

# **The Mughal-Maratha Period (1500 AD– 1800 AD)**

## **Philosophy and Religion**

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# Mughal-Maratha Period Highlights

- Imposition of Islamic faith
- Erosion of freedom of expression
- Decline of *Vedānta* teachings
- Proliferation of *Bhakti* movement
- Amalgamation of Hindu and Sufi ideals in *Bhakti* teachings

# Imposition of Islamic Faith

- With the multiple invasions and occupation of India by Turks and Afghan rulers, Islam was imposed on the population through laws, taxation and conversions
- Local practices of Idolatry and polytheism were abhorrent to Islam and there was a systematic destruction, plundering and desecration of temples and other places of worship
- Imposition of religion based taxes and persecution led to mass religious conversions
- The tax burden to support administrative overhead for the rulers caused artisans and farmers to lose the land ownership and reduced them to subsistence and eventual loss of their land.

# Decline of *Vedānta* Teachings

- Different interpretations of *Upanishads* and *brahamsūtras* gave rise to *Śaiva* and *Vaiśṇava* schools of thought with different theories about personal and impersonal God
- Decline of Shankara's teachings of equality of universal self - *Brahman* and individual self *ātman* gave way to the devotion to personal God
- The result of this was a proliferation of various sects and *panths*
- *Vedic* ritualism took a back seat to localized worship of gods

# Loss of freedom

- Invasions and subjugation of the large population by Turks, Afghans and Mughals
- Frequent wars between various kingdoms led people to feel insecure
- This impacted freedom in different walks of life as alien language, art and culture were adopted to serve the rulers and to cater to their interests
- The concept of *Brahman* as the universal being was replaced by a God who was other than the self
- This appears to lead to widespread practice of idolatry by giving human characteristics to deities who could protect the people from plundering and persecution

# Evolution of *Bhakti* movement

- Originally, *Bhakti* movement that started in South during 8<sup>th</sup> Century AD witnessed an evolution during the Islamic rule
- Saints and poets brought message of hope to the oppressed masses by channeling their fear and anger through creative writing
- These saints being aware of people's over-dependence on deities to solve their day-to-day problems emphasized on importance of balancing spiritual pursuits with self-effort to defend and to manage daily life
- Writings from Saints like Ramdas, Kabir and Rahim were popular

# Proliferation of *Bhakti* movement

- The period witnessed religious and social reform in *Hinduism* with inclusiveness and devotional relationship with personal God (*Ishta*)
- The *Bhakti* movement thus took hold of large parts of India with various poet saints emphasizing importance of devotion to God over empty rituals for salvation
- Caste, creed and wealth had no bearing on the *Bhakti* to God and all were same in *His* eyes
- The content of religious texts was available to common people through translations in local dialects
- Ideas and thoughts from other religions were welcomed



## Saint Kabir , Ravidas and Dadu



- Kabir (1440 AD-1518 AD) was a disciple of *Vaishṇava* saint Ramananda but his writings were influenced by both *Hinduism* and *Islam*
- He criticized contemporary religions for their religious practices and considered all human beings as manifestation of one God
- According to Kabir devotion to *saguṇa* God is a step towards the realization of the *nirguṇa* God
- Ravidas (16<sup>th</sup> Cent) was Kabir's contemporary and like him preached the equality of human beings; believed existence of one God. He opposed idolatry
- Ravidas's teachings had profound impact on Guru Nanak and many of his devotional songs were included in the Sikh spiritual literature
- Dadu (1544 AD – 1603 AD) considered that devotion to God is beyond caste, creed or sect and the devotees should be *nipākh*





# Vallabhacharya and Chaitanya



- Vallabhacharya (1479 AD – 1531 AD) was a *Vaishnava* philosopher of *Bhakti* period
- Vallabha propounded the philosophy of *Shuddhādvaita* or pure monism without the presence of *Māyā* where Krishna is the *Brahman*
- He established the *Pushtimārga* school of thought where Krishna in child form is the central figure
- Chaitanya (1486 AD – 1534 AD) was proponent of *Vaishnava* school of *Bhakti yoga* that emphasized loving devotion to God.
- His is the philosophy of *Achintya Bhedābheda* that states that God is simultaneously one with and different from His own creation with an overall control over it



# Meera and Surdas



- Meerabai (1498 AD – 1547 AD) was one of the significant personalities during the *Bhakti* period
- Born and married into royalty, her view of liberation was having personal relationship with God or Krishna in her case
- Songs of Meera were included in *Prem Ambodh Pothi* – a devotional compilation by Guru Gobindsingh
- Like Meera, Surdas (1483 AD – 1584 AD) was a devotee of Krishna and part of *Bhakti* movement where devotion to personal God was key to God realization
- Surdas considers Krishna as the creator of the universe and the primordial human being
- Devotional compositions of Surdas have been included in the Sikh religious literature

## Guru Nanak and Sikhism

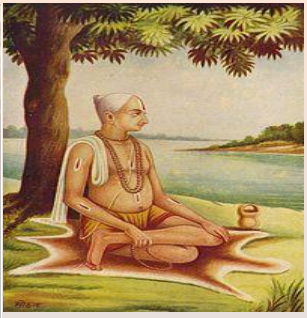


- The influence of *Bhakti* movement gave rise to different panths with thought processes regarding God and place of human beings in the world
- Guru Nanak (1469 AD – 1539 AD)) believed in oneness of God and equality of different religious thoughts
- Nanak viewed *prakṛti* as the *lilā* or sport of all pervading Reality
- This Reality is *Brahman* that can be known through *Mūla* (root) *Mantra*
- *Brahman* is both *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa*; and *Ek Omkāra* is that *Brahman*
- *His* name is Truth – *Satnām* who is the *Kartā Purakh* or the creator without fear, enmity, eternal, unborn and self existent
- The emphasis on a spiritual teacher or *guru* being preceptor and guide to the disciple *sikh* rather than an incarnation of God, is one of the important parts of *Sikhism*

# Sikh Gurus



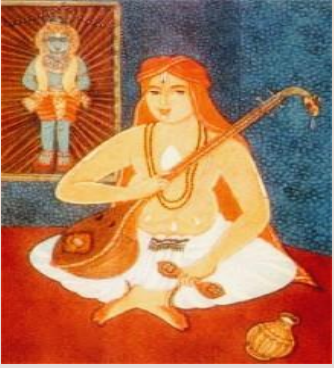
- There were ten Sikh Gurus and 10<sup>th</sup> Guru was Gobind Singh
- Sikh militarization as a response to tyranny of Mughal rule started with Guru Hargobind Singh(1595 AD – 1644 AD)
- He advocated physical fitness and was not averse to consumption of meat
- Guru Gobind Singh (1666 AD – 1708 AD) formalized the Sikh religion with the establishment of *Khalasa panth* that required the followers to observe abstinence from tobacco, intoxication, *halal* meat and adultery
- *Khalsa* followers were required to have uncut hair, sword, comb, short breeches and steel bracelet



# Tulasidas and Rahim



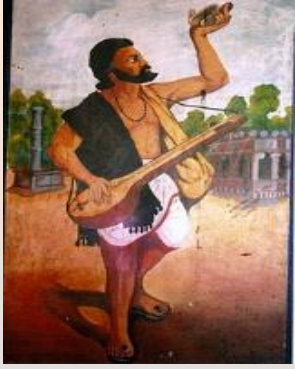
- Tulasidas (1511 AD – 1623 AD) retold the epic *Ramāyaṇa* in local dialect *Avadhi* as *Rāmacharitamānas*
- According to Tulasidas the *nirguṇa* God becomes manifest for the devotee
- He believed that *Rāma* was none else but an incarnation of *Vishnu* who had come to the earth to rid it from demons
- He says that the *prakṛti* or phenomenal world is just a manifestation of the *lilā* of *Rāma* and *Māyā* or *avidyā* is an impediment towards realization of God.
- Abur Rahim Khan-i-khana (1556 AD – 1627 AD) was a minister in Akbar's court and was devoted to Krishna
- His couplets or *Dohas* are often quoted for their moral and philosophical message



## Purandaradasa and Thyagaraja



- Purandaradasa (1484 AD – 1564 AD) was a poet saint from South in the court of Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara
- He was a disciple of Vyasatirtha and was influenced by the philosophy of Madhvacharya's *Dvaitavāda* where individual self is a reflection of the universal self- *Bimba Pratibimba*
- His devotional songs in *Kannada* language forms basis of *Carnātic* devotional music
- Just like Purandaradasa, Thyagaraja (1767 AD– 1847 AD) was a poet saint who composed many Telugu and Sanskrit devotional songs
- Rama was his central deity and he is the manifestation of the supreme being



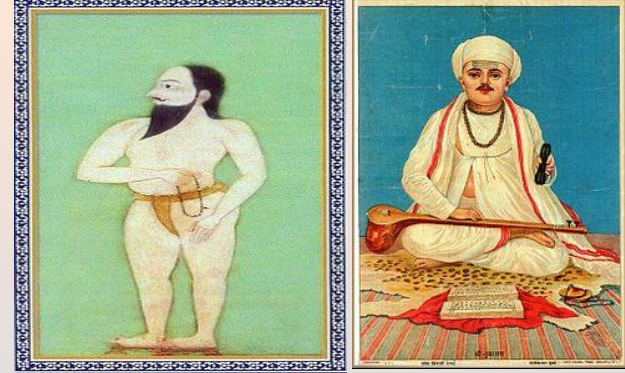
## Kanakadasa and Jagannatha Dasa



- Kanakadasa (1509 AD – 1609 AD) was a contemporary of Purandaradasa and has composed many *Kannada* mystical poems that combine devotion with social issues
- He was also a *Vaishnava* and was initiated in spiritual life by Vyasatirtha
- Kanakadasa criticized divisions in the society due to caste and wealth through his compositions
- Similar to Kanakadasa, Jagannatha Dasa (1728 AD – 1809 AD) was a *Vaishnava* devotional poet
- His acute illness led to his initiation into spiritual life and he was a follower of Madhvacharya's *Dvaita* philosophy
- His view of *Karma* is that he puts responsibility on God for all good or bad



# Eknath, Ramadas and Tukaram



- Eknath (1533 AD -1599 AD) was a Maharashtrian poet of *Vārakari sampradāya* that believed in equality of human beings, forgiveness, compassion and peace
- He re-compiled *Jñaneshwara's Jñaneshwari*, *Bhāgvat Purāna* and composed many devotional *abhangas*
- *Samarth* Ramadas (1608 AD – 1681 AD) was a poet saint during Shivaji's regime and his spiritual literature combined moral conduct with devotion
- Two of his major compositions are *Dāsabodha* and *Manāche Sholka*- verses addressed to the mind
- Tukaram (1600 AD)) was his contemporary and was a *Vitthal* devotee
- He composed several *abhangs* and he was a pantheistic *Vedānti*





## Sufism and Sufi Saints



- Sufism during the Mughal period influenced religious beliefs of *Bhakti* saints
- Bulle Shah (1680 AD – 1757 AD) was one of the prominent Sufi poet saints whose compositions exhorted people to respect different ideologies and creeds
- He believed in the universality and unity of Being
- Waris Shah (1722 AD – 1798 AD) , likewise, was a Punjabi Sufi poet whose poems criticized ritualism in both Hindu and Muslim religions
- He was the author of *Heer Ranjha* through which he says that path to liberation can be found through any belief
- He used both Islamic and Hindu scriptures to make his point regarding unity of the two ideals

## Summary

- Mughal-Maratha period was a period of turmoil with economic and religious subjugation
- Personal relationship with God through intense love became the common trait among people
- The period witnessed a surge in *Bhakti* movement where saints and poets emphasized on common ground than the differences in the religions
- Worship of deities replaced *Vedānta* teachings
- Ideas from Sufism were incorporated in different *panths* and sects
- Reform movement in various regions developed creating many saints and poets