

Chapter – 6: Devotional Paths to the Divine

- People – perform rituals – worship, singing *bhajans*, *kirtans* and *qawwalis*
- Intense devotion of god – various bhakti and Sufi movements – developed since 8th century

The Idea of a Supreme God

- Before large kingdoms – different people – worshipped their own gods and goddesses
- People – came together – growth of towns, trade, empires – new ideas developed
- Idea – all living things – countless cycles of birth and death – good and bad deeds (works) – accepted widely
- Idea – all humans – not equal – even by birth – developed in this period
- Subjects of many texts – belief – social privileges come from birth
- Many people – didn't like these ideas – followed the teachings of Buddha or Jainas – believed – cycle of rebirth – can be broken through efforts
- Some believed – idea – Supreme God – remove humans from this cycle – approach with devotion (bhakti)
- This idea – advised in the *Bhagavad-Gita* – grew popular – early centuries of common era
- Shiva, Vishnu, Durga – supreme gods – worshipped – detailed rituals
- Different god and goddesses – worshipped in different areas – identified as Shiva, Vishnu, Durga
- Local myths, legends – became part of Puranic stories – methods of worship from Puranas – introduced into the local religion
- This idea of Bhakti – became popular – accepted by Buddhists and Jainas

A New Kind of Bhakti in South India – Nayanars and Alvars

- **7th-9th century** – new religions developed – Nayanars (worship Shiva) and Alvars (worship Vishnu) – from all castes – including Pulaiyar, Panars – considered 'untouchables'
- These people were against Buddhists and Jainas – taught the worship of Shiva or Vishnu – path to salvation (freedom)
- Took the ideals (examples) of love and heroism – Sangam literature – mixed them with values of Bhakti
- Travelled – place to place – created music – praise of deities (gods)
- **10th-12th century** – Chola and Pandya kings – built huge temples – strengthens the link between bhakti tradition and temple worship
- This period – poems composed (created) – hagiographies (writing of saints' lives), religious biographies of Alvars and Nayanars – composed
- Today – these texts – sources for histories – bhakti tradition

Philosophy and Bhakti

- 8th century – Shankara – most imp. philosopher
- He believed in Advaita – belief in oneness of individual soul and Supreme God – Ultimate Reality
- He taught – Brahman – only or Ultimate Reality – formless
- World around us – illusion or *maya*

- He also taught – rejection of world – adoption of path of knowledge – understand true nature of Brahman – attain salvation (freedom)
- 11th Century – Ramanuja – born in Tamil Nadu – influenced by Alvars
- He believed – best way – attain salvation – intense devotion (worship) of Vishnu
- Vishnu – helps the devotee (bhakt) – unite with HIM
- He believed in Vishishtadvaita – belief in qualified oneness – individual soul – remained unique – even after uniting with Supreme God
- This belief – inspired lots of people – specially in North India

Basavanna's Virashaivism

- Connection between Tamil bhakti movements and Temple worship – led to Virashaiva movement – started by Basavanna and his companions – Allama Prabhu and Akkamahadevi
- Mid-12th century – started in Karnataka
- Virashaivas – believed in equality of all humans – not believed in Brahmanical ideas of caste
- Against all forms of rituals and idol worship

Bhakti Movement in the Deccan

- 13th-17th century – Maharashtra – lots of saint-poets – songs in simple Marathi – inspire people
- Most imp. – Dnyaneshwar (Gyaneshwar), Namdev, Eknath, Tukaram – women – Sakhubai, family of Chokhamela – belonged to 'untouchable' Mahar caste
- This regional bhakti – focused on Vitthala (form of Vishnu) Temple in Pandharpur
- Also believed – personal God – resides in the heart of people
- These saint-poets – rejected – all forms of ritualism, social differences by birth, etc
- Even rejected – idea – renunciation (rebirth) – preferred – live with families – serve other humans
- New idea developed – bhakti is sharing others' pain
- Famous Gujarati saint – Narsi Mehta said – Vaishnavas – understand pain of others

Nathpanthis, Siddhas and Yogis

- Many religious groups – developed in this period – criticized – rituals, traditional (older ways) religion – Nathpanthis, Siddhacharas, Yogis
- They believed in renunciation – also believed – path to salvation – meditation of Ultimate reality and oneness
- Achieve this – intense training of mind and body – *yogasanas*, breathing exercise, meditation
- Really popular among – 'low' castes
- Criticism of traditional religion – started devotional religion

Islam and Sufism

- Sants – too much common with Sufis – people believed – they adopted ideas of each other
- Sufis – Muslim mystics – people who claim to attain extra knowledge than other humans
- Rejected – traditional religious beliefs – accepted – love and devotion to God – AND – compassion for all humans

- Islam – believed in – monotheism – follow 1 God
- 8th-9th centuries – religious scholars developed – different idea – Holy Law (Shariat) and study of Islam
- Islam – became more complex – Sufis – added another way – more personal devotion to God
- Sufis – rejected – rituals and other rules – suggested by Muslim scholars
- United with God – as a lover – ignores the world
- Like saint-poets – Sufis – composed poems – express their feelings
- Great Sufis – Central Asia – Ghazzali, Rumi, Sadi
- Like Nathpanthis – Sufis believed – heart can be trained – look at the world – different way
- Developed – detailed training methods – *zikr* (chanting), *sama* (singing), *raqs* (dancing), breath control, etc – guidance of *pir* (master)
- This developed *silsilas* – spiritual lineage of Sufi teachers – each developed – different methods of teaching (*tariqa*)
- 11th century – lots of Sufis from Central Asia – settled in Hindustan
- Delhi Sultanate – several major Sufi centres – developed
- Chishti *silsila* – most imp. groups – lots of teachers –
 - Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti – Ajmer
 - Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki – Delhi
 - Baba Farid – Punjab
 - Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya – Delhi
 - Bandanawaz Gisudaraz - Gulbarga
- Sufi masters – meeting – in *khanqahs* (hospices) – place of rest for travelers – maintained by religious groups
- All the devotees – came to these places – discussed spiritual problems, took blessings of saints, attended music and dancing sessions
- People believed – Sufi masters had powers – their tombs (*dargah*) – place of pilgrimage (religious place)

New Religious Developments in North India

- After 13th century – North India – new religious developments
- This period – Islam, Brahmanical Hinduism, Sufism, Nathpanths, Siddhas, Yogis – affected each other
- New kingdoms developed – people – started new professions, found new roles
- These people – listened to new saints – spread their ideas
- Some saints – Kabir, Baba Guru Nanak – rejected all older religions
- Other saints – Tulsidas, Surdas – accepted current beliefs – BUT – made them accessible to all
- Tulsidas – accepted God in the form of Rama – his composition – *Ramacharitmanas* – written in Awadhi – imp. – expression of devotion and literary work
- Surdas – devotee of Krishna – his compositions – *Sursagara*, *Surasaravali* and *Sahitya Lahari* – express his devotion
- Shankaradeva, Assam – late 15th century – devotion of Vishnu – composed poems in Assamese
- Started setting up *namghars* – places of worship
- Also included – Dadu Dayal, Ravidas, Mirabai
- Mirabai – Rajput princess – married to Mewar family – 16th century

- Mirabai – became student of Ravidas – saint from ‘untouchable’ caste
- Mirabai – devotee of Krishna – composed many *bhajans* – express her devotion
- Her songs – openly challenged – ‘upper’ castes – became popular in Rajasthan and Gujarat
- Unique feature – most saints – works composed in regional language – could be sung
- These works – became popular – transferred generation to generation
- Poorest communities, women – spread these songs – adding their own experience
- Songs – as of today – composition of saints and generations of people – spread them

A Closer Look – Kabir

- Kabir – 15th-16th century – one of the most powerful saints
- Brought up in Muslim family – *julahas* (weavers) – near the city of Banaras (Varanasi)
- Very little information about his life – BUT – his ideas – collection of verses (poems) – *sakhis* and *pads* – composed by him – sung by *bhajan* singers
- Some of these – collected in *Guru Granth Sahib*, *Panch Vani* and *Bijak*
- Kabir’s teachings – based on complete rejection of all religious traditions – including all forms of worship – Brahmanical Hinduism and Islam – priestly classes and caste system
- Language of poetry – ordinary Hindi – understood by everyone – sometimes used cryptic language
- Kabir believed – formless Supreme God – taught – path to salvation (freedom) – bhakti or devotion
- His followers – both Hindus and Muslims

A Closer Look – Baba Guru Nanak

- Baba Guru Nanak (1469-1539) – born in Talwandi (Nankana Sahib, Pakistan) – travelled widely – then established a centre - Kartarpur (Dera Baba Nanak, near river Ravi)
- Regular worship – singing of his own songs
- All followers – irrespective of creed, caste, gender – ate together in common kitchen (*langar*)
- Sacred space – created by Baba Guru Nanak – *dharmsala* – now known as Gurdwara
- Just before death in 1539 – Baba Guru Nanak – appointed Lehna as his successor – later known as Guru Angad
- Guru Angad – compiled compositions of Baba Guru Nanak – added some of his own in Gurumukhi (new script)
- 3 successors of Guru Angad – wrote under the name ‘Nanak’ – all their composition – compiled by Guru Arjan – 1604
- Writings of Shaikh Farid, Sant Kabir, Bhagat Namdev, Guru Tegh Bahadur – added to this compilation
- 1706 – compilation – authenticated by Guru Tegh Bahadur’s son and successor – Guru Gobind Singh
- Now known as – *Guru Granth Sahib* – holy text of the Sikhs
- 16th century – Baba Guru Nanak’s followers increased – belong to different castes – BUT – traders, farmers, artists – more numbers
- Baba Guru Nanak insisted – all followers – adopt productive and useful occupation – expected to contribute – general funds of the community
- Beginning – 17th century – town of Ramdasapur (Amritsar) developed around central Gurdwara – Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple)
- Modern historians – refer to this community as state within the state

- Mughal emperor – Jahangir – saw them as threat – ordered execution of Guru Arjan – 1606
- Sikh community – started politicizing (taking part in politics) – 17th century
- This development – finalized by Guru Gobind Singh – 1699
- Community of Sikhs – *Khalsa Panth* – became a political entity
- Changing situations – 16th-17th century – influenced Sikh religion
- Ideas of Baba Guru Nanak – huge impact on the life of people
- He believed – helping others – main devotion to the God
- Used terms – *nam* (right worship), *dan* (welfare of goods) and *isnan* (purity) – his teachings
- History of followers of Baba Guru Nanak – different from followers of previous religious figures – teaching were similar to Baba Guru Nanak