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Name of Department: History and Culture
Name of Topic: FORMATION OF A 'SYNCRETIC' RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IN LATER
MEDIEVAL INDIA: THE CASE OF THE PRANAMIS

FINDINGS

Keywords: Pranami, Kulzam Swarup, Bitak, Pran Nath, Chhatrasal, Tartam Sagar, Bhakti

The theme of Study, Objectives and Historiographical Perspective

The doctoral thesis is an attempt to study the rise and growth of the Pranami community in late medieval India (or what is now increasingly being called 'early modern India'). The focus of the study is on the exploration of the religious ideas of Mahamati Pran Nath, the founder of the community and the most important figure in its history. The thesis explores the religious, social, and political dimensions of the rise and growth of a religious community called Pranami Sampradaya or Pranami panth in various parts of Gujarat and central India during the seventeenth and early eighteenth c centuries. The sampradnya" led by its major figure, Pran Nath (1618- 1694), preached an extraordinary form of syncretic religion and raised a sizeable following in the regions of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Bundelkhand. The thesis highlights Pran Nath's relentless efforts to stress the commonalities among various religions in 17th-century India. While underlining the similarities between these religions, Pran Nath also criticized the ritualistic and dogmatic aspects of all religions. He was critical of such religious beliefs and practices that created differences among the followers of these religions. The thesis examines the extent to which Mahamati Pran Nath and his panth bore a resemblance to, or differed from, the Sant movement led by Kabir. On the other hand, the thesis also investigates the nature of syncretism inherent in the teachings of Pran Nath. Was the Pranami movement an integral part of the composite religious culture of India? The composite religious culture perspective emphasizes religious syncretism as its basis. But as is demonstrated in the thesis, there were many significant differences between the non-Hindu, non-Islamic Sant ideology propounded by Kabir and the strongly Hindu-Muslim syncretic religious philosophy of Pran Nath. The thesis also mentions the underlying differences between the peasant-artisan social base of the lower-caste sant movement and the aristocratic mercantile social base of the Pranami community, though there were instances of mutual overlapping. Moreover, Pran Nath's political relations with contemporary Rajput and Mughal ruling elites and dominant religious classes stood in sharp contrast to the subaltern nature of the Sant movement.