

# **BHAKTI MOVEMENT**

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# ORIGIN

Bhakti movement which stressed mystical union of the individual with God had been at work in India long before the arrival of the Turks. Bhakti as a concept is very ancient in Indian religion dating back to the **Vedic period**. In fact, **The Bhagvat Gita** also mentions that one should give up all religious path and take refuge in God alone, and it discusses ways to know God fully and practice yoga and take refuge in God. The word Bhakti is derived from root **bhaj**, meaning '**to adore**'. The word bhakti occurs for the first time in **Upanishads**. In the **Svetasvatara** Upanishad we come across the doctrine of 'self-surrender' and 'grace'.

It has been repeatedly told in **Epics** that to achieve liberation one must transcend all the opposites, including good and evil. The goal of the path of knowledge and the path of the action thus becomes the same. **The Yoga sutras** also introduce a new element that concentration on the idea of God as being an eternal exemplar of the liberated soul.

Bhakti as a concept first evolved in the southern regions with the hymns of **vaisnava Alwars** and those of the **Saiva Nayanars** and became a major movement against resisting Brahmanical domination moving to northern regions and spreading to western, eastern and north eastern regions also.

# FEATURES OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

Foremost is the idea of devotion (bhakti) to personal God. It could be any God or also in any form. Some of the bhaktas saw the God either a teacher or a friend; a lover; a husband.

Second is that, protest against Orthodox Vedic Brahmanism and the exclusiveness of Brahmans in their access to Divine grace and salvation.

Thirdly, vehement denunciation of the Jains and Buddhists as non-believers, heretics and hence heterodox in nature.



# BHAKTI MOVEMENT FEATURES

The Bhakti movement was essentially **monotheistic** and devotees worshipped either a particular form (**saguna**) or formless (**nirguna**).

Exponents of bhakti greatly emphasized the **importance of a guru**, securing true knowledge from him.

Many of the bhaktas were drawn from the lower castes, especially in the later period, which gave the popular impression that it was an **egalitarian movement**.

Bhakti saints preached in **simple languages** of the masses

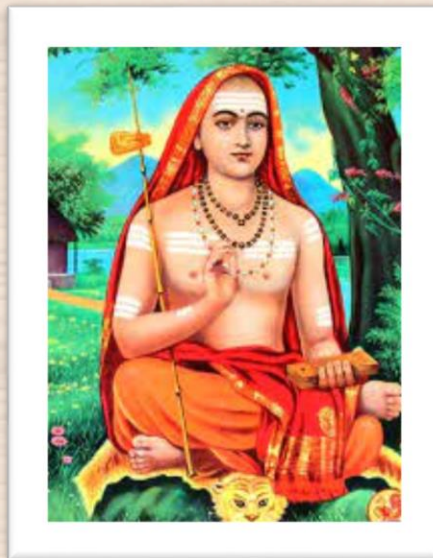
Bhakti was a **widespread movement** and got spread over the whole of the Indian subcontinent.

One of its agenda was to **reform Hindu religion** to withstand the onslaught of Islamic propaganda.

The other objective was bringing about the **simplification of the traditional caste bound practices**.

# SANAKAR

At the intellectual level, the Buddhist ideas and beliefs were given a death blow by Sankara who is placed at the end of the 8th century and the beginning of the 9th century. Sankara systematized the Vedanta system, and was the great exponent of the philosophy of advaita or non-dualism. According to him, the separation of God and the phenomenal world was due to ignorance and the way to salvation was through the realization, by means of knowledge (jnana), that God and the created world was one.



He was born in Kalady, Kerala and in his short life span of 32 years, his accomplishments seem a marvel even today

At the age of two, he could fluently speak and write Sanskrit. At the age of four, he could recite all the Vedas, and at the age of twelve, he took sanyas and left his home. Even at such a young age, he gathered disciples and started walking throughout the country.

Adi Shankara's guidance came from Gowdapada.

Apart from being the champion of Advaita philosophy, one of his invaluable contributions towards Hinduism was the reordering and restructuring of the ancient Sannyasa order.

A temple at Badrinath installed by Adi Shankara. He set up his own people there. Even today, the descendants of the families that he set up – traditionally, the Nambudiris – are the priests in the temple.



“Brahman, Pure Consciousness, is the Absolute Reality. The world is unreal. This is the correct understanding of the Sastra is the thundering declaration of Vedanta ”

ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः।  
अनेन वेद्यं सच्छास्त्रमिति वेदान्तडिण्डिमः॥  
(ब्रह्मज्ञानावलीमाला)

In essence, the individual is not different from Brahman. Thus by the statement “*Brahma Satyam Jagan Mithya, Jeevo Brahmaiva Na Para*” he condensed the essence of the voluminous scriptures.





He established 4 ashrams in four corners of India and entrusted his four disciples to teach and propagate Advaita through them.

He composed 72 devotional and meditative hymns like Soundarya Lahari, Sivananda Lahari, Nirvana Shalkam, Maneesha Panchakam. He also wrote 18 commentaries on the major scriptural texts including the Brahma Sutras, the Bhagavad Gita and 12 major Upanishads. He also authored 23 books on the fundamentals of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy which expound the principles of the non-dual Brahman. These include Viveka Chudamani, Atma Bodha, Vaakya Vritti, Upadesa Sahasri, among others.

Considered to be an incarnation of Lord Siva, Sri Shankara lived only a short life span of 32 years. There are many inspiring legends about him.

<b>Direction</b>	South India	West India	North India	East India
<b>Place</b>	Sringeri	Dwaraka	Badrinath	Puri
<b>Math Name</b>	Sringeri Math	Sarada Math	Jyotir Math	Govardhan Math
<b>Acharya</b>	Sureswara	Hastamalaka	Trotaka	Padmapada
<b>Veda</b>	Yagur	Sama	Atharva	Rik
<b>Mantra</b>	Aham brahmāsmi	Tattvamasi	Ayamātmā brahma	Prajñānam brahma
<b>Sanyasa Order</b>	Saraswati, Bharati, Puri	Tirtha, Ashrama	Giri, Parvata, Sagara	Vanam, Aranyam

# RAMANUJA

Another important bhakti saint was **Ramanuja** who is placed in the eleventh century. Ramanuja argued that for salvation, the grace of God was more important than knowledge about him. He furthered argued that the path of bhakti was open to all, irrespective of caste, and enrolled disciple from all castes.





**Ramanuja**, also called **Ramanujacharya**, or **Ilaiya Perumal** (Tamil: **Ageless Perumal [God]**), (born c. 1017, Shriperumbudur, India—died 1137, Shrirangam), South Indian Brahman theologian and philosopher, the single most influential thinker of devotional Hinduism.



After a long pilgrimage, Ramanuja settled in Shrirangam, where he organized temple worship and founded centres to disseminate his doctrine of devotion to the god Vishnu and his consort Shri (Lakshmi).

Tradition has it that later he suffered from the zeal of King Kulottunga of the Chola dynasty, who adhered to the god Shiva, and withdrew to Mysore, in the west. There he converted numbers of Jains, as well as King Bittideva of the Hoyshala dynasty; this led to the founding in 1099 of the town Milukote (Melcote, present Karnataka state) and the dedication of a temple to Shelva Pillai (form of Vishnu).

His three major commentaries: the *Vedārtha-samgraha* (on the Vedas, the earliest scriptures of Hinduism), the *Shri-bhashya* (on the *Brahma-sutras*), and the *Bhagavadgita-bhashya* (on the *Bhagavadgita*)

# RAMANUJA'S DOCTRINE

His doctrine is known as Vishishtadvaita (“qualified nonduality”) as opposed to the unqualified nonduality of Shankara.

Ramanuja's theory posits both Brahman and the world of matter are two different absolutes, both metaphysically real, neither should be called false or illusive, and *saguna* Brahman with attributes is also real. God, like man, states Ramanuja, has both soul and body, and all of the world of matter is the glory of God's body. The path to Brahman (Vishnu), asserted Ramanuja, is devotion to godliness and constant remembrance of the beauty and love of personal god (*saguna* Brahman, Vishnu).



# MADHAVACHARYA



Madhvacharya was born to Narayana Bhatta and Vedavati in Pajaka, a small place near Udupi. He was born in 1238, on the auspicious day of Vijayadashami, and he was named Vasudeva.

He came after Sri Shankaracharya and Shri Ramanujacharya. He propounded the philosophy of Dwaita or Dualism.

He was initiated into Sanyasa by Achyutapreksha, a great teacher belonging to the Advaita School of Philosophy. At the time of initiation, he was given the name Purnaprajna. It was also Achyutapreksha who gave him the title 'Madhva' by which he was more famously known.

Madhvacharya wrote commentaries on several important Hindu holy texts, including the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutra.

## Dvaita Philosophy

Dvaita emphasizes that the world is real and not just an illusion.

Some of Sri Madhvacharya's teachings fall along these lines:

The soul is bound to this world through ignorance

The way for the soul to release itself from this bondage is to seek the grace of Sri Hari

To reach Sri Hari, one has to practice Bhakthi, there is no other way

To practice Bhakthi, one needs to meditate

To meditate, one needs to clear the mind and attain detachment by studying the sacred texts

Understanding the sacred texts can be possible only through the grace of a Guru.

Although there were many points of contact between south and north India, the transmission of the ideas of the Bhakti saints from south to north India was a slow and long drawn out process. The popular bhakti movement which began in north India from the 14-15<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards has often been considered an off-shoot of southern movement. The ideas of bhakti carried to the north by scholars as well as saints. Among these, mention may be made of the Maharashtrian saint, **Namadeva**, who flourished in the first part of the fourteenth century, and **Ramananda**, who is placed in the second half of the fourteenth and the first quarter of the fifteenth century. Namadeva was a tailor. It is said that he had taken 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 discussion with the Sufi saints. Another saint, Ramanada, who was a follower of Ramanuja, was born at Prayag (Allahabad) and lived there and at Banaras. He popularised the worship of Rama as an avtar of Vishnu. What is more, he taught his doctrine of bhakti to all the four varnas, and disregarded the ban on people of different castes cooking or eating their meals together. He is said to have enrolled disciples from all castes, including the low castes. Thus, his disciples included **Ravidas**, who was a cobbler by caste; **Kabir**, who was a weaver; **Sena**, who was a barber; and **Sadhana**, who was a butcher. Namadeva was equally broad-minded in enrolling his disciples.



# BHAKTI AND ALVARS

Bhakti movement, the period of the medieval era, where a new kind of culture and Bhakti paths were introduced. At this period of time, the former religious practices were completely corrupted and complex. Society was tired of caste trending norms, and at that point in time, there was a need for a new path of devotion. Something that can help reform society and break it free from various rituals. The Bhakti movement played a vital role in reforming society and breaking the chains of caste systems. It showed the path of devotion without discriminating against the people on the basis of their caste. Here we will discuss the new kind of bhakti in the south region, especially the Alvars and the Nayanars.

The Alvars and Nayanars initiated the protest against the caste system and societal norms. In the medieval era, there was the dominance of Brahmanas and the people were very influenced by the caste system. The Alvars and Nayanars were the devotees of God Shiva and Vishnu. They led the path of devotion to God without discriminating people against their castes or social background.

# ALVARS

The Alvars are the twelve Vaisnava saints of South India who flourished between the sixth and ninth centuries of the Common Era. The Tamil word Alvar indicates they were God-intoxicated people. They were wandering saints who eulogized Lord Visnu. The Alvars maintained no caste rigidities and they belonged to different caste groups. Seven of them were Brahmins, one was a Ksatriya, two were Sudras and one was of the low Panar caste. One of them, Andal, was a woman. The Alvars practiced different forms of devotion but the most common is called prapatti (self-surrender), a form different from the general pattern of bhakti (more technical in nature and confined to the three upper castes). The Alvars being devotees of Visnu have access to the many temples dedicated to the god.

During their visits they composed devotional hymns in praise of Visnu. These hymns promoted devotion and surrender by glorifying the greatness of Visnu. Although their hymns are replete with the ideas of the Vedas, their uniqueness lie in the great emphasis on devotion and surrender, which are rarely found in the Vedic Mantras or in the highly metaphysical pronouncements within the Upanisads.

Poikaiyavar

Bhuthathalwar

Beyalwar

Thirumazhisaiyalwar

Nammalvar

Madhurakavi Alvar

Kulasekhara Alvar

Periyalwar

Andal

Thondarati Podiyalvar

Tiruppanawar

Thirumangayathwar



Periyalvar



Andal



Kulasekhara Alvar



Thirumala Alvar



Thondaripodi Alvar



Tiruppan Alvar



Thirumanga Alvar



Pagan Alvar



Bhuthathalwar



Payalwar



Nammalvar



Madhurakavi Alvar



# NAYANARS

During the 6th through 9th centuries, South India was home to 63 fervent devotees of Lord Siva who became known as the Nayanars (or Nayanars). Several among these pious souls, coming from all segments of society—potter, fisherman, farmer, merchant, priest, hunter, washerman—composed devotional hymns that are sung to this day by devotees worldwide. A festival dedicated to the 63 Nayanmars, the Arupathu Moovar Thiruvila, is held annually at Kapaleeswarar Temple in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

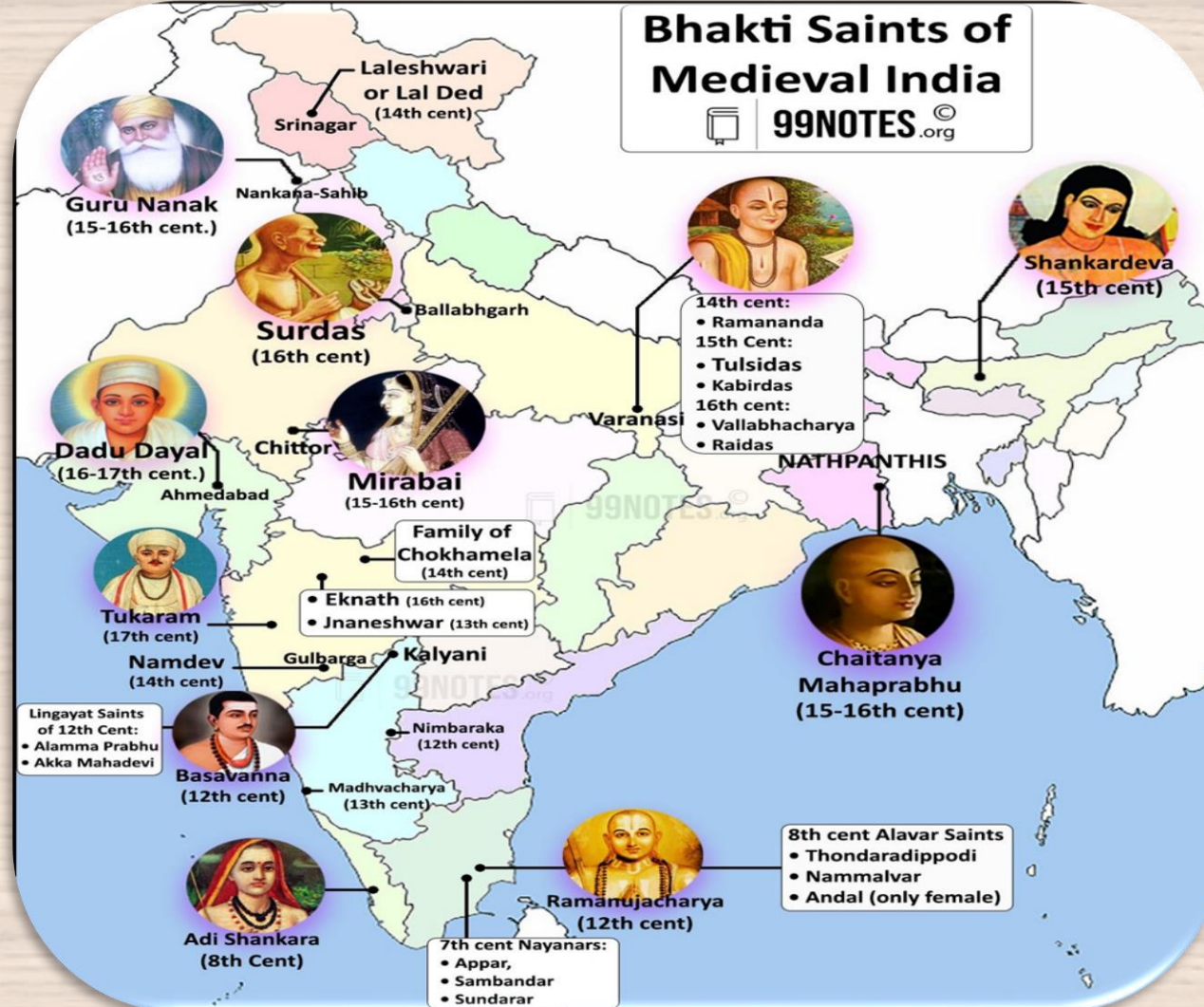
Three of the most prominent Nayanars—Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar (composers of Thevaram hymns)—along with Manikkavasagar are called the Samayacharyas (teachers of the faith) referred to in Tamil as Nalvar, “The Four.” They promoted Saiva Siddhanta philosophy and culture, countering the incursion of Jainism and Buddhism. They taught that Siva is Love and that love (for all beings—indeed, for all existence) is the key to reaching Siva, the Supreme Being.

Namdev (1270-1350) belonged to the tailor caste. He is considered to be the link between the Maharashtrian bhakti movement and North Indian monotheistic movement. He lived in Pandharpur but travelled to North India, including Punjab. His bhakti songs have also been included in the Adi Granth. In Maharashtra, Namdev is considered to be a part of the Varkari tradition (Vaishnava devotional tradition), but in the North Indian monotheistic tradition he is remembered as a nirguna saint. Other prominent bhakti saints of Maharashtra were Eknath (1533- 99) and Tukaram (1598-1650).

## Bhakti Saints of Medieval India



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# KABIR

Among those who were most critical of the existing social order and made a strong plea for Hindu-Muslim unity, the names of Kabir and Nanak stand out.

**Kabir** was most important mystic saints of India. There is a good deal of uncertainty about the dates and early life of Kabir. Legend has it that he was the son of a brahman widow who abandoned him, and that he was brought up in the house of a Muslim weaver.

He learned the profession of his adopted father, but while living at Kashi, he came in touch with both the Hindu saints and sufis.

He was also strongly influenced by the Nath-panthis. Kabir emphasised the unity of God whom he calls by several names, such as Rama, Hari, Govind, Allah, Sain, Sahib, etc.

He strongly denounced idol-worship, pilgrimages, bathing in holy rivers or taking part in formal worship, such as namaz.

Nor did he consider it necessary to abandon the life of a normal householder for the sake of a saintly life

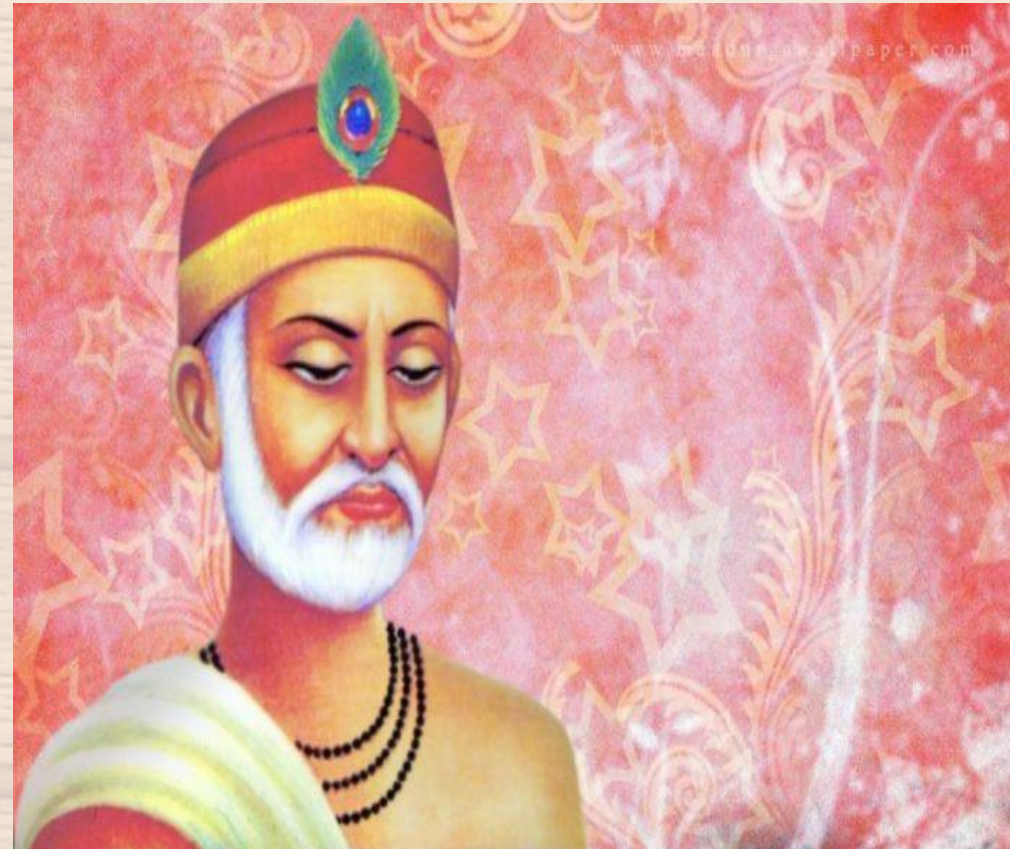


# KABIR

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In a book called '**Bijak**' describes concepts such as **Brahma, Atman, Karma, Punar-janam** etc. **kabir composed many doha's, sabad's, sakhi's.**

As a modern historian **Dr. Tara Chand**, says: 'The mission of Kabir was to preach a religion of love which would unite all castes and creeds. He rejected those features of Hinduism and Islam which were against this spirit and which were of no importance for the spiritual welfare of the individual'.



# NANAK



Like kabir, Nanak laid emphasis on the one god, by repeating whose name and dwelling on it with love and devotion one could get salvation without distinction of caste, creed or sect.

Guru Nanak, from whose teachings the Sikh religion was derived, was born in a Khatri household in the village of Talwandi (now called Nanakana) on the bank of river Ravi in 1469.

Although married early, and trained in Persian to take his father's profession of accountancy, Nanak showed a mystic, contemplative bent of mind, and preferred the company of saints and sadhus.

Sometimes later, he had a mystic vision and forsook the world.

He composed hymns and sang them to the accompaniment of the rabab, a stringed instrument played by his faithful attendant, Mardana.

It is said that Nanak undertook wide tours all over India and even beyond it, to Sri Lanka in the south, and Mecca and Madina in the west.

He attracted a large number of people towards him, and his name and fame spread far and wide before his death in 1538.



Apart from the non-sectarian movements led by Kabir and Nanak, the bhakti movement in north India developed around the worship of Rama and Krishna, two of the incarnations of the god Vishnu. The childhood escapades of Krishna and his dalliance with the milkmaids of Gokul, especially with Radha, became the theme of a remarkable series of saint-poets who used them in an allegoric manner to depict the relationship, in its various aspects, of the individual soul with the supreme soul. Born and educated in Nadia which was the centre of Vedantic rationalism, Chaitanya's tenor of life was changed when he visited Gaya at the age of 22 and was initiated into the Krishna cult by a recluse. He became a god intoxicated devotee who incessantly uttered the name of Krishna. Like the early sufis, Chaitanya popularised musical gathering or kirtan as a special form of mystic experience in which the outside world disappeared by dwelling on God's name. He spread the Yuga-dharma as the practice for attainment of pure love for Radha-Krishna. That process is harinam-sankirtan, or the congregational chanting of the Holy Names of Krishna “ Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare”.

# CHAITANYA

Chaitanya (1486-1533) was the most prominent Vaishnava saint of Bengal. He popularized Krishna-bhakti in many parts of Eastern India. His popularity as a religious personality was so great that he was looked upon as an avatara (incarnation) of Krishna. The advent of Chaitanya marks the shifting of the focus of the Bengal Vaishnava bhakti from devotional literary compositions to a fullfledged reform movement with a broad social base.

Chaitanya disregarded all distinctions of caste, creed and sex to give a popular base to Krishna-bhakti. His followers belonged to all castes and communities. One of his most favourite disciples was Haridas who was a Muslim. He popularized the practice of sankirtan or group devotional singing accompanied by ecstatic dancing.

Chaitanya's movement had a great impact on Bengali society. His disregard for caste distinctions in the sphere of devotional singing promoted a sense of equality in the Bengali life. In Bengal and in Puri, in Odisha, his movement remained popular. In these places, his followers were not always scholarly Brahmans but included common people. They wrote in Bengali, propagated his bhakti and looked upon Chaitanya as the living Krishna or as Radha and Krishna in one body.





# BHAKTI AND WOMEN

The relationship of a woman to God is relevant of understanding gender relationship in any society. In Bhakti their struggle is with the family and the family values and often against marriage. The conceptualism of God in Bhakti tradition is that of an equal partner and a confidence. In Bhakti men often speak in a feminine voice.

Among the women bhaktas **Mirabai, Akka Mahadevi, Lal ded, Sahajo Bai, Divalibai and Gourabai, Ganga Sati, Sant Toral, Janabai and Bahina Bai** was famous.

The women bhaktas negotiated patriarchy and created an alternative space for themselves which survives even to this day in folk memory.

# MIRABAI

Mirabai was born to Rajput king Thakur Ratan Singh and Vir Kumari in kurki, Marwar district of Rajasthan.

As every princesses she was educated in sastras, music, art, philosophy, horse riding, sword fighting etc.

From earlier age Mira immersed herself in Krishna Bhakti.

But as tradition goes she was married at age of 13 to prince of Chitor Bhojraja. She was not able to lead conventional married life. Because in her mind she was already married to Lord Krishna.

But the royal family member were jealous and harassed her in many times in many ways.

For this reason Mira left Chitor and moved to Brindaban to be with her lord. She continued immersing herself in the worship in a small Govinda temple.

Mira continued her kirtana, bhajana in Brindaban. Mirabai composed many **bhajans (Mira's Bhajan)** which are sung till date.

She was living proof that one can rise above the worldly riches and position and lead an austere life filled with Krishna-Prema. She was against all social norms.



# IMPACT

The cardinal principle of Bhakti Cult was influencing devotion to a personal God, whose grace was the only means of attaining **salvation or Mukti**.

The Bhakti exponents raised their powerful voice **against different types of immoral acts** like infanticide and sati and encouraged prohibition of wine, tobacco, and toddy. Adultery and sodomy were also discouraged.

They aimed to set up a good social order upholding **high moral values**.

The spirit of tolerance, harmony and mutual respect which was inaugurated by the Bhakti saints had another everlasting impact- the emergence of a new cult of satyapir. It started under the initiative of King Husain Shah of Jaunpur which later paved the way for the spirit of liberation adopted by Akbar.

The bhakti movement promoted the growth **of vernacular language and literature** in different parts of the country.

Kabir in Hindi, Nanak in Gurmukhi and Chaitanya in Bengali.



All the saint-poets mentioned earlier remained within the broad framework of Hinduism. They all emphasized on **unity of God and the created World**.

Bhakti preacher **broke the barrier of casteism** and gave new force and life of the Hindi society.

The approach of these saint-poets was broadly **humanistic**.

The Bhakti movement was a strong protest **against Brahmanical Orthodoxy**.

It led to great and fundamental reform of Hinduism.

Another remarkable impact was bringing about **a unity among the Hindu and Muslim communities.**

the saints of Bhakti movement and Sufi saints spread **message of friendship, amity, tolerance, peace and equality among all.**

The **method of worship and belief** in God took a new turn during the movement.

Henceforth, importance was given to devotion and love for God who is the God of all-God both Hindus as well as Muslims.

**So, the Bhakti Movement created virtually a revolution in Hindu society.**

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