

Introduction

We saw in an earlier chapter that by the mid-first millennium CE the landscape of the subcontinent was dotted with a variety of religious structures like stupas, monasteries, temples. If these typified certain religious beliefs and practices, others have been reconstructed from textual traditions, including the Puranas, many of which received their present shape around the same time, and yet others remain only faintly visible in textual and visual records.

New textual sources available from this period include compositions attributed to poet-saints, most of whom expressed themselves orally in regional languages used by ordinary people. These compositions, which were often set to music, were compiled by disciples or devotees, generally after the death of the poet-saint. What is more, these traditions were fluid, generations of devotees tended to elaborate on the original message, and occasionally modified or even abandoned some of the ideas that appeared problematic or irrelevant in different political, social or cultural contexts. Using these sources thus poses a challenge to historians.

Historians also draw on hagiographies or biographies of saints written by their followers (or members of their religious sect). These may not be literally accurate, but allow a glimpse into the ways in which devotees perceive the lives of these path breaking women and men. As we will see, these sources provide us with insights into a scenario characterized by dynamism and diversity. Let us look at some elements of these more closely.

1. A Mosaic of Religious Beliefs and Practices:

Perhaps the most striking feature of this phase is the increasing visibility of a wide range of gods and goddesses in sculpture as well as in texts. At one level, this indicates the continued and even extended worship of the major deities – Vishnu, Shiva and the goddess – each of whom was visualized in a variety of forms.



1.1 The integration of cults:

ALVARS & INCARNATIONS OF VISHNU



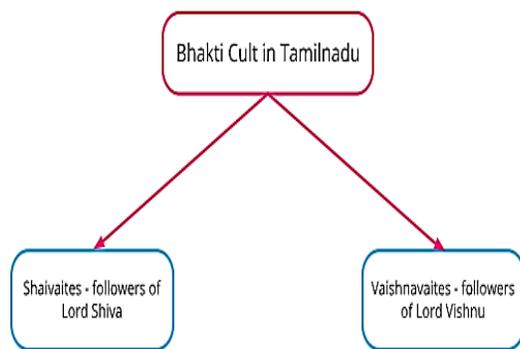
Historians who have tried to understand these developments suggest that there were at least two processes at work. One was a process of disseminating Brahmanical ideas. This is exemplified by the composition, compilation and preservation of Puranic texts in simple Sanskrit verse, explicitly meant to be accessible to women and Shudras, who were generally excluded from Vedic learning. At the same time, there was a second process at work – that of the Brahmanas accepting and reworking the beliefs and practices of these and other social categories. In fact, many beliefs and practices were shaped through a continuous dialogue between what sociologists have described as “great” Sanskritic Puranic traditions and “little” traditions throughout the land. One of the most striking examples of this process is evident at Puri, Orissa, where the principal deity was identified, by the twelfth century, as Jagannatha (literally, the lord of the world), a form of Vishnu.

You will notice that the deity is represented in a very different way. In this instance, a local deity, whose image was and continues to be made of wood by local tribal specialists, was recognized as a form of Vishnu. At the same time, Vishnu was visualized in a way that was very different from that in other parts of the country. Such instances of integration are evident amongst goddess cults as well. Worship of the goddess, often simply in the form of a stone smeared with ochre, was evidently widespread. These local deities were often incorporated within the Puranic framework by providing them with an identity as a wife of the principal male deities; sometimes they were equated with Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu, in other instances, with Parvati, the wife of Shiva.

1.2 Difference and conflict:

Often associated with the goddess were forms of worship that were classified as Tantric. Tantric practices were widespread in several parts of the subcontinent, they were open to women and men and practitioners often ignored differences of caste and class within the ritual context. Many of these ideas influenced Shaivism as well as Buddhism, especially in the eastern, northern and southern parts of the subcontinent.

All of these somewhat divergent and even disparate beliefs and practices would come to be classified as Hindu over the course of the next millennium. The divergence is perhaps most stark if we compare Vedic and Puranic traditions. The principal deities of the Vedic pantheon, Agni, Indra and Soma, become marginal figures, rarely visible in textual or visual representations. And while we can catch a glimpse of Vishnu, Shiva and the goddess in Vedic mantras, these have little in common with the elaborate Puranic mythologies. However, in spite of these obvious discrepancies, the Vedas continued to be revered as authoritative. Not surprisingly, there were sometimes conflicts as well – those who valued the Vedic tradition often condemned practices that went beyond the closely regulated contact with the divine through the performance of sacrifices or precisely chanted mantras. On the other hand, those engaged in Tantric practices frequently ignored the authority of the Vedas. Also, devotees often tended to project their chosen deity, either Vishnu or Shiva, as supreme. Relations with other traditions, such as Buddhism or Jainism, were also often fraught with tension if not open conflict. The traditions of devotion or bhakti need to be located within this context. Devotional worship had a long history of almost a thousand years before the period we are considering. During this time, expressions of devotion ranged from the routine worship of deities within temples to ecstatic adoration where devotees attained a trance-like state. The singing and chanting of devotional compositions were often a part of such modes of worship. This was particularly true of the Vaishnava and Shaiva sects.



DO YOU KNOW?

Great Tradition: The cultural practices of major social groups are called great traditions.

Small tradition: This is a tradition that does not match the great tradition.

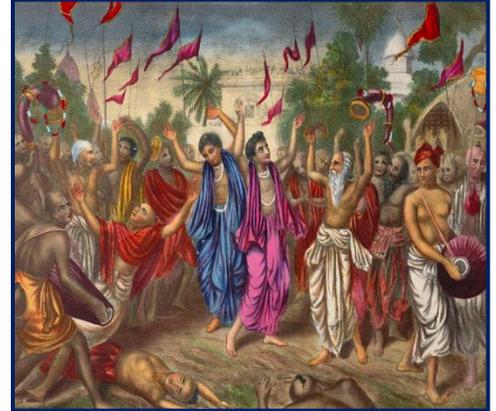
The Unification of the Cult: Methods of Worship.

Jagannath: Lord of the worlds.

1. Poems of Prayer Early Traditions of Bhakti:



In the course of the evolution of these forms of worship, in many instances, poet-saints emerged as leaders around whom there developed a community of devotees. Further, while Brahmanas remained important intermediaries between gods and devotees in several forms of bhakti, these traditions also accommodated and acknowledged women and the “lower castes”, categories considered ineligible for liberation within the orthodox Brahmanical framework. What also characterized traditions of bhakti was a remarkable diversity. At a different level, historians of religion often classify bhakti traditions into two broad categories: Saguna (with attributes) and Nirguna (without attributes). The former included traditions that focused on the worship of specific deities such as Shiva, Vishnu and his avatars (incarnations) and forms of the goddess or Devi, all often conceptualized in anthropomorphic forms. Nirguna bhakti on the other hand was worship of an abstract form of God.



2. The Alvars and Nayanaras of Tamil Nadu:

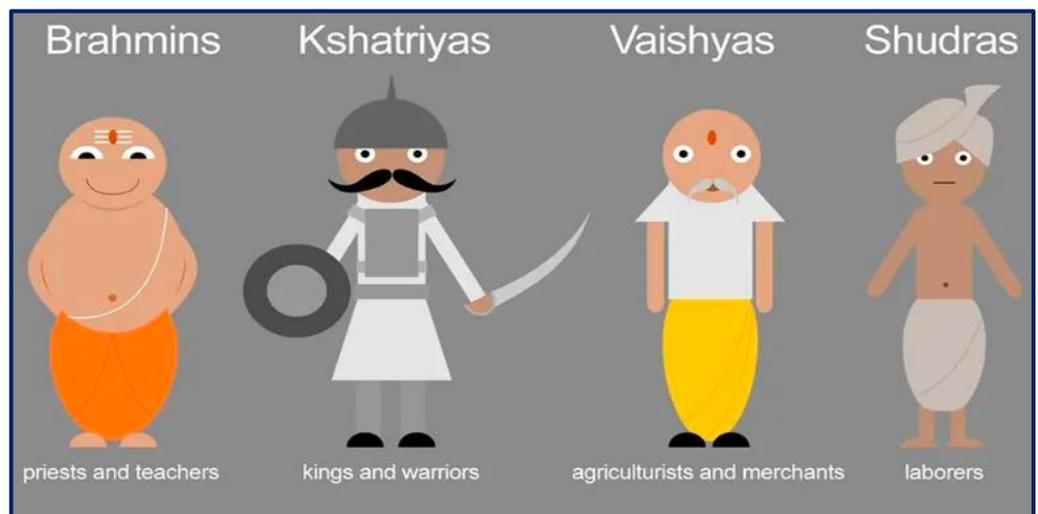
Some of the earliest bhakti movements (c. sixth century) were led by the Alvars (literally, those who are “immersed” in devotion to Vishnu) and Nayanaras (literally, leaders who were devotees of Shiva). They travelled from place-to-place singing hymns in Tamil in praise of their gods.

During their travels the Alvars and Nayanaras identified certain shrines as abodes of their chosen deities. Very often large temples were later built at these sacred places. These developed as centers of pilgrimage. Singing compositions of these poet-saints became part of temple rituals in these shrines, as did worship of the saints’ images.



2.2 Attitudes towards caste:

Some historians suggest that the Alvars and Nayanaras initiated a movement of protest against the caste system and the dominance of Brahmanas or at least attempted to reform the system. To some extent this is corroborated by the fact that bhaktas hailed from diverse social backgrounds ranging from Brahmanas to artisans and cultivators and even from castes considered “untouchable”. The importance of the traditions of the Alvars and Nayanaras was



sometimes indicated by the claim that their compositions were as important as the Vedas. For instance, one of the major anthologies of compositions by the Alvars, the Naalayira Divya Prabandham, was frequently described as the Tamil Veda, thus claiming that the text was as significant as the four Vedas in Sanskrit that were cherished by the Brahmanas.

2.3 Women devotees:

Perhaps one of the most striking features of these traditions was the presence of women. For instance, the compositions of Andal, a woman Alvar, were widely sung (and continue to be sung to date). Andal saw herself as the beloved of Vishnu; her versus expressing her love for the deity. Another woman, Karaikal Ammaiyar, a devotee of Shiva, adopted the path of extreme asceticism in order to attain her goal. Her compositions were preserved within the Nayanaras tradition. These women renounced their social obligations, but did not join an alternative order or become nuns. Their very existence and their compositions posed a challenge to patriarchal norms.

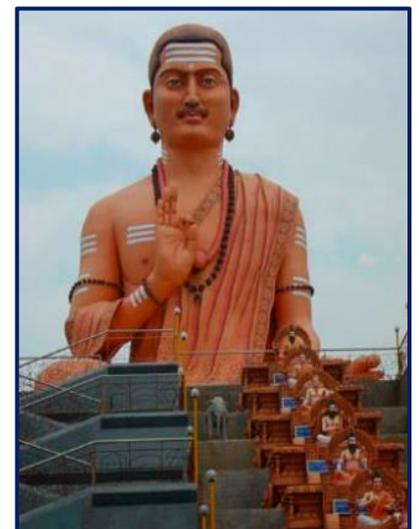


2.4 Relations with the state:

There were several important chiefdoms in the Tamil region in the early first millennium CE. From the second half of the first millennium there is evidence for states, including those of the Pallavas and Pandyas (c. sixth to ninth centuries CE). While Buddhism and Jainism had been prevalent in this region for several centuries, drawing support from merchant and artisan communities, these religious traditions received occasional royal patronage. Interestingly, one of the major themes in Tamil bhakti hymns is the poets' opposition to Buddhism and Jainism. This is particularly marked in the compositions of the Nayanaras. Historians have attempted to explain this hostility by suggesting that it was due to competition between members of other religious traditions for royal patronage. What is evident is that the powerful Chola rulers (ninth to thirteenth centuries) supported Brahmanical and bhakti traditions, making land grants and constructing temples for Vishnu and Shiva. In fact, some of the most magnificent Shiva temples, including those at Chidambaram, Thanjavur and GangaiKondacholapuram, were constructed under the patronage of Chola rulers. This was also the period when some of the most spectacular representations of Shiva in bronze sculpture were produced. Clearly, the visions of the Nayanaras inspired artists. Both Nayanaras and Alvars were revered by the Vellalar peasants. Not surprisingly, rulers tried to win their support as well. The Chola kings, for instance, often attempted to claim divine support and proclaim their own power and status by building splendid temples that were adorned with stone and metal sculpture to recreate the visions of these popular saints who sang in the language of the people. These kings also introduced the singing of Tamil Shaiva hymns in the temples under royal patronage, taking the initiative to collect and organise them into a text (Tevaram). Further, inscriptional evidence from around 945 suggests that the Chola ruler Parantaka-I had consecrated metal images of Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar in a Shiva temple. These were carried in processions during the festivals of these saints.

3. The Vira Shaiva Tradition in Karnataka:

The twelfth century witnessed the emergence of a new movement in Karnataka, led by a Brahmana named Basa-Vanna (1106-68) who was a minister in the court of a Kalachuri ruler. His followers were known as Virashaivas (heroes of Shiva) or Lingayats (wearers of the Linga). Lingayats continue to be an important community in the region to date. They worship Shiva in his manifestation as a Linga, and men usually wear a small linga in a silver case on a loop strung over the left shoulder. Those who are revered include the jangama or wandering monks. Lingayats believe that on death the devotee will be united with Shiva and will not return to this world. Therefore, they do not practice funerary rites such as cremation, prescribed in the Dharmashastras. Instead, they ceremonially bury their dead. The Lingayats challenged the idea of caste and the



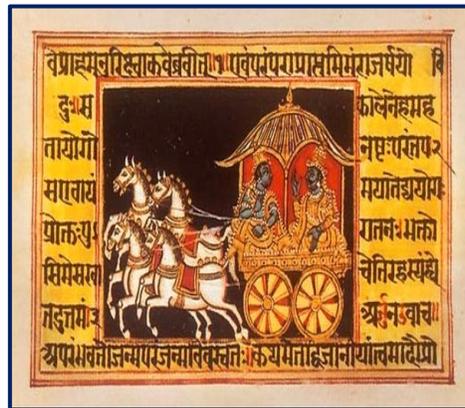
“pollution” attributed to certain groups by Brahmanas. They also questioned the theory of rebirth. These won them followers amongst those who were marginalized within the Brahmanical social order. The Lingayats also encouraged certain practices disapproved in the Dharmashastras, such as post-puberty marriage and the remarriage of widows. Our understanding of the Virashaiva tradition is derived from vachanas (literally, sayings) composed in Kannada by women and men who joined the movement.

DO YOU KNOW?

- Alwar:** A devotee of Vishnu in South India.
- Nayanaras:** Shiva devotees in South India.
- Saguna Bhakti:** Bhakti focuses on the worship of Shiva, Vishnu and Devi.
- Nirguna Bhakti:** Worshiping the formless or formless form of God.
- Tavaram:** A collection of poems in Tamil.

3. Religious Ferment in North India:

During the same period, in north India deities such as Vishnu and Shiva were worshiped in temples, often built with the support of rulers. However, historians have not found evidence of anything resembling the compositions of the Alvars and Nayanaras till the fourteenth century. How do we account for this difference? Some historians point out that in north India this was the period when several Rajput states emerged. In most of these states Brahmanas occupied positions of importance, performing a range of secular and ritual functions. There seems to have been little or no attempt to challenge their position directly. At the same time other religious leaders, who did not function within the orthodox Brahmanical framework, were gaining ground. These included the Naths, Yogis and Siddhas. Many of them came from artisanal groups, including weavers, who were becoming increasingly important with the development of organized craft production. Demand for such production grew with the emergence of new urban centers, and long-distance trade with Central Asia and West Asia. Many of these new religious leaders questioned the authority of the Vedas, and expressed themselves in languages spoken by ordinary people, which developed over centuries into the ones used today. However, in spite of their popularity these religious leaders were not in a position to win the support of the ruling elites. A new element in this situation was the coming of the Turks which culminated in the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate (thirteenth century). This undermined the power of many of the Rajput states and the Brahmanas who were associated with these kingdoms. This was accompanied by marked changes in the realm of culture and religion. The coming of the sufis (Section 6) was a significant part of these developments.



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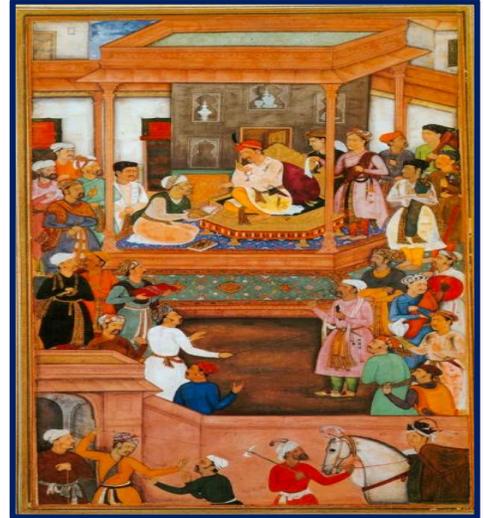
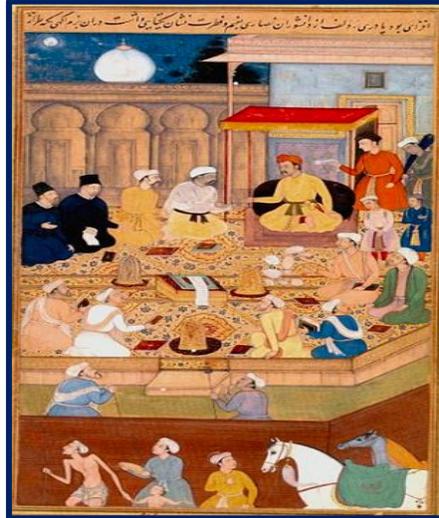
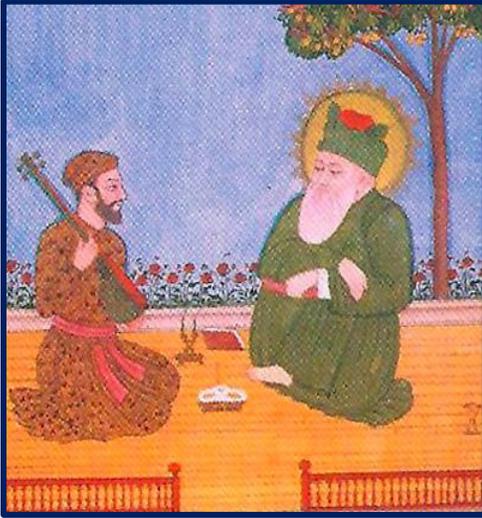
- Mama:** Religious scholar of Islamic studies.
- Sharia:** The law governing the Muslim community.
- Maktubat:** Letters written by Sufi saints.
- Tajkiras:** Biography of the Saints.
- Sangat:** A religious community where followers gather in the morning and evening to listen to the teacher's sermons.

4. New Strands in the Fabric Islamic Traditions:

Just as the regions within the subcontinent were not isolated from one another, so too, contact with lands beyond the seas and mountains had existed for millennia. Arab merchants, for instance, frequented ports along the western coast in the first millennium CE, while Central Asian people settled in the north-western parts of the subcontinent during the same period. From the seventh century, with the advent of Islam, these regions became part of what is often termed the Islamic world.



5.1 Faiths of rulers and subjects:

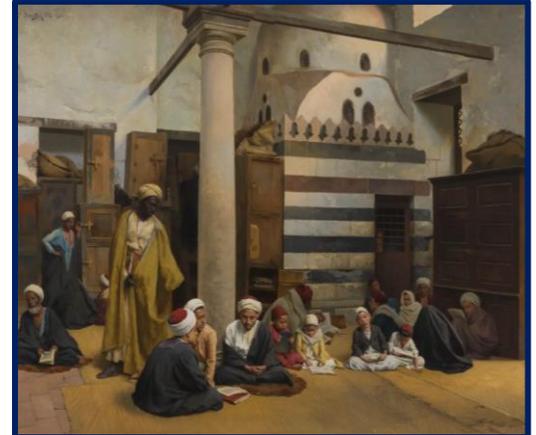
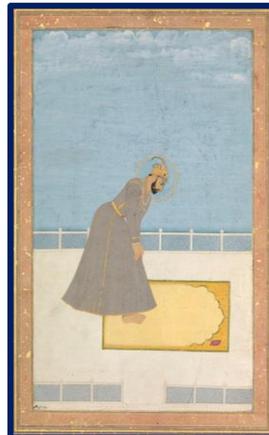


One axis of understanding the significance of these connections that is frequently adopted is to focus on the religions of ruling elites. In 711 an Arab general named Muhammad Qassim conquered Sind, which became part of the Caliph's domain. Later (c. thirteenth century) the Turks and Afghans established the Delhi Sultanate. This was followed by the formation of Sultanates in the Deccan and other parts of the subcontinent; Islam was an acknowledged religion of rulers in several areas. This continued with the establishment of the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth century as well as in many of the regional states that emerged in the eighteenth century. Theoretically, Muslim rulers were to be guided by the ulama, who were expected to ensure that they ruled according to the shari'a. Clearly, the situation was complicated in the subcontinent, where there were populations that did not subscribe to Islam. It is in this context that the category of the zimmi, meaning protected (derived from the Arabic word zimmi, protection) developed for people who followed revealed scriptures, such as the Jews and Christians, and lived under Muslim rulership. They paid a tax called jizya and gained the right to be protected by Muslims. In India this status was extended to Hindus as well. As you will see (Chapter 9), rulers such as the Mughals came to regard themselves as emperors of not just Muslims but of all peoples. In effect, rulers often adopted a fairly flexible policy towards their subjects. For instance, several rulers gave land endowments and granted tax exemptions to Hindu, Jaina, Zoroastrian, Christian and Jewish religious institutions and also expressed respect and devotion towards non-Muslim religious leaders. These grants were made by several Mughal rulers, including Akbar and Aurangzeb.

DO YOU KNOW?

- 1206:** Delhi Sultanate established
- 1236:** Death of Sheikh Moinuddin Chisti
- 1469:** Birth of Guru Nanak Dev ji
- 1604:** Compilation of Guru Granth Sahib
- 1699:** The Khalsa sect is founded by Guru Gobind Singh, a prominent religious leader of the subcontinent. This chronology refers to the periods of the major sages and the Reformation era.

5.2 The popular practice of Islam:



The developments that followed the coming of Islam were not confined to ruling elites; in fact they permeated far and wide, through the subcontinent, amongst different social strata – peasants, artisans, warriors, merchants, to name a few. All those who adopted Islam accepted, in principle, the five “pillars” of the faith: that there is one God, Allah, and Prophet Muhammad is his messenger (shahada); offering prayers five times a day (namaz/salat); giving alms (zakat); fasting during the month of Ramzan (sawm); and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj). However, these universal features were often overlaid with diversities in practice derived from sectarian affiliations (Sunni, Shia), and the influence of local customary practices of converts from different social milieus. For example, the Khojahs, a branch of the Ismailis (a Shia sect), developed new modes of communication, disseminating ideas derived from the Qur’an through indigenous literary genres. These included the ginan (derived from the Sanskrit jnana, meaning “knowledge”), devotional poems in Punjabi, Multani, Sindhi, Kachchi, Hindi and Gujarati, sung in special ragas during daily prayer meetings. Elsewhere, Arab Muslim traders who settled along the Malabar coast (Kerala) adopted the local language, Malayalam. They also adopted local customs such as matriliney and matrilocal residence. The complex blend of a universal faith with local traditions is perhaps best exemplified in the architecture of mosques. Some architectural features of mosques are universal – such as their orientation towards Mecca, evident in the placement of the mihrab (prayer niche) and the minbar (pulpit). However, there are several features that show variations – such as roofs and building materials.

5.3 Names for communities:

We often take the terms Hindu and Muslim for granted, as labels for religious communities. Yet, these terms did not gain currency for a very long time. Historians who have studied Sanskrit texts and inscriptions dating between the eighth and fourteenth centuries point out that the term musalmaan or Muslim was virtually never used. Instead, people were occasionally identified in terms of the region from which they came. So, the Turkish rulers were designated as Turushka, Tajika were people from Tajikistan and Parashika were people from Persia. Sometimes, terms used for other peoples were applied to the new migrants. For instance, the Turks and Afghans were referred to as Shakas (Chapters 2 and 3) and Yavanas (a term used for Greeks). A more general term for these migrant communities was mlechchha, indicating that they did not observe the norms of caste society and spoke languages that were not derived from Sanskrit. Such terms sometimes had a derogatory connotation, but they rarely denoted a distinct religious community of Muslims in opposition to Hindus. And as we saw (Chapter 5), the term “Hindu” was used in a variety of ways, not necessarily restricted to a religious connotation.



5. The Growth of Sufism:

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 Sunnah (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, and by following the example of the Prophet Muhammad whom they regarded as a perfect human being. The Sufis thus sought an interpretation of the Qur’an on the basis of their personal experience.



By the eleventh century Sufism evolved into a well-developed movement with a body of literature on Quranic studies and Sufi practices. Institutionally, the Sufis began to organize communities around the hospice or khanqah (Persian) controlled by a teaching master known as shaikh (in Arabic), pir or murshid (in Persian). He enrolled disciples (murids) and appointed a successor (khalifah). He established rules for spiritual conduct and interaction laypersons and the master. Sufi Silsilas

6.1 Khanqahs and Silsilas:

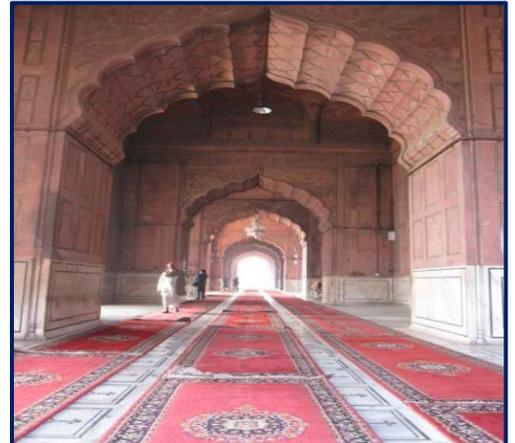
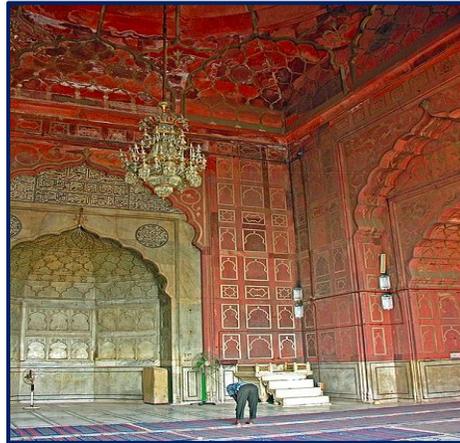


between inmates as well as between began to crystallize in different parts of

the Islamic world around the twelfth century. The word Silsila literally means a chain, signifying a continuous link between master and disciple, stretching as an unbroken spiritual genealogy to the Prophet Muhammad. It was through this channel that spiritual power and blessings were transmitted to devotees. Special rituals of initiation were developed in which initiates took an oath of allegiance, wore a patched garment, and shaved their hair. When the shaikh died, his tomb-shrine (dargah, a Persian term meaning court) became the centre of devotion for his followers. This encouraged the practice of pilgrimage or ziyarat to his grave, particularly on his death anniversary or urs (or marriage, signifying the union of his soul with God). This was because people believed that in death saints were united with God, and were thus closer to Him than when living. People sought their blessings to attain material and spiritual benefits. Thus evolved the cult of the shaikh revered as wali.

6.2 Outside the khanqah:

Some mystics-initiated movements based on a radical interpretation of sufi ideals. Many scorned the khanqah and took to mendicancy and observed celibacy. They ignored rituals and observed extreme forms of asceticism. They were known by different names – Qalandars, Madaris, Malangs, Haidaris, etc. Because of their deliberate defiance of the sharia's they were often referred to as Be-sharia's, in contrast to the Ba-sharia's Sufis who complied with it.

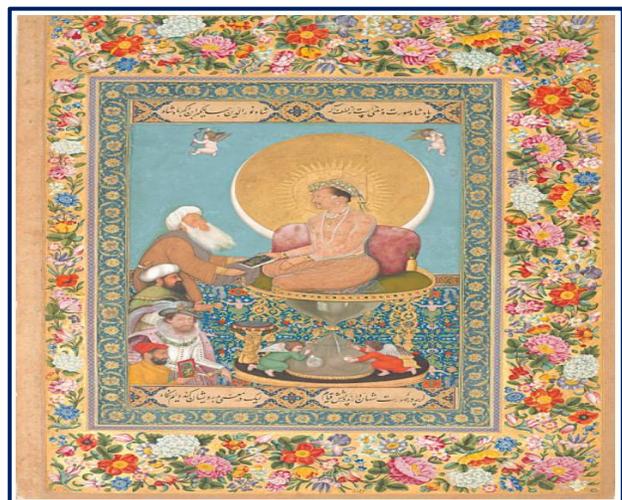
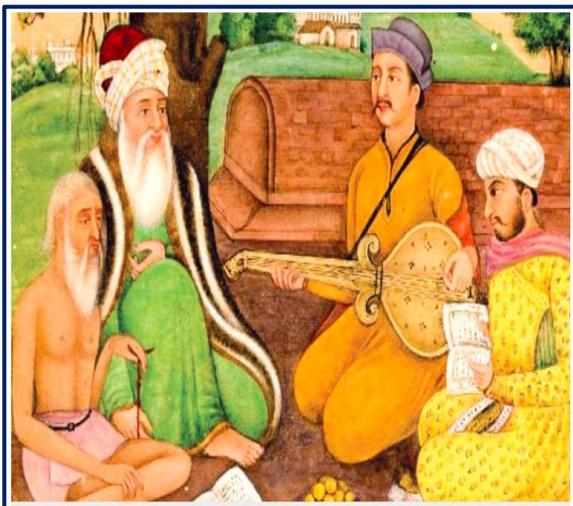


DO YOU KNOW?

- 500-800:** CE Upper, Sambandar, Sundaramurthy in Tamil Nadu
- 800-900:** The teachings of Nammalwar, Manikkavachar, Andal and Thondaradipodi in Tamil Nadu influence people all over India.
- 1000-1100:** Al Hujwiri, Data Ganj Bakhsh in Punjab, Ramanujacharya in Tamil Nadu
- 1100-1200:** Basavanna in Karnataka
- 1200-1300:** Muktabai in Gyandev, Maharashtra; Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Rajasthan; Bahauddin Zakariya and Fariduddin Ganj-e Shakar in Punjab; Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki from Delhi.

6. The Chishtis in the Subcontinent:

Of the groups of sufis who migrated to India in the late twelfth century, the Chishti were the most influential. This was because they adapted successfully to the local environment and adopted several features of Indian devotional traditions.



7.1 Life in the Chishti khanqah:

The khanqah was the center of social life. We know about Shaikh Nizamuddin's hospice (c. fourteenth century) on the banks of the river Yamuna in Ghiyaspur, on the outskirts of what was then the city of Delhi. It comprised several small rooms and a big hall (Jama 'at khana) where the inmates and visitors lived and prayed. The inmates included family members of the Shaikh, his attendants and disciples. The Shaikh lived in a small room on the roof of the hall where he met visitors in the morning and evening. A veranda surrounded the courtyard, and a boundary wall ran around the complex. On one

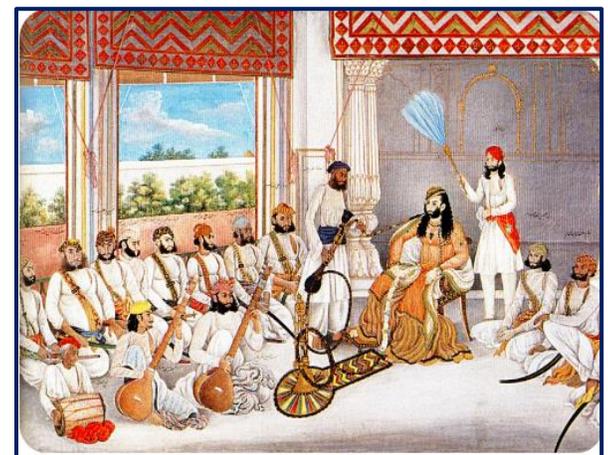


occasion, fearing a Mongol

invasion, people from the neighboring areas flocked into the khanqah to seek refuge. There was an open kitchen (langar), run on futuh (unasked-for charity). From morning till late night people from all walks of life – soldiers, slaves, singers, merchants, poets, travellers, rich and poor, Hindu jogis (yogi) and qalandars – came seeking discipleship, amulets for healing, and the intercession of the Shaikh in various matters. Other visitors included poets such as Amir Hasan Sijzi and Amir Khusrau and the court historian Ziyauddin Barani, all of whom wrote about the Shaikh. Practices that were adopted, including bowing before the Shaikh, offering water to visitors, shaving the heads of initiates, and yogic exercises, represented attempts to assimilate local traditions. Shaikh Nizamuddin appointed several spiritual successors and deputed them to set up hospices in various parts of the subcontinent. As a result the teachings, practices and organisation of the Chishtis as well as the fame of the Shaikh spread rapidly. This in turn drew pilgrims to his shrine, and also to the shrines of his spiritual ancestors.

7.2 Chishti devotionalism: Ziyarat and qawwali:

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). For more than seven centuries people of various creeds, classes and social backgrounds have expressed their devotion at the dargahs of the five great Chishti saints (see chart on p.154). Amongst these, the most revered shrine is that of Khwaja Moinuddin, popularly known as "Gharib Nawaz" (comforter of the poor). The earliest textual references to Khwaja Moinuddin's dargah date to the fourteenth century. It was evidently popular because of the austerity and piety of its Shaikh, the greatness of his spiritual successors, and the patronage of royal visitors. Muhammad bin Tughlaq (ruled, 1324-51) was the first Sultan to visit the shrine, but the earliest construction to house the tomb was funded in the late fifteenth century by Sultan Ghiyasuddin Khilji of Malwa. Since the shrine was located on the trade route linking Delhi and Gujarat, it attracted a lot of travellers. By the sixteenth century the shrine had become very popular; in fact it was the spirited singing of pilgrims bound for Ajmer that inspired Akbar to visit the tomb. He went there fourteen times, sometimes two or three times a year, to seek blessings for new conquests, fulfillment of vows, and the birth of sons. He maintained this tradition until 1580. Each of these visits was celebrated by generous gifts, which were recorded in imperial documents. For example, in 1568 he offered a huge cauldron (deg) to facilitate cooking for pilgrims. He also had a mosque constructed within the compound of the dargah. Also, part of ziyarat is the use of music and dance including mystical chants performed by specially trained musicians or qawwals to evoke divine ecstasy. The Sufis remember God either by reciting the zikr (the Divine Names) or evoking His Presence through sama' (literally, "audition") or performance of mystical music. Sama' was integral to the Chishtis, and exemplified interaction with indigenous devotional traditions.

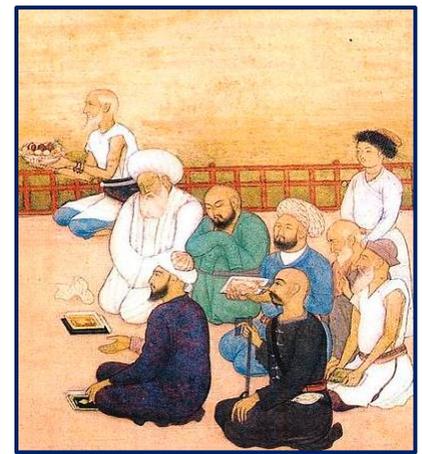
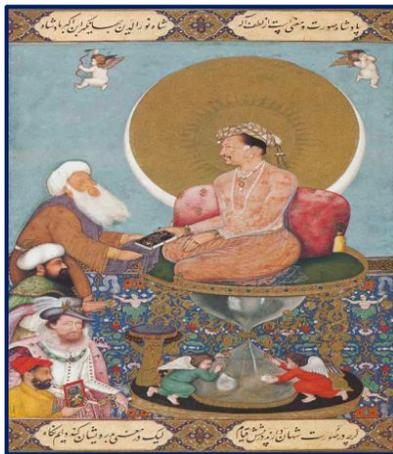


7.3 Languages and communication:

It was not just in Shama'a that the Chishtis adopted local languages. In Delhi, those associated with the Chishti silsila conversed in Hindavi, the language of the people. Other sufis such as Baba Farid composed verses in the local language, which were incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib. Yet others composed long poems or masnavis to express ideas of divine love using human love as an allegory. For example, the prem-akhyan (love story) Padmavat composed by Malik Muhammad Jayasi revolved around the romance of Padmini and Ratansen, the king of Chittor. Their trials were symbolic of the soul's journey to the divine. Such poetic compositions were often recited in hospices, usually during sama'. A different genre of sufi poetry was composed in and around the town of Bijapur, Karnataka. These were short poems in Dakhani (a variant of Urdu) attributed to Chishti sufis who lived in this region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These poems were probably sung by women while performing household chores like grinding grain and spinning. Other compositions were in the form of lurinama or lullabies and shadinama or wedding songs. It is likely that the sufis of this region were inspired by the pre-existing bhakti tradition of the Kannada vachanas of the Lingayats and the Marathi abhangs of the saints of Pandharpur. It is through this medium that Islam gradually gained a place in the villages of the Deccan.

7.4 Sufis and the state:

A major feature of the Chishti tradition was austerity, including maintaining a distance from worldly power. However, this was by no means a situation of absolute isolation from political power. The sufis accepted unsolicited grants and donations from the political elites. The Sultans in turn set up charitable trusts (auqaf) as endowments for hospices and granted tax-free land (inam). The Chishtis accepted donations in cash and kind. Rather than accumulate donations, they preferred to use these fully on immediate requirements such as food, clothes, living quarters and ritual necessities (such as sama'). All this enhanced the moral authority of the shaikhs, which in turn attracted people from all walks of life. Further, their piety and scholarship, and people's made sufis popular among the masses, whose support kings wished to secure. Kings did not simply need to demonstrate their association with sufis; they also required legitimation from them. When the Turks set up the Delhi Sultanate, they resisted the insistence of the ulama on imposing shari'a as state law because they anticipated opposition from their subjects, the majority of whom were non-Muslims. The Sultans then sought out the sufis – who derived their authority directly from God – and did not depend on jurists to interpret the shari'a. Besides, it was believed that the auliya could intercede with God in order to improve the material and spiritual conditions of ordinary human beings. This explains why kings often wanted their tombs to be in the vicinity of sufi shrines and hospices. However, there were instances of conflict between the Sultans and the sufis. To assert their authority, both expected that certain rituals be performed such as prostration and kissing of the feet. Occasionally the sufi shaikh was addressed with high-sounding titles. For example, the disciples of Nizamuddin Auliya addressed him as sultan-ul-mashaikh (literally, Sultan amongst shaikhs).



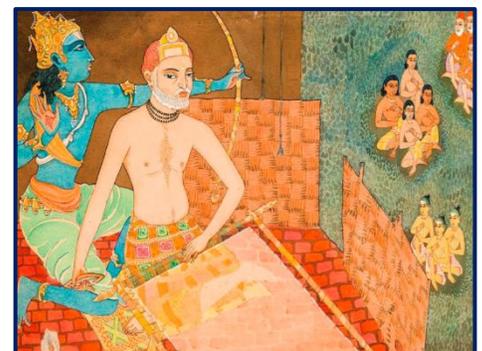
belief in their miraculous powers

7. New Devotional Paths Dialogue and Dissent in Northern India:

Many poet-saints engaged in explicit and implicit dialogue with these new social situations, ideas and institutions. Let us now see how this dialogue found expression. We focus here on three of the most influential figures of the time.

8.1 Weaving a divine fabric: Kabir:

Kabir (c. fourteenth-fifteenth centuries) is perhaps one of the most outstanding examples of a poet-saint who emerged within this context. Historians have painstakingly tried to reconstruct his life and times through a study of compositions attributed to him as well as later hagiographies. Such exercises have proved to be challenging on a number of counts. Verses ascribed to Kabir have been compiled in three distinct but overlapping traditions. The Kabir Bijak is preserved by the Kabirpanth (the path or sect of Kabir) in Varanasi and elsewhere in Uttar Pradesh; the Kabir Granthavali is associated with the Dadupanth in Rajasthan, and many of his compositions are found in the Adi Granth Sahib (see Section 8.2). All these



manuscript compilations were made long after the death of Kabir. By the nineteenth century, anthologies of verses attributed to him circulated in print in regions as far apart as Bengal, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Kabir's poems have survived in several languages and dialects; and some are composed in the special language of nirguna poets, the sant bhasha. Others, known as ulat bansi (upside-down sayings), are written in a form in which everyday meanings are inverted. These hint at the difficulties of capturing the nature of the Ultimate Reality in words: expressions such as "the lotus which blooms without flower" or the "fire raging in the ocean " convey a sense of Kabir's mystical experiences. Also striking is the range of traditions Kabir drew on to describe the Ultimate Reality. These include Islam: he described the Ultimate Reality as Allah, Khuda, Hazrat and Pir. He also used terms drawn from Vedantic traditions, alakh (the unseen), nirakar (formless), Brahman, Atman, etc. Other terms with mystical connotations such as shabda (sound) or shunya (emptiness) were drawn from yogic traditions.

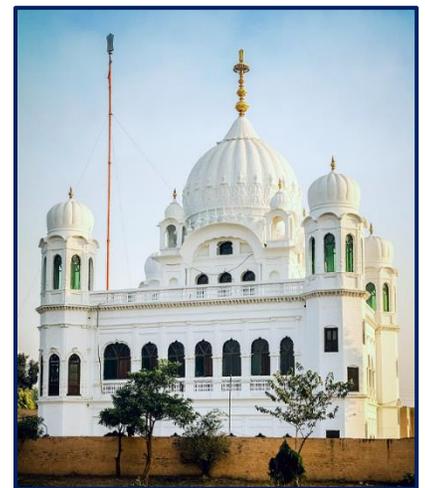
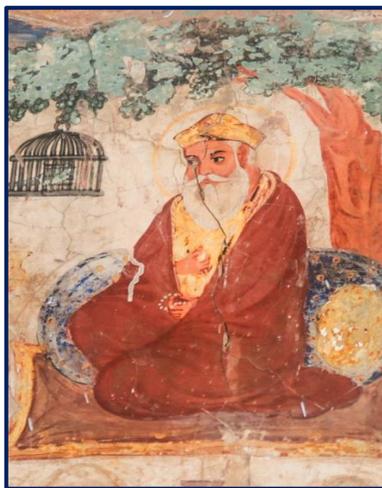


Diverse and sometimes conflicting ideas are expressed in these poems. Some poems draw on Islamic ideas and use monotheism and iconoclasm to attack Hindu polytheism and idol worship; others use the sufi concept of zikr and ishq (love) to express the Hindu practice of nam-simaran (remembrance of God's name). Were all these composed by Kabir? We may never be able to tell with certainty, although scholars have tried to analyze the language, style and content to establish which verses could be Kabir's. What this rich corpus of verses also signifies is that Kabir was and is to the present a source of inspiration for those who questioned entrenched religious and social institutions, ideas and practices in their search for the Divine. Just as Kabir's ideas probably crystallized through dialogue and debate (explicit or implicit) with the traditions of sufis and yogis in the region of Awadh (part of present-day Uttar Pradesh), his legacy was claimed by several groups, who remembered him and continue to do so. This is most evident in later debates about whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim by birth, debates that are reflected in hagiographies. Many of these were composed from the seventeenth century onwards, about 200 years after Kabir's lifetime. Hagiographies within the Vaishnava tradition attempted to suggest that he was born a Hindu, Kabirdas (Kabir itself is an Arabic word meaning "great"), but was raised by a poor Muslim family belonging to the community of weavers or julahas, who were relatively recent converts to Islam. They also suggested that he was initiated into bhakti by a guru, perhaps Ramananda.

However, the verses attributed to Kabir use the words guru and satguru, but do not mention the name of any specific preceptor. Historians have pointed out that it is very difficult to establish that Ramananda and Kabir were contemporaries, without assigning improbably long lives to either or both. So, while traditions linking the two cannot be accepted at face value, they show how important the legacy of Kabir was for later generations.

8.2 Baba Guru Nanak and the Sacred World:

Baba Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was born in a Hindu merchant family in a village called Nankana Sahib near the river Ravi in the predominantly Muslim Punjab. He trained to be an accountant and studied Persian. He was married at a young age but he spent most of his time among sufis and bhaktas. He also travelled widely. The message of Baba Guru Nanak 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. For Baba Guru Nanak, the Absolute or "rab" had no gender or form. He proposed a simple way to connect to the Divine by



remembering and repeating the Divine Name, expressing his ideas through hymns called "shabad " in Punjabi, the language of the region. Baba Guru Nanak would sing these compositions in various ragas while his attendant Mardana played the rabab . Baba Guru Nanak organised his followers into a community. He set up rules for congregational worship (sanga t) involving collective recitation. He appointed one of his disciples, Angad, to succeed him as the preceptor (guru), and this practice was

followed for nearly 200 years. It appears that Baba Guru Nanak did not wish to establish a new religion, but after his death his followers consolidated their own practices and distinguished themselves from both Hindus and Muslims. The fifth preceptor, Guru Arjan, compiled Baba Guru Nanak's hymns along with those of his four successors and other religious poets like Baba Farid, Ravidas (also known as Raidas) and Kabir in the *Adi Granth Sahib*. These hymns, called "gurbani", are composed in various languages. In the late seventeenth century the tenth preceptor, Guru Gobind Singh, included the compositions of the ninth guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and this scripture was called the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Guru Gobind Singh also laid the foundation of the Khalsa Panth (army of the pure) and defined its five symbols: uncut hair, a dagger, a pair of shorts, a comb and a steel bangle. Under him the community got consolidated as a socio-religious and military force.

8.3 Mirabai, the devotee princess:

Mirabai (c. fifteenth-sixteenth centuries) is perhaps the best-known woman poet within the bhakti tradition. Biographies have been reconstructed primarily from the bhajans attributed to her, which were transmitted orally for centuries. According to these, she was a Rajput princess from Merta in Marwar who was married against her wishes to a prince of the Sisodia clan of Mewar, Rajasthan.



She defied her husband and did not submit to the traditional role of wife and mother, instead recognising Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu, as her lover. Her in-laws tried to poison her, but she escaped from the palace to live as a wandering saint composing songs that are characterized by intense expressions of emotion.

According to some traditions, her preceptor was Raidas, a leather worker. This would indicate her defiance of the norms of caste society. After rejecting the comforts of her husband's palace, she is supposed to have donned the white robes of a widow or the saffron robe of the renouncer. Although Mirabai did not attract a sect or group of followers, she has been recognised as a source of inspiration for centuries. Her songs continue to be sung by women and men, especially those who are poor and considered "low caste" in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

DO YOU KNOW?

- 1300-1400:** Lai dies in Kashmir, Shahbaz Qalandar is brought to Sindh; Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi; Ramanand in Uttar Pradesh; Chokhamela in Maharashtra; Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri in Bihar
- 1400-1500:** Kabir, Raidas, Surdas in Uttar Pradesh; Baba Guru Nanak in Punjab; Vallabhacharya in Gujarat; Mir Syed Muhammad Gesudaraz in Gulbarga, Sankardev in Assam; Tukaram in Maharashtra.
- 1500-1600:** Sri Chaitanya in Bengal; Mirabai in Rajasthan; Sheikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi, Malik Muhammad Jayasi, Tulsidas in Uttar Pradesh.
- 1600-1700:** Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi in Haryana; Mian Mir in Punjab.

8. Reconstructing Histories of Religious Traditions:

We have seen that historians draw on a variety of sources to reconstruct histories of religious traditions – these include sculpture, architecture, stories about religious preceptors, compositions attributed to women and men engaged in the quest of understanding the nature of the Divine. As we have seen in Chapters 1 and 4, sculpture and architecture can only be understood if we have a grasp of the context – the ideas, beliefs and practices of those who produced and used these images and buildings. What about textual traditions regarding religious beliefs? If you return to the sources in this chapter, you will notice that they include a wide variety, written in several different languages and styles. They range from the apparently simple, direct language of the vachanas of Basavanna to the ornate Persian of the farman of the Mughal emperors. Understanding each type of text requires different skills: apart from a familiarity with several languages, the historian has to be aware of the subtle variations in style that characterize each genre.

SUMMARY

The Bhakti movement, Islam and the Sufi movement played an important role in the history of medieval India in the 8th-18th centuries. Alvar and Nayanaras are considered to be the founders of the Bhakti movement in South India. While the Alvars were devotees of Lord Vishnu, the Nayanaras followed the Shaivite religion.

According to Muslim tradition, the Qur'an is a compilation of messages sent to the Prophet Muhammad by his messenger Archangel Gabriel in Mecca and Medina between 610-632.

Sufism emerged as a powerful movement in India during the Middle Ages. Sufis are called because of their purity of heart (safa). They are in the front row before God. There are a few more

Different religious beliefs and practices:

Many types of gods and goddesses are found in sculptures and scriptures. The epic texts were designed and adapted in simple Sanskrit language to be generally accessible to women and Shudras far removed from Vedic education. Many beliefs and practices have evolved by constantly mixing mythological traditions with local traditions. Jagannath worship in Odisha is recognized by local tribal experts as a local deity made of wood and a form of Vishnu.

Early traditions of devotion:

Historians have divided the devotional traditions into two broad categories: Nirguna (without attributes) and Saguna (with attributes).

In the sixth century, devotional movements were led by Alvars (devotees of Vishnu) and Nayanaras (devotees of Shiva). He wandered around singing Tamil devotional songs. During their travels, Alvar and Nayanaras discovered some temples and later large temples were built in these places.

"Veer Shaiva" tradition in Karnataka:

A new movement emerged in Karnataka in the 12th century under the leadership of a Brahmin named Basavana. His followers were called "Veera Shaivas" (Shiva heroes) or Lingayats (those who wore the linga). Lingayats continue to be an important community in the region to this day. Lingayats challenged the theory of caste, pollution, reincarnation, etc. and encouraged marriage and widow remarriage after puberty.

The Rise of Islamic Traditions:

In the 13th century, the Turks and Afghans invaded India and established the Delhi Sultanate. Theoretically, Muslim rulers should be guided by ulama and follow Shariah rules. Non-Muslims had to pay a tax called jizya and get the right to be protected by Muslim rulers. Many Mughal rulers, including Akbar and Aurangzeb, donated land and granted tax breaks to Hindu, Jain, Parsi, Christian and Jewish religious institutions.

Development of Sufism:

During the early centuries of Islam, a group of Sufis with religious ideas leaned towards monasticism and spirituality against the growing materialism of the Caliphate. Sufis were critics of the dogmatic definitions and educational methods of interpreting the Qur'an and sought its interpretation based on their personal experience. By the 11th century, Sufism had developed into a highly developed movement. Suites began to form communities around hospices or Khanqah (Persian) known as sheikhs, piers or murshids. He nominated the disciples (murids) and appointed the successor (caliph).

Chishti on the subcontinent:

Chishti are an important group of Sufis who migrated to India. Khanqah was central to social life. In the fourteenth century, the Sheikh Nizamuddin Dharamshala on the banks of the Yamuna River in Ghyaspur was very famous. Sheikh lives here and meets visitors in the morning and evening. There were an open kitchen (langar) and people from all walks of life used to come here from morning till midnight. Tourists visiting here include Amir Hassan Sizzi, Amir Khusrau and Ziauddin Barani.

New Ways of Devotion in North India:

Kabir was a 14th-15th century poet-monk. Kabir's poems have been compiled in three different traditions. Kabir Bijak was preserved by Kabir Pant in Uttar Pradesh. Kabir's bibliography is related to Dadupanthi from Rajasthan. Many of his verses are included in the Adi Granth Sahib. Kabir described the ultimate truth as Allah, Khuda, Hazrat and Peer-o-Murshid. He also used words from the Vedic traditions such as Alakh, Nirankari, Brahmana, Atama etc. Kabir accepted all kinds of philosophies i.e., theological traditions, yoga traditions and Islamic ideas. Kabir's ideas were probably made clear through conversations and discussions. Important information about that period, but many aspects of social life go unnoticed.

Questions For Practice

1. What common term is used to refer to immigrant communities?
(a) Shakas (b) Juanci
(c) Turkish (d) Mleccha
2. What is the meaning of the word 'Silsila'?
(a) A Series
(b) Disciple
(c) Devotion
(d) None
3. Which of the following methods in Chishti's Khanka represents an attempt to assimilate local traditions?
(i) Bend in front of the shrine
(ii) Providing water to visitors
(iii) Shaving the heads of initiates
(iv) Yoga exercises
(a) 'i' and 'ii'
(b) 'I' only
(c) 'iii' and 'iv'
(d) All of the above
4. Who composed the love story 'Padmavat'?
(a) Amir Khusrau
(b) Baba Farid
(c) Malik Muhammad Jayasi
(d) Ratan Singh
5. Which of the following statements about Sant Kabir is incorrect?
(a) Kabir used words derived from the theological traditions.
(b) Kabir describes the ultimate reality as Allah, Khuda, Hazrat and Peer.
(c) Many of his compositions are in the Adi Granth Sahib.
(d) Poems attributed to Kabir mention the name of his mentor Ramananda.
6. The devotees of Vishnu are called _?
(a) Alvar (b) Veershaiva
(c) Nayanaras (d) Zimmi
7. Alvar Saints Worship ____?
(a) Shiva (b) Lakshmi
(c) Indra (d) Vishnu
8. Non-Muslims are required to pay a religious tax of ____?
(a) Zakat
(b) Venus
(c) Jizya
(d) None of these
9. Which of the following is a part of Chishti Worship?
(a) Dance (b) Music
(c) Qawwali (d) All of these
10. Khwaja Moinuddin was teacher of?
(a) Sant Kabir (b) Khwaja Usman Harun
(c) Sant Farid (d) Ramananda
11. Who were Nayanaras saints ____?
(a) Group of Saints (b) Kings
(c) Courtier (d) None
12. Nayanaras Saints Worship ____?
(a) Vishnu (b) Lakshmi
(c) Indra (d) Shiva
13. Who introduced jizya to pay a religious tax first time India?
(a) Balban (b) Akbar
(c) Mohammad bin Qasim (d) None of these
14. Which of the following is a part of Chishti Worship?
(a) Dance (b) Music
(c) Qawwali (d) All of these
15. Swami Ramananda was teacher of?
(a) Sant Kabir (b) Sant Ravi Das
(c) Sant Farid (d) None
16. Which of these capitals was the capital of Akbar?
(a) Lahore
(b) Multan
(c) Delhi
(d) Fatehpur Sikri
17. Who composed the book 'Guru Granth'?
(a) Guru Teg Bahadur ji
(b) Guru Ram Das ji
(c) Guru Nanak Dev ji
(d) All of the above
18. Islamic law is called ____?
(a) Sharia (b) Rule
(c) Ulema (d) None of these
19. Alvar and Nayanaras was belonged in which century?
(a) 4th Century
(b) 1st Century
(c) 5th to 10th Century
(d) None
20. Vittala is the presiding deity of the Vithal Temple. Vithal was called the incarnation of God?
(a) Brahma (b) Vishnu
(c) Shiva (d) Ganesh
21. Which of the following is the capital of Akbar?
(a) Lahore
(b) Multan
(c) Delhi
(d) Fatehpur Sikri
22. Who compiled the book of Adi?
(a) Guru Teg Bahadur ji
(b) Guru Arjan Dev ji
(c) Guru Nanak dev ji
(d) Guru Gobind Singh ji
23. Choose the correct option: Islamic law is called _?
(a) Sharia (b) Rule
(c) Ulema (d) None of these
24. Select the appropriate option: Alvar and Nayanaras are devotees
(a) Kerala
(b) Karnataka
(c) Tamil Nadu
(d) Andhra Pradesh
25. Vithal is the main deity of the temple. Vithal was called the incarnation of God
(a) Brahma (b) Vishnu
(c) Shiva (d) Ganesh
26. What is Sharia?
(a) Muslim Sufi Saint
(b) Fasting during the month of Ramadan
(c) Laws governing the Muslim community
(d) Giving alms
27. What does Ulema mean?
(a) Devotee of Shiva
(b) Devotee of Vishnu
(c) Muslim Religious Person
(d) Scholars of Islamic Studies
28. What are the devotees of Vishnu called?
(a) Alvar (b) Nayanaras
(c) Lingayat (d) Chishti

- 29.** Which of the following is incorrect regarding Karaikal Ammaiyar?
 (a) She is a devotee of Shiva.
 (b) He took the path of intense penance.
 (c) His writings are preserved in the Alwar traditions.
 (d) His writings challenged patriarchal norms.
- 30.** Regarding Kabir, consider the following statements:
 1. Kabir verses are compiled in three different traditions.
 2. Kabir's poems are available only in Urdu.
 3. Kabir used many traditions to explain the ultimate reality.
 4. Kabir called the ultimate truth Allah.
 Which of the following statements is incorrect?
 (a) 1, 2, 3 (b) 2, 4
 (c) 1, 4 (d) 3, 4
- 31.** Which of the following is the capital of Akbar?
 (a) Lahore
 (b) Multan
 (c) Delhi
 (d) Fatehpur Sikri
- 32.** Who compiled the book of Adi?
 (a) Guru Teg Bahadur ji
 (b) Guru Arjan Dev ji
 (c) Guru Nanak Dev ji
 (d) Guru Gobind Singh ji
- 33.** Head in Islamic law is called as?
 (a) Imam (b) Sharia
 (c) Maulvi (d) None of these
- 34.** Alwar and Nayanaras belonged to which state?
 (a) Kerala
 (b) Karnataka
 (c) Tamil Nadu
 (d) Andhra Pradesh
- 35.** Vithal is the main deity of the temple. Vithal was called the incarnation of God
 (a) Brahma (b) Vishnu
 (c) Shiva (d) Ganesh
- 36.** What is Sharia?
 (a) Muslim Sufi Saint
 (b) Fasting during the month of Ramadan
 (c) Laws governing the Muslim community
 (d) Giving alms
- 37.** Who is the Khwaja Moinuddin?
 (a) Devotee of Shiva
 (b) Devotee of Vishnu
 (c) Muslim Sufi Saint
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- 38.** Who were the devotees of Vishnu called?
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 4. Kabir called the ultimate truth Allah.
 Which of the following statements is incorrect?
 (a) 1, 2, 3 (b) 2, 4
 (c) 1, 4 (d) 3, 4

Solutions

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. (d) | 5. (d) | 9. (d) | 13. (c) | 17. (d) | 21. (d) | 25. (b) | 29. (c) | 33. (a) | 37. (d) |
| 2. (a) | 6. (a) | 10. (b) | 14. (d) | 18. (a) | 22. (b) | 26. (c) | 30. (b) | 34. (c) | 38. (a) |
| 3. (d) | 7. (d) | 11. (a) | 15. (b) | 19. (c) | 23. (a) | 27. (d) | 31. (d) | 35. (b) | 39. (c) |
| 4. (c) | 8. (c) | 12. (d) | 16. (d) | 20. (b) | 24. (c) | 28. (a) | 32. (b) | 36. (c) | 40. (b) |

