

**Prelims Master Program (2023-24) – Ancient, Medieval, Art and Culture**  
**Handout 27: Bhakti Movement (Part 2)**

*Bhakti in North India*

With the establishment of Turkish rule, a strong centralizing state was established in Delhi with a new political ideology after a long time, the old Sanskrit universe was partially replaced by Persianate elites and the role of trade/commerce/trade/craft in economy again became seminal. During this time, new religious ideas became popular in north India.

Here, the bhakti movement was **essentially a religious protest against prevailing socio-religious orthodoxy**. Emphasis on bhakti and religious equality were two common features of north Indian bhakti, like in the case of South India.

Bhakti during this period emerged in two forms:

Nirguna Nirakar	Saguna Sakar
Worship of God <b>without attributes, formless.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ultimate reality is formless Brahman. Thus, monotheist.</li> <li>He is Gunateet and Nirvachaniya who cannot be captured in limited words.</li> </ul>	Worship of God <b>with attributes, with forms.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nam, Rup, Guna: Idol worship</li> <li>Dedication to personal individual ishta devata.</li> <li>Reincarnation/Avatars of God to play some role on earth (leela).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Believes in Advaita philosophy of Adi Shankara.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Believes in Dvaita philosophy or other forms of Advaita like Shuddhadvaita.</li> </ul>
<b>Social reform</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Denial of caste divisions</li> <li>Denied temple cult, pilgrimage and ritualism.</li> <li>Humanist egalitarianism</li> <li>Anti-communalism</li> </ul>	<b>Social reform</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relatively less radical, some adjustment with caste system.</li> <li>Accepted priesthood and temple cult.</li> </ul>
<b>Examples:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nathpanthi</li> <li>Kabir</li> <li>Nanak</li> </ul>	<b>Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shakti</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Within Vaishnavism: Rama bhakti, Krishna bhakti and Vithoba bhakti</li> <li>Within Shaivism: Lingayata, Shaiva Siddhanta, Kashmiri Shaivism etc.</li> </ul>

## Nirguna Bhakti (North India)

- **Bhagat Pipa (b 1425) (Rajasthan)**

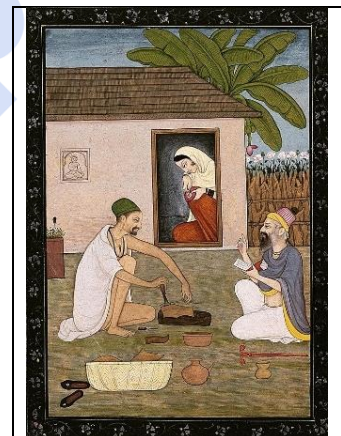
- A Rajput king of Gagaraun garh, abdicated the throne to become a mystic poet and saint.
- Became disciple of Ramananda.
- His hymns are included in the Guru Granth Sahib.

- **Bhagat Dhanna Jat (Haryana)**

- Mystic poet whose three hymns are present in Adi Granth.
- Jat community was getting socially upwardly mobile due to agriculture at that time. Dhanna Jat represents the movement.

- **Dadu Dayal (b. 1544) (Gujarat)**

- A saint-poet and a religious reformer who spoke against formalism and priestcraft.
- Called as Rajasthan ka Kabir.
  - Both Dadu and Kabir were **nirguni** saints. Both believed that devotion to God should transcend religious or sectarian affiliation, and that devotees should become non-sectarian (Nipakh).
  - Both focussed on communal harmony between Hindu-Muslim.
  - Doha's of both are popular. Dadu alludes to spontaneous (**sahaja**) bliss in his songs. Much of the imagery used is similar to that used by Kabir.
- His compositions are compiled in Braj bhasha book called **Dadu Anubhav Vani**.
  - Some of his compositions are in Dhundhadi language.
- In 1585, Dadu met Akbar in Fatehpur Sikri.
- Two of his disciples are famous:
  - **Rajjab**: He lived his entire life in dulhe-ka-vesh and kept on spreading Dadu's thoughts.
  - **Sant Kavi Sundarads**: known for his contributions to Hindi language poetry.



Ravidas as a shoemaker.  
(First generation after Manaku and Nainsukh of Guler, c. 1800–1810)

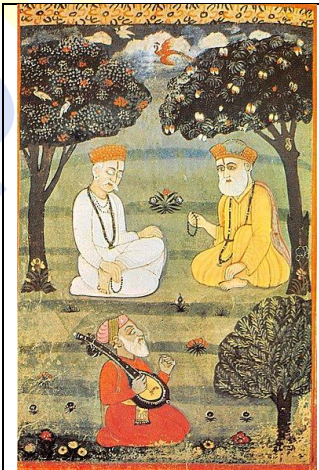
- **Ravidas**

- Mystic poet-saint and social reformer of the bhakti movement.
- He was a disciple of Ramanand as per Bhaktmal. Young contemporary of Kabir.
- **Religious Message:**
  - Discusses **Nirguna-Saguna themes**, as well as **Nathpanthi** philosophy.
  - **Sahaj bhakti**, a mystical state where there is a union of the truths of the many and the one.
- **Social Message:**

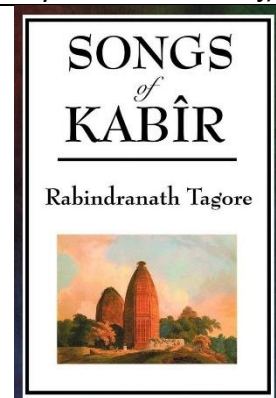
- Taught removal of **social divisions of caste and gender**.
- He promoted **unity** in the pursuit of personal spiritual freedoms.
- Strong anti-Brahmanical and anti-communal themes.
- The devotional songs of Ravidas made a lasting impact upon the bhakti movement.
  - 41 songs were included in **Guru Granth Sahib** of Sikhs.
  - **Panch Vani** text of Dadupanthis also includes numerous poems of Ravidas.

### Kabir (1398-1518):

- Most powerful monotheist saint.
- He was a common weaver (**julaha**) from **Benaras** and a **disciple of Ramanand**.
- **Religious teachings:**
  - Rejection of formal worship, idolatry and scriptural knowledge.
  - He believed in **personal experiences** to discover spiritual knowledge.
  - His philosophy was trying to seek absolute, very much like **Nirguna Brahma of Adi Shankara**.
- **Social teachings:**
  - Social equality, universal brotherhood, peaceful coexistence, religious toleration. For Sikhs he is a precursor to Nanak. Muslims place him in Sufi lineages, and for Hindus he becomes a Nirguni saint.
  - For Kabir, the divine (brahman) and truth (satya) are present in all living beings (jiv). Hence, we must transcend the binary of “me” and “you” and regard all as a living being like ourself. We must **destroy our egotism**, caste arrogance, caste ranks, discrimination of high and low. We must be each other’s habitations. This standpoint leads to condemnation of Brahmanical caste discrimination and of conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. In the Kabir tradition, love (prema) and mercy (daya) should animate our relations with social others.
  - He believed in simple living as a householder and rejected severe ascetism.
  - He accepted disciples from all backgrounds.
- **Poetry:**
  - He preached in the local **Awadhi, Braj, Bhojpuri** dialects. He made a great contribution to the growth of literature through his **Dohas**.
  - His dohas are sometimes called **Shabad** (word) or **Sakhi** (witness).
  - They were later compiled into a book called **Bijak**.



Nanak, Mardana and Kabir (1773 painting, by Alam Chand Raj)

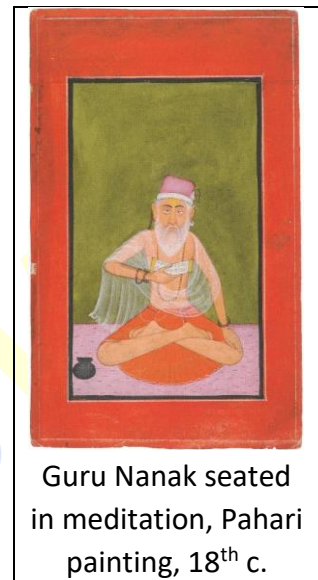


Collected by  
Kshitimohan Sen,  
translated by  
Rabindranath Tagore in  
English

- Kabir was also a great satirist to **expose** the ridiculousness of some rituals and orthodox people through satire and wit. He employed a new literary device called **ulatbansi** (upside-down) to express his views.
- Some of his verses were included in **Adi Granth**.
- **Kabir Panth**
  - Kabir did not find any distinct sect in his own lifetime but two of his disciples later found maths.
  - Kabir Chaura (Banaras) by Surat Gopal
  - Dham Khera (Chhattisgarh) by Dharamdas

### Guru Nanak (1469-1539):

- **First Guru of Sikhs.** His birthday is celebrated as **Prakash Guru Purab** on Kartik Purnima.
  - **Birthplace:** Talvandi (Nankana Sahib), today's Pakistan
  - **Died:** Kartarpur, today's Pakistan
  - He lived in **Punjab** during 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c., when it was **exposed to continuous wars and invasions** leading to social and economic dislocations. He introduced his **version of Nirguna bhakti** to respond to the problems. Stories of his extensive travels are found in **sakhis** and **udasis**.
- **Religious Teachings:**
  - Monotheism (Ik Omkar)
  - Rejection of idol worship and priestly intermediation.
  - Three practices: Naam jap (recite), Kirat karo (work honestly), Vand Chakko (share)
- **Social Teachings:**
  - Selfless service
  - Universal brotherhood, Hindu-Muslim unity, Religious and social equality
  - Maintaining a balance between spiritual and worldly life
  - Utmost respect towards women. He spoke against Sati as well.
- Whereas the other radical thinkers only criticized the existing system, Nanak **provided positive and practical alternative**, with definite socio-religious program:
  - He regulated the community life of his followers.
  - In order to strengthen the feelings of unity and equality, Guru Nanak introduced the practice of **sangat** (congregation of all) and **pangat** (communal dining for all) which presented new social order based on **liberal values**.
  - Finally, his teachings founded a new religion that helped unite the robust peasantry of Punjab.
- **Political Teachings:**
  - Nanak's drew a large number of **religious metaphors** from political life (e.g. **God = sachu padshah**).



- **Kingship:** God himself elevated some people to rule and made other beggars. Kingship was not evil, but he reminded the **rulers to be just and work for people.**
- He **blamed Sultan for not protecting his subjects in the battle of Panipat with Babur.**
- He condemned the oppression of tyrannical rulers and **called their cruel, and greedy officials butchers.**
- He made a great contribution to the **growth of Punjabi language.**
  - **Nathpanthi influence:** terms like **Shabad, Shunya**
  - Singing devotional songs with assistant playing Rabab
  - Anecdotes about his life are collected in **janam-sakhis.**
- His followers referred to themselves as **Sikhs.**

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### *Common Characteristics and Contribution of Nirgun Bhakti*

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- **Religious Ideas:**
  - **Nirgun Bhakti:** They uncompromisingly believed **in only one God.**
    - God of Nanak was non-incarnate and formless (nirankar), eternal (akal) and ineffable (alakh).
  - There was only one way of establishing communion with God: it was the way of **personally experienced bhakti.**
    - Monotheists also emphasized the crucial importance of **repetition of divine name, spiritual guru, community kirtan** and companionship of saints (**satsang**).
  - The monotheistic saints **travelled widely** to propagate their beliefs.
  - **Synthesis of three traditions:** All the monotheists were influenced in varying degrees by the **Vaishnava** concept of bhakti, the **Nathpanthi** movement and **sufism.**
- **Social Ideas:**
  - Most of the monotheists **belonged to the 'low' castes.** They **promoted social radicalism** – attacked caste system and ritual orthodoxy.
  - Their path was **independent of both Hinduism and Islam.**
    - They didn't try to create a new religion – **harmonizer of both and yet critical of both** Hinduism and Islam.
    - They denied their allegiance to either of them and criticized the superstitions and orthodox elements of both the religions.
    - They attacked idolatry, rejected the authority of the Brahmins and Maulavis and their religious scriptures.
  - Most of the monotheistic saints were not ascetics. They led **worldly life** and were married.
- **Literature and Music**



- They composed their poems in **popular languages**.
  - Not only reflected the emotions of common people but also used the **language of common people** - Hindawi, Awadhi, Punjabi, Braj etc.
  - Some of them used a language which was a **mixture of different dialects** spoken in various parts of North India.
  - They preferred **common language over their own native dialects** because they considered it fit for the propagation of ideas among the masses.
  - The monotheists also made use of **popular symbols and images** to propagate their teachings.
  - Their utterances are expressed in **short verses** which could be easily remembered.
  - Support to **local literature** too – Saqi, Ramani, Doha, Bijak
- **Development of music** – Guru Nanak and Rabab. Even today Raagis in Gurudwaras.
- **Three more points:**
  - **Ideological Affinity:** The saints were aware that there existed a unity of ideas among themselves.
  - **The popularity** of the monotheists broke territorial barriers.
    - A 17<sup>th</sup> c Persian work on comparative religion **Dabistan-i Mazahih** testifies to the continuing popularity of Kabir among the people of North India.
  - **Sect formation**
    - Despite the widespread popularity, the followers of each one of the major figures in the monotheistic movement like Kabir, Raidas and Nanak gradually organized themselves into exclusive sectarian orders called panths such as Kabir panth, Dadu panth, Nanak panth, etc.

## Saguna Bhakti (North India)

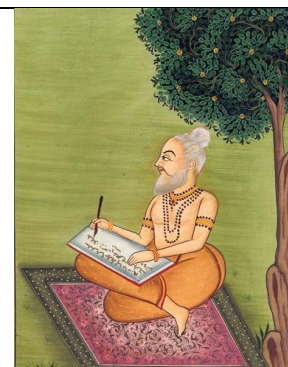
Rama bhakti	Krishna bhakti
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Popular story of Rama.</li> <li>Righteousness was emphasized. It is all about <b>Maryada Purushottam, upholder of dharma</b>. Rama had within him all the desirable virtues that any individual would seek to aspire, and he fulfils all his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

## Rama Bhakti

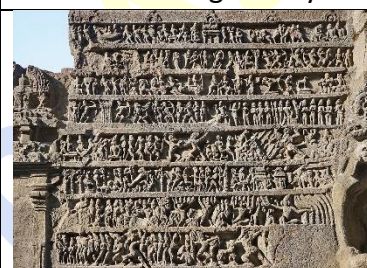
The primary source of the life of Rama is the Sanskrit epic **Ramayana** composed by **Valmiki**. The oldest part of Ramayana composition may belong to 8<sup>th</sup> c BCE, but its narrative kept on enlarging and extending upto Gupta era.

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.
- **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**.



Valmiki writing Ramayana



Ramayana carved relief in Kailas cave at Ellora, 8<sup>th</sup> c CE

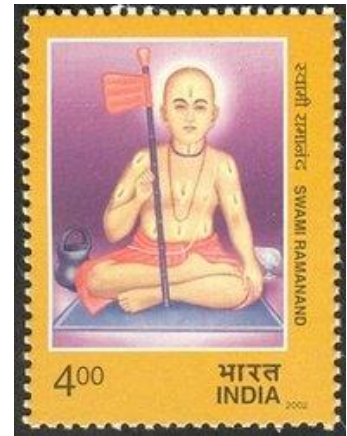
Apart from Sanskrit, with the beginning of Bhakti movement, there was a translation and transformation of Ramayana in many other traditions and various regional vernaculars. In **Buddhism**, there is **Dasharatha Jataka** and the **Jain** version of Ramayana is known as **Paumachariya**, written by Vimalasuri. Following are some of the important Ramayanas in **regional languages/dialects**:

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
	Ramcharitamanas	Goswami Tulsidas	Hindi
	Ramayana of Akbar		Persian
1600-1700	Tulsi Krita Ramayana	Premananda Swami	Gujarati
	Pothi Ramayan		Urdu



**Ramanand (14<sup>th</sup> 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):** (He was contemporary to Akbar).

- Composed **Ramcharitmanas** in **Awadhi**.
  - Tulsidas was inspired by **Adhyatma Ramayana**.
  - It 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.
  - His idealist characterization of Rama emerged the symbol of Indian unity, integrity and self-respect.
- Other compositions: **Kavitavali**, **Vinay Patrika**
- His verses are called **dohas** and **chaupayis**.
- He started the **Ramlila plays**, a folk-theatre adaption of the Ramacharitmanas, during Dussehra.
  - It brings the whole population together, without distinction of caste, religion or age, in various activities and performances.
  - It was inscribed in **UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritages of Humanity**.



Stylized painting of Tulsidas by Dinanath Dalal



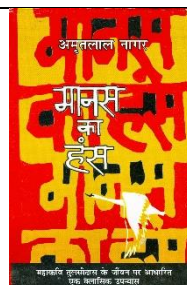
Tulsi Manas Mandir, Varanasi, 1964

- Quotes:
  - *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.

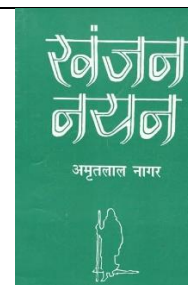
### Nabhadas (17<sup>th</sup> c):

- Composed **Bhaktamal** (Braj language) which mentions about 200 Ram bhakts.

**Amritlal Nagar** (1916-1990) wrote two biographies of great contemporary saints. Tulasidas 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*

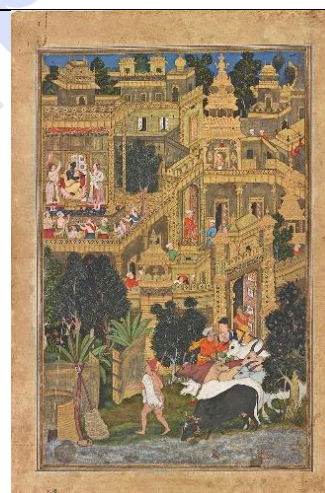
### Important Sources:

#### (1) Harivamsha (post-Mauryan era)

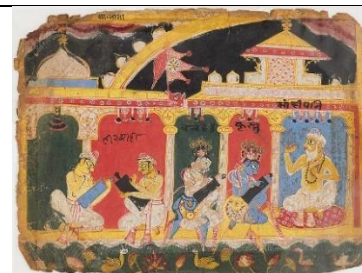
- Added as an **appendix to Mahabharata** in the post-Mauryan era.
- An important source for information on Krishna. It deals with the ancestry and exploits of Krishna, who was by now wholly deified and identified with Lord Vishnu.

#### (2) Bhagavata Purana (9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> c)

- It promotes Krishna-bhakti, integrating themes from the Advaita and Dvaita both.
- It celebrates Vishnu in his many avatars, but it is particularly evocative in its **celebration of Krishna avatara** and the playful story of his youth. It is a **source of many popular stories of Krishna's childhood and of legends.**
- Its influence on Indian religion, art, and literature** has been monumental.
  - It was adapted in many Indian **languages**. It partly inspired Jaideva's Geet Govinda. Moreover, it played a significant role in Chaitanya's Krishna-bhakti, Ekasharana Dharma, Eknath's bhakti as well Telugu language.



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



Krishna and Balaram in  
Sandipani Ashram,  
Bhagavata Purana, 1525

- 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.

### (3) Jayadeva's Geeta Govinda (Sanskrit, 12<sup>th</sup> c)

- 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 lover and constant companion, not as the wife, of Krishna.
- It became popular among people due to imagery which focused on aspects of **erotic and ecstatic love between Radha-Krishna**. It represents attraction, yearning, estrangement, viraha, upeksha, and final reconciliation, all happening in Vasant Ritu. Thus, it is a Shringara Kavya.
- It goes above and beyond carnal love and enters in spiritual domain and thus became immensely popular in medieval times.
  - As per the **orders of Gajapati ruler Prataprudra Deva** (1497-1540), only Geeta Govinda was to be sung and danced in Jagannatha Temple (**by Maharjis**), the tradition which continues till date.



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

#### Cultural Influence of Geeta Govinda:

- **Performing Arts:**
  - **Ashtapadis** and **Ashta Nayikas** of Geetagevinda are represented in **classical dances**. It is a must on repertoire of all **Indian classical dance traditions**.
  - Gwalior gharana of **Hindustani music** highly adores Ashtapadis.
  - There is a riwaz of singing ashtapadis in **Haveli sangeet**.
- 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**, Rasamanjari by Shankara Mishra, and Rasa-pari-lupta by Vitthalnath of Pushtimarga.
  - It has **deep impact on bhakti poetry** of Vidyapati, Chandidas, Kumbhandas, Nandadas, and Surdas.
- Popular theme for **Pahari and Rajasthani paintings** in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.



## Krishna Bhakti in West and North

- Gujarat – **Narsinh Mehta** (early 15<sup>th</sup> c)
  - He is considered as the **Adi Kavi** of Gujarati language.
  - He popularized bhakti through devotional song like *Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye*.
  - Focus of his bhakti is **Sakhya bhav**.
- Rajasthan – **Mirabai** (b 1498)



- She was 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.
- However, 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 Vrindavan**.



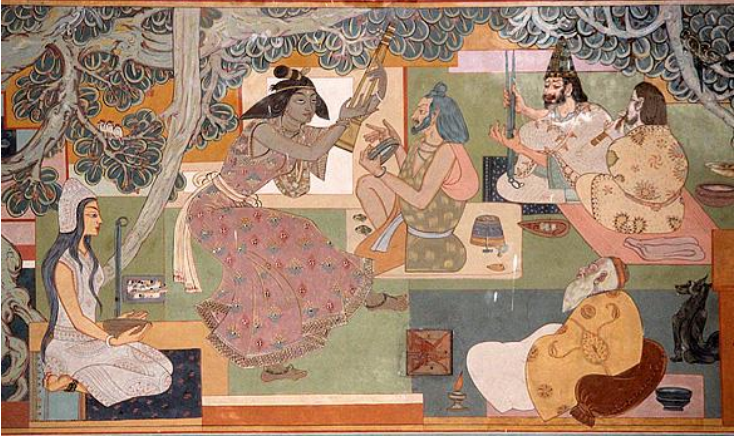

Kumbha Shyam Mandir (Meera Mandir), Chittorgarh

**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 her poetry (pada-s) in **Brajhasha, interspersed with Rajasthani**. Around 1000-1200 padas of Meera are available now. Around 500 more are attributed to her.

### Nandal Bose' paintings in Vadodara Palace depict the life of bhakti saint Mirabai

	<p>Mira is seen in full Marwari dress, deep in meditation. In the second frame she gazes beyond a lake, her mind elsewhere.</p>
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	<p>Mira is leaving her home, with an ektari in her hand, in the company of other devotees.</p>
	<p>Mira at the Dwarkadheesh Temple where according to legend she dissolved and merged with the idol of Krishna inside.</p>

• UP – Surdas (16<sup>th</sup> 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.





### Krishna Bhakti in East

Apart from the influence of Jayadeva's Geet Govindam and Bhagvata Purana tradition, additionally, there was also lingering influence of Sahajiya Buddhism + Nath panthi tradition in Eastern India. Bhakti tradition here therefore was influenced by these various streams.

#### Initial Bhakti saint-poets:

- 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 medieval **Bengali** saint, writing poems on Krishna-Radha love.

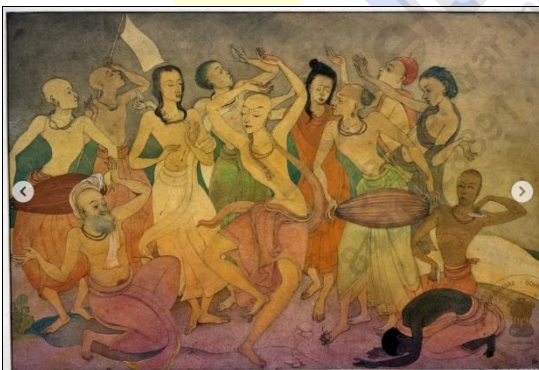
#### Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486 – 1534):

- Founder of **Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Bengal**
- Most important source: **Bhagavat Purana**
- **Bhakti Dimension:**
  - He transformed Krishna bhakti into a major popular movement and popularized the mantra of **Hare Krishna Mantra**.
  - In this tradition, a devotee **emotionally identifies himself with Radha** and then experiences 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**. (neither identity, nor difference because nothing conclusive). 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.



Sri Chaitanya and Nitai (Nityananda)  
performing Kirtan.

- **Bhedabhed:** because bhed exists, but whenever Ishvara chooses to focus completely and directly, it becomes abhed.
- **Achintya:** How exactly it happens is inconceivable, cannot be thought about. Thus, the exact nature of this relationship (being simultaneously one and different with Krishna) is inconceivable to the human mind. It can be experienced through the process of Bhakti yoga.
- **Six Gosvamis of Vrindavan** (E.g. 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.*
  - **He 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. The six Brahmin Goswamis gradually distanced themselves from the popular movement and the original teachings.
  - 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.



Kirtan

Artist: Kshitindranath Majumdar

Bengal School of Art, 20th century

### Emergence of Vrindavan and Mughal-Rajput nexus

It is under the Mughals though, that Bhakti tradition really begins to thrive. It is argued that the political alliances that Mughal Emperor Akbar formed with the Rajputs went a long way in allowing Bhakti institutions and literature to flourish in early modern north India.

The Kachwahas of Amer, who were followers of the Ramanandi Bhakti community, served in the Mughal court of Akbar and were influential in shaping imperial policies and practices of rule. In 1526, for instance, Akbar made a land grant to the officiating priest of the Govindadev temple in Vrindavan. By 1580, the Mughals had awarded jagir grants to at least seven temples in the Braj region.

It is due to the patronage extended by the Mughal-Kachawaha nexus that Vrindavan emerged as one of the most important Bhakti religious centre of the period.

### **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.

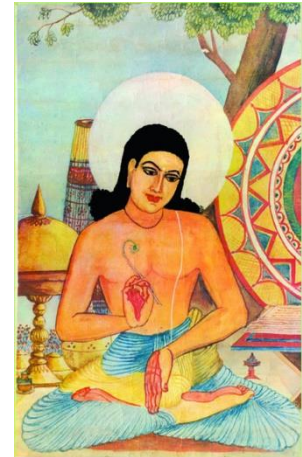
- **Raskhan** or Syed Ibrahim Khan was a 16th century Sufi Muslim poet born either in Amroha or Hardoi in Uttar Pradesh. He became a follower of Krishna and spent his life in Vrindavan.
- **Taj Bibi**, also known as the '**Mughal Mirabai**', was the daughter of a Muslim nobleman, appointed by the Mughals 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 Uttar Pradesh Government focused on creating Krishna Janmabhoomi as a major pilgrim tourist destination in the State, the redevelopment of these burial sites has been prioritised. A 14-acre complex has been developed around the two hitherto neglected tombs.

Assam: Mahapurush Srimant Shankar Dev (1449-1568)

- Krishna bhakti of **dasya bhaav** was popularized in Assam by Shankar Deva. In it, there is not much 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) 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 **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:**
  - This 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 Sattrah himself.



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## Contribution of Saguna Bhakti

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- **Social Radicalism:**
  - Although it is true that Saguna bhakti tried to compromise with varna system, nonetheless, it also **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 challenged existing social norms during the medieval era.
- **In Cultural Field:** Saguna Bhakti became a major theme in contemporary literature, architecture, music, dance, drama, painting etc.
  - **Local dialects and languages:** Hindi, Awadhi, Braj, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Odiya.
  - **Literature:** Various formats of poetry
  - **Architecture:** Bhakti movement encouraged temple cult.
  - In one sense, Bhakti paved the path for the **development of dharma-sangeet based classical music**.
    - **Sankritan** of Chaitanya, **Padas** of Meera, **Dhrupad** of Swami Haridas, **Haveli Sangeet** among Vallabha followers.
    - In south India too, **Purandaradasa**, **Shamashastri**, **Muthuswami**, **Tyagaraja** were all followers of Haridasi tradition.
    - There was a 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 the classical dances.
    - Birth of **Sattariya** dance and **Manipuri** out of Bhakti movement.
    - Support to various temple dance traditions in South India.
  - **Sculpture**