

UPSC Civil Services Examination

UPSC Notes [GS-I]

Topic: Bhakti Movement - Origin, Saints, Timeline [Medieval Indian History Notes For UPSC]

Bhakti Movement

Bhakti Movement (c. 8th to 18th Century)



Spread of Islam in India directly resulted in the Medieval Bhakti Movement. The Bhakti Movement in Medieval India is of diverse way.

The thinking of Bhakti Reformers' thinking like that of Kabir, Nana and Ramananda were shaped by the preaching of Sufi teachers.

Sufism

Sufism was a liberal reform movement within Islam. It spread into India in the 11th century but had origin in Persia.

- Shaikh Ismail
 - Shaikh Ismail of Lahore was the first Sufi Saint who started preaching his ideas.
- Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti
- He was one of the most famous Sufi Saints who settled in Ajmer which became the centre of his activities.
- He had a number of disciples who are called Sufis of the Chishti Order.
- Bahauddin Zakariya
 - He is another renowned Sufi Saint who was influenced by Shihabuddin Suhrawardi another famous mystic.
 - He founded the Sufis of the Suhrawardi Order.
- Nizamuddin Auliya
 - He belonged to the Chishti Order who is regarded to be a mighty spiritual force.

About Sufism

- Sufism highlighted the essentials of love and devotion as the effective means of the realization of God.
- Sufis believed service to humanity was equal to service to God. According to the Sufis, Love of God meant Love of Humanity.
- In Sufism, self-discipline is essential to gain knowledge of God with a sense of insight.

Read more about [Sufism](#) in the linked article.

Major differences between the Sufis and Orthodox Muslims:

Sufis	Orthodox Muslims
The Sufis highlight on inner purity.	the Orthodox Muslims stress on external conduct
They consider love and devotion as the only means of attaining salvation.	They believed in blind observance of rituals.

Sufism also taught a spirit of tolerance among its followers.

Ideas of Sufism

- Sufism emphasized on good actions, meditation, performance of prayers and pilgrimages, repentance for sins, fasting, charity and suppression of passions by austere practices.

- The liberal and unorthodox features of Sufism had a profound influence on Medieval Bhakti Saints.

MAJOR TEACHERS OF THE CHISHTI SILSILA

SUFI TEACHERS	YEAR OF DEATH	LOCATION OF DARGAH
Shaikh Muinuddin Sijzi	1235	Ajmer (Rajasthan)
Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki	1235	Delhi
Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i Shakar	1265	Ajodhan (Pakistan)
Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya	1325	Delhi
Shaikh Nasiruddin Chiragh-i Dehli	1356	Delhi

Bhakti Movement in South

The Bhakti Movement originated in the seventh-century in Tamil, South India (now parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala), and spread northwards. It swept over east and north India from the 15th century onwards, reached its peak between the 15th and 17th century CE.

The Alvars and Nayanars of Tamil Nadu

- The Alvars and Nayanars led some of the earliest bhakti movements (c. sixth century).
- Alvars – those who are “immersed” in devotion to Vishnu
- Nayanars – leaders who were devotees of Shiva
- They travelled from place to place singing hymns in Tamil praising their gods.
- The Alvars and Nayanars initiated a movement of protest against the caste system and the dominance of Brahmanas or at least attempted to reform the system. This is supported by the fact that bhaktas or disciples hailed from diverse social backgrounds ranging from Brahmanas to artisans and cultivators and even from castes considered “untouchable”
- The Nalayira Divyaprabandham (“Four Thousand Sacred Compositions”) – one of the major anthologies of compositions of the 12 Alvars compiled by the 10th Century
- It was frequently described as the Tamil Veda, thus claiming that the text was as significant as the four Vedas in Sanskrit that were cherished by the Brahmanas.
- From a composition of an Alvar named Tondaradippodi a Brahmana mentions Chaturvedins – Are strangers and without faithfulness to your service.
- Tevaram – a collection of compiled and classified in the 10th century on the basis of the music of the songs of Appar, Sambandar, and Sundarar.

Women Devotees

Andal

- A woman Alvar the compositions of Andal were widely sung (and continue to be sung to date).
- Andal saw herself as the beloved of Vishnu; her verses express her love for the deity.

Karaikkal Ammaiyar

- Another woman, Karaikkal Ammaiyar, a devotee of Shiva, adopted the path of extreme asceticism in order to attain her goal.

Sankara

- A Hindu revivalist movement giving a new placement to Hinduism was started by Sankara.
- Kaladi in Kerala is his birthplace.
- His doctrine of Monoism or Advaita was too abstract to appeal to the common people.
- The Advaita Concept of Nirgunabrahman (God without attributes) received contradictory reaction with the emergence of the idea of Sagunabrahman (God with attributes).

Ramanuja

- He was born at Sriperumbudur near modern Chennai.
- He preached Visishtadvaita in the 12th century.
- According to him, God is Sagunabrahman.
- He encouraged Prabattimarga or path of self-surrender to God.
- He invited the downtrodden to Vaishnavism.

Madhava

- Madhava is from Kannada region whose preaching prevailed in the 13th
- He spread Deviator dualism of Jivatma and Paramatma.
- His philosophy was that the world is not an illusion but a reality. God, soul, matter is unique in nature.

Nimbarka and Vallabhacharya

- **Nimbarka and Vallabhacharya** were also other preachers of Vaishnavite Bhakti in the Telangana region

Surdas

- He was the disciple of Vallabhacharya
- He popularized Krishna cult in the Northern part of India

Mirabai

- She was a great devotee of Krishna.
- She became popular in Rajasthan for her bhajans.

Tulsidas

- He was a worshipper of Rama.
- He composed the famous Ramcharitmanas, the Hindi version of Ramayana.

Ramananda

- He was born at Allahabad.
- Initially he was a follower of Ramanuja.
- Later he founded his own sect and preached his principles in Hindi at Banaras and Agra.
- Ramananda was the first to employ the vernacular medium to spread his ideas.
- He opposed the caste system and chose his disciples from all sections of society irrespective of caste.

Ramananda's disciples were:

- Kabir
- Raidasa, he was a cobbler
- Sena, he was a barber
- Sadhana
- Dhanna, he was from a Jat farmer

- Naraharai, he was a goldsmith
- Pipa, he was a Rajput prince

Kabir

- Kabir was the most famous disciple of Ramananda.
- He was brought up by a Muslim couple who were weavers by profession.
- He had a curious mind in learning new things and he learnt much about Hinduism in Benares.
- Kabir's aim was to reunite Hindus and Muslims and form harmony between them.
- He is regarded as the greatest of the mystic saints.
- His followers are called **Kabirpanthis**.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, Ramananda, Kabir and Nanak remained the great apostles of the Bhakti cult.

They aided the common people to shed age-old superstitions and attain salvation through Bhakti or pure devotion.

Criticized all forms of worship of idols.

Guru Nanak

- Guru Nanak was born in Talwandi near Lahore.
- He was a disciple of Kabir.
- He was founder of the Sikh Religion.
- He condemned caste difference and rituals like bathing in holy rivers.
- He established a centre at Kartarpur named Dera Baba Nanak on the river Ravi. His idea of religion was highly practical and strictly moral.
- His one of the famous sayings was "Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world".

Guru Angad

- **Guru Angad** also known as Lehna was appointed by Guru before his death.
- Guru Angad compiled the compositions of Guru Nanak in a new script known as Gurmukhi and added his own compositions as well.

Guru Arjan

- He was the 5th Guru.

- He compiled the writings of the three successors of Guru Angad who wrote under the name of "Nana".
- He was executed by Jehangir in 1604.

Guru Gobind Singh

- He was the 10th Guru.
- In 1706, he authenticated the compilation which was added with the writings of other figures like Shaikh Farid, Sant Kabir, Bhagat Namdev and Guru Tegh Bahadur, which is now known as Guru Granth Sahib.

The town of Ramdaspur (Amritsar) had developed around the central Gurdwara called Harmandar Sahib (Golden Temple) by the beginning of the 17th century. It was almost self-governing and also referred as 'a state within the state' community.

Chaitanya

- Chaitanya was another renowned saint and reformer of Bengal who popularised the Krishna cult.
- He believed that a devotee can feel the presence of God through song and dance and love and devotion.

Gnanadeva

- He was the founder of the Bhakti Movement in Maharashtra in the 13th
- It was called as Maharashtra dharma.
- He wrote Gnaneswari a commentary of Bhagavad Gita.

Namadeva

- In the 16th Century, Namadeva preached the gospel of love.
- He opposed idol worship and the dominance of priests.
- He criticized the Caste System.

Ekanatha

- He was a prominent Marathi Sant, a scholar and religious poet of the Varkari Sampradaya.
- He opposed caste differences and was kind towards the lower castes.

- He is known as a bridge between his predecessors Dnyaneshwar and Namdev and the later Tukaram and Ramdas.

Tukaram

- Tukaram was another Bhakti saint of Maharashtra and was a contemporary of Shivaji.
- Tukaram also referred to as Sant Tukaram, Bhakta Tukaram, Tukaram Maharaj, Tukoba and Tukobaraya.
- He was a 17th-century poet-saint of the Bhakti movement.
- Tukaram is best known for his Abhanga- devotional poetry and kirtans – community-oriented worship with spiritual songs.
- His poetry was devoted to Vitthala or Vithoba, an avatar of Hindu god Vishnu.
- Responsible for creating a background for Maratha nationalism.

Nathpanthis, Siddhas, and Yogis

- They condemned the ritual and other aspects of orthodox religion and the social order, using simple, logical arguments.
- They encouraged the renunciation of the world.
- To them, the path to salvation lay in meditation and to achieve this they advocated intense training of the mind and body through practices like yogasanas, breathing exercises and meditation.
- These groups became particularly popular among “low” castes.

Importance of the Bhakti Movement

- Bhakti movement provided a spur for the development of regional languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Kannada, etc.
- The lower classes rose to a position of great importance.
- The Bhakti movement gave equal importance to men and women which gave way to the importance of women in society.

TIMELINE

SOME MAJOR RELIGIOUS TEACHERS IN THE SUBCONTINENT

c. 500-800 CE	Appar, Sambandar, Sundaramurti in Tamil Nadu
c. 800-900	Nammalvar, Manikkavachakar, Andal, Tondaradippodi in Tamil Nadu
c.1000-1100	Al Hujwiri, Data Ganj Bakhsh in the Punjab; Ramanujacharya in Tamil Nadu
c.1100-1200	Basavanna in Karnataka
c.1200-1300	Jnanadeva, Muktabai in Maharashtra; Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in Rajasthan; Bahauddin Zakariyya and Fariduddin Ganj-i Shakar in the Punjab; Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki in Delhi
c.1300-1400	Lal Ded in Kashmir; Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sind; Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi; Ramananda in Uttar Pradesh; Chokhamela in Maharashtra; Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri in Bihar
c.1400-1500	Kabir, Raidas, Surdas in Uttar Pradesh; Baba Guru Nanak in the Punjab; Vallabhacharya in Gujarat; Abdullah Shattari in Gwalior; Muhammad Shah Alam in Gujarat; Mir Sayyid Muhammad Gesu Daraz in Gulbarga, Shankaradeva in Assam; Tukaram in Maharashtra
c.1500-1600	Sri Chaitanya in Bengal; Mirabai in Rajasthan; Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi, Malik Muhammad Jaisi, Tulsidas in Uttar Pradesh
c.1600-1700	Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi in Haryana; Miyan Mir in the Punjab

Note: These time frames indicate the approximate period during which these teachers lived.