

# Lesson 14

## Cultural Development in Medieval India

### Summary

India already had a very rich cultural tradition in all spheres. The synthesis between different cultures gave birth to new philosophical and religious traditions, ideas, forms and styles in almost all spheres of culture. In this lesson you would be introduced to some important spheres of cultural developments.

### Sufism

• Sufism is a term used to refer to mystical religious ideas in Islam.

Fundamental to Sufism is God, Man and the relation between them that is Love.

The *khanqah* (the hospice) was the center of activities of the various sufis orders

### Silsalas



### Chishti Silsilah

established in India by Muinuddin Chishti

Renunciation of worldly possessions

Simplicity of life, poverty, humility and selfless devotion to God

Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Baba Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar, Nizamuddin Auliya and Nasiruddin Chiragh Delhi

### Suhrawardi Silsilah

founded by Shihabuddin Suhrawardi in Baghdad

accepted, maintenance grants from the Sultans.

*hal* or mystical enlightenment

## Naqshbandi Silsilah

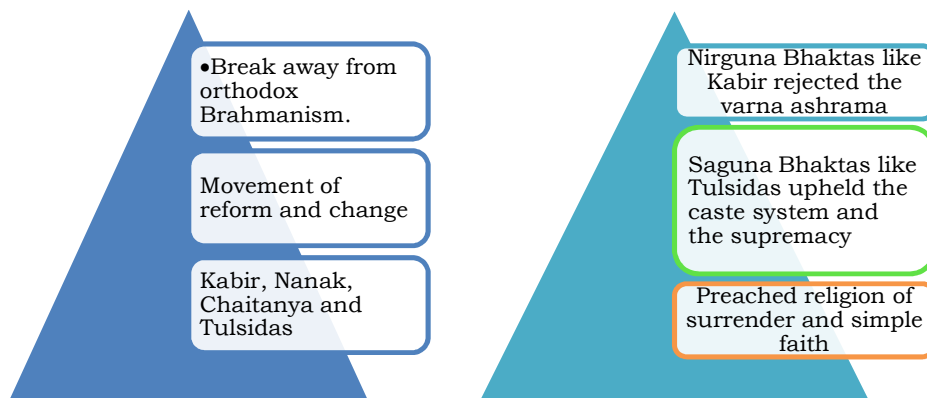
Established by Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshbandi

Observance of the shariat and denounced all innovations or *biddat*

## Qadri Silsilah



## Bhakti Movement



### Monotheistic Bhakti

- Teachings of the various monotheistic Bhakti saints in North India were influenced by the Vaishnava concept of Bhakti, the Nathpanthi movement and Sufism.
- Their ideas seem to be a synthesis of the three traditions.
- The importance given to the personal experience of Bhakti saint with God was common feature among the monotheistic bhakti saints.
- They rejected the authority of the Brahmins and attacked the caste system and practice of idolatry.

### Vaishnava Bhakti

- In the 14th and early 15th centuries Ramananda emerged as a popular Vaishnava bhakti saint in north India.

- He worshiped Ram and Sita and came to be identified as the founder of the Ram cult in north India.
- His followers are called Ramanandis.
- Vallabacharya, a popular bhakti saint popularized the Krishna bhakti.
- These traditions focused on esoteric and emotional aspects of devotion
- Jayadeva was an important bhakti saint, highlighted the mystical dimension of love with reference to Krishna and Radha.
- In Maharashtra the bhakti movement drew its inspiration from the Bhagavata purana and the Siva Nathpanthis.
- Jnaneswar was a pioneer bhakti saint of Maharashtra.
- Vithoba was the God of this sect and its followers performed a

pilgrimage to the temple twice a year

- Some of the other important bhakti saints of Maharashtra were the

### **Sikhism**

- The teachings and philosophy of Guru Nanak form an important part of Indian philosophical thought.
- He repudiated idol worship and did not favour pilgrimage nor accept the theory of incarnation.
- He advised people to follow the principles of conduct and worship: **sach**(truth), **halal** (lawful earning), **khair**(wishing well of others), **niyat**(right intention) and service to the lord.
- He argued that the caste and honour should be judged by the acts or the deeds of individuals.

### **Literature and languages**

#### **Sanskrit literature**

- The medieval period witnessed the growth of a rich corpus of literature that accompanied the development of new languages
- This period is marked with composition of poetical works called the Kavya (poetical narrative) and the texts that codified laws called the Dhramashastras.
- A new style of writing called the **champu** also emerged during this period.
- Rajavinoda that was a biography of Sultan Mahmud Begarha of Gujarat written by his court poet, Udayaraja.

#### **Persian literature**

- The development of Persian literature in the sub-continent entered a new era in the writings of Amir Khusrau
- His poetry was written in the different forms of lyric, ode, epic and elegy.

saints Namdev, Choka, Sonara, Tukaram and Eknath.

- His verses mainly consist of two basic concepts, **Sach**(truth) and **Nam** (name).
- The bases of the divine expression for him were formed by, the **Sabad**(the word), Guru (the divine precept) and **Hukam**(the divine order).
- He introduced the concept of Langar (a community kitchen).
- The idea of Guru Panth was another institutional idea that emerged during this period.
- It was believed that the spirit of the guru did not pass onto any successor but instead remained within “Shri Gurugranth Sahib”.

- Another important work was Kalhan’s **Rajtarangini**, which presented a history of the kings of Kashmir.
- Among the important writers in the southern court of this period were Govinda Dikshita (**Sahitya Sudha** and **Sangitsudhanidhi** being among his important works); Appaya Dikshita (in the court of the Nayaka ruler of Vellore); Nilanatha Dikshita (who was a minister in the court of the Nayaka of Madurai); Chakrakavi (who was patronized by the rulers of Kozhikode).

- His writing style represents the first instance of Persian styles being composed in the Indian context.

- This came to be known as the **Sabaq-i-Hindi** (the Indian style).
- The court chronicles were an important feature of the literature during the period of the Delhi Sultanate.
- The Sufi literature of the period developed a new form called the malfuzat that was in the form of a dialogue of the Sufi saints.
- Like that of the sultanate, Persian also continued as the official language of the Mughal court

### **Growth and Development of Regional Languages**

- The growth of regional languages like Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Marathi and Gujarati during the medieval period was an important development.
- These languages can be traced to the 7th and 8th centuries when they seem to have broken away from their Prakrit base.
- In the south Malayalam emerged as an independent language in the 14th century

### **Literature in South India**

- In the south Villiputtur was an important literary figure of the period. The tradition of using Sanskrit words and literary expressions is ascribed to him
- The most famous Telugu poet was Errapragada who popularized the Champu genre of literary writing (mixed form of verse and prose).

### **MUSIC**

- The important phase in the development of music during this period belongs to the time of Amir Khusrau.
- It is during this period that the **qawwali** style is said to have developed.
- He is also credited for the development of many modern ragas like **aiman, gora and sanam**.
- He is credited with the creation of a new musical instrument, the sitar that was a combination of the Indian **vina** and the Iranian tambura.
- Tansen is regarded as an important exponent of the Hindustani classical music and is credited with introducing ragas as the Miyan ki Malhar, Miyan ki Todi and Darbari.

### **Paintings**

- The developments in painting during the sultanate period have not been studied because of the limited samples.
- Paintings in medieval India entered a new phase under the Mughals.
- The Mughal paintings are defined by the styles and subjects popular at the imperial court
- Many paintings of this period are collaborative efforts with two or even four painters working on one painting.
- Among the important features of the paintings of this period are restricted movement of the figures, fineness of lines of drawings and flat depiction of architectural columns.
- The Mughal paintings are also marked with a naturalism and rhythm, the clothing of the objects assumed Indian forms and the use of subsidiary scenes in the background.
- The paintings of the Jahangir period accentuate a formalist

style and have broad margins which are well decorated with the depiction of flora and faces of human figures, the naturalistic representations matured during the reign of Jahangir.

### **Architecture**

- The arch and dome were new architectural additions of the period.
- The development of the true arch was important feature of the architectural style of the period
- The early buildings show signs of being worked upon by local craftsmen while the later buildings show the development or the maturing of the Indo-Islamic style.
- The new architectural style of the Tughluq period is represented with the use of stone rubble as the principle building material, the battering of walls and bastions, a new type of arch called the four centred arch, the emergence of the pointed dome and the introduction of an octagonal plan of tomb building.
- Rajput paintings that are also of the same period consist of various different court styles, corresponding to the various Rajput kingdoms
- Another important feature of Tughlaq architecture was the “batter” or sloping walls.
- Mughal period witnessed large scale architectural activities that represented the peak of Islamic art in India.
- During the reign of Akbar many indigenous styles were encouraged leading to the common use of sandstone, the use of arches and the decoration that comprised mainly of boldly carved or inlaid patterns complemented by brightly coloured patterns on the interiors
- Another feature of the art of this period was the decorative art in Islamic buildings that was introduced in the sub-continent for the first time.
- These decorative styles were usually in the form of calligraphy, geometrical figures and foliation.

### **Evaluate Yourself**

- Q. On the map of India mark and name the monuments of Mughals.
- Q. What are the architectural differences between Humayun's tomb and Taj Mahal?
- Q. List the main features of sufi movement of India.