

EXPLORING THE INTERPLAY OF DANCE AND MUSIC IN SUFI AND BHAKTI MOVEMENTS

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Abstract: *The Sufi movement and the Bhakti movement are two important religious and social movements in the Indian subcontinent that emerged during the medieval period. These movements had a strong impact on the evolution of social and cultural life of the people of the region. Bhakti movement was connected to the Hindu and revolved around devotion to Hindu deities, whereas Sufi movement was centered around the Islamic mysticism and offerings to Allah. These movements also influenced the religious life of the region. The Sufi movement emerged in India during 11th-12th century C.E. and it spread massively during the medieval period. The Sufis were Islamic mystics who believed in the unity of God and the oneness of humanity. They preached love, compassion and universal brotherhood and also believed in the concept of "Fanaa" meaning "the complete denial of self and the realization of God". They were against the orthodox Islam. Sufis believed dance and music as a means of reaching a state of ecstasy and union with God. Qawwali, a form of devotional music became popular throughout the region. The Bhakti movement emerged in India during 7th century C.E. and was at its peak between 15th to 17th centuries C.E. The Bhakti movement was against the caste system and rituals of orthodox Hinduism. The Bhakti saints emphasized the importance of personal experience and direct connection with God, which is the absolute truth of one's life. The Bhakti saints used dance and music as a means of attaining salvation. Many forms of devotional music and dance came into being such as Bhajans, Kirtans, Raslila etc.*

Keywords: *Sufi Movement, Bhakti Movement, Dance, Music*

INTRODUCTION

The Bhakti and Sufi movements were two distinct religious and cultural movements that emerged in the Indian subcontinent during the medieval period. Both these movements arose in different regions at different times, but share some similarities. "During the medieval period, both the Hindu and Muslim religions were reformed. Both the religions had fallen apart from the real teachings; the Muslim as well as the Hindu performed a number of rites and rituals without understanding their meaning."¹ Both movements challenged the tradition and orthodox Brahminical Hindu and Islamic beliefs and rituals and emphasized the significance of love, compassion, devotion and direct connection with the divine. Both movements had a deep impact on Indian society influencing religious beliefs and practices as well as social and cultural norms. The Sufi movement was centered around the mysticism of Islam and worship of Allah, whereas the Bhakti movement focused on Hindu deities and their worship through the mode of music and dance. Both the movements were characterized by a strong emphasis on individual experience and a rejection of formal religious rituals and hierarchies. Both these Hindu and Muslim movements ultimately preached the same practices. Both in their own time and region promoted religious tolerance, Oneness of human being with God and spirituality.

THE SUFI MOVEMENT

The Sufi movement emerged in Indian subcontinent during 11th and 12th century CE and it rapidly spread during medieval period. It originated in the Middle East and spread to India through various channels, including the Arab traders, Sufi saints and scholars or peers. Over time, Sufism evolved and adapted to the Indian cultural and religious context, resulting in the arousal of a different form

of Indian Sufism. “The origin of Sufism in India can be traced back to the 8th to 11th century, when Arab traders and Sufi scholars began visiting India to spread the message of Islam.”² The early Sufis in India were primarily concentrated on the mystical characteristics of Islam and maintaining a personal relationship with God through spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer and devotion.

“The 12th to 16th century saw the rise of several prominent Sufi orders in India, such as the Chisti, Suhrawadi and Qadiri orders.”³ these orders were founded by Sufi Pirs and Fakirs who came to India from the Middle East and Central Asia and settled their ‘Khanqahs’ (Sufi hospices) in different regions of the country.

SUFI SECTS

Some major Sufi orders in India:-

1. Chisti Order - The Chishti order was founded in 12th century in Afghanistan by the Sufi saint ‘Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti’. The order is named after him. He is also known as ‘Khwaja Garib Nawaz’, meaning ‘the helper of the poor’. It is one of the most prominent Sufi orders in India. The Chishti order highlights the significance of love and devotion to God and has a strong tradition of music and poetry. It played an important role in spreading Islam in the region, as many people were attracted to its message of love and devotion. Some of the famous Chishti saints include Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, Nizamuddin Auliya and Baba Farid.

2. Qadiri Order - The Qadiriyya or Qadri order was founded in 12th century by the Sufi saint Abdul Qadir Jilani. This order gained popularity in 13th century in northern parts of the country, particularly in Kashmir. The Qadri order is famous for its emphasis on spiritual discipline, the purification of the soul, repentance and the teachings of Quran and the Sunnah (the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad). This order has great respect for the spiritual guide or Sheikh. “The Qadri order has produced many notable scholars and mystics throughout its history, including the famous Sufi poet, Rumi, who was a disciple of the Qadri Sheikh ‘Shams-e Tbarizi’.”⁴

3. Suhrawadi Order - the Suhrawadi order was also founded in the 12th century and was named after its founder, the Persian Sufi saint, Sheikh Shihabuddin Suhrawadi. This order is also known as ‘the Sufi order of illumination’ or ‘the Sufi order of the lamp’. This order became popular in the eastern parts of the country, particularly in Bengal. This order has its name for its beliefs in rationalism and philosophical enquiry. This order emphasizes ‘Dhikr Al- nur’ meaning ‘the remembrance of the light’, a spiritual practice in which the Sufi meditate on the divine light that permeates all existences.

4. Naqshbandi Order - The Naqshbandi order was founded in the 14th century by the Sufi saint ‘Baba Ud-din Naqshbandi Bukhari’. This order emphasizes the significance of silent meditation and inner reflection. The order conveys the message that the achievement of inner purity and letting go of the ego are necessary for spiritual growth and oneness with God. The Naqshbandi has some sub-sects, including Mujaddidi, Khawajagan, and Haqqani branches each having its own spiritual practices.

IMPACT OF SUFISM

“The 17th to 19th century was a period of great growth and expansion for Sufism in India.”⁵ This was probably due to the arrival of the Mughal rulers, who were themselves followers of Sufism. They encouraged the establishment of many Sufi shrines and Khanqahs. In the 20th century, Sufism in India was not only limited to Islam but was also applied to a variety of different religious and cultural context. As a result, Sufism was adopted by people from different backgrounds including Christians, Jews, Buddhists and Hindus. In the later half of the 20th century, Sufism began to attract increased attention and interest from people in the West. Many Westerners were drawn to Sufism because of its emphasis on the inner life and its teachings on meditation, self awareness and spiritual growth. Today, Sufi shrines and Khanqahs can be found throughout India, attracting both Muslim and non-Muslim visitors who seek spiritual guidance and inspiration.

DANCE AND MUSIC IN SUFISM

In Sufism, dance and music play an important role in Sufi rituals and practices. These are used to achieve a trance like state where the practitioner can experience a deeper connection with the God. The most well-known form of Sufi dance is the ‘Whirling dance’. The dance involves spinning movements while holding one hand up towards the heaven and the other hand down towards the Earth. This is performed by Mevlevi Order. Sufi music is often associated with the Qawwali, which features devotional poetry in Urdu or Punjabi set to music and performed by a group of musicians. Sufi music has gained popularity worldwide for its ability to inspire feelings of peace, unity and transcendence. It is often performed in Sufi shrines, mosques and other spiritual spaces, as well as in concerts and festivals.

THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT

The bhakti movement was a devotional movement that emerged in medieval India between the 7th and 10th century CE and gained most popularity between 15th to 17th century CE. It emphasized on the worship of one God and aimed to break down the social and religious barriers that had developed in the Hindu society. The term ‘bhakti’ comes from the Sanskrit word ‘bhaj’ which means ‘to adore or worship’. This movement was characterised by its emphasis on devotion (bhakti) to a personal God, regardless of one’s caste, gender or social status . “ The bhakti cult believed in Hinduism, pure and simple in its philosophy as given in the ancient Vedas, Upanishads and the Bhagwad Gita.”⁶ The roots of the Bhakti movement can be traced back to the ancient Vedic and Upanishad traditions which emphasized the importance of devotion as a means of achieving spiritual liberation. It reached its peak during the medieval period. However, it was the emergence of the Alvars and Nayanars in South India that marked the beginning of Bhakti movement. The Alvars were a group of Vaishnava saint who worshipped Lord Vishnu, whereas the Nayanars were Shaivite who worshipped the Lord Shiva.

SOME MAJOR SECTS OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

1. Vaishnavism- the sect worships Lord Vishnu and his incarnations such as Rama and Krishna. It is one of the largest sects in Hinduism and believed to be the most direct path to salvation. The sect

includes various sub-sects like the followers of Ramanuja, Madhava, Chaitanya and Vallabhacharya.

2. Shaivism- This sect of bhakti asserts the worship of Lord Shiva. Shaivites believe that devotion to Lord Shiva can lead to liberation from the cycle of birth and death. This sect considers Lord Shiva to be the ultimate reality and creator of the universe. They believe that Lord Shiva is both transcendent and immanent and that he is present in every atom of the universe.

3. Shaktism- Shaktism is a branch of the bhakti movement that centres around the worship of the divine feminine energy or Shakti. Shaktism is often associated with the worship of goddesses such as Durga, Kali and Parvati. The practice of Shaktism involves various rituals and ceremonies including Puja, meditation and chanting of mantras. Shaktism has also inspired a rich tradition of music, dance and art which continues to thrive in India. Today this sect includes sub-sects like Tantriks. “The new religious sentiment, as affected by philosophical speculations, became mellowed in temper, and began to be directed to a God of grace, united with a practically eternal partner, conceived as a female principle, whether philosophically as Shakti or prakriti or religiously as Lakshmi, Sarasvati or Uma.”⁷

4. Nirguna Bhakti- Nirguna bhakti is a branch of the bhakti movement that emphasizes devotion to an abstract formless God or Brahman rather than a personal deity. Its followers believe that the ultimate reality is beyond human comprehension and cannot be expressed in any form. “The disciples of Ramananda founded a number of new sub-sects usually described as Nirguniya”.⁸ The word Nirguna means without ‘qualities’ or ‘attribute-less’. This sect worships through the means of singing hymns, repeating mantras and meditating on the divine. The famous exponents in the tradition include saint Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas and Tukaram.

5. Saguna Bhakti- Saguna Bhakti is a form of devotional worship in Bhaktism that emphasizes the worship of a personal God with attributes such as form, name, qualities and activities. Saguna Bhakti is particularly popular in Hinduism where the worship of personal deities such as Krishna, Shiva, Vishnu and Devi is a central aspect of the tradition. Saguna Bhakti is often associated with the devotional poetry and literature of saints and sages such as the Bhagwad Gita, the Ramayana, the Puranas and the works of vaishnav saints like Jaidev, Tulsidas and Surdas.

IMPACT OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

The Bhakti movement has a profound impact on Indian society and culture. It challenged the Brahminical hierarchy, which had placed the Brahmans at the top of the social order and encouraged the people from all castes and communities to participate in the worship of God. The bhakti saints rejected the rigid rules of orthodox Hinduism, such as the caste system and preached the value of personal devotion and direct connection with God. The Bhakti movement also played an important role in promoting vernacular literature in India. The devotional hymns written and composed by bhakti sages were in regional languages which were easily understood by lay man. This led to the growth of regional literature and the development of new literary forms, such as the Abhanga in Marathi, the Pada in Kannada and the Doha in Hindi. The movement also gave rise to various art forms such as temple, architecture, sculpture and painting. “Great Kings like Sasanka

and Harsh-Vardhana, great poets like Kalidas and Bhababhuti and great masters of prose like Subandhu and Banabhatta seem to have been ardent worshippers of Shiva without probably belonging to any particular sect.”⁹

DANCE AND MUSIC IN BHAKTISM

In Bhakti tradition, devotees use music and dance to express their love and devotion to the God. Bhakti music includes devotional songs called bhajans, kirtans and aartis. The songs are often lead by a lead singer where he/she sings a line and the congregation responds with the next line. Dance is also an integral part of Bhakti movement. In Krishna Bhakti of the Braj region, The locals use dance to reenact the stories of Lord Krishna such as Rasleela, the playful dance of Lord Krishna with the beloved Gopis and Lord Krishna’s childhood Leelas. In other forms of Bhakti, such as the worship of Devi, the classical dance forms of Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi and Odissi are often used to express devotion by using such dance movements which represent the divine forms of Kali, Durga or other goddesses. In Shaivism, one of the most popular dance form is Tandav which is believed to be performed by Lord Shiva himself. Another form of Shaivite dance is Lasya which is a graceful and gentle dance and is said to be performed by the Goddess Lakshmi or Parvati.

CONCLUSION

Overall, both the Bhakti and Sufi movements had a profound impact on Indian society, promoting religious tolerance, social equality, and cultural diversity. These movements helped to break down barriers between different social and religious groups, and they continue to influence Indian society to this day. Both played an important role in shaping Indian culture and society, and their teachings continue to have relevance and significance today. Both the movements also have a rich tradition of devotional music and dance that expresses the devotee's love and devotion to the divine. These art forms continue to be an integral part of Hindu and Muslim culture and are cherished by millions of people around the world. In the Bhakti movement, poets wrote in various Indian languages, including Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu. Sufi poets wrote in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and other languages, and their works often emphasized the themes of love, devotion, and mysticism.

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