Atomic Energy Central School No.3 Rawatbhata

Lesson Six – Bhakti –Sufi Traditions

Class-12 Sub- History

Hand out- Module 1/2 of Lesson 6

 Topic- A Mosaic of Religious Beliefs and Practices

Introduction:

* By the mid-first millennium, CE the landscape of the subcontinent was dotted the variety of religious structure, stupas and temple.
* These typical certain religious beliefs and practices other have been reconstructed from textual traditions including Puranas.
* New textual source available include compositions of poet-saint expressed orally in regional languages.

A Mosaic of Religious Beliefs and Practices:

Integration of cults:

* Historians who have tried to understand this development suggested that there were at least two processes at work.
* One was a process of disseminating Bramanical ideas.
* During the period from 8th to 18th century in India, we come across a wide range of gods and goddesses in sculpture and texts, at one level this indicates the extended worship of major deities – Vishnu and Shiva and mother goddess, each of whom was visualized in a variety of forms.
* In this complex situation, an attempt was made for the integration of various cults, which included two processes:

1. Process of dissemination Bramanical ideas – This is exemplified by the composition, compilation and preservation of Puranic texts in simple Sanskrit verse, clearly meant to be accessible to Shudras and Women, who were generally excluded from Vedic learning.

* At the same time there was second process at work that of the Brahmans accepting and reworking the beliefs and practices of these and social categories.

2. Process of Brahmanas accepting and reworking the practices of other Social categories – It was done through a system of continuous dialogue between what Sociologist have described as the “Great Sanskritic” Puranic traditions and “Little Traditions”.

Examples:

 One of the most striking examples of this process is evident at Puri, Orisa, where the Principal deity was identified as JAGANNATH a form of Vishnu.

Difference and conflict among Cults:

* Often associated with the goddess were forms of worships that were classified as Tantric.
* Tantric practices were widespread in several parts of the subcontinent,
* They were open to all men and women ignored differences of caste and class within the ritual context.
* Many of these ideas influence Shaivism as well Buddhisum.
* The divergence is perhaps most stark if we compare Vedic and Puranic traditions.
* The principal deities to the Vedic pantheon, Agni, Indra and Soma.

Poems of prayer Early Traditions of Bhakti

* In the course of these forms of worship, in many instance, poet saint emerged as leader around whom there developed a community of devotee.
* While Brahman remained important intermediates between god and devotees in the several forms.

Early Bhakti Traditions

* The Bhakti movement of Hinduism saw two ways of imaging the nature of divine ( Brahman)

They are divided in two groups.

1. Nirguna

2. Saguna

* Saguna Bhakti :
* With attribute of god has form.
* Saguna Bhakti which see God in physical form.
* Believe in Doctrine incarnation.
* They worship specific deities like Vishnu, Shiva and Devi.
* Ex a form of Vishnu-Rama by Tulsidas, Krishna by Meerabai.

Nirguna Bhakti-

* Nirgana Bhakti was the concept of the ultimate reality as formless, without attribute or quality or lack of physical attribute in God.
* Ningana Bhakti is devotion toward a formless god.
* Bhaktas worshiped on abstract form of God.
* Ex Kabir, Baba GuruNanak
* Salient feature of Bhakti Movement:
* Emphasis on the unity of God.
* Stress on without utmost devotion.
* Stress on self surrender.
* Faith in spiritual guide or Guru.
* Salvation without the grace or Guru.
* Renouncing the bands of castisum.

The Alvars and Nayanars of Tamilnadu:

* Some of the earliest Bhakti movement was led by the Alvars.
* Alvars those who are immersed in devotion to Vishnu.
* Nayanars literally leaders who were devotees of Lord Shiva.
* Nayanars and Alvars were the Tamil poet-saints who propagated Bhakti movement in South India.

**Protest against the Caste system:**

* The Alvars and Nayanars initiated a movement of protest against caste system and the dominance of Brahmans.
* The importance of the traditions of the Alvars and Nayanars were sometimes indicated by the claim that their compositions were as important as the Vedas.

**Women devotee:**

* One of the most striking features of these traditions was the presence of women as devotees.
* The compositions of Andal, a woman Alwar were widely sung. Andal saw herself as the beloved of Vishnu.
* Karaikkal Ammaiyar, a devotee of Shiva adopted the path extreme ascertain to attain her goal.
* Her compositions were preserved within the nayanar tradition.
* These women renounced for their social obligations.

Relations with state:

* There were several important chiefdoms in the Tamil region in the early first millennium CE.
* From the second half of the first millennium there is evidence for state, including those of Pallavas and Pandyas.
* One of the major themes in Tamil Bhakti hymns is that poet’s opposition to Buddhisum and Jainism.
* This is particularly marked in the compositions of the Nayanars.

The Virashaivas Tradition in Karnataka:

* The 12th century witnessed the emergence of new movement in Karnataka, led by a Brahman named Basavanna who was initially Jaina.
* His followers were known as Virashaivas ( Heroes of Shiva) or Lingayats ( Wearers of linga)
* Lingayats is the important community in the region till date.
* They worship Shiva in their manifestation as a linga.
* Lingayats believed that on death the devotee will be united with the Shiva and will not return to this world.
* The Lingayats challenge the idea of caste.
* The Lingayats also encouraged certain practices such as post-puberty marriage and remarriage of widows.

Religious Ferment in North India

* During the same period, in the north India deities such as Vishnu and Shiva were worshiped in the temples, often build with the supports of rulers.
* Some historians pointed that in North India this was the period when several Rajput states emerged.
* At the same time other religious leaders who did not function within the orthodox Bramanical framework were gaining ground.
* Many of these new religious leaders questioned the authority of Vedas and expressed themselves in the in the languages spoken by ordinary people.