



GS FOUNDATION BATCH FOR CSE 2024

**Ancient and Medieval Indian
History and Culture- 03**

**(Bhakti Movement and Acharyas -
Part 3)**

Saguna Bhakti (North India)

Rama bhakti	Krishna bhakti
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Popular story of Rama. Righteousness was emphasized. It is all about Maryada Purushottam, upholder of dharma. Rama had within him all the desirable virtues that any individual would seek to aspire, and he fulfils all his ethical/moral obligations. So, seriousness and idealism – best father, son, ruler, brother and husband. Dasya-bhaav prominent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Popular imagination of Krishna, Radha, Gopi He was in all relationships as Purna Purush. Also, entertainment too for popular mind. He was more relatable to common people.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socially, relatively more orthodox. Maryada of Ram is generally more dharmashatra-related yet there are some exceptions like Tribal Shabari. Still, it reduced sufferings of caste system. There was no intensity/rigidity of caste system in Ram bhakti. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varna/Jati is not very visible in Krishna bhakti. It is much more inclusive. Compared to Ram Bhakti, there is more protest element in Krishna bhakti. For example, relation between Radha and Krishna.

Rama Bhakti

The primary source of the life of Rama is the Sanskrit epic **Ramayana** composed by **Valmiki**. The oldest part of Ramayana composition may belong to 8th c BCE, but its narrative kept on enlarging and extending upto Gupta era.

Apart from Valmiki Ramayana, there are various versions of Ramayana in Sanskrit.

- **Raghuvamsha**, by Kalidasa, is a Sanskrit mahakavya, written during Gupta era.
- **Adhyatma Ramayana**, written in late medieval era, tries to reconcile Bhakti to Rama with Advaita Vedanta. It represents Rama as the Brahman (ultimate reality), mapping all saguna (attributes) of Rama to the nirguna nature.
- **Yoga Vasishtha** depicts a dialogue between Prince Rama and Rishi Vashistha through which Vedantic philosophy is explained.
- Various **Puranas** contain Rama's story: Vishnu Purana, Padma Purana, Garuda Purana, Agni Purana etc. Apart from that, Ramayana is also included in **Mahabharata**.

In **Buddhism**, there is **Dasharatha Jataka** and the **Jain** version of Ramayana is known as **Paumachariya**, written by Vimalasuri.

Apart from Sanskrit, with the beginning of Bhakti movement, there was a translation and transformation of Ramayana in various regional vernaculars. Following are some of the important Ramayanas:

Era	Ramayana	Author	Language
1100-1200	Ramachandra Charita (Jain) (Pampa Ramayana)	Nagachandra (Abhinav Pampa)	Kannada
	Ramacharitam	Cheraman	Malyalam
	Kambaramayanam	Kambar	Tamil
1200-1300	Ramayana (Jain)	Kumudendu	Kannada
1300-1400	Sri Ranganatha Ramayana	Gona Budda Reddy	Telugu
	Saptakanda (katha) Ramayana	Madhava Kandali	Assamese
1400-1500	Krittivasi Ramayana	Krittibas Ojha	Bengali
	Ramayanu	Krishnadasa Shama	Konkani
	Vilanka Ramayana	Sarala Das	Odiya
1500-1600	Torave Ramayana	Kumar Valmiki	Kannada
	Bhavartha Ramayana	Eknath	Marathi
	Dandi Ramayana	Balaram Dasa	Odiya
	Ramcharitmanas	Goswami Tulsidas	Hindi
	Ramayana of Akbar		Persian
1600-1700	Tulsi Krita Ramayana	Premananda Swami	Gujarati
	Pothi Ramayan		Urdu



Valmiki writing Ramayana



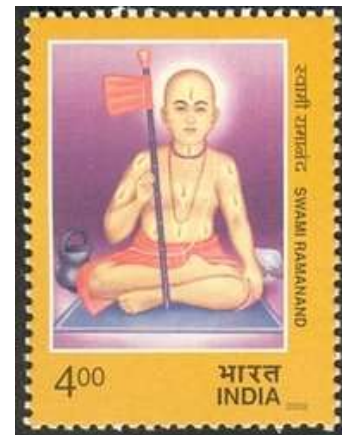
Ramayana carved relief in Kailas cave at Ellora, 8th c CE



Ramayana panel, Rameshwar Shiva Temple, Bamunpara, Ilambajar, Birbhum

Rama Bhakti in North

- **Ramanand (14th c):**
 - **Connected south to north.**
 - Tradition holds that his disciples included Kabir, Ravidas, Sen, Bhagat Pipa and others.
 - Apart from Acharyas, he was also influenced by Nathpanthis. He deviated from the ideology and practice of the earlier acharyas in three important respects:
 - **Vishnu → Ram**
 - **Sanskrit → Vernacular Hindi (Awadhi)** compositions (increased accessibility)
 - **Greatly relaxed the caste rules** in respect of religious and social matters.
 - Accepted **both saguna and nirguna brahma**.
 - His verse is included in **Guru Granth Sahib**.
 - He is claimed to have started **Ramanandi/Bairagi Sampradaya**.
- **Tulasidas (1532-1623):**
 - Composed **Ramcharitmanas** in Awadhi.
 - Tulsidas was **inspired by Adhyatma Ramayana**.



- Ramacharitmanas is notable for **synthesising the epic story in a Bhakti movement framework**. He transformed the original ideas to express spiritual bhakti for a personal god.
- Tulasi's depicted **Rama as a symbol of unity and integrity of India**.
- Other compositions: **Kavitavali, Vinay Patrika**
- His verses are called **dohas** and **chaupayis**.
- Started the **Ramlila plays**, a folk-theatre adaption of the Ramayana.
 - "Staging of the Ramayana based on the Ramacharitmanas" was inscribed in **UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritages of Humanity**.
- He was **contemporary to Akbar**.
- **Comments:**
 - *Tulsidas established a "sovereign rule on the kingdom of Dharma in northern India", which was comparable to the impact of Buddha.* – Hazariprasad Dwivedi.
 - *In the turbulent Middle Ages, India got light from Tulsidas. The north Indian society as it exists today is an edifice built by Tulsidas, and the Rama as we know today is the Rama of Tulsidas* – Mahadevi Varma.
- **Nabhadas** (17th c):
 - Composed **Bhaktamal** (Braj language) which mentions about 200 Ram bhakts.



Stylized painting of Tulsidas by Dinanath Dalal



Tulasi Manas Mandir, Varanasi, 1964

Amritlal Nagar (1916-1990) wrote two biographies of great contemporary saints. *Tulasi wrote on Ram in Awadhi while Surdas wrote on Krishna in Brajbhasha*. Amritlal talks about the historical details in great depth, but the events are fictional.



On Tulsidas



On Surdas

Krishna Bhakti

Sources:

(1) Harivamsha (post-Mauryan era)

- Added as appendix to Mahabharata in post-Mauryan era.
- An important source of information on the origin of Vishnu's incarnation Krishna
- It deals with the ancestry and exploits of Krishna and now wholly deified and identified with the great god Vishnu.



City of Dwarka, Harivamsha,
Mughal painting from
Akbar's era

(2) Bhagavata Purana (9th – 10th c)

- It celebrates Vishnu in his many avatars but is particularly evocative in its **celebration of Krishna avatars** and the playful story of his youth. It is a **source of many popular stories of Krishna's childhood** and of legends. It promotes Krishna-bhakti, **integrating themes from the Advaita and Dvaita both**.
- It was adapted in many Indian languages. It played a significant role in Chaitanya's Krishna-bhakti, Ekasharana Dharma, Eknath's bhakti as well Telugu language. It partly inspired Jaideva's Geet Govinda as well.
- Its influence, particularly **the 10th book**, on Indian religion, art, and literature has been monumental.
 - Its scenes are carved in stone on temple walls and illustrated in beautiful Rajasthani/Pahari miniatures.
 - It played a key role in theatre, dance and music, especially for Ras and Leela. Kathak, Odissi, Bharatnatyam and Manipuri dance performances on stories from Bhagavat Purana are very common even today.



Krishna and Balaram in
Sandipani Ashram,
Bhagavata Purana, 1525

(3) Jayadeva's Geeta Govinda (12th c)

Composed by Jayadeva in Sanskrit.

- It is the earliest-known poem dealing with the theme of the divine lovers, Radha and Krishna, and in it, Radha is treated as the mistress, not as the wife, of Krishna.
- It became popular among people due to imagery which focused on aspects of **erotic love between Radha-Krishna**. It represents attraction, yearning, estrangement, viraha, upeksha, and final reconciliation, all happening in Vasant Ritu.



- It goes one step above carnal love and enters spiritual domain and thus became immensely popular in medieval times.

- **Additional features:**

- It is represented through **Ashtapadis** and **Ashta Nayikas**, in classical dances.
- It inspired much of the subsequent poetry and painting in the bhakti (devotional) tradition of Krishna and Radha throughout India.
 - Commentaries **Rasikapriya** by **King Kumbha**, and **Rasamanjari** by Shankara Mishra.
 - As per the **orders of Gajapati ruler Prataprudra Deva** (1497-1540), only Geeta Govinda was to be sung and danced in Jagannatha Temple (**by Maharis**), the tradition which continues till date.
 - It has **deep impact on bhakti poetry** of Vidyapati, Chandidas, and Surdas.
 - Gwalior gharana of **Hindustani music** highly adores Ashtapadis.
 - Vitthalnath of Pushtimarga wrote a commentary called **Rasaparilupta** on Geeta Govinda and made a riwaz of singing ashtapadis in **Haveli sangeet**.
 - It is a must on repertoire of all **Indian classical dance traditions**.
 - Popular theme for **Pahari and Rajasthani paintings** in 17th and 18th centuries.



Radha in her jealousy imagines Krishna with other women, Gita Govinda, Purkhu, Kangra style, c. 1820

Krishna Bhakti in Northern and Western India

- Gujarat – **Narsinh Mehta** (early 15th c)
 - **Adi Kavi** of Gujarati language
 - He popularized bhakti through devotional song like **Vaishnav Jan To**
 - Focus – **Sakhya bhav**
- Rajasthan – **Mirabai**
 - A Rajput princess married into great Sisodias of Mewar as the **wife of Rana Kumbha** and a **daughter-in-law of Rana Sanga**.
 - Rana Sanga built a **Kumbha Shyam Temple** (Meera Mandir) in Chittorgarh for her worship.
 - But she became **widow at a young age**, then her father-in-law died. She refused to go Sati, as was expected of Rajput widow. Then faced a lot of **exclusion, abuse and ostracism** within the family.



- When the torture became unbearable, she chose to leave the palace, practice bhakti in the open, and left Mewar for Brindavan. She **popularized bhakti through her devotional padas**.
- Later, she moved to Dwaraka where she became one with the Lord, never to be separated again.
- Choosing the language of the people, Meera wrote in **Brajbhasha**, interspersed with Rajasthani.
- UP – **Surdas** (16th c)
 - He was a **blind** bhakti saint who composed songs in **Braj bhasha**, which are collected in **Sur Sagar, Sur Saravali, and Sahitya Lahari**.
 - His poetry raised the standard of Braj Bhasha from a dialect to the language of repute.
 - He was **one of the Ashta-chhops** of Vitthalanth Gosain, son of Vallabhacharya of Pushtimarga.
 - Sur Sagar represents **Krishna as a lovely child** of Gokul and Vraj. It also contains the love of Radha and Krishna and longing of Radha for Krishna, and vice versa.



Kumbha Shyam Mandir (Meera Mandir), Chittorgarh



U.P. promotes tombs of Muslim devotees of Krishna for tourism (The Hindu 28 October 2022)

- Amid the forested lanes of Gokul in Mathura are the once forgotten tombs of Raskhan and Taj Bibi, arguably the two most famous Muslim devotees of Lord Krishna.
 - **Raskhan** or Syed Ibrahim Khan was a 16th century Sufi Muslim poet born either in Amroha or Hardoi in Uttar Pradesh. He became a follower of Krishna and spent his life in Vrindavan.
 - **Taj Bibi**, also known as the '**Mughal Mirabai**', was the daughter of a Muslim nobleman, appointed by the Mughals to protect the Gokul area. According to a publication of the State-run Braj Teerth Vikas Parishad: "Taj Bibi wrote poetry during the Mughal time when the ruling class belonged to the Muslim religion. She had shown great courage by giving up recitation of Kalma Quran and announcing that she was a Hindu devotee."
- With the UP Government focused on creating Krishna Janmabhoomi as a major pilgrim tourist destination in the State, the redevelopment of these burial sites has been prioritised.



Krishna Bhakti in Eastern India

Apart from the influence of Jayadeva's Geet Govindam and Bhagvata Purana tradition, additionally, there was also linger influence of Sahajiya Buddhism + Nath panthi tradition in Eastern India.

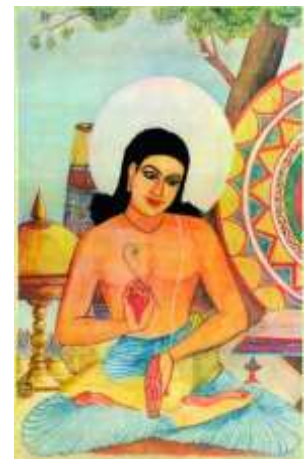
- Bihar: **Vidyapati** (1352 – 1448)
 - **Maithili** dialect, also father of Bengali literature
 - Songs with the theme of madhura bhakti of Krishna
 - Popularized Ras Leela in Mithilanchal
- Bengal: **Chandidas** (b. 1408)
 - First **Bengali** saint, writing poems on Krishna-Radha love.
- Bengal: **Chaitanya Mahaprabhu** (1486 – 1534)
 - Founder of **Gaudiya Vaishnavism**
 - Most important source: **Bhagavat Purana**
 - **Bhakti Dimension:**
 - He transformed Krishna bhakti into a major popular movement.
 - He popularized **Hare Krishna Mantra** as well as **Radha cult**.
 - It means that a devotee should **emotionally identify himself with Radha** and then experience love for Krishna the way she used to do. So, the **highest objective** was to experience the sweetness of Radha-Krishna love – **Madhurya bhakti**.
 - He also introduced **Sankirtan tradition** (ecstatic communal devotional chanting/singing and dancing).
 - He also created a **musical jatra theatre** tradition wherein Chaitanya himself played Rukmini in the performance of Rukmini Haran.
 - His popularity was so great that he was considered by his followers to be an **incarnation of Krishna himself**.
 - **Philosophical Dimension:**
 - His darshan is called **Achintya Bhedabheda**.
 - It is an integration of Ramanuja's and Madhvacharya's ideas. It is the meeting point of Dvaita and Advaita philosophy.
 - His perspective:
 - Jiva and jagat are dependent on Ishvara.
 - Ishvara can control Jiva and Jagat in two ways – direct and indirect.
 - Bhedabheda – because bheda exists, but whenever Ishvara chooses to focus completely and directly, it becomes abheda.
 - How it exactly happens is inconceivable – Achintya, cannot be thought about. Thus, the exact nature of this relationship (being



Sri Chaitanya and Nitai (Nityananda)
performing Kirtan.

simultaneously one and different with Krishna) is inconceivable to the human mind.

- It can be experienced through the process of Bhakti yoga.
- **Six Goswamis of Vrindavan** (Eg Rupa Goswami, Jiva Goswami)
 - They were closely associated with Vrindavan where they **uncovered many ancient sacred sites associated with lilas of Radha, Krishna and Gopis** in the previous yugas mentioned in Bhagavat Puranas.
 - Then, Goswamis managed to inspire the **building of a number of large and ornate temples** here.
 - Eg. Radha Raman Temple at Vrindavan by Gopala Bhatta Goswami.
- **Social Dimension:**
 - *His advent marks shift in the focus of Bengali bhakti tradition from bhakti poetry to full-fledged reform movement with broad social base.*
 - **Disregarded all distinctions of caste, creed and sex** to give a popular base to Krishna-bhakti.
 - One of his most favourite disciples was Haridas who was a Muslim.
 - However, Chaitanya didn't give up Brahmanical norms altogether. He didn't question the authority of Brahmanas and scriptures. He sent six Brahmin Goswamis to Vrindavan, who gradually distanced themselves from Chaitanya's original teachings and popular movement.
 - Still, Chaitanya's movement had great impact on Bengali society. It promoted a sense of equality in Bengali life. His movement remained popular and the followers came from varied social backgrounds.
- His followers wrote in **Bengali**.
- ISCKON today belongs to this tradition.
- Assam: **Mahapurush Srimant Shankar Dev** (1449-1568)
 - Krishna bhakti of **dasya bhaav** was popularized in Assam by him. There is no focus on Radha.
 - His sect is called **ek-sharan-dharma** or **Mahapurushiya dharma**, which rejects Vedic and other rites and uses simplified form that requires just naam.
 - **Cultural dimension:**
 - He preached in **Assamese**.
 - He also wrote **Gunamala**, abridged version of Bhagavat Purana.
 - Started **Sattras** (monasteries) (like sangha) and **namghar** (prayer houses like chaitya). Later on, Sattras grew into full-fledged monasteries which continue to be important even today.
 - **Music:** His devotional compositions **Borgeets**. The collection of his compositions is called as **Kirtan-Ghosha** which are meant **for community singing**.
 - **Dance:** From here emerged **Sattriya dance** later.
 - **Theatre:** Native theatre associated is **Ankiya Naat**.



- Assamese silk weavers started to weave a drape called **Vrindavani Vastra** under the guidance of Shankardeva.
- **Social Dimension:**
 - The simple and accessible religion attracted already Hinduized as well as non-Hindu tribal populations into its egalitarian folds.
 - It was against caste system, and especially against animal sacrifices common in shakta forms.
- **He influenced two kingdoms:** Koch kingdom and Ahom kingdom.
 - He had to face persecution at the hands of orthodox Brahmanical priesthood in Ahom kingdom and took shelter in the territories of neighbouring Cooch-Bihar, where the king gave him freedom to preach bhakti.
- **Madhav Deva (1489-1596)**
 - He composed Namghosha.
 - He laid down the system of Sattras and established Barpeta Sattra himself.

Overall Contribution of Saguna Bhakti

- **Social radicalism**
 - Although it is true that saguna bhakti tried to compromise with varna system, nonetheless, it **tried to soften the blow/rigour of the caste system**.
 - Even in Saguna bhakti, we can underline the **element of protest against Brahmanic orthodoxy and elite norms**.
 - Maharashtra dharma reflected popular consciousness.
 - Krishna bhakti challenges existing social norms
- **In cultural field:** Saguna Bhakti became a major theme in contemporary literature, architecture, music, dance, drama, painting etc.
 - **Local dialects** - Hindi, Awadhi, Braj, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi
 - Encouraged temple cult – **Architecture**.
 - In one sense, Bhakti paved the path for the **development of classical music**.
 - **Sankritan** of Chaitanya, **Padas** of Meera, **Dhrupad** of Swami Haridas.
 - In south India too, **Purandaradasa**, **Shamashastri**, **Muthuswami, Tyagaraja**. There was Sufi-like intensity and both Hindus and Muslims all followed it.
 - **Paintings** – Bani Thani, Kangra, Nathdwara, Tanjore, Lepakshi
 - **Dance** – Ideal of Radha-Krishna in all classical dances. Birth of Sattariya dance and Manipuri out of Bhakti movement.
 - **Sculpture**