

Medieval India (D) Composite Culture

The interaction of the Turks with the Indians, resulted in the development of a new composite culture, called the **Indo-Islamic culture**. This culture was neither purely Persian nor entirely Indian, but a fusion of the best elements of the two.

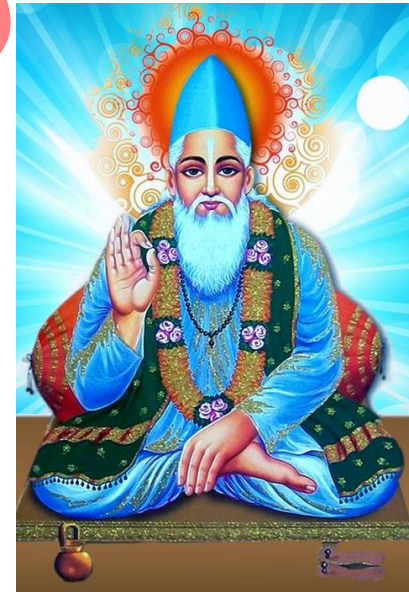
SOURCES

The main sources of information about the emergence of composite culture in India are the following:

1. Bijak: Bijak (the seed book) is the compilation of the verses of Kabir. Kabir was a disciple of the Bhakti saint Ramananda. He was said to have been born in about AD 1398, of a Brahmin widow, who abandoned the child near a tank in Benaras.

Kabir was an oral poet, whose works were down by others. The Bijak is preserved by the Kabirpanthis the followers of Kabir in Varanasi and elsewhere in Uttar Pradesh.

Bijak consist of 3 mains sections: Sakhi(Doha), Ramaini (Chaupai) and shabda(Song).



Kabir's Teachings According to Bijak:

- There is only one God. He may be worshipped under many names.
- Devotion to God and good actions are the only means of salvation.
- One must be free from dishonesty, insincerity and hypocrisy to Reach God.
- All men are equal before God.

2. Guru Granth Sahib: The fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev compiled Guru Nanak Dev's hymns along with those of his four successors and other religious preachers. Guru Teg Bahadur and a couplet of his own and this scripture was called the Guru Granth Sahib.



Guru Nanak's Teachings:

- Guru Nanak preached the unity of God and the unity of mankind.
- He advocated devotion to God in place of ritualism.
- He believed that "there is one God, His name is Eternal Truth, He is the maker of all things."
- He emphasised the importance of devotion to God, and the repetition of Satnam god's name which should combine with meditation.

3. Ajmer Sharief: Ajmer Sharief is the holy shrine of the sufi saint, Khwajah Moinuddin Chishti, located at Ajmer in Rajasthan. He came to India with Mahmud of Ghazni and made Ajmer his headquarters till his death in AD 1236. The dargah of Khwajah Moinuddin Chishti is one of the most revered sites in India.



4. St. Francis Church (Kochi): St. Francis Church, in Fort Kochi, originally built in 1503, is the oldest European church in India. The Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama died in Kochi in 1524 when he was on his third visit to India. His body was originally buried in this church.

St. Francis Assisi: Francis Assisi was an Italian Roman Catholic priest and preacher. He was born in 1182 to a prosperous silk merchant. He lived the life typical of a wealthy young man, even fighting as a soldier for Assisi. On the eve of setting out for a battle, he experienced a vision which caused him to abandon his ambition for military glory.



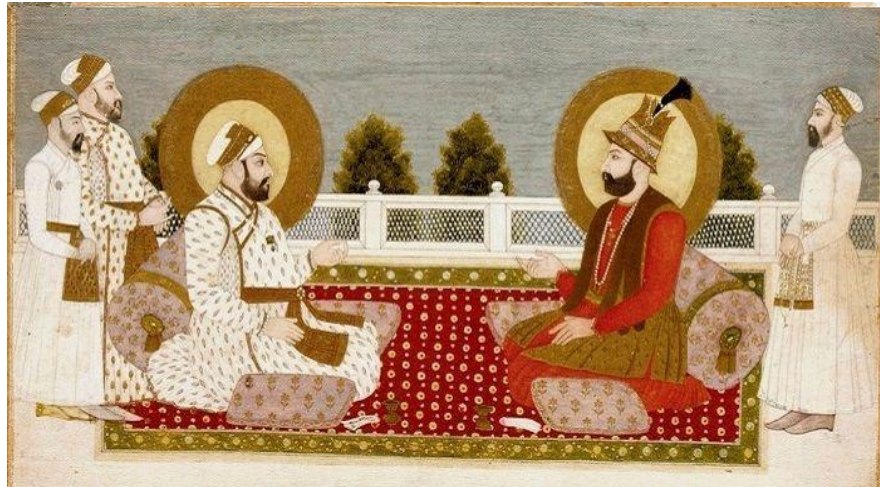
Factors Responsible for the Growth of Composite Culture

- The Mughal emperor's patronage of fine arts and literature. They used their wealth to build palaces, forts and monuments.
- The relatively settled conditions and a long period of peace that prevailed all over northern India paved the way for undertaking extensive works of art.
- The Mughal Emperors had a great sense of beauty and art.
- The glorious and rich cultural heritage of the Mughals on the one hand, and the Indians on the other hand, created a unique atmosphere for the brilliant output of letters and fine arts.

Impact of Composite Culture

The Indo-Islamic culture impacted all aspects of life-culture, art, architecture and literature.

(a) The dress, manners, social amenities and festivals which the Mughals introduced in India, were accepted by the people in India.



(b) The trend towards fusion of two cultures is best seen in the field of music. When the Turks

came to India, they brought with them not only a number of new musical instruments like the rabab and sarangi but also new musical modes. Amir Khusrau (Nayak) introduced many Perso-Arabic ragas.

(c) During the reign of Akbar, there was a fusion of Persian and Indian style of painting. Painting was organised in one of the imperial establishments (karkhanas) and a number of painters.

(d) In the field of architecture, the Indian and Islamic systems of art were mingled to give rise to a new type of Indo-Islamic architecture. The significant features of this architecture were the following

- The Islamic architecture added to the Indian architecture the special characteristics of spaciousness, massiveness, majesty and width.
- In the sphere of decoration, the Turks avoided representation of human and animal figures in the buildings. Instead, they used geometrical and floral designs, combining them with panels of inscriptions containing verses from the Holy Quran. They also borrowed Indian motifs like swastika, bell, lotus, etc.
- The Mughal traditions influenced temples, palaces and forts of many kingdoms. For example, many temples of Vrindavan assimilated the Mughal style of architecture.

(e) Persian became the language of administration and the language of the upper classes. Urdu is a mixture of Persian, Arabic, Hindi and other regional language. Also called Zaban-e-Hindvi because its grammatical structure is similar to that of Hindi.

SUFISM AND BHAKTI MOVEMENT

The *spirit of tolerance and mutual influence* which resulted in the blossoming of the Indo-Islamic culture led to the development of two liberal religious reforms movements in India - the Sufi and the Bhakti movements.

BHAKTI MOVEMENT

It originated as a reaction against caste division and ritualism in India. The Vaishnava and Saiva saints of the south started the Bhakti movement. In the 11th and 12th centuries the Tamil Vaishnava saints known as **Alvars** and Saivite saints known as **Nayanars** both preached 'personal devotion to God as a means to reach God.

'Bhakti' means *devotion to God*. It has its roots in the revival of the Indian philosophy by Shankaracharya. Some of the prominent followers of the Bhakti cult were Ramanujacharya, Madhavacharya, Ramananda, Kabir, Nanak, Namdev, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Mirabai.

Doctrines of Bhakti Cult

1. God is one. He must be worshipped with love and devotion.
2. By following the path of true devotion or Bhakti one can find salvation. Blind faith, empty ceremonies and external rites are not to be followed.
3. All are equal before God. Dignity of man depends on his actions; and not on the privileges of birth. Universal brotherhood of humanity is a reality to be accepted.
4. Guru, an enlightened teacher, is indispensable for realising God.
5. Religious rites, rituals and ceremonies are devoid of substance. Man can reach God only through absolute surrender to Him.
6. One must avoid image-worship, caste distinctions and class-hatred.

IMPACT OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

1. Bhakti saints preached universal brotherhood and emphasised equality of all men.
2. They preached in the language of the people. Languages such as Hindi, Bhojpuri, Maithili and Oriya became popular.
3. They tried to evolve a new social order by following the principle of equality and by opposing caste distinctions. It brought social changes.

BHAKTI SAINTS

I. Mirabai: Mirabai was the Rajasthani princess of Mewar who lived during the time of Mughal ruler Akbar. Mirabai, the only daughter of a Rajput noble was married to Bhoja Raj, the heir apparent of Rana Sanga of Mewar. She renounced the world and became a devotee of Lord Krishna. Her devotional songs (bhajans) made her popular. These songs are sung even today. She mixed with ordinary people and showed them with her personal example how to surrender themselves to Lord Krishna. Her brilliant poetry is known as **Padavali**.

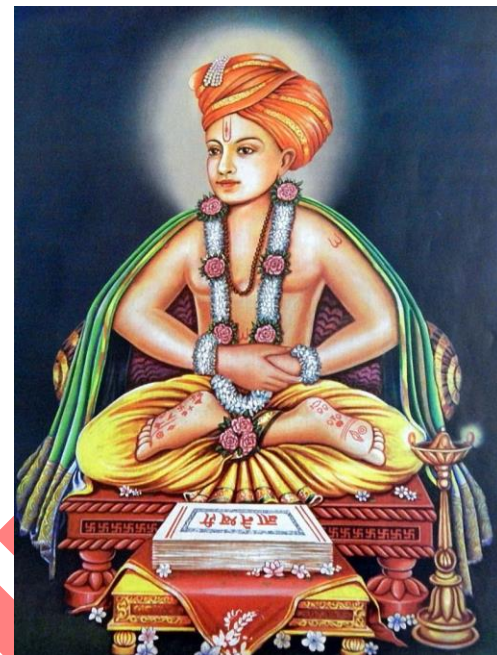


II. Sant Jnaneswar: Jnaneswar or Dnyaneshwar was a 13th century saint, poet and philosopher from Maharashtra. He was the second of the four children of Vithalpant and Rukmabhai.

He learnt and mastered the philosophy and various techniques of kundalini yoga. At the age of 15, he is said to have delivered nine-thousand verses of his commentary on the Bhagvad Gita, called the Jnaneswari, also called Bhavartha Dipika.

Jnaneswar regarded bhakti (devotion) as the means to liberation. He wrote **Amritanubhava**.

With Namdev he join the Varkari movement which is path combining Vedic principle with knowledge and bhakti. He wrote **Abhangas** to worship Lord Vitthal.



SUFISM

The word 'Sufi' has come from the Arabic word **Suf** meaning **wool** and was used for the mystics who used to wear only a coarse woollen garment.

They started a movement - preaching religious tolerance, brotherhood and oneness of God. They held that all religions were different paths of reaching the same God.

The Sufi Saints of Persia and Central Asia were organised into 12 orders or silsilas. The word '**silsila**' means a chain, signifying a continuous link between the master and the disciple. The leader of the order was called the **pir** and the followers were called the **murids**.

Doctrines of Sufism

1. Fundamental unity of all religions.
2. One can reach God through personal devotion and not through empty rituals.

3. Individual soul is the manifestation of the supreme God and human soul would finally merge with it.
4. Equality and brotherhood of all human beings irrespective of caste, colour, creed and religion.
5. Inner purity and self-discipline are essential for gaining the knowledge of God.

Impact of Sufism

1. It fostered the feelings of Hindu-Muslim unity.
2. Many principles of Sufism were similar to those of the Bhakti cult. It led to the popularity of the Bhakti Movement.
3. Sufism played a great role in promoting feelings of tolerance among the rulers.
4. People, irrespective of their religion, began to understand and appreciate others' faith.
5. Sufism made its influence on the poets of the period, like Amir Khusro and Malik Muhammed Jayasi, who composed poems in Persian and Hindi in praise of Sufi principles.

HAZRAT NIZAMUDDIN

Hazrat Nizamuddin was a famous Sufi saint of the Chishti Order that believed in drawing close to God through renunciation of the world and service to humanity.

He was born in Badayun in Uttar Pradesh. At the age of five, after the death of his father, he came to Delhi with his mother. At the age of twenty, Nizamuddin went to Ajodhan (the present Pakpattan Sharif in Pakistan) and became a disciple of the Sufi saint, **Baba Farid**.

Nizamuddin did not take up residence in Ajodhan but continued with his theological studies in Delhi while simultaneously starting the Sufi devotional practices. He visited Ajodhan each year to spend the month of Ramzan in the presence of Baba Farid.

His vision of the world was marked by a highly evolved sense of secularity and kindness. His key beliefs included the following:

- Renunciation and complete trust in God.
- The unity of mankind and shunning distinctions based on social, economic and religious status.
- Helping the needy, feeding the hungry and being sympathetic to the oppressed.
- Strong disapproval of mixing with the Sultans, the princes and the nobles.
- An uncompromising attitude towards all forms of political and social oppression.

INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

The arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut in 1498 is a landmark in the history of Christianity in India. With the arrival of Portuguese in India, the visits of Roman Catholic Missions to India became more organised and were initially confined to Goa, Cochin, Tuticorin and other coastal areas. St. Francis Xavier became the first Jesuit missionary to arrive in India in 1542. He played a significant role in spreading Christianity in India.

St. Francis Xavier: St. Francis Xavier was born on April 7, 1506 in the castle of Xavier in Spain. After completing his studies and working as a teacher for sometime, St. Xavier displayed zeal and charity in attending to the sick in hospitals.

In 1541, he started his missionary journey towards India and landed at Goa in 1542. He spent the first five months in preaching and attending to the sick in hospitals. When he had gathered a large number of people, he would take them to a church and explain the beliefs related to Christianity to them.



IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

The Christian missionaries spread Christianity in India and played a significant role in promoting language, literature and art.

- The missionaries brought out grammars and dictionaries of the Indian languages.
- St. Francis Xavier learnt the language of Malabar and brought out a manual of grammar and a vocabulary which helped the Jesuits and other missionaries to learn the language of the people of Malabar.
- The English Jesuit, Thomas Stephens, brought out an epic in Konkani and a grammar book. Diogo Ribeiro, another English missionary, wrote a grammar book and booklets on Christian doctrines.
- The Missionaries began teaching Western music in Church schools in India. Apart from music, they also taught dance and instrumental music. Many churches had music schools, so that in every church, hymns were sung, accompanied by organ and other musical instruments.
- The Portuguese Church provided the earliest introduction to European architectural ideas in India. This included the long, two-storeyed house, with high-pitched roof, balconies and verandas, many windows and elaborately carved walls.



- The Missionaries were the best interpreters of India to the Western world with their popular letters from the mission field.