UNIT 7: RELIGION AND CULTURE IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

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7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the religious life of the medieval people,
- analyse the artistic activities of the rulers of Medieval India,
- discuss the cultural life of the medieval people,

7.2 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit you have learnt about the society and economic developments in medieval India. Medieval Indian rulers contributed a lot to the religious and culture life of the Medieval Indian society. In this unit we shall discuss the architectural and literature development of medieval India.

7.3 RELIGION IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

In the previous sections we have got an idea regarding the socio-economic condition of Medieval India, let us now have some idea on the religious life of the same period. During the Sultanate period, Islam was the religion of the state. It was considered to be the duty of the sultan and his government to defend and uphold the principles of Islam and to propagate them among the masses. Majority of the people were followers of Hinduism. Hindu subjects were given the status of *Zimmis* or protected people who accepted the Muslim rule and agreed to pay tax called *Jizyah*. Women and children were exempted from it. At first *Jizyah* was collected along with land revenue. But Firuz Shah made *Jizyah*a separate tax. Historians like Zia-Ud-Din Barani states that the sultans were not intolerant towards other religious sects. We come to from his writing that "The Hindus pass beneath the wall of the royal palace in processions, singing, and beating drums to immerse the idols in the *Yamuna*." However, some Sultans harassed the Hindu subjects.

LET US KNOW



A large number of Hindus were converted to Islam during the medieval period. Conversation to Islam was mainly due to the hopes of political gain or economic advantage or to improve one's social position.

The Mughal Emperors followed a policy of religious toleration and equality. Babur and Humayun remained busy in fighting against the Afghan and the Rajput for the establishments and consolidation of the Mughal Empire. Akbar ruled for a long period. He followed a policy of religious toleration and also attempted for the cultural unity of India. Jahangir and Shah Jahan pursued the same religious policy. Aurangzeb was a religious bigot. The Mughal Empire reached the zenith of its power during his period and probably he felt perfectly

confident to impose his personal religious views on the majority ofthe masses. Aurangzeb failed in his attempt and the failure of his religious policy contributed towards his failure and disintegration of the Mughal Empire.

7.3.1 Bhakti Movement

In medieval times a religious movement spread in various parts of India which is known as *Bhakti* movement. As their chief emphasis was upon Bhakti i.e. true devotion to God, the movement began to be known as Bhakti movement. In the Middle Ages, the Hinduism had greatly degenerated. The Brahmins had become corrupt and they exploited the innocent people. The Bhakti movement strongly denounced the evils of Hinduism, like superstitious practices, caste system etc and emphasised on unity and equality. The Bhakti movement preached that there is only one God. The Bhakti reformers did not believe in idol worship. Its important saints were Ramanuja, Namdeva, Ramananda, Surdas, Chaitanya, Kabir, Guru Nanak, etc.

Bhakti movement flourished in various regions in India. In Bengal, Maharastra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kashmir, Assam etc. it became very popular. In Assam Sankardeva introduced Bhakti movement. Monotheistic ideas influenced his concept of Bhaktiwhich came to be known as *EakaSarana Dharma*. He also founded the institution of Satra where people of all classes assembled for religious as well as social purpose.



LET US KNOW

The *Bhakti* movement had been at work in India long before the coming of the Turks. The *Bhakti* movement started in South India around the seventh century A.D. and it spread in Northern India in the fifteenth century

A. D.

The movement popularised the ideas of unity and equality and revolutionised the Indian society. The attacks on the caste system helped the downtrodden people to improve their status in the society.

7.3.2 Sufism

Have you heard about Sufism? Sufism was an important religious force in India during the medieval period. It is a form of Islamic mysticism. Sufism was a revolt against orthodox Islam. The Islamic stress on equality was respected by the Sufis far more than by the Ulemas. They sincerely believed that there are many paths to reach God.

There were two chief orders (*Silsila*) of the Sufis in India; they were *Chishti* and *Surhawardi*orders. The Famous *Chishti*saints were KhwajaMoinuddinChishti, Bakhtiyar Khaki, NizamuddinAuliya and NaziruddinChiragh-a-Dahlvi. The famous *Surhawardi*saints were Shaikh ShihabudinSurhawardi and Hamid-Ud-Din Nagori.

Sufi and *Bhakti* thought and practice were akin at various points. Both of them attracted the attention of the lower classes as they not only preached equality, but also practiced it. They gave stress on love as the basis of the relationship with God.



ACTIVITY –7.1

Prepare a list of Bhaktiand Sufisaints.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Which religion was followed by the Sultans of Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals?

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Q 2: Name one Chishti saint of India.

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7.4 CULTURE IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate opened a new phase in the cultural development of the country. Sultans of Delhi took keen interest in the art and architecture. During that period Indian art had attained great excellence. The interaction of the Turks with the Indians has led to the development of a new enriched culture.

7.4.1 Architecture

We have already mentioned Qutub-ud-din Aibak, the founder of the *slave dynasty*. He was also a great builder. He laid the foundation of a great mosque "*Quwat-ul-Islam*", built out of the material of a Hindu temple. He also built the first few storeys of the *QutubMinar* which was completed by his son-in-law Iltutmish. Another great ruler Ala-ud-din Khilji of Khilji dynasty also took keen interest in architecture. He built his capital at *Siri*, near Delhi. He also built *AlaiDarwaza, ZamatKhana Masjid* at the *Dargah* of Nizam-ud-din-Auliya, *Hauz-i-Khas* etc. There was a great building activity in the Tughlaq period. Ghiyas-ud-dinand Muhammad Tughlaq built huge palace-fortress complex called Tughlaqabad. The Sayyids and Lodi rulers built several huge tombs. Several hundredtombs have been found in the neighborhood of Delhi alone.

LET US KNOW



The Turks used the arch and dome on a wide scale in their architecture. The arch and dome were known to the Indian earlier, but they were not used on a large scale. It became a characteristic feature in the later period.

The Mughals had great contribution in the field of architecture also. Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, was fond of gardens. The first great period in building activity occurred under Akbar (1556-

1605). He built a series of forts - the most famous being the Agra fort built with red sandstone. In 1572 Akbar commenced a palace-cum-fort complex at *FatehpurSikri*, 36 K.M. from Agra which he completed in eight years. Some of the magnificent buildings in *FatehpurSikri* are *Diwan-i-khas*, *Diwan-i-Aam*, *PanchMahal*, *JodhabaiMahal*, *BulandDarwaza*, the tomb of Shaikh Salim Chisti etc. Jahangir built the tomb for his father Akbar at Sikandara near Agra and the tomb of his father-in-law Itimad-ud-daula.

The period of Shah Jahan was the golden age for Mughal architecture. He was a builder per excellence. White marble became the chief material for building activity during his rule. He dismantled many of Akbar's red stone structure in Agra and erected *Dewan-i-aam*, *Diwan-i-khas*, *Khas-Mahal*, *Shish Mahal*, *Moti Masjid* etc. in their place. All these were built with white marbles. In 1638 Shah Jahan laid the foundation of a new city near Delhi (Shahjahanabad) and built there a palace fort with red sandstone, which we know today as the Red Fort. Many beautiful structures were erected inside it with white marbles; such as *MotiMahal*, *HiraMahal*, *Rang Mahal*, *Diwan-i-aam*, *Dewan-i-khas* etc. All these structures were highly ornamented. However, the crown of all the architectural activities in Mughal period is the *TajMahal*, which is regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Have you ever seen the *TajMahal*?

Shah Jahan built the *Taj* in the memory of his beloved wife, Mumtaz. The milk white marble structure was commenced in 1631 and completed in 1653. It was designed by Ustad Ahmad and both indigenous and foreign craftsmen were employed in its construction. After Shah Jahan's death, Mughal architecture began to degenerate rapidly. Aurangzeb was a puritan and he discouraged art and architecture.

7.4.2 Fine Arts

Fine arts such as painting and music also flourished during this period. The blending of the Persian and Rajput techniques of painting led to the emergence of a new school of art during Delhi Sultanate. Many Hindu painters adopted the minuteness of the Persian techniques and produced outstanding works.

The Mughals also made distinctive contributions in the field of painting. They introduced several new themes depicting the court, battle scene etc and used new colours and new forms. Humayun took keen interest in painting and brought two master painters, namely Mir Sayyad Ali and AbdusSamad, from Iran. Under their leadership a separate department for painting was created during the reign of Akbar. Jaswant and Daswant were two very famous painters of Akbar's court.

Mughal painting reached the zenith under Jahangir. Special progress was made in portrait painting and paintings of animals in his reign. Mansur and Abdul Hasan and Bishan Das were important.

While the tradition continued under Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb paid no interest to this art. As a result, most of the artists traveled to otherparts of the country and engaged themselves in different places which helped in the development of painting in the states of Rajasthan and the Punjab hills.

LET US KNOW



The Rajasthan style of painting combined the themes of western India with Mughal forms and style. Thus besides hunting and court scenes, the paintings of mythological themes of Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. became popular.

In the sphere of music the blending of the Persian and Indian music led to the emergence of new notations. During that time Qawalis etc. became more popular.

In Mughal period, Babur, was a patron of music. Humayun had Bacchu as his court musician. Akbar was also a great patron of music. There were thirty six musicians in Akbar's court. Tansen was regarded as the greatest of all the musicians of Akbar's time. Jahangir and Shah Jahan also were interested in music. Jagannatha and Lal Khan were the great musicians of Shah Jahan's court. However, as was in all other field of arts, Aurangzeb hated music.

7.4.3 Literature

The Delhi Sultanate adopted Persian as the language of literature and administration of the country. The most notable Persian writer of this period was Amir Khusru. Khusru wrote a large number of poetical works and created a new style called the *Sabaq-i-hindi*or the style of India. A strong school of history writing in Persian apart from poetry also developed in that period. The historical accounts in Persians are Hasan Nijami's "*Taj-ul-Massir*", MinhajSiraj's "Tabaqat-i-Nasiri", ZiauddinBarani's "*Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi*", and "*Fatwa-i-Jahandari*", etc.

Sanskrit literature also played an important role during the Sultanate period. Several works on philosophy, drama, fiction, medicine,astronomy were written in Sanskrit. Some Sanskrit works were translated into Persian in this period such as *TutiNama*(Book of the Parrot) which was very popular. Some other Sanskrit books on medicine and music were translated into Persian. Thus, Sanskrit and Persian functioned as link language in the country in politics, religion, philosophy etc.

LET US KNOW



Although the greatest amount of literature produced by the Muslim was in Arabic, the Turks, who came to India, were deeply influenced by the Persian language. There was a resurgence of

Persian language in Iran and Central Asia from tenth century onward.

During the Mughal period also Sanskrit and Persian played an important role. Several regional languages like Telegu, Marathi, Bengali, etc developed due to the patronage extended to them by local rulers. The Mughal emperors patronised literature. The first of the Mughal rulers, Babur was an eminent poet in Persian and wrote his autobiography *Baburnama*. Humayun was a lover of poetry. Akbar could neither read nor write, but was well informed in a number of subjects. Akbar's court was adorned with scholars like AbulFazal, Faizi, Badauni, etc. AbulFazal wrote *Ain-i-Akbari*(Institutes of Akbar), *Akbarnama* (History of Akbar), Babar"s daughter Gulbadan Begum wrote*HumayunNama*. Some great Sanskrit works were translated into Persian. The translation of the *Mahabharata* was carried out under the supervision of Faizi. Todar Mal translated the *BhagavataPurana* into Persian. Hindi poets like Ganga Kavi, Tansen, and Kesavadas flourished in Akbar's court. Tulsidas, who wrote *Ramcharitamanasa*, occupied the first place among the Hindu poets of the age.

Jahangir wrote his autobiography called *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. In the court of Shah Jahan there were some great Persian, Hindi and Sanskrit scholars. His son Dara Shikoh was also a great scholar. Aurangzeb was well versed Arabic and Persian. He was a specialist in and Islamic Holy Law.



ACTIVITY -7.2

On an outline map of India mark the following:

a) QutubMinar b) Agra fort c) Red Fort

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



Q 3: Match the following :

a. Shah Jahan	a. Alai Darwaza
b. AlauddinKhilji	b. FatehpurSikri
c. Akbar	c.TajMahal

Q 4: Fill in the blanks:

a) In Jahangir's reign special progress was made in ..... painting.

b) …..…….. was the famous musician in Akbar's court.



7.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you have learnt about

- in the field of religion Hinduism and Islam flourished side by side. There was the emergence of two new trends in religion, the Bhakti movement and Sufism.
- culturally the medieval period was progressive one. There was tremendous development in the field of architecture, fine arts and literature.



7.6 FURTHER READING

1) Bandyopadhyay, Sekhara. (2004). From *Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India.* New Delhi, India: Orient Longman.
2) Chandra, B., Mukherjee, A., Panikkar, K.N. & Mahajan, S. (Ed.). (1988). *India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947.* Delhi, India: Penguin.
3) Majumdar, R.C., Raychaudhuri, H.C. & Datta, K. (1978). *An Advanced History of India* (4th Ed.). New Delhi, India: Macmillan India



7.7 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to the question no 1. Islam

Answer to the question no 2. KhwajaMoinuddinChisti

Answer to the question no 3

a) Shah Jahan TajMahal

b) AlauddinKhilji Alai Darwaza

c) Akbar FatehpurSikri

Answer to the question no 4. (a)Portrait (b). Tansen



7.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q.1: With whom Dhamm is asociated?

Q.2: Name two Sufi saints.

Q.3: Who introduced Bhakti movement in Assam?

Q.4: Name various land revenue systems of Mughal period?

B) Short Questions (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q.1: Write a short note on Bhaktism.

Q.2: Write a short note on the architecture of the medieval India.

Q.3: What do know about Sufism?

C) Long Questions (Answer each question in between 150-300 words)

Q.1: Narrate the development of Bhakti movement in medieval India.

Q.2:‘ The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate opened a new phase in the cultural development of the country’- Discuss.

Q.3: Discuss the development of Literature in the medieval India.

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