

Chapter 8: Devotional Paths to the Divine

Intext Questions:

Question 1: You can observe this process of local myths and legends receiving wider acceptance even today. Can you find some examples around you?

Answer: Yes, the stories of Maina Sundari and Anjana Kumari in Jainism are well known that they attained salvation due to their Bhakti in the supreme God.

Other Examples:

- Alha Udal in Bundelkhand
- Raginis in Haryana and Western U.P.

Another such example is as under:

India possesses a large body of heroic ballads and epic poetry preserved in oral tradition. One such oral epic, telling the story of Pabuji, has been collected by Dr. John Smith from Rajasthan. It is a long poem in the Rajasthani language, traditionally told by professional storytellers, known as Bhopas. They deliver it in front of a tapestry that depicts the characters of the story and functions as a portable temple, accompanied by a ravankattho fiddle

Question 2: How does the poet describe his relationship with the deity?

Answer: The devotee said that he had been salvaged with the touch of the blessings of the God.

Question 3: Try and find out more about the ideas of Shankara or Ramanuja.

Answer: **Shankara**, was born in Kerala in the eighth century. He was an advocate of Advaita or the doctrine of the oneness of the individual soul and the Supreme God which is the Ultimate Reality. He taught that Brahman, the only or Ultimate Reality, was formless and without any attributes. He considered the world around us to be an illusion or maya, and preached renunciation of the world and adoption of the path of knowledge to understand the true nature of Brahman and attain salvation.

Ramanuja, was a great Vaishnavite philosopher and social reformer. He was born in the year 1017. He is revered and held in very high esteem by the entire Vaishnavite community. He resurrected Vishisht Advaita or oneness of God (Brahman) with attributes and followed the path of great Vaishnavite leaders like Nammalwar, Nadamuni and Alawandar.

Question 4: What is the temple that Basavanna is offering to God?

Answer: Basavanna's body.

My legs are pillars,

The body the shrine,

The head a cupola of gold.

Question 5: Discuss the ideas about the social order expressed in the compositions of Saint Tukaram.

Answer:

1. God lives in the hearts of all, high or low, Dalits or the high ups.
2. He treats the weak as his son and daughter.
3. These pious people are God themselves.
4. If anyone ill-treats them, he should be ashamed of.

Question 6: Why do you think Mirabai left Rana's palace?

Answer: Mirabai was a Rajput princess married into the royal family of Mewar. But she did not like to remain confined in the four walls of the palace. Hence, she **left** it and became a disciple of Ravidas, a saint from a caste considered "untouchable". She devoted her life to Lord Krishna and composed innumerable bhajans expressing her intense devotion.

Question 7: In what ways are the ideas of this poem similar to or different from those of Basavanna and Jalaluddin Rumi?

Answer:

1. The ideas in this poem are similar in this way that this poem emphasises equality and against the caste and Brahmanical system.
2. Differences are in the ways that there is no need for keeping fast or Ramzan. God or Allah lives in the heart not outside.

Imagine:

Question: You are attending a meeting where a saint is discussing the caste system. Relate the conversation.

Answer: The main points of the conversation are:

- Origin of the caste system started from varna system.
- Division in the society.
- Caste conflicts.
- Major ill effects of the caste system.
- How to remove the caste evils.

LET'S RECALL:

1. Match the following:

1)The Buddha

a)namghar

2)Shankaradeva

b)worship of Vishnu

3)Nizamuddin Auliya

c)questioned social differences

4)Nayanars

d)Sufi saint

5)Alvars

e)worship of Shiva

Answer:

1)The Buddha

a)questioned social differences

2)Shankaradeva

b)namghar

3)Nizamuddin Auliya

c)Sufi saint

4)Nayanars

d)worship of Shiva

5)Alvars

e)worship of Vishnu

Question 2: Fill in the blanks:

1. Shankara was an advocate of
2. Ramanuja was influenced by the
3.,and..... were advocates of Virashaivism.
4. was an important centre of the Bhakti. tradition in Maharashtra.

Answer:

1. Advaita.
2. Alvars.
3. Basavanna, Allama Prabhu, Akkamahadevi.
4. Vitthala (a form of Vishnu) temple in Pandharpur.

Question 3: Describe the beliefs and practices of the Nathpanthis, Siddhas, and Yogis.

Answer:

- They advocated renunciation of the world.
- They believed that the path to salvation lay in meditation on the formless God and the realisation of oneness with it.
- To achieve this, they advocated intense training of the mind and body through practices like Yog asanas, breathing exercises and meditation.
- They did not believe in the ritual and oilier aspects of conventional religion and the social order.

Question 4: What were the major ideas expressed by Kabir? How did he express these?

Answer: The major ideas expressed by Kabir include:

- Rejection of major religious traditions.
- Criticism of all forms of external worship of both Brahmanical Hinduism and Islam.
- Criticism of priestly classes and caste system.
- Belief in a formless Supreme God.
- Emphasis on Bhakti or devotion to achieve salvation.

Kabir expressed his ideas in a vast collection of verses known as sakhis and pads. These are said to have been composed by him and sung by wandering bhajan singers.

LET'S UNDERSTAND:

Question 5: What were the major beliefs and practices of the Sufis?

Answer: Sufis were the Muslim mystics:

1. Rejected the outward religiosity and believed in devotion to God.
2. They rejected the elaborate rituals and the codes of behavior and believed that union with God should be as a lover seeks his beloved.
3. They composed poems to express their feelings and developed methods to train heart.
4. Zikr, contemplation, sama (singing), raqs (dancing) were some of the methods.
5. They were against idol worship and believed in collective prayers.

Question 6: Why do you think many teachers rejected prevalent religious beliefs and practices?

Answer: Many teachers rejected prevalent religious beliefs and practices because all such beliefs advocated social differences. They believed in the power of personal devotion and supported the idea of a Supreme God. They believed that the only path to salvation was through bhakti or devotion.

Question 7: What were the major teachings of Baba Guru Nanak?

Answer:

- Baba Guru Nanak emphasised the importance of the worship of one God.
- He insisted that caste, creed or gender was irrelevant for attaining liberation. His idea of liberation was based on the pursuit of active life with a strong sense of social commitment.
- He used the terms nam, dan and isnan for the essence of his teaching, which actually meant right worship, the welfare of others and purity of conduct.
- He gave importance to right-belief and worship, honest living and helping others.
- Guru Nanak, thus, promoted the idea of equality.

LET'S DISCUSS:

Question 8: For either the Virashaivas or the sants of Maharashtra, discuss their attitude towards caste.

Answer: The saints of Maharashtra focused on the Vitthala form of Vishnu and on a personal god residing inside the hearts of all people:

1. Their songs in simple Marathi language inspired people.
2. They rejected all forms of ritualism, outward display of piety and social differences based on birth and treatment to women.
3. They even rejected the idea of renunciation and preferred to live with their families and earning a livelihood.
4. They believed in serving fellow beings and sharing the pain of others.

Question 9: Why do you think ordinary people preserved the memory of Mirabai?

Answer: Ordinary people preserved the memories of Mirabai because of the following reasons:

1. She was devoted to Krishna.
2. Composition of innumerable bhajans expressing her intense devotion.
3. Challenged norms of uppercastes.

Let's Do:

Question 10: Find out whether there are any dargahs, gurudwaras or temples associated with saints of the bhakti tradition in your neighbourhood. Visit any one of these and describe what you see and hear.

Answer:

- A dargah, sometimes a Sufi saint or dervish, is a shrine constructed over the grave of a respected religious figure.
- For Sikhs, a gurdwara is a place of assembly and worship. In Gurdwaras, people from all religions are welcomed.
- A temple is a building used for ceremonies and events such as prayer and sacrifice that are religious or spiritual.

I have visited a gurudwara named Hari Mandir Sahib. It is one of the famous gurudwara in India. It is located in Amritsar, Punjab. Every gurudwara has a Darbar Sahib where Guru Granth Sahib, the present and eternal guru of the Sikhs, is placed on an elevated throne named takhat in a central position. In the presence of the congregation, the raagis (who sing Ragas) read sing, and clarify the verses of Guru Granth Sahib.

To demonstrate that everyone is welcome, regardless of rank, occupation, gender, religion, or income, there are four entrance doors. The divan hall is considered the main prayer hall. The Guru Granth Sahib will be in here, during the day. Guru Granth Sahib will be in a room named sachkhand in the night. There is a Langar Hall where people can eat free vegetarian food. The volunteers will serve the food.

Also, they have other facilities. It includes medical facility rooms, meeting rooms, nursery, library, classroom, playground, etc. Tall flagpoles bearing the Nishan Sahib, the Sikh flag, will help to recognize gurudwara from a distance. Some ceremonies are performed there. It includes the Sikh marriage ceremony, some of the rites of the death ceremony, and other Sikh festivals.

Question 11: For any of the saint-poets whose compositions have been included in this chapter, find out more about their works, noting down other poems. Find out whether these are sung, how they are sung, and what the poets wrote about?

Answer: One of the poets mentioned in the chapter is Kabir. Kabir wrote in a language which was in comparison to other languages eloquent for the people to understand his thoughts and ideas. His poems contribute a lot to literature and are sung like folksongs by his followers. Kabir penned down the cohesion and fluidity of God and how one should accept the might of the God's will.

Question 12: There are several saint-poets whose names have been mentioned but their works have not been included in the chapter. Find out more about the language in which they composed, whether their compositions were sung, and what their compositions were about.?

Answer: Amongst the many saints whose works aren't included in the chapter are those of the Nayanars and their saints. One of the Nayanars was Appar. Appar wrote in Tamil language and his poems displayed intense devotion to Shiva. He composed 4,900 devotional hymns to the Hindu god Shiva, out of which 313 have survived and are now canonized as the 4th to 6th volumes of Tirumurai. They are being sung as a prayer to the Almighty.

Champpstreet