

15 most famous Saints of the Medieval India are as follows:

1. Ramanuja (1060-1188):

The earliest exponent of the Bhakti movement was Ramanuja who was appointed the successor of his teacher Yamunamuni. He travelled all over India and ultimately settled down at Srirangam. He established Vaishnavism on a sound foundation. He founded Visistadvaita Siddhanta or qualified monism and according to him, the way to salvation lies through Karma, Gyan and Bhakti. He wrote Sribasya and Gitabhasya.

2. Nimbarka:

The next leader of the Bhakti movement was Nimbarka, a younger contemporary of Ramanuja. He was worshipper of Krishna and Radha. He founded Dvaitadvaita or dualistic monism. He wrote Vedanta Parijata-saurabha, a commentary on Brahmasutras. He settled in Mathura.

3. Madhavacharya:

He ranks with Sankaracharya and Ramanuja as one of the three principal philosophers of the Vedanta system. He propounded Dvaita or dualism. According to him, the final aim of man is the direct perception of Hari which leads to Moksha or eternal bliss.

4. Vallabhacharya (1479-1531):

Born in Varanasi, he propounded Suddhadvaita Vedanta (Pure non-dualism) and philosophy called Pustimarga (the path of grace) He founded a school called Rudra Sampradaya. He identified Brahman with

Sri Krishna, characterised by Sat (Being), Cit (consciousness) and Ananda (bliss). According to him, salvation is through Sneha (deep rooted love for God). He was the author of a number of scholarly works in Sanskrit and Brajhabasa, the important being Subodhini and Siddhant Rahasya.

5. Ramananda (Fifteenth century):

Born at Prayag, he was the first great Bhakti saint of North India. He opened the door of Bhakti to all without any distinction of birth, caste, creed or sex. He was a worshipper of Rama and believed in two great principles, namely as perfect love for god and human brotherhood.

His disciples included: (a) Kabir, a Muslim weaver; (b) Raidasa, a cobbler;

(c) Sena, a barber;

(d) Dhanna a Jat peasant; (e) Sadhana, a butcher;

(f) Narahari, a goldsmith; and

(g) Pipa, a Rajput prince. Ramananda has been described as “the bridge between the Bhakti movement of the South and the North.”

6. Namadeva:

Namadeva, who flourished in the first part of the fourteenth century, was a tailor who had taken to banditry before he became a saint.

His poetry which was written in Marathi breathes a spirit of intense love and devotion to God. Namadeva is said to have travelled far and wide and engaged in discussions with the Sufi saints in Delhi.

7. Chaitanya (1485-1534):

Chaitanya was the greatest saint of the Bhakti movement. Born at Navadvip in Bengal, his original name was Vishwambhar Mishra. He was responsible for the popularity of Vaishnavism in Bengal through his Kirtans. He began the Achintyabhedabheda School of theology. He preached the religion of intense faith in one Supreme Being whom he called Krishna or Hari.

He adored Krishna and Radha and attempted to spiritualise their lives in Vrindavan. He settled permanently at Puri where he died. After his death, his followers systematised his teachings and organised themselves into a sect called Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Krishnadasa Kaviraja wrote his biography, Chaitanyacharitamrita.

8. Mirabai (1498-1546):

A great saint of the Bhakti movement, she was the only child of Ratna singh Rathor of Merta. She was married to Rana Sanga's eldest son and heir-apparent Bhojaraj in 1516. She was highly religious from her childhood and a follower of the Krishna cult of Vaishnavism. After the death of her husband, she devoted herself completely to religious pursuits. Mirabai is said to have composed numerous devotional songs.

9. Tulsidas (1532-1623):

He was a great poet and a devotee of Rama. He composed the famous Ramcharitamanas in Hindi, expounding the various aspects of Hindu dharma. His other creations are Vinaya-Patrika and Kavitavali.

10. Surdas (1479-1584):

As a saint and a poet, he preached the religion of love and devotion to a personal God. Surdas was a devotee of Lord Krishna and Radha. He made use of Brajbhasa in his works which include Sursagar, Sahitya Ratna and Sur Sarawali.

11. Shankar Dev:

Other well known Saguna bhakti saints were Sankardev who popularised Vaishanava bhakti in Assam

12. Narasi:

The original name of Narasi was Narasimha Mehta. He popularised Vaishnava cult in Gujarat.

13. Kabir:

Born near Benaras, he led the life of a normal householder. A disciple of Ramananda, his mission was to preach a religion of love which would unite all castes and creeds. He emphasised the unity of god whom he calls by several names, such as Rama, Hari, Allah, etc. He strongly denounced Hindu and Muslim rituals.

He strongly denounced the caste system, especially the practice of untouchability. However, he was not a social reformer, his emphasis being reform of the individual under the guidance of a true guru.

His dohas and sakhi (poems) are found in the Bijak. After Kabir's death, his Muslim disciples organised themselves in Maghar, and the Hindu disciples were organised into an order by Surat Gopala, with their centre at Banaras.

14. Other Nirguna saints were Dadu Dayal, who founded the Brahma Sampradaya or Parabrahma Sampradaya, Malukdasa a follower of Kabir, Sundardasa and Dharanidasa.

15. The bhakti saints of Maharashtra were the proponents of Maharashtra Dharma. Jnandeva; Namadeva, Eknatha, Tukaram and Ramdas were some of the great Bhakti saints in Maharashtra.