

1. Discuss the contribution of Sufi and Bhakti movements in the philosophical awakening of the masses.

Approach- Question is straight forward. Student can give account of bhakti and sufi movements from medieval times and their impact on masses in the spiritual awakening.

Introduction

In medieval period, we see intense devotion or love of God of various kinds of bhakti and Sufi movements that have evolved since the eighth century. The idea of bhakti became so popular that even Buddhists and Jain adopted these beliefs.

Body

Bhakti movement

- Bhakti was accepted as a means to attain moksha along with jnana and karma. The development of this cult took place in South India when the Nayanars and Alvars moved against the austerities propagated by the Buddhist and Jain schools and professed that ultimate devotion to god was the means to salvation.
- People were no longer satisfied with a religion which emphasized only ceremonies. The cult is the combined result of the teachings of various saints, through the then times.
- Each of them had their own views, but the ultimate basis of the cult was a general awakening against useless religious practices and unnecessary strictness. The cult also emerged as a strong platform against casteism.

Some of the important leaders of bhakti movement

- Namadeva and Ramananda (Maharashtra and Allahabad) – Both of them taught the concept of bhakti to all the four varnas and disregarded the ban on people of different castes cooking together and sharing meals.
- Sankara and Ramanuja – The propounders of Advaita (non-duality) and vishishta adwaitha (qualified non-duality)
- Vallabhacharya – propounder of shuddha adwaitha or pure non-duality.
- Chaitanya (Bengal) – relied on the use of music, dance and bhajans to get in touch with God.
- Kabir – was a disciple of Ramananda, and was raised by a Muslim weaver. He stood for doing away with all the unnecessary customs and rituals in both religions and bringing union between these religions.
- Nimbakacharya – founder of the Radha-Krishna cult. He expressed this relation to substantiate the importance of marriage.
- In South India 7th to 9th centuries saw the emergence of new religious movements, led by the Nayanars (saints devoted to Shiva) and Alvars (saints devoted to Vishnu) who came from all castes including those considered “untouchable” like the Pulaiyar and the Panars.

Sufi movement

- In the early centuries of Islam a group of religious minded people called sufis turned to asceticism and mysticism in protest against the growing materialism of the Caliphate as a religious and political institution. They were critical of the dogmatic definitions and scholastic methods of interpreting the Qur'an and sunna (traditions of the Prophet) adopted by theologians.
- Instead, they laid emphasis on seeking salvation through intense devotion and love for God by following His commands.
- By the eleventh century Sufism evolved into a well developed movement with a body of literature on Quranic studies and sufi practices.
- Of the groups of sufis who migrated to India in the late twelfth century, the Chishtis were the most influential. This was because they adapted successfully to the local environment and adopted several features of Indian devotional traditions.
- Shaikh Muinuddin Sijzi, Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya are some of the prominent sufi saints.
- Pilgrimage, called ziyarat, to tombs of sufi saints is prevalent all over the Muslim world. This practice is an occasion for seeking the sufi's spiritual grace (barakat).

Spiritual awakening

- Shankaraharya, from Kerala in the 8th century, was an advocate of Advaita or the doctrine of the oneness of the individual soul and the Supreme God which is the Ultimate Reality.
- Basavanna's virshaivism movement began in Karnataka in the 12th century which argued for the equality of all human beings and against Brahmanical ideas about caste and the treatment of women.
- From Maharashtra Janeshwar, Namdev, Eknath and Tukaram as well as women like Sakkubai and the family of Chokhamela, who belonged to the "untouchable" Mahar caste. This regional tradition of bhakti focused on the Vitthala (a form of Vishnu) temple in Pandharpur, as well as on the notion of a personal god residing in the hearts of all people.
- For baba guru nanak the message is spelt out in his hymns and teachings. These suggest that he advocated a form of nirguna bhakti. He firmly repudiated the external practices of the religions he saw around him. He rejected sacrifices, ritual baths, image worship, austerities and the scriptures of both Hindus and Muslims.
- From the tradition and hierarchy ridden society this message of unity in diversity gave new impetus to the lower castes and a new form of awakening took place against the redundant traditions.

Conclusion

Bhakti and sufi movements gave rise to new Indian consciousness. Indian society became spiritually awakened with the new philosophical ideas instilling new sense of identity among lower castes seeking spiritual salvation and philosophical awakening.

2. Why is Rumi, the 13th century poet so famous? Can you discuss some of ideas and philosophies about life and love?

Approach:

Question is asking you to discuss, it requires you to write a debate where one has to use your skill at reasoning, backed up by deliberately selected evidence to make a case for and against an argument.

Introduction:

Rumi was 37, a traditional Muslim preacher and scholar, as his father and grandfather had been, He was this compelling figure in all cultures whose tomb draws reverent followers and heads of state each year for a whirling dervish ceremony on 17 December, the anniversary of his death.

Body:

RUMI'S IDEAS AND PHILOSOPHIES ABOUT LIFE AND LOVE

- Rumi believed passionately in the use of music, poetry and dance as a path to reach God. It was from these ideas that the practice of whirling dervishes developed into a ritual form.
- Rumi believed that all lives were sacred: Taa'shif nifaak b'astz sang (Even a seemingly lifeless stone has a degree of consciousness; respect it).
- He believed that all religions are only one religion. because all praises are directed towards God's Light.
- He believed in THE SILENCE OF LOVE and that Love is the astrolabe of God's mysteries. A lover may hanker after this love or that love, but at the last he is drawn to the KING of Love. However, much we describe and explain Love, when we fall in love, we are ashamed of our words. Explanation by the tongue makes most things clear, But Love unexplained is better.
- Rumi was a jurist and religion teacher until the age of 37, when he met a wandering dervish named Shams Tabrizi. He soon became Rumi's spiritual mentor and intimate friend and eventually changed the course of his life.
- Rumi's poetry is a series of mystical experiences – a reflection on nature's beauty, a song, a dance, an idea, a feeling... anything that makes us human, everything we're able to see with our eyes open or shut. Below you will find a lot of Rumi love quotes that prove how spiritual and intense his poems are.
- Rumi's work continues to resonate and today, his tomb draws dervish followers and heads of state each year for a ceremony that marks the anniversary of his death.
- He is among the poets that show us the importance of every experience, be it good or bad.

Conclusion:

Rumi is a very mysterious and provocative poet and figure for our time, as we grapple with understanding the Sufi tradition and understanding the nature of ecstasy and devotion and the power of poetry. As new translations come into print, and his work continues to resonate, Rumi's influence will continue. His inspiring words remind us how poetry can be a sustaining part of everyday life.



3. “Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.” Comment on this quote of Robert Frost.

Approach:

Question is straight forward in its approach, students are expected to explain the meaning of the quote in introduction then explain the quote using relevant examples.

Introduction:

The given statement emphasizes on the essence of education that it cultivates spirit of tolerance and boost self confidence. Education provides ability to take criticisms in a constructive manner. A well educated person develops a temperament of critical thinking and knows how to deal with success and failure properly. As such, an educated person, when confronted with conflicting views, will not lose temper. He/she will rather try to analyse others' views, try to learn from others; and thereafter come up with an appropriate response/strategy. Also, an educated person doesn't lose self-confidence easily, for he/she is aware of own limits and is confident of own abilities. ‘Voltaire’ says that i don't agree with you but I respect your right to disagree with me . To make this statement his education could be inclusive, diverse, tolerant.

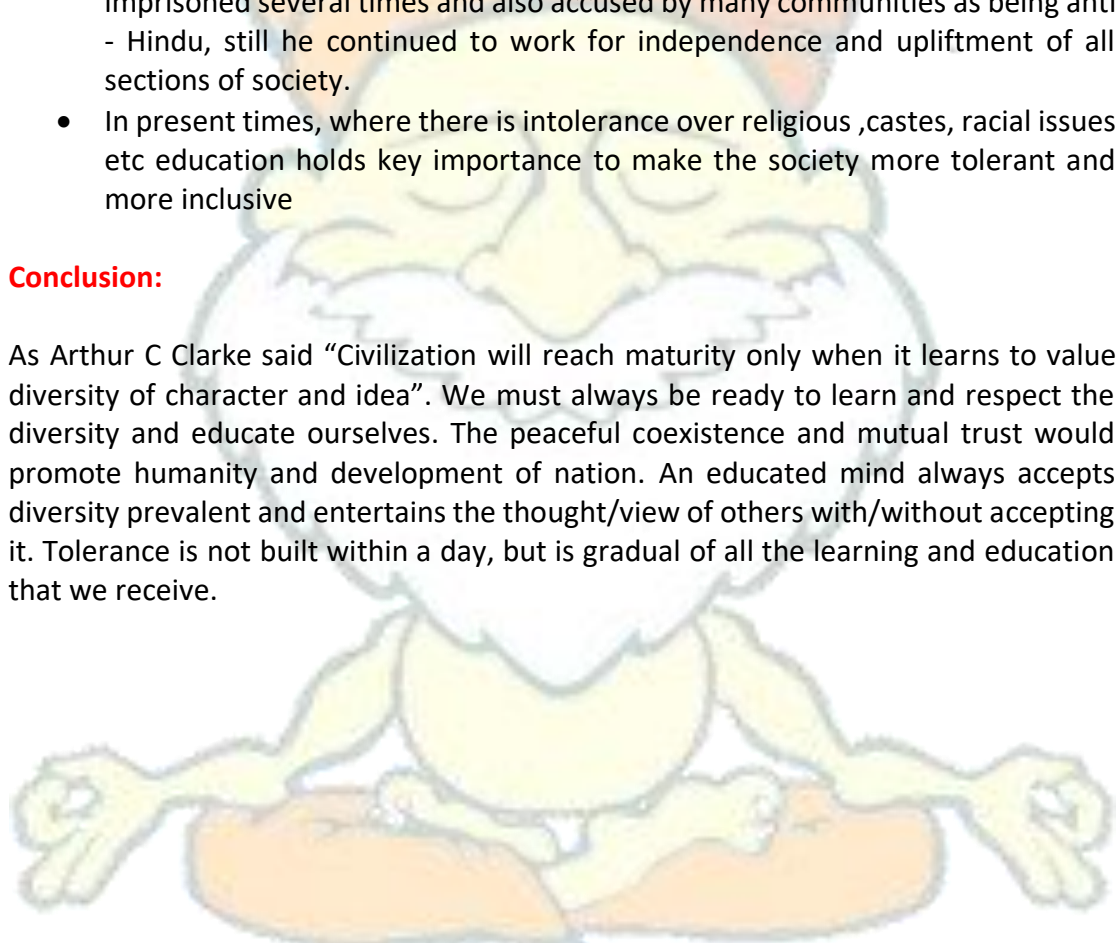
Body:

- Education is manifestation of perfection already in men so a Person it helps person to make his mind strong, educated mind listen to all without any reaction. In the diverse country like India, Civil servants must possess ability to deal with diverse interests, political pressures and criticisms. Such ability can be cultivated through proper education. Issue of corruption among government officials is also a manifestation of lack of self confidence and character building ability of present status of education system.
- For example, Pame Armstrong, IAS wanted to build a road in Tamenglong, Manipur out of empathy for the local people. He tried to get it done through State projects but he faced hindrances. Later, he took to crowd-financing and built it, by mobilizing the public for the cause, without Government financing. His confidence, empathy and patience emanate from his education.
- Peace and Harmony can be brought only if we have tolerance in the society. Different culture and different ideas lead towards higher development goals. For example- American society is an amalgamation of different views, religions, culture and rights of individual freedom and thereby it has achieved a position of being a global destination. Whereas an intolerance to others may lead to downfall as happened with Myanmar at international forum.
- Mahatma Gandhi showed tolerance towards the agitated public when he withdrew non cooperation movement because he had true education of Freedom and how to achieve it. He had differences of opinion with Ambedkar, Subhas chandra Bose but have never show or spoken anything intolerant.

- Education in form of awareness , information related to health and hygiene helped in behavioural change among the society towards building toilets in houses who were earlier resisting to such changes citing religious reasons.
- As it is said "mind once enlightened can not go dark again". Such enlightenment can only be achieved through proper value education and concept based learning. Dr APJ Abdul Kalam also emphasized the importance of value education in his quote "Real education enhances the dignity of a human being and increases his or her self-respect. If only the real sense of education could be realized by each individual and carried forward in every field of human activity, the world will be so much a better place to live in." meaning importance of education in overall development of human beings which includes respect, tolerance and dignity of individual.
- A well educated person develops a temperament of critical thinking and knows how to deal with success and failure properly. eg. Mahatma Gandhi was imprisoned several times and also accused by many communities as being anti - Hindu, still he continued to work for independence and upliftment of all sections of society.
- In present times, where there is intolerance over religious ,castes, racial issues etc education holds key importance to make the society more tolerant and more inclusive

Conclusion:

As Arthur C Clarke said "Civilization will reach maturity only when it learns to value diversity of character and idea". We must always be ready to learn and respect the diversity and educate ourselves. The peaceful coexistence and mutual trust would promote humanity and development of nation. An educated mind always accepts diversity prevalent and entertains the thought/view of others with/without accepting it. Tolerance is not built within a day, but is gradual of all the learning and education that we receive.



4. Truth can be stated in a thousand different ways, yet each one can be true. Elucidate.

Approach

The candidate needs to dwell upon the given statement and bring out its meaning through the help of different examples, which makes the understanding of 'Truth' more substantial.

Introduction

The above quote by Swami Vivekananda clearly demonstrates the nature of 'Truth' and the ideal way of understanding it in human society where in the present polarised times, truth can be seen from different perspectives which would help in healing the society.

Body

- Truth is multi-faceted. Truth remains true from the point of view of an observer but may be seemingly false from other's point of view. There has been a perpetual fight of perspectives and will always be as long as truth is concerned. There is no black or white but shades of grey.
- Proclaiming something as one absolute truth would be a recipe for disaster in matters where the outcomes can be subjective or unknown to humans. Here, Swami Vivekananda emphasized that truth can have different perspectives.
- In this light, the Rig Veda states, 'E-kam sad viprah bahudha vadanti' i.e. the truth is one but is called by many names. Thus, it brings home the point that we need not quarrel over each and every difference of opinion in life. Different opinions must co-exist for the sake of a free world.
- Further, this is the basis for development of Indian way of thinking where all religions are considered as true and rightful approach to reach the almighty. Thus, theological discussions can go a long way in present times, if everyone considers the above approach.
- Also, each religion teaches its followers to be truthful and non-violent. However, the ways of saying the same is different for different religions.
- Leaders can't lead without followers and unfortunately, some of the most passionate ideas die an early death because the leader is ineffective. To be able to take people along, inspire them with your vision, you need to know that there are a thousand sides to the same story.
- This is even true for leaders in corporate sector, where if you can't respect the diversity in your teams, you cannot establish a culture of tolerance and respect which could hamper improved performance by the team.
- What other person is saying may seem us to be false but when seen from his/her perspective can be true. Understanding this would help us solve issues in amicable ways. It helps us not be prejudiced against others' opinions.

- Understanding the other side of the story and other faces of a situation/practice/thought is required before reaching to any conclusion.
- At the same time, it is important to understand that objective truths have no place for variations under the present discussions where the scientific truths are an example. The Earth is round and not flat is an objective truth, such facts can't be under scrutiny through the argument of different perspectives.
- In the present age of fake news, such a differentiation becomes important to understand where facts and objective truths need to be upheld at all costs, where the facts and objective truths have been arrived at through rigorous academic scrutiny.
- But on a more theological and subjective levels, there must be scope for incorporating the variations of truth. Here, perspectives are different from truths where many people conflate perspectives with truths in present times.

Conclusion

Thus, we need not quarrel over each and every difference of opinion in life. Different opinions can co-exist for the development of a free world and for ensuring global peace where competing political ideologies are making the world an unsafe place. In this light, people must strive towards the goal of reaching the eternal truth of human brotherhood and feelings of oneness.



5. What is your view on the following quote by Venkataraman Ramakrishnan: We are all human beings, and our nationality is simply an accident of birth.

Approach:

Candidates are expected to provide the context of the quote and explain the quote by Venkataraman Ramakrishna. And then express the personal view on the quote.

Introduction

Just when Nobel laureate Venkataraman Ramakrishnan flooded with goodwill emails from India on winning Nobel prize and many were taking pride of him being a Indian origin. He said "We are all human beings, and our nationality is simply an accident of birth," it doesn't matter much as per Venkataraman on belonging to particular country.

Body

Nationality is not simply with accident of birth:

- Birth is not just a random momentary thing. It involves your parents. And they already had a nationality too.
- Nationality is a shared group identity in the significance of a geographical and sometimes demographic region seeking independence for its culture and/or ethnicity that holds that group together. This can be expressed as a belief or political ideology that involves an individual identifying with or becoming attached to one's nation.
- With identity of nationality the feelings of the high and low and casteism are banished from the minds of the people, and social unity is achieved. The nationalist leaders make the people understand with full force that our nation can progress and can have a prestigious place in the world only, when all disparities are removed.
- Nationality transforms into the nationalism. Nationalism as a ideology built on feeling of togetherness and belongingness of community but try to exclude those who are different from them. It has characteristics of heterogeneity whereas humanity is based on homogenous characteristics and try to be more inclusive rather than exclusive.

Nationality brings people together with the same mindset. Whereas humanism bring everyone to live together with or without the same mindset:

- Economically, nationality may give everyone equal rights to trade, practice profession or work, etc. Humanism is about fulfilling basic needs of an individual.
- India, as the birthplace of the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ideal and long-honored for its multiplicity of wisdom traditions and paths, is primed to become a model to lead a way out of this crisis. It is thus imperative that moral, spiritual and civil leaders work together to articulate universal ethical

principles and values that can form the basis for social cohesion, shared agreements and lasting peace.

- Environmentally, nationalism and nationality cares about the environment related issues in their nation. They don't care about the environmental issues of other countries. Humanism cares about the environment at global level. They know that humans can exist only at those places where environment is proper to live and carry out other activities. For example Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was criticised by all conservationist cross the world.
- Adherence to human values and humanity such as love and compassion is required in today's world which is affected by many nationality based conflicts such as civil wars, refugee crises and terrorism.
- It is with humanity and human values that one becomes truly able to put into practice his/her ethical values, such as justice, integrity, refusal of violence and ban to kill even in a crisis situation.
- Humanity convey a positive and affective surge, which reinforces the rationale of moral values. Humanity is value that permit us to live together in harmony and personally contribute to peace. Human values are a tool to manage human relations and a tool for peace when the tension is high.
- National citizenship is an accident of birth; global citizenship is different. It is a voluntary association with a concept that signifies "ways of thinking and living within multiple cross-cutting communities cities, regions, states, nations, and international collectives.
- It generates Cultural of empathy helps people see questions from multiple perspectives and move deftly among cultures sometimes navigating their own multiple cultural identities, sometimes moving out to experience unfamiliar cultures.
- When forces of Nationality and Patriotism try to take the front seat, there is a kind of hostility, protectionist feelings generated among the people of different countries. Therefore, Humanity should be always at a higher pedestal than other such values.

Conclusion

Since ancient times, the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the world is one family, has stood as an ideal of Indian civilization. This inclusive and compassionate spirituality recognizes that "the truth is one, sages call it variously"; this has allowed for groundbreaking advances in philosophical inquiry and civilizational advances throughout world history.