wealth through hard work and honest means. It encouraged the value of social service to the poor and the needy. It developed a humanitarian attitude. It pointed out the virtues of contentment and self control. It drew attention to the evils of anger, greed and vanity.

Result of Fanaticism:

The same man who is kind, good, honest and loving to people of his own opinion, will not hesitate to do the vilest deeds when they are directed against persons beyond the pale of his own religious brotherhood. But this danger exists only in that stage of Bhakti which is called the preparatory (Gauni). When Bhakti has become ripe and has passed into that form which is called the supreme (Para), no more is there any fear of these hideous manifestations of fanaticism; that soul which is overpowered by this higher form of Bhakti is too near the God of Love to become an instrument/means for the diffusion of hatred.

We know that that character is of the noblest type in which all these three — knowledge and love and Yoga — are harmoniously fused. Three things are necessary for a bird to fly — the two wings and the tail as a rudder for steering. Gyana (Knowledge) is the one wing, Bhakti (Love) is the other, and Yoga is the tail that keeps up the balance. For those who cannot pursue all these three forms of worship together in harmony and take up.

Bhakti in Practice:

"Meditation again is a constant remembrance (of the thing meditated upon) flowing like an unbroken stream of oil poured out from one vessel to another. When this kind of remembering has been attained (in relation to God) all bandages break. 'When, he, who is far and near is seen, the bonds of the heart are broken, all doubts vanish, and all effects of work disappear'. Worship is constant remembering as may be seen from the essential texts of scriptures. Knowing, which is the same as repeated worship, has been described as constant remembering. We plainly see, therefore, that Bhakti is a series or succession of mental efforts at religious realization beginning with ordinary worship and ending in a supreme intensity of love for Ishvara. All this shows that at social level, the Bhakti movement has succeeded to in realizing, implementing & practicing its two-fold objective i.e. bringing about reforms in Hinduism and developing harmonious relations between the Hindus and the Muslims.



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