DEVOTIONAL PATH TO THE DIVINE

MODULE 1

The Idea of a Supreme God

* Before the 7th century, **Buddhist**, **Jain**, **and other faiths** in the Indian sub-continent **believed** that **all are equal** and all have the right to live and to become free.
* **Before**the **formation**of **empires**, **people worshipped**different **gods**and **goddesses**, but as **kingdoms grew**into **empires**, the **idea**that all **living things**pass **through cycles**of **birth**, **rebirth**, and **karma**became widely **accepted**.
* One of the beliefs that developed from the 7th century onwards was that **human beings**are **not equal**, noteven **at birth**,and **social privileges**are for those who are **born**in **a higher caste**.
* Many people **did not believe**in this **idea**and **turned**to **Buddhism**or **Jainism**,where the **path to salvation**lay through **personal effort**.
* Other **people followed** the **idea**of a **supreme God**,where **salvation** (nirvana, moksha, freedom from birth and death) could be **achieved**through **devotion**to **one God**(**bhakti**), and this is **advised**in the ***Bhagavadgita***.
* **Shiva**, **Vishnu**, and **Durga** **became supreme deities**,and **their myths**and **legends**became **a part**of **Puranic stories**.
* The **Puranas**introduced **methods**of **worship**in **local cults**, and **said**that **all devotees**could **get the blessings of the gods**,**regardless**of their **caste**.

### *Nayanars and Alvars*

* **Between**the **7th**and the **9th centuries**, there was **an emergence**of **new religious movements led**by ***Nayanars***(**saints devoted to Shiva**) and ***Alvars***(**saints devoted to Vishnu**), who **came**from **all castes**,including those considered '**untouchables**', such as the **Pulaiyar**and the **Panars**.
* They **detested Buddhists**and **Jains**and **preached**that **love**for **Shiva**and **Vishnu**was **the path**to **salvation**. **They believed**in the **ideals**of **love**and **heroism**from the ***Sangam* literature**and **mixed them**with **values of bhakti**.
* **Nayanars**and **Alvars wandered**from **place**to **place**and **composed unique poems**and **music**in ***praise***of ***their deities***.
* Between the **tenth**and the **twelfth centuries**, **the Chola**and **Pandya kings**built **splendid temples *around the shrines***visitedby these ***saint-poets***.
* Their **poems**were **compiled**and their **hagiographies**(**religious biographies**)were **composed**,and even today,they are ***sources of history for modern researchers***.

### Philosophy and Bhakti

#### Shankara

* ***Shankara****,****born****in****Kerala****in the****eighth century****,*was a very **influential** **thinker**of **India**.
* He was an **advocate**of ***Advaita***or the **doctrine**of **the oneness**of **the human soul**and ***the Supreme Soul***which is ***formless*** and is the ***Ultimate Reality***.
* He **advised people**to **give up worldly things**because they are **an illusion**or ***maya***, and to follow the **path of knowledge**because it is the **true path**of **salvation**.

#### Ramanuja

* He was **born**in **Tamil Nadu**in the **eleventh century**,and he was **highly influenced**by the **philosophy**of the **Alvars**.
* He **thought**that the **path to salvation**was **through intense devotion**to **Lord Vishnu**because the *grace of the Lord helps devotees attain permanent bliss* (freedom and happiness).
* He also suggestedthe **theory**of ***Vishishadvaita***or **qualified oneness**which **says**that even if a **soul unites**with the **Supreme Soul**, it **remains distinct**and**under the blessing**of the**Supreme Soul**.This ideology **inspired a new form**of ***bhakti***in **northern India**.

### *Basavanna's Virashaivism*

* The **Tamil bhakti movement**and **temple worship**came together to ***create*** the ***Virashaiva movement***thatbegan in ***Karnataka***in the ***mid-twelfth century***.
* It wasinitiated by ***Basavanna***and other **virashaivas**such as **Allama Prabhu**and **Akkamahadevi**. They**fought for** the **equality of all human beings**and **against**the **Brahmanical ideas**of **caste**and **poor treatment**of **women**.
* They were also **against *religious rituals***and ***idol worship***

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