

Bhakti and Sufi ideas on composite culture

November 19, 2019

Source: *The Hindu*

Manifest pedagogy: Bhakti and sufi movement, ideas like composite culture and emergent threats to this composite culture are areas of interest for UPSC in History and Society sections. These areas are the once which ever aspirant expects a question from but never prepares. So Manifest aims to convert this aspiration into reality and give sufficient content for this section.

Placing it in syllabus: Medieval India – Bhakti movement and Sufism

Dimensions:

- Definition of composite culture
- Examples of composite culture in medieval India
- Bhakti and Sufi contribution to building composite culture
- Threats to composite culture of India today

Content:

Definition of composite culture:

Composite culture is a **heterogeneous mixture of multiple cultures meeting and co-existing in one single region.**

India has been the birth-land of a dozen of religions. The **teachings of each religion is based on the concept of dharma (moral duty) and karma (action).** Another famously preached concept is that of **Ahimsa**, known as non-violence.

Religions are a part of Indian value system which provides

direction to the way of living.

India provides the right to choose whichever religion its citizen wants to follow and change into other religions that suit themselves at that point of time.

This general **tolerant nature of the society** which finds its roots in the concept of **secularism** makes it easier to accept each other's religion and live in peace and stability.

Still prevalent **Joint Family structure** and the **diversity in festivals, clothing, cuisine, dialects, traditions, customs, music and dance forms** has made **Indian composite culture even richer.**

Examples of composite culture in medieval India:

Culturally medieval period marks the beginning of a new stage in the growth of India's composite culture.

- The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate which led to the **assimilation of the Turkish, Arabic and Persian culture with Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism** led to the development of new **Indo Islamic culture.**
- **Two new languages-Arabic and Persian** became a part of India's linguistic heritage.
- **Historical writings** for the first time became an important component of Indian literature.
- Under the influence of Persian, **new forms of literature** such as the **ghazal** were introduced.
- **Urdu language developed** as a mixture of Persian, Arabic, Hindi and other regional languages.
- The growth of a composite culture reached its **zenith under the Mughals** (16th and 17th centuries).
- The **Mughal painting** developed into a distinct Indian style.
- **Various dresses, social amenities and festivals which were introduced by the Mughals** in India were accepted by the people and became a part of the composite culture.

- Islamic features introduced the **concept of spaciousness, massiveness and width to the Indian architectural designs.**
- Verses from Quran were also engraved on the walls of the structures built.
- The **Turks and the Mughals borrowed Indian motifs like swastika, bell, lotus, etc.**
- The period saw two great religious movements – **Sufi and Bhakti movements.**

Bhakti and Sufi contribution in building composite culture:

Bhakti movement, came to be defined as “devotion to a personal deity”. It is a **mystical tradition**, as the focus is “**devotion to god or the ultimate reality**” through different forms of practices. The Bhakti movement has also been interpreted as a **movement of dissent and of social reform.**

The focus is not only on a personal experience of the divine, but also on the **teachings of a personal guru.** Within such traditions **texts were transmitted orally.** The **chief exponents** of this cult were Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Ramananda, Vallabhacharya, Kabir, Nanak and Sri Chaitanya.

The development of Bhakti started in South India between the 7th and 12th century. During this period the **Shaiva Nayanars and the Vaishnavites** preached personal devotion to God as a means of Salvation. They also disregarded the **rigidities of the caste system and unnecessary rites and rituals of Hindu religion.**

The **Sufi movement** was a socio-religious movement of 14th-15th century whose exponents were **unorthodox Muslim saints** who had a deep study of vedantic philosophy and had come in contact with great sages and seers of India. They could **see the Indian religion from very near and realized its inner values.**

It therefore was the result of the Hindu influence on Islam and **provided a common platform for both the religions.** Sufis

believed in **inner purity**. The **union of the human soul with God through love and devotion was the essence of the teachings of the Sufi Saints**.

They realized God by the renunciation of the world and worldly pleasures. The leading **sufi saints** like Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti, Fariuddin Ganj-i-Shakar, Nizam-ud-din Auliya etc.

Threats to composite culture of India today:

Though our perspective upon the composite culture of our country is of pride, there are many **factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic** which constantly try to **undo the 'unity'** in the diversity of our nation.

Communalism is on high in the country today. It is **blind loyalty to one's own religious group**. It is used as a **tool** to mobilize people for or against by raising an appeal on communal lines. It is associated with **religious fundamentalism and dogmatism**.

Communal consciousness arose as a result of the transformation of Indian society under the **impact of colonialism** and the need to struggle against it.

In the long run, **political scenarios, socio economic conditions** like population, poverty, illiteracy and unemployment have created a lot of compulsions, especially before younger generation. **External elements (including non-state actors)** also have a role in worsening the problem of communalism and making it serious.

Starting from the demand for separate electorate followed by the Partition of India, 1947, Anti-Sikh riots, 1984, Ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Hindu Pandits in 1989, Babri masjid demolition in Ayodhya, 1992, Godhra incident in 2002, Assam Communal violence, 2012, Muzaffarnagar violence, 2013 etc., are all **practical manifestations** of the thought of communalism in India.

The framers of our Constitution had the **objective of securing civic, political, economic, social and cultural rights** as essential ingredients of citizenship. Hence particular emphasis was placed on the rights of religious minorities.