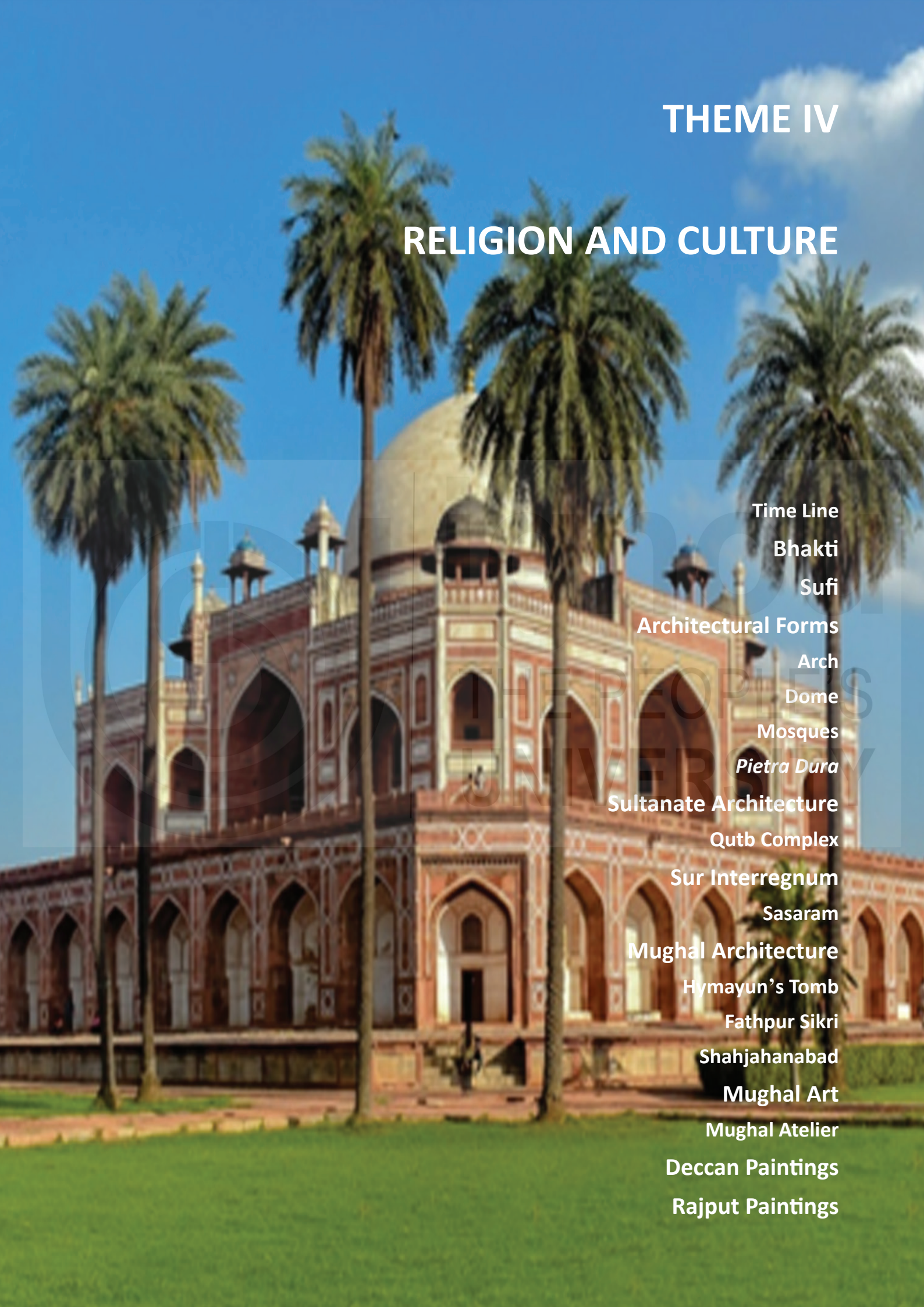

THEME IV

RELIGION AND CULTURE

Time Line

Bhakti

Sufi

Architectural Forms

Arch

Dome

Mosques

Pietra Dura

Sultanate Architecture

Qutb Complex

Sur Interregnum

Sasaram

Mughal Architecture

Hymayun's Tomb

Fathpur Sikri

Shahjahanabad

Mughal Art

Mughal Atelier

Deccan Paintings

Rajput Paintings

Humayun's Tomb
Courtesy: "Humayun's Tomb, Delhi, India 2019.jpg from Wikimedia Commons by Eatcha, CC-BY 4.0
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c5/Humayun%27s_Tomb%2C_Delhi%2C_India_2019.jpg

UNIT 16 BHAKTI AND SUFI TRADITIONS*

Structure

16.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- understand the background of the bhakti movement,
- identify the main political and socio-economic factors for the rise of bhakti movement in north India,
- list the main popular branches and the saints of this movement,

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- know the main characteristic features of the bhakti movement,
- identify the salient features of sufism,
- describe its development in India during the period of Delhi Sultanate,
- comprehend the reasons for the popularity of Chishti *silsilah* in India, and
- analyze the character and philosophy of the Mahdavi movement.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Bhakti as a religious concept means devotional surrender to a personally conceived Supreme God for attaining salvation. The origin of this doctrine has been traced to both the Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions of ancient India and to various scriptures such as the Bhagvat Gita. But it was for the first time in South India between the 7th and 10th century that bhakti grew from a mere religious doctrine into a popular movement based on religious equality and broad-based social participation. The movement which was led by popular saint-poets reached its climax in the 10th century after which it began to decline. But it was revived as a philosophical and ideological movement by a series of wandering scholars or *acharyas*, beginning with Ramanuja in the 11th century. The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in early 13th century witnessed great outburst of many diverse and widespread socio-religious movements in various parts of the country drawing upon the concepts of bhakti. These movements have been seen as a continuation or revival of the older South Indian bhakti movement. But each one of the later movements which grew in the Sultanate period had a historical context of its own and its own peculiarities. Moreover, one of them, namely, the non-conformist monotheistic movement which is associated with Kabir and other 'low-caste' saints bears only superficial resemblance to the variants of the movement. Its social roots, its ideology, social composition of its leadership and even its concept of bhakti and God set it fundamentally apart from the older bhakti movement of South India as well as from the rest of the later bhakti movements. In view of these wide and at times even basic differences among various bhakti movements, they must be discussed individually in order to clearly bring out the characteristics of each one of them and also to discover elements of unity and diversity among them.

Sufism or *tasawwuf* is the name for various mystical tendencies and movements in Islam. It aims at establishing direct communion between God and man through personal experience of mystery which lies within Islam. Every religion gives rise to mystical tendencies in its fold at a particular stage of its evolution. In this sense, sufism was a natural development within Islam based on the spirit of *Quaranic* piety. The sufis while accepting the *Shariat* did not confine their religious practice to formal adherence and stressed cultivation of religious experience aimed at direct perception of God. In this Unit, we will discuss the main features of sufism and its spread in India.

The religious milieu of India, when Islam reached this subcontinent, presents a phase where Buddhism had lost its supremacy; Brahmanism was trying to consolidate its position by compromising with Buddhist doctrines as well as with pre-Aryan practices. Islam, though altogether a new thing, had exercised an influence upon the Indians with its principles of universal brotherhood and human equality. In the words of Tarachand, 'Not only did Hindu religion, Hindu art, Hindu literature and Hindu Science absorb Muslim elements, but the very spirit of Hindu culture and the very stuff of Hindu mind were also altered, and the Muslim reciprocated by responding to the change in every development of life'. An everlasting process of give and take thus began. Among the Muslims, Al-Biruni,

Amir Khusrau, Abul Fazl, Dara Shikoh, etc. tried to understand Hinduism and made valuable attempts to enhance Muslim understanding of Hinduism by their own works and by translating Sanskrit works into Persian. Rulers like Firuz Shah Tughlaq, Zainul Abidin of Kashmir, Sikandar Lodi, Akbar and Jahangir, among others encouraged this trend with the result that scholars like Mirza Jan Janan rose in the 18th century to declare that both Rama and Krishna were 'prophets'.

Thus, during the period of our study one can identify two significant trends in the realm of religion, mainly bhakti and sufi, a detailed discussion on which follows in the subsequent sections.

16.2 BACKGROUND: BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN SOUTH INDIA

The Saiva Nayanar saints and **Vaishnava** Alvar saints of South India spread the doctrine of bhakti among different sections of the society irrespective of caste and gender during the period between the 7th and the 10th century. Some of these saints came from the 'lower' castes and some were women. The saint-poets preached bhakti in an intense emotional manner and promoted religious egalitarianism. They dispensed with rituals and traversed the region several times singing, dancing and advocating bhakti. The Alvar and Nayanar saints used the Tamil language and not Sanskrit for preaching and composing devotional songs. All these features gave the movement a popular character. For the first time bhakti acquired a popular base.

The South Indian bhakti saints were critical of Buddhists and Jains who enjoyed a privileged status at the courts of South Indian kings at that time. They won over many adherents of Buddhism and Jainism, both of which by now had become rigid and formal religions. At the same time, however, these poet-saints resisted the authority of the orthodox Brahmans by making bhakti accessible to all without any caste and sex discrimination. But the South Indian bhakti movement had its limitations as well. It never consciously opposed Brahmanism or the varna and caste systems at the social level. It was integrated with the caste system and the 'lower' castes continued to suffer from various social disabilities. There was no elimination of Brahmanical rituals such as worship of idols, recitation of the Vedic *mantras* and pilgrimages to sacred places in spite of the overriding emphasis on bhakti as the superior mode of worship. The Buddhists and Jains were its main targets, not the Brahmans. This perhaps was also the reason why the Brahman dominated temples played an important role in the growth of South Indian bhakti movement.

Since the ideological and social foundations of caste system were not questioned by the South Indian saint-poets, the bhakti movement of the South in the long run strengthened it rather than weakening it. Ultimately, after the movement reached its climax in the 10th century, it was gradually assimilated into the conventional Brahmanical religion. But despite these limitations, the South Indian bhakti movement in its heyday succeeded in championing the cause of religious equality and, consequently, the Brahmans had to accept the right of the 'low-caste' to preach, to have access to bhakti as a mode of worship and to have access even to the *Vedas*.

Bhakti and the South Indian *Acharyas*

When the popularity of the bhakti movement in South India was on the wane, the doctrine of bhakti was defended at the philosophical level by a series of brilliant Vaishnava Brahaman scholars (*acharyas*). Ramanuja (11th century) was first

among them. He gave philosophical justification for bhakti. He tried to establish a careful balance between orthodox Brahmanism and popular bhakti which was open to all. Though he did not support the idea of the 'lower' castes having access to the *Vedas*, he advocated bhakti as a mode of worship accessible to all including the Sudras and even the outcastes. While propagating bhakti, he did not observe caste distinctions and even tried to eradicate untouchability. Nimbarka, a Telugu Brahman, is believed to have been a younger contemporary of Ramanuja. He spent most of his time in Vrindavan near Mathura in North India. He believed in total devotion to Krishna and Radha. Another South Indian Vaishnavite bhakti philosopher was Madhava who belonged to the 13th century. Like Ramanuja, he did not dispute orthodox Brahmanical restriction on the Vedic study by the Sudras. He believed that bhakti provided alternate avenue of worship to the Sudras. His philosophical system was based on the Bhagvat Purana. He is also believed to have toured North India. The last two prominent Vaishnava acharyas were Ramananda (late 14th and early 15th century) and Vallabha (late 15th and early 16th century). Since both of them lived mostly in North India during the Sultanate period and gave new orientation to the Vaishnava bhakti, they will be discussed in the section dealing with North India.

16.3 BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN NORTH INDIA

There arose during the Sultanate period (13th -15th century) many popular socio-religious movements in North and East India, and Maharashtra. Emphasis on bhakti and religious equality were two common features of these movements. As has been pointed out, these two were also the features of the South Indian bhakti movements. Almost all the bhakti movements of the Sultanate period have been related to one South Indian Vaishnava *acharya* or the other. For these reasons, many scholars believe that the bhakti movements of the Sultanate period were a continuation or resurgence of the older bhakti movement. They argue that there existed philosophical and ideological links between the two, either due to contact or diffusion. Thus, Kabir and other leaders of non-conformist monotheistic movements in North India are believed to have been the disciples of Ramananda who, in turn, is believed to have been connected with Ramanuja's philosophical order. Similar claims have been made that Chaitanya, the most significant figure of the Vaishnava movement in Bengal, belonged to the philosophical school of Madhava. This movement is also believed to have been connected with Nimbarka's school because of its emphasis on 'Krishna' bhakti.

There are undoubtedly striking similarities between the older bhakti tradition of South India and various bhakti movements that flourished in the Sultanate and Mughal periods. If we exclude the popular monotheistic movements of Kabir, Nanak and other 'low' caste saints, the two sets of movements can be shown to have possessed many more common features. For example, like the South Indian bhakti movement, the Vaishnava bhakti movements of North and Eastern India and Maharashtra, though egalitarian in the religious sphere, never denounced the caste system, the authority of Brahmanical scriptures and the Brahmanical privileges as such.

Consequently, like the South Indian bhakti, most of the Vaishnava movements of the later period were ultimately assimilated into the Brahmanical religion, though in the process of interaction, the latter itself underwent many changes. However, the similarities end here. Bhakti movement was never a single movement except in the broad doctrinal sense of a movement which laid emphasis on bhakti and

religious equality. The bhakti movements of medieval India differed in many significant respects not only from the older South Indian bhakti tradition but also among themselves. Each one of them had its own regional identity and socio-historical and cultural contexts. Thus, the non-conformist movements based on popular monotheistic bhakti contained features that were essentially different from various Vaishnava bhakti movements. Kabir's notion of bhakti was not the same as that of the medieval Vaishnava saints such as Chaitanya or Mirabai.

Within the Vaishnava movement, the historical context of Maharashtra bhakti was different from that of the Bengal Vaishnavism or North Indian bhakti movement of Ramanand, Vallabha, Surdas and Tulsidas. During the later period, when the Vaishnava bhakti movement crystallized into sects, there arose frequent disputes between them which sometimes even turned violent. Among all the bhakti movements of the period between the 14th and 17th century, the popular monotheistic movements of Kabir, Nanak, Raidas and other 'lower' caste saints stand out fundamentally different.

Popular Monotheistic Movement and Vaishnava Bhakti Movement

Both these movements arose in Northern India at the same time, that is, in the centuries following the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate and advent of Islam in that part of the country. For this reason, the rise of both the movements is quite often attributed to certain common causes such as the influence of Islam on Hinduism. However, the causes and sources of the two movements and the factors exerting influence on them were quite diverse. It will become clear from the following discussion that a cause which explains one movement may not do so in the case of the other. This is so because the popular monotheistic movements arose and reached their peak in the Sultanate period, while the Vaishnava movements began in the Sultanate period but reached their climax during the Mughal period.

16.4 EMERGENCE OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

The bhakti movement which influenced large number of people during 14th-17th centuries in North India emerged due to a number of political, socio-economic and religious factors. We will discuss all these in this Section.

16.4.1 Political Factors for the Rise of Bhakti Movement

It has been pointed out that as the popular bhakti movement could not take root in Northern India before the Turkish conquest because the socio-religious milieu was dominated by the Rajput-Brahman alliance. The Turkish conquests brought the supremacy of this alliance to an end. The advent of Islam with the Turkish conquest also caused a setback to the power and prestige commanded by the Brahmans: Thus, the way was paved for the growth of non-conformist movements, with anti-caste and anti-Brahmanical ideology. The Brahmans had always made the people believe that the images and idols in the temples were not just the symbols of God but were gods themselves who possessed divine power and who could be influenced by them (i.e. the Brahmans). The Turks deprived the Brahmans of their temple wealth and state patronage. Thus, the Brahmans suffered both materially and ideologically. The non-conformist sect of the Nathpanthis was perhaps the first to gain from the declining power of the Rajput-Brahman alliance. This sect seems to have reached its peak in the beginning of the Sultanate period. The loss of power and influence by the Brahmans and the new political situation ultimately created conditions for the rise of the popular monotheistic movements and other bhakti movements in Northern India.

16.4.2 Socio-Economic Factors

It has been argued that the bhakti movements of medieval India represented sentiments of the common people against feudal oppression. According to this viewpoint, elements of revolutionary opposition to feudalism can be found in the poetry of the bhakti saints ranging from Kabir and Nanak to Chaitanya and Tulsidas. It is in this sense that sometimes the medieval bhakti movements are seen as Indian counterpart of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. However, there is nothing in the poetry of the bhakti saints to suggest that they represented the class interests of the peasantry against the surplus-extracting feudal state. The Vaishnava bhakti saints broke away from orthodox Brahmanical order only to the extent that they believed in bhakti and religious equality. Normally, they continued to subscribe to many basic principles of orthodox Brahmanism. The more radical monotheistic saints rejected orthodox Brahmanical religion altogether but even they did not call for the overthrow of the state and the ruling class. For this reason, the bhakti movements cannot be regarded as Indian variant of European Protestant Reformation which was a far greater social upheaval linked to the decline of feudalism and the rise of capitalism.

This, however, does not mean that the bhakti saints were indifferent to the living conditions of the people. They used images of daily life and always tried to identify themselves in one way or another with the sufferings of the common people.

Economic and Social Changes

The widespread popularity of the monotheistic movement of Kabir, Nanak, Dhanna, Pipa, etc. can be explained fully only in the context of certain significant socio-economic changes in the period following the Turkish conquest of Northern India. The Turkish ruling class, unlike the Rajputs, lived in towns. The extraction of large agricultural surplus led to enormous concentration of resources in the hands of the ruling class. The demands of this resource-wielding class for manufactured goods, luxuries and other necessaries led to the introduction of many new techniques and crafts on a large scale. This, in turn, led to the expansion of the class of urban artisans in the 13th and 14th centuries.

The growing classes of urban artisans were attracted towards the monotheistic movement because of its egalitarian ideas as they were now not satisfied with the low status accorded to them in traditional Brahmanical hierarchy. It has been pointed out that some groups of traders like the Khatris in the Punjab, who benefited directly from the growth of towns, urban crafts production and expansion of markets, were also drawn into the movement for the same reason. The popularity of the monotheistic movement was the result of the support it obtained from one or more of these different classes of the society. It is one or more of these sections which constituted the social base of the movement in different parts of Northern India. In Punjab, the popularity of the movement did not remain confined to urban classes: it acquired a broader base by the incorporation of the Jat peasants in its ranks. The support extended by the Jats of the Punjab to Guru Nanak's movement ultimately contributed to the development of Sikhism as a mass religion.

16.5 MAIN POPULAR MOVEMENTS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

In this Section, we will discuss some of the main monotheistic and Vaishnava movements in North India, including Maharashtra and Bengal during the period under review.

16.5.1 Monotheistic Movements of North India

Kabir (*c.* 1440-1518) was the earliest and undoubtedly the most powerful figure of the monotheistic movements that began in the 15th century. He belonged to a family of weavers (Julaha – who were indigenous converts to Islam). He spent greater part of his life in Banaras (Kashi). The monotheistic saints who succeeded him either claimed to be his disciples or respectfully mention him. His verses were included in the Sikh scripture, the ***Adi Granth*** in large numbers than those of other monotheists. All this indicates his pre-eminent position among the monotheists. Raidas (or Ravidas) most probably belonged to the generation next to Kabir's. He was a tanner by caste. He also lived in Banaras and was influenced by Kabir's ideas. Dhanna was a 15th century Jat peasant from Rajasthan. Other prominent saints of the same period were Sen (a barber) and Pipa. Dadu (*c.* 1544-1603) was also inspired by Kabir's doctrine. In his Bani, a collection of his hymns and poems, he regards Allah, Ram and Govind as his spiritual teachers. Dadu's cosmology and the stages of the soul's pilgrimage carry sufi influence. In the 18th century, with the decline of the Mughal Empire, the Dadu Panth got transformed into Nagas or professional fighters.

Sikhism

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) preached his ideas much in the same way as Kabir and other monotheists, but due to various developments later his teachings led to the emergence of a mass religion, Sikhism. The basic similarity of his teachings with those of Kabir and other saints and the basic ideological agreement between them makes him an integral part of the monotheistic movement. He belonged to a caste of traders called Khatri and was born in a village in Punjab now known as Nankana Sahib. In his later life he travelled widely to preach his ideas. Eventually he settled in a place in Punjab now known as Dera Baba Nanak. There he attracted large number of disciples. The hymns composed by him were incorporated in the Adi Granth by the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan, in 1604.

The teachings and philosophy of Guru Nanak constitute an important component of Indian philosophy and thought. His philosophy comprised three basic elements: a leading charismatic personality (the *Guru*), ideology (*Shabad*) and organization (*Sangat*). Nanak evaluated and criticized the prevailing religious beliefs and attempted to establish a true religion which could lead to salvation. He repudiated idol worship and did not favour pilgrimage nor accepted the theory of incarnation. He condemned formalism and ritualism. He believed in the unity of God and laid emphasis on having a true *Guru* for revelation. He advised people to follow the principles of conduct and worship: *sach* (truth), *halal* (lawful earning), *khair* (wishing well of others), *niyat* (right intention) and service of the lord.

Nanak denounced the caste system and the inequality which it perpetrated. He said that caste and honour should be judged by the acts or deeds of the individuals. He believed in Universal brotherhood of man and equality of men and women. He championed the cause of women's emancipation and condemned the practice of *sati*. Nanak did not propound celibacy or vegetarianism. He laid stress on concepts like justice, righteousness and liberty. Nanak's verses mainly consist of two basic concepts: (i) *Sach* (truth) and *Nam* (Name). *Sabad* (the word), *Guru* (the divine precept) and *Hukam* (the divine order) form the basis of divine self-expression. He laid emphasis on *kirtan* and *satsang*. He introduced community lunch (*langar*).

Tarachand regards the influence of sufis upon the religious thought of Nanak of fundamental importance. The similarity of thought in the verses of Nanak and Baba Farid consisted of the following: the sincere devotion and surrender

before one God. But at the same time Nanak did not hesitate in criticizing the sufis for leading a luxurious life. Nanak made an attempt to unify the Hindus and Muslims and certainly succeeded in synthesizing within his own teachings the essential concepts of Hinduism and Islam. The religious book of the Sikhs the *Guru Granth Sahib* (*Adi Granth*) was compiled by Guru Arjan. After the death of the tenth *Guru*, Gobind Singh the divine spirit did not pass on to another *Guru* but remained in the *Granth* and the community of the *Guru's* followers.

The *Gurus* mostly belonged to the Khatri mercantile caste whereas their followers were mostly rural Jats. It was Guru Gobind Singh who inaugurated the *khalsa* (brotherhood) among the Sikhs. The Khatris and Aroras as well as Jats constituted important groups within the Sikh community. The artisan castes known as Ramgarhia Sikhs and converts to Sikhism from scheduled castes represented other groups within the Sikh *panth*. Caste consciousness did exist in the Sikh ***panth*** but was not so prominent.

16.5.2 Common Characteristic Features

The teachings of all the saints who are associated with the monotheistic movement have certain common features which give the movement its basic unity:

i) Most of the monotheists belonged to the 'low' castes and were aware that there existed a unity of ideas among themselves. Most of them were aware of each other's teachings and influences. In their verses they mention each other and their predecessors in such a way as to suggest a harmonious ideological affinity among them. Thus, Kabir speaks of Raidas as 'saint among saints'. Raidas, in his turn, respectfully mentions the names of Kabir, Namdev, Trilochan, Dhanna, Sen and Pipa. Dhanna takes pride in speaking of the fame and popularity of Namdev, Kabir, Raidas and Sen and admits that he devoted himself to bhakti after hearing their fame. Kabir's influence on Nanak is also beyond dispute. It is, therefore, not surprising that the later traditions link Kabir, Raidas, Dhanna, Pipa, Sen, etc. together as disciples of Ramananda. The ideological affinity among the monotheists is also clear from the inclusion of the hymns of Kabir, Raidas, etc. along with those of Nanak by the fifth Sikh Guru Arjan in the *Adi Granth*.

ii) All the monotheists were influenced in one way or another and in varying degrees by the Vaishnava concept of bhakti, the Nathpanthi movement and sufism. The monotheistic movement represents the synthesis of elements from these three traditions. But more often than not they did not accept the element of these traditions in their original form and made many innovations and adaptations which gave new meanings to old concepts.

iii) For the monotheists, there was only one way of establishing communion with God: it was the way of personally experienced bhakti. This was also the way of the Vaishnava bhakti saints, but there was one fundamental difference of perceptions: they all have been called monotheists because they uncompromisingly believed in only one God. Then, God of Nanak was non-incarnate and formless (*nirankar*), eternal (*akal*) and ineffable (*alakh*). The monotheistic bhakti, therefore, was ***nirguna*** bhakti and not ***saguna*** – which was the case with the Vaishnavites who believed in various human incarnations of God. The monotheists adopted the notion of bhakti from the Vaishnava bhakti tradition but gave it a *nirguna* orientation. Quite often Kabir called God by the name, Ram. For this reason, he has been called Ram-bhakta. But Kabir himself made it clear in his utterances that the Ram he was devoted to was not the one who was born as an incarnation in the house of

king Dashratha of Ayodhya or who had killed Ravana, but a formless, non-incarnate God. In addition to the oneness of God and *nirguna* bhakti, the monotheists also emphasized the crucial importance of repetition of divine name, spiritual *guru*, community singing of devotional songs (kirtan) and companionship of saints (satsang).

iv) The monotheists followed a *path* which was independent of both dominant religions of the time – Hinduism and Islam. They denied their allegiance to either of them and criticized the superstitions and orthodox elements of both the religions. They launched a vigorous ideological assault on the caste system and idolatry. They rejected the authority of the Brahmans and their religious scriptures. Kabir, in his harsh and abrasive style, uses ridicule as a powerful method for denouncing orthodox Brahmanism.

v) The monotheists composed their poems in popular languages. Some of them used a language which was a mixture of different dialects spoken in various parts of North India. The monotheistic saints preferred this common language to their own native dialects because they considered it fit for the propagation of their non-conformist ideas among the masses in various regions. The use of common language is a striking feature of the movement considering that the saints belonged to different parts of North India and spoke different dialects. 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. Thus, for instance, Kabir's poetry is unpolished and has a rustic, colloquial quality but it is essentially a poetry of the people.

vi) Most of the monotheistic saints were not ascetics. They led worldly life and were married. They lived and preached among the people. They had aversion to and disdain for professional ascetics. They frequently refer to professional caste groups in their verses which would suggest that they continued to pursue their family professions. They were also not like the medieval European Christian saints who were recognized as 'holy' by the Church. The expression which has been used for them and by which they themselves referred to each other is *sant* or ***bhagat***. In the *Adi Granth*, Kabir, Raidas, Dhanna, Pipa, Namdev, etc. have been listed as *bhagat*.

vii) The monotheistic saints travelled widely to propagate their beliefs. Namdev, a 14th century saint from Maharashtra travelled as far as Punjab where his teachings became so popular that they were later absorbed in the *Adi Granth*. Kabir, Raidas and other saints are also believed to have travelled widely.

viii) The ideas of Kabir and other monotheists spread to various regions and became popular among the 'lower' classes. The popularity of the monotheists broke territorial barriers. This is clear from the high position accorded to Kabir in the Sikh tradition and in the Dadupanthi tradition of Rajasthan. Their continuing popularity even almost two hundred years after their time and in a distant region is clear from the way a mid-17th century Maharashtrian saint Tukaram looked upon himself as an admirer and follower of Kabir, Raidas, Sen, Gora, etc. A 17th century Persian work on comparative religion *Dabistan-i Mazahib* testifies to the continuing popularity of Kabir among the people of North India.

ix) Despite the widespread popularity that the teachings of monotheists enjoyed among the masses, 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, Raidasi *panth*, Nanak *panth*, etc. Of all these *panths*, the Nanak *panth* alone eventually crystallized into a mass religion while most of the others continue to survive till today but with a vastly reduced following and a narrow sectarian base.

Check Your Progress-1

1) Give the salient features of the bhakti movement

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2) Write two lines on each of the following:

a) Ramanuja .....

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b) Nimbarka .....

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c) Vallabha .....

.....

d) Chaitanya .....

.....

e) Madhava .....

.....

f) Kabir .....

.....

g) Guru Nanak .....

.....

3) What were the chief tenets of Sikhism?

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4) Discuss the factors that led to the rise of the bhakti movement.

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5) What are the characteristic features of monotheistic bhakti movement? Give the names of three saints belonging to this movement.

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16.5.3 Vaishnava Bhakti Movement in North India

Ramananda was the most prominent scholar saint of the Vaishnava bhakti in Northern India during this period. Some of his ideas have already been mentioned in **Section 16.3**. He belonged to the late 14th and early 15th century. He lived in South India in the early part of his life but later settled in Banaras. He is considered to be the link between the South Indian bhakti tradition and North Indian Vaishnava bhakti. However, he deviated from the ideology and practice of the earlier South Indian *acharyas* in three important respects:

i) He looked upon Ram and not Vishnu as object of bhakti. To him, Ram was the supreme God who is to be adored with Sita. In this sense he came to be regarded as the founder of the Ram cult in North India within the framework of Vaishnava bhakti tradition.

ii) He preached in the language of the common people, and not in Sanskrit, to propagate the Ram cult.

iii) The most significant contribution to Vaishnava bhakti, was that he made bhakti accessible to all irrespective of caste. He greatly relaxed the caste rules in respect of religious and social matters. Though himself a Brahman, he took food with his 'low' caste Vaishnava followers.

It is perhaps for the last mentioned point that some later Vaishnava traditions link Kabir and some other monotheists to him as his disciples. The innovations were probably due to the influence of Islamic ideas. It has also been suggested that he made these innovations in order to counter the growing popularity of the heterodox Nathpanthis, the 'lower' classes of the society. His followers are called Ramanandis. A hymn attributed to him was incorporated in the *Adi Granth*.

Another prominent Vaishnava preacher in the Sultanate period was Vallabhacharya, a Telugu brahman of the late 15th and early 16th century. He, too, was born in Banaras. He was the founder of *Pushtimarga* (way of grace). It also came to be known as Vallabha *sampradaya* (Vallabha Sect). He advocated Krishna bhakti. Famous Krishna bhakti saint-poet, Surdas (1483-1563) and seven other Krishna bhakti poets belonging to the *ashtachhap* were believed to have been the disciples of Vallabha. The sect later became popular in Gujarat.

In North India, however, the Vaishnava bhakti cult acquired a more popular base. Only in the Mughal period, Tulsidas (1532-1623) championed the cause of Rama bhakti while Surdas (1483-1563), Mira Bai (1503-73) and many others popularized Krishna bhakti.

16.5.4 Vaishnava Bhakti Movement in Bengal

In many significant ways the Vaishnava bhakti in Bengal was different from its North Indian and the older South Indian bhakti. The sources which influenced it can be traced to two different traditions – the Vaishnava bhakti tradition of the *Bhagavata Purana*, with its glorification of Krishna *lila* on the one hand, and Sahajiya Buddhist and Nathpanthi traditions on the other. The Vaishnava influence was transmitted by various bhakti poets, beginning with Jayadeva in the 12th century. Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* was composed in Sanskrit. He also wrote songs in Maithili dialect which were later absorbed in the Bengali Vaishnava bhakti tradition. Various non-Vaishnava cults such as those of Sahajiya Buddhists and Nathpanthis that survived in Bengal and Bihar influenced the growth of bhakti movement in Bengal.

These cults preached an easy and natural religion focusing on esoteric and emotional elements. Vaishnava bhakti poets such as Chandidas (14th century) and Vidyapati (14th to 15th centuries) came under the influence of these non-Vaishnava cults, though the *Bhagavata* tradition was always the major source of influence. The songs of Chandidas who was the first Bengali bhakti poet and those of Vidyapati who wrote in Maithili, highlighted the Krishna-Radha relationship. These songs became part of the growing Vaishnava movement in Bengal. Chaitanya himself did not come under the direct influence of Sahajiya doctrine. It is, however, possible that elements of esoteric cults entered into his movement through the influence of Chandidas and Vidyapati. But the most important source of inspiration was the *Bhagavata Purana*.

Chaitanya (1486-1533) was the most prominent Vaishnava saint of Bengal. He popularized Krishna-bhakti in many parts of Eastern India. His popularity as a religious personality was so great that he was looked upon as an *avatara* (incarnation) of Krishna. The advent of Chaitanya marks the shifting of the focus of the Bengal Vaishnava bhakti from devotional literary compositions to a full-fledged reform movement with a broad social base.

Chaitanya disregarded all distinctions of caste, creed and sex to give a popular base to Krishna-bhakti. His followers belonged to all castes and communities. One of his most favourite disciples was Haridas who was a Muslim. He popularized the practice of *sankirtan* or group devotional singing accompanied by ecstatic dancing.

However, Chaitanya did not give up traditional Brahamanical values altogether. He did not question the authority of the Brahmans and scriptures. He upheld the caste prejudices of his Brahman disciples against the 'lower' caste disciples. Six Sanskrit-knowing Brahman Goswamins who were sent by him to Vrindavan near Mathura established a religious order which recognized caste restrictions in its devotional practices and rituals. These Goswamins gradually distanced themselves from Chaitanya's teachings and from the popular movement that had grown around him in Bengal.

But Chaitanya's movement had a great impact on Bengali society. His disregard for caste distinctions in the sphere of devotional singing promoted a sense of equality in the Bengali life. In Bengal and in Puri, in Odisha, his movement remained popular. In these places, his followers were not always scholarly Brahmans but included common people. They wrote in Bengali, propagated his bhakti and looked upon Chaitanya as the living Krishna or as Radha and Krishna in one body.

Gaudia Vaishnavism

The Gaudia Vaishnava movement and the Chaitanya movement (neo-Vaishnav movement) which derived its inspiration from the life and teachings of Chaitanya had a tremendous impact on the social, religious and cultural life of the people of Assam, Bengal and Odisha. The people were not only influenced by his message but began to regard him as an incarnation of God. The social structure in the pre-Chaitanya Bengal and Orissa was based on *Varnashrama*. The Sudras and the lower castes suffered from various disabilities. Among the religious systems the Sakta-tantric creed predominated. The medieval Bhakti in Bengal was influenced by two streams – Vaishnav and non-Vaishnava (Buddhism and Hinduism). Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* written during the time of the Palas provided an erotic-mysticism to the love of Radha and Krishna. Buddhism was also on the decline and this decadent form of Buddhism influenced Vaishnavism which in turn

affected the Bengali Bhakti movement. The emphasis was on eroticism, female form and sensuousness. In the pre-Chaitanya Bengal and Odisha, oppression of lower castes by the Brahmins was rampant. Moral decadence was the order of the day.

16.5.5 Bhakti Movement in Maharashtra

Like other Vaishnava bhakti movements, the Maharashtra bhakti tradition drew its basic inspiration from that of the *Bhagavata Purana*. In addition, however, it was also influenced by the Saiva Nathpanthis who were quite popular in the 'lower' classes of the Maharashtrian society during the 11th and 12th centuries and who composed their verses in Marathi. Jnaneswar (1275-1296) was the pioneer bhakti saint of Maharashtra. He wrote an extensive commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, popularly called *Jnanesvari*. This was one of the earliest works of Marathi literature and served as foundation of the bhakti ideology in Maharashtra. He was the author of many hymns called *abhangs*. He taught that the only way to attain God was bhakti and in bhakti there was no place for caste distinctions.

Namdev (1270-1350) belonged to the tailor caste. He is considered to be the link between the Maharashtrian bhakti movement and North Indian monotheistic movement. He lived in Pandharpur but travelled to North India, including Punjab. His bhakti songs have also been included in the *Adi Granth*. In Maharashtra, Namdev is considered to be a part of the Varkari tradition (Vaishnava devotional tradition), but in the North Indian monotheistic tradition he is remembered as a *nirguna* saint. Other prominent bhakti saints of Maharashtra were Eknath (1533-99) and Tukaram (1598-1650).

Maratha Vaishnavism

The Maratha school of Vaishnavism or the *Bhagavata Dharma* has a long history. By the close of the 13th century, steady enrichment and vigour was imparted to the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra by a number of poet-saints. The most outstanding of these was Jnaneswar, a Brahmin who is considered to be the greatest exponent of the Maratha Vaishnavism. The main features of the Vaishnava religious devotion – anti-ritualism and anti-casteism in Maharashtra – were similar to those of other non-conformist movements in the North. The poet-saints tried to bring religion to the lowest strata of the society. By interpreting the *Bhagavat Gita* in melodious Marathi tunes, Jnaneswar laid the basis of the *Bhagavata Dharma* in Maharashtra by giving a fillip to the Varkari sect which had initiated and instituted regular popular pilgrimage to the shrine of Vithoba (the form of the great God Vishnu) at Pandarpur.

Vithoba was the god of the Varkari sect. Its followers were householders who performed pilgrimage twice a year to the temple. Its membership cut across caste boundaries. The movement in Maharashtra witnessed mass participation by different social groups such as Sudras, Atisudras, Kumbhera (potter), Mali, Mahar and *alute/balutedars*. Some of the saints belonging to lower strata of society were Harijan Saint Choka, Gora Kumbhar, Narahari Sonara, Banka Mahara, etc. In the post-Jnaneshwar period, Namdeva (a tailor by caste), Tukaram, and Ramdas, were important Marathi saints. Eknath (a Brahman) furthered the tradition laid down by Jnaneshwar. Tukaram and Ramdas (Shivaji's teacher) also raised anti-caste and anti-ritual slogans. Eknath's teachings were in vernacular Marathi. He shifted the emphasis of Marathi literature from spiritual text to narrative compositions.

Tukaram's teachings are in the form of *Avangas* or verses (*dohas*) which constitute the *Gatha*. It is an important source for the study of the Maratha Vaishnavism.

The Varkari Maratha saints developed a new method of religious instruction, i.e. *Kirtan* and the *Nirupana*. The Maratha movement contributed to the flowering of Marathi literature. These saints used popular dialect which paved the way for transformation of Marathi into a literary language. The literature of the Varkari school gives us some idea about the plebeian character of the movement. It addressed itself to the problems of the Kunbis (farmers), Vanis (traders) and the artisans, etc. M.G. Ranade points out that this movement led to the development of vernacular literature and upliftment of lower castes, etc.

16.5.6 Bhakti Movement in Other Regions

Saiva bhakti flourished in Kashmir in the 14th century. Most prominent of the Saiva bhakti saints was a woman, Lal Ded. In Gujarat, bhakti was preached by the Vallabha sect of Vallabhacharya and another important saint, Narsimha Mehta (1414-1481, or 1500-1580). He knew of Jayadeva and Kabir and was followed by a number of poet-saints. The Vallabha sect became popular among merchants and landowners of Gujarat. In Karnataka, the Saiva bhakti cult of the Kannad speaking Virasaivas developed during the 12th and 13th centuries. They preached a strongly radical and heterodox concept of bhakti by incorporating social criticism in their religious outlook.

In Assam, Sankaradeva (1449-1568) introduced bhakti both in the Brahmaputra valley as well as in Cooch-Behar. He was born in the family of non-Brahman Bhuyan chiefs. He became an ascetic during the later part of his life and is believed to have visited many places of pilgrimage in North and South India. He preached absolute devotion to Vishnu or his incarnation, Krishna. He had to face persecution at the lands of orthodox Brahmanical priesthood of the Ahom kingdom and took shelter in the territories of the neighbouring Cooch-Behar, where its king gave him the freedom to preach bhakti. Monotheistic ideas influenced his concept of bhakti which came to be known as the *eka-sarana-dharma* ('religion of seeking refuge in one'). He denounced the caste system and preached his ideas to the people in their language (an Assamese form of Brajaboli). He made some significant innovations in the devotional practice such as inclusion of dance-drama-music form in the preaching of bhakti. He also founded the institution of *satra*, which means a sitting during which people of all classes assembled for religious as well as social purposes. Later the *satras* grew into full-fledged monasteries. His sect is called *mahapurashiya dharma*.

Check Your Progress-2

1) What were the main features of the Maratha Vaishnavism?

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2) Discuss the background against which the Gaudia Vaishnava movement developed. What were its chief characteristics?

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3) Write on each of the following:

a) Bhakti movement in Bengal .....

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b) Bhakti movement in Maharashtra .....

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16.6 SALIENT FEATURES OF SUFISM

Mysticism is an offshoot of religion. All Islamic religious movements arose out of controversies about God's attributes and decrees and their impact on the universe. Religious and spiritual movements in Islam contain an element of political implication. Various founders of religious movements, therefore, sought state support to strengthen their ideologies. There had been from the very early days a close combat between the upholders of *Ilm-ul kalam* (the science of defending orthodoxy by rational arguments) and the philosophers, who absorbed a lot from the Greek philosophy and laid more emphasis upon the identification of the Being. The orthodox theologians in spite of all their efforts neither could stop studies in philosophy nor could persuade the rulers to abstain from extending patronage to the philosophers. Sufi doctrine was the third element which presented yet another viewpoint of Islamic philosophy.

Unlike the philosophers who were trying to rationalize the nature of the Necessary Being, and the scholars of *kalam* who were mainly concerned with the defence of the divine transcendence (i.e. God is above His creation and not one with it), sufism sought to achieve the inner realization of divine unity by arousing intuitive and spiritual faculties. Rejecting rational arguments, the sufis advocated contemplation and meditation.

According to the analysis of Shah Waliullah, an 18th century scholar of India, sufism finds justification in the esoteric aspects of Islam, which involves the purification of the heart through ethical regeneration. This aspect is defined in the Islamic doctrine: that Allah should be worshipped with the certainty that the worshipper is watching Allah or He is watching the worshipper.

Sufism or *tasawuuf* is the name for various mystical tendencies and movements in Islam. Sufism is divided into four phases. The first began with the Prophet Muhammad and his companions and extended to the time of Junaid of Baghdad (d. 910). The sufis during this period exclusively devoted themselves to prayer (*namaz*), fasting (*rozah*) and invoking God's names (*zikr*). During Junaid's time, the sufis lived in a state of continued meditation and contemplation. This resulted in extensive spiritual experiences which could be explained only symbolically or in unusual phrases. Emotional effect of ***sama*** (religious music) upon the sufis increased during this phase. The practice of self-mortification was started by the sufis in order to save themselves from material desires. Many lived in mountains and jungles far away from the shadow of the devil believed to be resting within the folds of worldly settlements.

With Shaikh Abu Said bin Abul Khair (d. 1049) began the third phase. Now the emphasis was laid upon the state of ecstasy which led to spiritual telepathy. In contemplating the union of temporal and eternal, their individuality dissolved and the sufis even ignored their regular prayers and fasting, etc.

In the fourth phase, the sufis discovered the theory of the five stages of the descent from Necessary Being (*wajib-ul wujud*). It is from here that the problem of *wahadat-ul wujud* (the unity of Being) began.

The man who played an important and decisive role in the history of sufism was an Irani, Bayazid Bastami (d. 874 or 877-78). He evolved the concept of *fana* (annihilation). It implies that human attributes are annihilated through union with God, a state in which the mystic finds eternal life (*baga*). Bayazid's line of thought was further developed by Husain Ibn Mansur Al-Hallaj, a disciple of Junaid. His mystical formula *ana-al Haq* (I am the Truth or God) became an important factor in the evolution of the mystical ideas in Persia and then in India. Many silsilahs were formulated and the practice of deputing disciples to distant lands began. This tendency increased in the Third phase and some eminent sufis also moved to India. Shaikh Safiuddin Gaziruni and Abul Hasan Ali bin Usman al-Hujwiri were among the noted immigrants.

There developed a number of sufi orders or *silsilah*, in and outside India. All these orders had their specific characteristics. However, there were a number of features which are common to all sufi orders, such as:

i) Sufism as it developed in the Islamic world came to stress the importance of traversing the sufi path (*tariqa*) as a method of establishing direct communion with divine reality (*haqiqat*).

ii) According to the sufi beliefs, the novice has to pass through a succession of 'stations' or 'stages' (*maqamat*) and changing psychological conditions or 'states' (*hal*) to experience God.

iii) The sufi path could be traversed only under the strict supervision of a spiritual director (*shaikh*, *pir* or *murshid*) who had himself successfully traversed it and consequently established direct communion with God.

iv) The disciple (*murid*) progressed through the 'stages' and 'states' by practicing such spiritual exercises as self-mortification, recollection of God's name to attain concentration (*zikr*) and contemplation.

v) The sufis organized impassioned musical recital (*sama*). The practice of *sama* was intended to induce a mystical state of ecstasy. However, some sufi orders did not approve of certain forms of *sama* and the *ulama* were particularly hostile to this practice.

vi) Yet another feature of sufism is the organization of the Sufis into various orders (*silsilah*). Each of these *silsilah* e.g. Suhrawardi, Qadiri, Chishti, etc. were found by a leading figure who lent his name to it. A *silsilah* consisted of persons who had become disciples of a particular sufi.

vii) The hospice (***khanqah***) was the centre of the activities of a sufi order. It was the place where the *pir* imparted spiritual training to his disciples. The popularity of the *khanqah* and its capacity to attract disciples depended on the reputation of the *pir*. The *khanqahs* were supported by endowment and charity.

16.7 GROWTH OF SUFISM IN INDIA

Al-Hujwiri (*c.* CE 1088) was the earliest sufi of eminence to have settled in India (**Section 16.6**). His tomb is in Lahore. He was the author of *Kashf-ul Mahjub*, a famous Persian treatise on sufism. However, various sufi orders were introduced in India only after the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate i.e. in the beginning of the 13th century. India not only provided a new pasture ground for the propagation of sufi ideas but also became the new home of the sufis who along with many other refugees fled from those parts of the Islamic world which

had been conquered by the Mongols in the 13th century. During the 13th and 14th centuries, *khanqahs* sprang up in various parts of India. The sufis introduced various orders in India from the Islamic world, built up their own organizations and established themselves in their respective areas of influence. By the middle of the 14th century, the entire country from Multan to Bengal and from Punjab to Deogiri had come under the sphere of their activity. According to the observation of an early 14th century traveller, there were two thousand sufi hospices and *khanqahs* in Delhi and its neighbourhood.

Sufism in India originally stemmed from the sufi thought and practice as it developed in various parts of the Islamic world, especially in Iran and Central Asia. However, its subsequent development was influenced more by Indian environment than by non-Indian variants of sufism. Once the sufi orders took root in different parts of India, they followed their own phases of growth, stagnation and revival. These were determined largely by indigenous circumstances, though the influence of developments in sufism outside India cannot altogether be discounted.

16.8 SUFI ORDERS IN INDIA DURING THE SULTANATE PERIOD

A number of sufi *silsilah* became popular in India during the Sultanate period. In this Section, we will discuss some of the important ones.

16.8.1 The Suhrawardi *Silsilah*

The Suhrawardi *silsilah* was a major order of the Sultanate period. Its founder in India was Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya (1182-1262). He was a Khurasani and was a disciple of Shaikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardi who had initiated the *silsilah* in Baghdad and was directed by the latter to proceed to India. He made Multan and Sind the centres of his activity. Thus, one of the oldest *khanqahs* in India was established by him at Multan. Iltutmish was the Sultan of Delhi at that time, but Multan was under the control of his rival, Qubacha. Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya was critical of Qubacha's administration and openly sided with Iltutmish in his conflict against the Multan ruler's overthrow. Bahauddin Zakariya received from lltutmish the title of *Shaikh-ul Islam* (Leader of Islam) and endowment. Contrary to the Chishti saints of his time, he followed a worldly policy and built up a large fortune. He accepted state patronage and maintained links with the ruling classes. However, during the later period many independent sufi lines stemmed from him and some of them came to be known as '*beshara*' (illegitimate orders).

In addition to Shaikh Bahuddin Zakariya, many other *Khalifas* were designated by Shaikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardi to spread the Suhrawardi *silsilah* in India. One of them was Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi. After his initial stay in Delhi, where he failed to establish his supremacy, he went to Bengal. He established his *khanqah* there and made many disciples. He attached a *langar* (centre for the distribution of free meals) to his *khanqah*. He is said to have played an important role in the process of Islamization in Bengal.

During the Sultanate period, Punjab, Sind and Bengal became three important centres of the Suhrawardi activity. Scholars are generally of the opinion that the Suhrawardi sufis converted Hindus to Islam and in this task they were helped by their affluence and connections with the ruling class. In this connection, a sharp contrast is drawn between their attitude and that of the Chishti sufis whose teachings did not aim at conversion.

16.8.2 The Chishti *Silsilah*

The growth of the Chishti order in India during the Sultanate period took place in two phases. The first phase ended with the death of Shaikh Nasiruddin (Chiragh-i Delhi) in 1356. The second phase is marked by its initial decline during the later part of the 14th century followed by revival and expansion in various parts of the country during the 15th and 16th centuries.

First Phase

The Chishti order which later became the most influential and popular sufi order in India, originated in Herat and was introduced in India by Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1236) who was born in Sijistan in *c.* 1141. He came to India at the time of the Ghori conquest. He finally settled in Ajmer about 1206 and won the respect of both Muslims and non-Muslims. No authentic record of his activities is available. During the later period, many legends projected him as an ardent evangelist. However, he was not actively involved in conversions and his attitude towards non-Muslims was one of tolerance. His tomb in Ajmer became a famous centre of pilgrimage in later centuries.

The successor of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in Delhi was Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1235). Shaikh Hamidduddin Nagauri (d. 1274), another *Khalifa* of Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti, made Nagaur in Rajasthan centre of his activity. Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri established the *silsilah* in Nagaur where he lived like an ordinary Rajasthani peasant and dissociated himself from those in authority. He was a strict vegetarian. He and his successors translated many Persian sufi verses in the local language called Hindavi, these are earliest examples of translations of this kind.

Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki was succeeded in Delhi by his *Khalifa*, Khwaja Fariduddin Masud (1175-1265) known as Ganjshakar and more popularly as Baba Farid. Baba Farid left Delhi for Ajodhan in Punjab and lived in his *khanqah* there. He despised association with the ruling class and rich persons. Nathpanthi *yogis* also visited his *khanqah* and discussed with him the nature of mysticism. His popularity in Punjab is clear from the fact that more than three hundred years after his death, verses ascribed to him were included in the *Adi Granth* compiled by the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjan, in 1604. His tomb at Pakpatan soon developed into a centre of pilgrimage.

The most celebrated disciple of Baba Farid and the greatest sufi saint of the 14th century was Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya (1236-1325). He made Delhi the most famous centre of the Chishti order. Two historians Ziauddin Barani and Amir Khusrau, who were his contemporaries, testify to his eminent position in the social and religious life of Northern India during the late 13th and early 14th centuries. Later, his successors spread the Chishti order in various parts of the country. His teachings and conversations (***malfuzat***) are recorded in *Fawaid-ul Fuwad* written by Amir Hasan Sijzi. This work serves more as a guide to practical aspects of sufism than as a treatise on its metaphysical and theosophical aspects.

Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya saw the reigns of seven successive Sultans of Delhi. But he always avoided the company of the kings and nobles and never visited the court. The *langar* (an alms-house for the distribution of free food) of his *khanqah* was open to Hindus and Muslims alike. In his *khanqah*, he had many conversations with the Nathpanthi *yogi* visitors. He adopted many *yoga* breathing exercises and was called a *sidh* (perfect) by the *yogis*. Amir Khusrau (1253-1325) was a devoted disciple of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya.

Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya had many spiritual successors or *Khalifas*. One of them was Shaikh Burhanuddin Gharib (d. 1340) who was one of those sufis who were forced by Sultan Muhammed Tughlaq to migrate to the Deccan. He made Daulatabad centre of his activities and introduced the Chishti order there.

The most famous of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya's *khalifas* and his successor in Delhi was Shaikh Nasiruddin Mahmud (d. 1356) who came to be known as Chiragh-i Delhi (Lamp of Delhi). He and some of his disciples discontinued some of those practices of early Chishtis which could clash with Islamic orthodoxy and, in turn persuaded the *ulama* to soften their attitude towards the Chishti practice of *sama*.

Decline of the Chishti Order in Delhi During the Later Tughlaq and Saiyyid Periods

Some scholars hold the view that the decline of Delhi as a centre of the Chishti order was due to the attitudes and policies of Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq. However, it must be pointed out that the Sultan was not opposed to the sufis per se. Some sufis, including Shaikh Nasiruddin Chirag-i Delhi, remained in Delhi though they were compelled by the Sultan to accept state service. Moreover, sufi activities in many *khanqahs* were restored after the death of Muhammad Tughluq when his successor Firuz Shah Tughlaq showered gifts on them. However, Delhi was left with no commanding Chishti figure after the death of Shaikh Nasiruddin in 1356. He died without appointing a spiritual successor. One of his chief disciples, Gesudaraz left Delhi for a safer place in the Deccan at the time of Timur's invasion (1398). As the Delhi Sultanate began to decline and disintegrate, the sufis dispersed to the more stable provincial kingdoms and established their *khanqahs* there. This dispersal of the Chishti order in different parts of the country during the later 14th and 15th centuries was accompanied by significant changes in the attitudes and practices of the Chishti sufis.

Second Phase

The second phase in the history of the Chishti *silsilah* during the Sultanate period began with its decline in Delhi following the death of Shaikh Nasiruddin and its subsequent dispersal in various regional kingdoms. Though the sufis had begun to arrive in the Deccan from the late 13th century, it was Shaikh Burhanuddin Gharib who introduced the Chishti order there during the reign of Muhammad Tughlaq. Later, several Chishti sufis migrated to Gulbarga, the capital of the Bahmani kingdom (1347-1538). In Gulbarga, these sufis developed close relations with the court and accepted state patronage, thus causing a change in the attitude of the Chishti order towards the state. The Bahmani kings, on their part, purchased the political loyalty of these sufis and gave land grants to them.

The most prominent of these Chishtis was Muhammad Banda Nawaz, Gesudaraz (*c.* 1321-1422). He left for the Deccan and received land grant of four villages from Bahmani Sultan, Firuz Shah Bahmani (1397-1422). He was an orthodox sufi and declared the supremacy of Islamic law (*Shariat*) over all sufi stages. Gisudaraz discontinued many practices of early Chishtis which clashed with the attitudes of orthodox *ulama*. Unlike the early Chishti masters, he was a voluminous writer on *tasawwuf*. After his death, the Bahmani Sultans continued the land grants in favour of his family descendants. His tomb or ***dargah*** in Gulbarga later developed into a popular place of pilgrimage in the Deccan. But the transformation of his descendants into a landed elite and their indifference towards Chishti teachings led to the decline of living Chishti tradition in Gulbarga. The change of Bahmani capital from Gulbarga to Bidar in 1422 also contributed to the decline of the Chishti order in Gulbarga.

However, the Chishti tradition began to thrive again in the Deccan from the end of the 15th century and it continued to grow during the 16th and 17th centuries. Its new centre was a place popularly known as Shahpur Hillock, just outside the city of Bijapur – the capital city of the Adil Shahi Sultans. The Chishti tradition of Shahpur Hillock was different from most of the later Chishti traditions such as that of Gulbarga in that it maintained distance from the court and the *ulama* and drew its inspiration from local influences. The Chishti saints of Shahpur Hillock were thus much closer in their attitudes to the early Chishti sufis of Delhi, though it must be pointed out that the Shahpur Hillock Chishti tradition developed independent of both the Delhi and Gulbarga traditions.

In Northern India, the resurgence of the Chishti order took place during the later 15th and early 16th century. The Chisthi sufis belonged to three different branches of the Chishti orders – Nagauriya (after the name of Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri), Sabiriya (after the name of Shaikh Alauddin Kaliyari) and Nizamiya Cafter the name of Shaikh Nizammuddin Auliya). Another important Chishti centre in Northern India during the later half of the 15th century and in the beginning of the 16th century was Jaunpur – the capital of the Sharqi Sultans. From the beginning of the 15th century, a Chishti centre flourished in Rudauli near Lucknow. Later, Bahraich (in modern Uttar Pradesh) emerged as another centre during the Lodi period. Gangoh in Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh became an important centre of the *silsilah* under Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi (1456-1537).

During the second phase, the Chishti centres also flourished in Malwa and Bengal. Many Chishti saints of the second phase wrote commentaries on Arabic and Persian classics and also translated Sanskrit works on mysticism into Persian. Like the early sufis of Delhi, the later Chishti sufis made followers from all classes of society but, unlike their spiritual predecessors, most of them accepted state patronage.

16.8.3 The Naqshbandi *Silsilah*

The Naqshbandi order was introduced into India by Khwaja Baqi Billah (1563-1603), the seventh in succession to Khawaja Bahauddin Naqshbandi (1317-1389), the founder of this order. From the beginning, the mystics of this order laid stress upon observance of the law (*Shariat*) and had emphatically denounced all *biddat* (innovations) which had spoiled the purity of Islam. Thus, it may be regarded as a reaction to the challenging ideas of the upholders of *wahdat-ul wujud*. This doctrine was furiously attacked by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, the chief disciple of Khwaja Baqi Billah. He wrote and circulated that God who created the world could not be identified with his creatures. Rejecting, *wahdat-ul wujud*, he expounded the doctrine of *wahdat-ul shuhud* ('apparentism') to serve as a corrective to the prevailing tendency. According to him, the 'Unity of Being' is not an objective but subjective experience. It appears to the mystic that he is identified with God, but in reality it is not so. In his rapturous ecstasy he gets lost in the object of his love and adoration and begins to feel as if his self was completely annihilated. But this is a temporary feeling and the mystic comes back to the stage of *abdiyat* (servitude). The Shaikh maintained that the relation between man and God is that of slave and master or that of a worshipper and the worshipped. It is not the relation of lover and beloved as the sufis generally hold. He emphasized the individual's unique relation of faith and responsibility to God as his Creator. It is the obedience to the Divine will which establishes the right relation between the human will in its fitness and the World Order ruled by God. Only through the *Shariat* one can realize the mystery of the Divine Existence. Thus Shaikh Ahmad tried to harmonize the doctrines of mysticism with the teachings of Orthodox

Islam. That is why he is called *Mujaddid* (the renovator) of Islam. Aurangzeb was the disciple of Khwaja Mohammad Masum, the son of the *Mujaddid*.

Shah Waliullah (1702-1762) was a noted scholar and a saint of the Naqshbandi order. He tried to reconcile the two doctrines of *wahdat-ul wujud* and *wahdat-ul shuhud*, his contention being that there is no fundamental difference between the two theories. He pointed out that in both these views the real existence belongs to God and that he alone has actual independent existence. The existence of the world is not real, and yet it can not be called imaginary either. To maintain that there is one reality which manifests itself in infinity of forms and pluralities is the same as to hold that contingent beings are the reflection of the names and attributes of the necessary being. If at all there is any difference between the two positions, it is insignificant.

Khwaja Mir Dard, the famous Urdu poet, was another mystic of the Naqshbandi order and a contemporary of Shah Waliullah. He also criticized *wahdat-ul wujud* in the light of his inner experience. According to him, this doctrine was expounded by the sufis in a state of ecstatic intoxication. So to give expression to such thoughts was highly injudicious. He condemned the believers in *wahdat-ul wujud* as those who have no knowledge of Reality. He was of the view that only through slavery to God one can attain closeness to Him.

In almost all parts of India, the sufis had established their centres (*khanqahs*) where spiritual discussions were held under the supervision of the mystic preceptor (*pir*). The mystic discipline continued to progress till the end of the 17th century, after which deterioration set in but even in the 18th century some of these *khanqahs* were the centres of spiritual culture. Khwaja Mir Dard's *khanqah* was one such important centre, which was often visited by Emperor Shah Alam.

16.8.4 Other Sufi Orders

In addition to the Chishti and the Suhrawardi orders, there were others such as the Firdausi, the Qadiri, the Shattari, the **Qalandari**, etc. which were introduced in India during this period. The Firdausi order was a branch of the Suhrawardi which established itself at Raigir in Bihar towards the end of the 14th century. The most prominent sufi belonging to this *silsilah* in India was Shaikh Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri (d. 1380).

The Qadiri was the important sufi order in the Central Islamic countries and was founded in Baghdad by Abdul Qadir Jilani (d. 1166). It was introduced in India in the late 14th century and established itself in the Punjab, Sind and the Deccan. The Qadiri had an orthodox orientation and its doctrinal positions were similar to those of the orthodox *ulama*. The Qadiri sufis had close relations with the ruling classes of various provincial Sultanates, and accepted state charity. The order was urban-based and attempted to reform the religious life of Indian Muslims of what it considered un-Islamic influences.

The Rishi order of sufism flourished in Kashmir during the 15th and 16th centuries. Before the emergence of this order, a religious preacher from Hamadan, Mir Saiyyid Ali Hamadani (1314-1385) had entered Kashmir with a group of followers to spread Islam. The missionary zeal of Hamadani, his sons and disciples made little impact on the people of Kashmir. The Rishi order, on the other hand, was an indigenous one established by Shaikh Nuruddin Wali (d. 1430). It prospered in the rural environment of Kashmir and influenced the religious life of the people during the 15th and 16th centuries. The popularity of the Rishi order was due to the fact and it drew inspiration from the popular Shaivite bhakti tradition of Kashmir and was rooted in the socio-cultural milieu of the region.

16.8.5 The Mahdavi Movement

The hope of the advent of a deliverer (a *Mahdi*) goes back to the traditions of Prophet Muhammad or his companions. The first person to lay claim to being a deliverer (a *Mahdi*) in the history of Islam was Muhammad al-Harafia, son of Ali. Many *Mahdis* came after him who were mainly concerned with the economic and political movements. Syed Mohammad of Jaunpur was the only *Mahdi* who did not crave political power but was mainly interested in spiritualism and purifying Islam.

He proclaimed himself *Mahdi* at Mecca. On returning to India, he was heckled by the *ulama* who were antagonistic towards him. However, he did manage to win a few converts some of whom belonged to the *ulama* group. The *Mahdis* enjoined worship of God according to the strict laws of *Shariat*: God, His Prophet and His Book were the only guides. The Mahdavis lived in *Daeras* where they practised the laws of the *Shariat*. For the Mahdavis the ordinance of the *Quran* was divided into two groups: commandments explained by the last of the Prophets associated with the *Shariat*; and commandments of the last of the *walis*, i.e., *Mahdi*.

The latter comprised the following: renunciation of the world, company of the truthful, seclusion from mankind, resignation to the Divine will, quest of the vision of God, distribution of one tenth of the income, constant *zikr*, and migration (*hijrat*). The Mahdavis abjured politics. After the death of Syed Muhammad of Jaunpur, several *Daeras* sprang up to disseminate the teachings of *Mahdi*. The preachers in these *Daeras* were called *khalifas*. They used local dialect for preaching. The *Daeras* attracted the masses because of the piety and simplicity of the Mahdavis. They were established in the North as well as South i.e. Gujarat. Chandigarh, Ahmadnagar, Bayana, etc.

16.9 THE CAUSES OF CHISHTI POPULARITY

All the sufi orders of the Sultanate period believed in achieving the basic sufi goal of establishing direct communion with God by traversing the sufi path under the supervision of a spiritual guide. However, different sufi orders observed distinct rituals and customs of their own and differed in their attitudes to state and society. Of all the orders of this period, the Chishti emerged as the most popular, and it was also widespread. The Chishti rituals, attitudes and practices made it an essentially Indian *silsilah*.

The causes of its popularity are as follows:

i) Many practices of early Chishtis bore close resemblance to the attributes of some of the already existing non-conformist religious orders in India such as asceticism, bowing before the master, shaving the head of a new entrant into the order and organizing spiritual musical recital. In this sense, the Chishtis came to be regarded as part of an established tradition in India.

ii) The Chishtis adopted an attitude of religious tolerance towards the non-Muslim population of India and adjusted themselves to the needs of a predominantly non-Muslim Environment. They made use of popular imagery and popular idiom to convey their ideas to their Indian followers and adopted many of their customs and rituals. Many of the Chishti saints made Hindawi the vehicle for spreading their teachings.

iii) The egalitarian atmosphere of the Chishti *khanqahs* attracted large number of people from lower sections of Indian society. The Chishti attitude towards religion was characterized by sympathy towards the deprived sections of the

society. Caste distinctions of the Brahmanical social order were meaningless in the Chishti *khanqahs*. Merchants, artisans, peasants and even sweepers became the followers of the Chishti order. Nor did they accept the two-fold racial division of the people by the Turkish ruling class into noble-born and low-born.

iv) The inspired leadership of the early Chishti masters, their aloofness from the court and their unwillingness to accept state patronage, their rejection of the orthodoxy and externalist attitudes of the *ulama*, and, finally, the combining of the simple precepts of Islam with the sufi teachings contributed to the popularity of the Chishti order.

v) The popularity of the early Chishtis rose after their life time as the cult of saints, began to develop in the later centuries around their shrines (*dargahs*). Later, legend-makers and writers of hagiographic literature sometimes attributed the popularity of the early Chishti sufis to their ability to perform miracles. In the subsequent centuries, traditions were invented to represent the early Chishtis as being actively involved in the conversion of the non-Muslims who were believed to have been drawn to them due to their alleged miracle-performing powers. However, the early Chishti sufis disapproved of the display of miraculous powers, though they did believe in the possibility of miracles. They did not consider the miracles of primary importance in sufi teaching and practice. Nevertheless, the miracle stories about the early Chishtis played an important role in enhancing the popularity of the Chishti shrines and the posthumous popularity of the sufis themselves.

16.10 THE SUFI AND BHAKTI MOVEMENTS AND CULTURAL SYNTHESIS

The interaction between sufism and the bhakti movement is clear from the remarkable similarities between the two. These similarities included emphasis on monotheism, on the role of the spiritual guide (*pir* or *guru*), and on mystical union with God. Moreover, both the bhakti saints and many Sufi orders were critical of the orthodox elements in Hinduism and Islam, respectively. One prominent example of the influence of the bhakti movement on sufism is offered by the Rishi order of the sufis in Kashmir. Here, the non-conformist ideas of the famous 14th century woman, bhakti preacher, Lal Ded, exercised profound influence on the founder of the order Shaikh Nuruddin Wali.

The interaction between the Chishti sufis and the Nathpanthi *yogis* during the Sultanate period is a well-established fact. The movement of the Nathpanthis had attained considerable popularity in Northern India, in particular among the lower sections of the society, during the 13th and 14th centuries. The Nathpanthi *yogis* frequently visited the *khanqahs* of the leading Chishti Shaikhs and had discussions with them on the nature of mysticism. The translation of the *yoga* treatise *Amrit-kund* into Persian from Sanskrit even before the advent of Sufism in India led to the adoption of many meditative practices by the sufis. The early Chishtis approved some of the ethical values of the Nathpanthi *yogis* and their corporate way of life. Like the Chishtis, the Nathpanthis had opened their doors to all sections of society, irrespective of caste distinctions. The common outlook of the two popular movements provided a basis for mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The adaptability of the Chishtis in the non-Muslim environment of India released syncretic forces and led to cultural synthesis. Many early Chishti spoke in Hindawi

and composed verses in it. Many *khanqahs* inspired the composition of mystical in poetry in regional languages. Some early Hindi works such as *Chandayan* by Mulla Daud (second half of the 14th century) combined mysticism with Hindu mythology and philosophy. The sufi folk literature of the later times was a mix of the simplest precepts of Islam and sufi terminology and the existing popular imagery and idiom and, thus, contributed to the growth of eclectic religious life, particularly in the rural areas. The Chishti practice of *sama* provided the basis for a syncretic musical tradition such as the repertoire of religious songs called *qawwali* which is said to have begun with Amir Khusrau.

Check Your Progress-3

1) What are the salient features of Sufism?

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2) List the main characteristics of the Suhrawardi *silsilah*.

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3) List the following:

a) Names of five sufis of Chishti *silsilah*. .....

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b) Names of five sufis orders that flourished in India. .....

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4) Write a brief note on Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya.

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5) Write a brief note on the Chishti saints who settled outside Delhi.

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6) What were the factors for the popularity of the Chishti order in India?

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7) What do you understand by *wahadat-ul wujud*? Write a note on the interaction between sufism and the bhakti movement.

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16.11 SUMMARY

The bhakti movement of the Sultanate period represented the most widespread constellation – both interwoven and variegated – of socio-religious movements in Indian history after the rise of heterodox movements of the 6th century BCE. They influenced the whole country at different times by propounding new socio-religious ideas and practices. Many of the current practices of popular Hinduism such as repetition of divine names, emphasis on the company of saints, and community devotional singing can be traced to the medieval bhakti movements. They also contributed to the growth of modern vernacular languages, emergence of organized religious communities like the Sikhs, and evolution of various sects or *panths*.

Early sufi saints came to India even before the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. The basic features of sufism in India continued to be the same as they were in the Islamic World. In the Islamic world it developed into an organized movement during 10th-12th centuries. During 12th and 13th centuries there developed a number of sufi orders or *silsilahs*. Like in the Islamic world a number of sufi orders became popular in India during the Sultanate period. Of these Suhrawardi and Chishti orders were more prominent. In India, the Chishti order became most popular among the masses. Sufis played a very important role in the social life of the period. In general, they did not get involved with the affairs of the state but we come across a number of cases where the sufis accepted state patronage and got involved with the affairs of the state.

The *khanqahs* were the centre of activity of sufis and their disciples. Sufis in India continued to be affected by the developments of mystic ideas in the contemporary Islamic world. In India, there was a regular interaction between the sufi and bhakti movements. This interaction had a positive impact on the social and cultural life during the Sultanate period. This interaction resulted in a cultural synthesis in the fields of art, music and literature.

16.12 KEYWORDS

Adi Granth	The most important sacred scripture of the Sikhs compiled by the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan in 1604. This later came to be called *Guru Granth Sahib*
Bhagat	The colloquial expression for *bhakta*, a devotee
Dargah	Sufi shrine/tomb
Futuh	Income received gratuitously
Khanqah	Place where sufi saints lived
Malfuzat	Sufi literature
Nirguna	Without attributes, unqualified
Panth	The community of the followers of a particular monotheist saint e.g., Kabirpanth, Nanakpanth, Dadupanth, etc
Qalandar	Muslim mendicant who abandons everything and leads a wandering life
Saguna	Having qualities or attributes
Sama	A sufi gathering where music is played and songs are recited
Vaishnava	Worshipper of Vishnu

16.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

1) See Sub-section 16.5
2) See Section 16.5
3) See Section 16.3
4) See Section 16.4
5) See Sub-section 16.5.2

Check Your Progress-2

l) See Sub-section 16.5.5
2) See Sub-section 16.5.4
3) See Sub-section 16.5.4 and 16.5.5

Check Your Progress-3

1) See Section 16.6
2) See Sub-section 16.8.1
3) See Section 16.8, especially Sub-section 16.8.2
4) See Sub-section 16.8.2
5) See Sub-section 16.8.2
6) See Section 16.9
7) See Section 16.6 and 16.10

16.14 SUGGESTED READINGS

Chand, Tara, (2006) (Reprint) *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (Nabu Book).

Krishnamurti, R., (1961) *Akbar: The Religious Aspect* (Baroda: Maharaja Sayajirao University).

Sharma, S. R., (2001) (Reprint) *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* (Book Enclave).

16.15 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECCOMENDATIONS

Role of Bhakti Movement in Indian History | Rajya Sabha TV
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFClKGI1Ybs

Sufism in India: Rise and Growth | CEC-UGC
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTmwmvnsWBA

The Indian Story: Sufi Culture of India | DD News
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8N7iDYhgVw

UNIT 17 ARCHITECTURE AND PAINTING*

Structure

17.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- distinguish between the pre-Islamic and Indo-Islamic styles of architecture,
- identify major phases of architectural development during the period,
- understand the traditions of painting prevalent in the Delhi Sultanate,
- learn new structural forms and techniques of Mughal architecture, and
- describe the main elements of Mughal painting.

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17.1 INTRODUCTION

Art and architecture are true manifestations of the culture of a period as they reflect the ethos and thought of a society. It is here that the ideas and techniques of a society find visual expression. In this context the advent of the Turkish rule in India marks the beginning of a new expression in the realm of art and architecture. The new style is generally identified as the Indo-Islamic style of architecture.

The establishment of Mughal rule in India in 1526 revitalized the Indo-Islamic architecture. The new rulers effected an amalgam of the prevalent architectural forms and techniques with those brought from Central Asia and Persia. The result of their efforts was the emergence of one of the most splendid buildings in India.

Unlike architecture, the art of painting as practiced in the Delhi Sultanate is not adequately documented. We know that **calligraphy** and book-illumination in the Islamic world had achieved supreme heights by the close of the 12th century. Moreover, there also existed a developed tradition of figural **murals** in the Ghaznavid kingdom. Possibly the same traditions were carried to Delhi by the early Turkish Sultans. However, the true flourish of these traditions seems to have occurred in the 13th and 14th centuries.

As against the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal developments in art and architecture, the regional states mostly followed a variant course. While they adhered mainly to the technological principles evolved under the Indo-Islamic style, interesting regional variations were introduced in the plans and appearance of buildings built under the patronage of regional kingdoms. Here, we will not go into details pertaining to the regional developments.

In this Unit, we will take into account these developments in the field of architecture and painting under the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal India.

17.2 ARCHITECTURE UNDER THE DELHI SULTANATE

The most important source for the study of architecture are the surviving remains of buildings themselves. They enable us to study architectural techniques and styles peculiar to our period. But little help is offered by these remains in furthering our understanding of other related aspects of architecture such as the role of the architects and the drawings and estimates and accounts of the buildings.

The Turkish Sultans in India brought with them the emergence of a culture which combined elements of both indigenous and Islamic traditions. The most effective and distinct manifestation of this syncretic culture is available in the art and architecture of this period.

17.2.1 New Structural Forms

We begin our study by noticing a distinct feature of this 'new' style – a significant increase in the number of masonry buildings from about the 13th century. It seems very likely that the introduction of a new cementing material in the construction of buildings during this period added longer life and greater durability to the masonry structures. How did this happen and which new structural forms provided support to the longer life and greater durability, is going to be detailed by us in the following paragraphs.

i) Arch and Dome

Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India, compiled between 1865-77 suggest that the incidence of masonry building – including civilian housing in towns in Northern India – increased significantly after the 13th century. This was primarily possible due to the use of lime-mortar as the basic cementing material and the introduction of a new architectural form i.e. the **arch** in raising masonry buildings. Additionally, an extended form of arch, called **dome**, was also applied as a building form to mainly provide the ceiling to the masonry building. These new techniques gave greater stability and therefore longer life to masonry buildings, as noted in the Archaeological Survey Reports. It is therefore important for us to clearly understand the details of these technological and architectural devices to truly appreciate the development of Indo-Islamic architecture.

It must be appreciated that the introduction of a new cementing material and a new architectural form were simultaneous processes as one complimented the other. Let us now examine the two features in detail – lime-mortar as cementing material and arch as an architectural technique.

As you have studied in **Unit-14** the building of arch required stones or bricks to be laid as voussoirs in the shape of a curve and bound together firmly by a good binding material. This binding material was lime-mortar **(Figure 1)**.

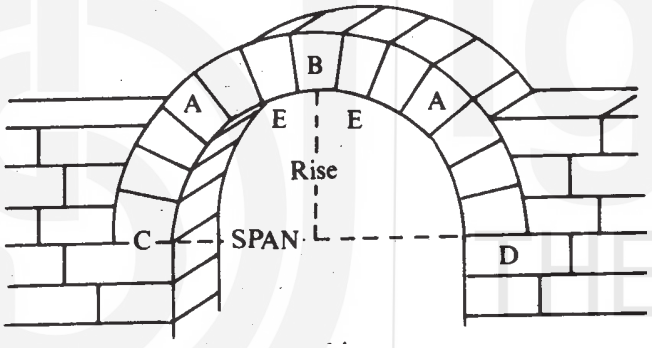

Figure 1

A major impact of the introduction of the new technique was the replacement of pre-Turkish forms – lintel and beam and corbelling – with true arches and vaults. Similarly, the spired roofs (*shikhar*) of the pre-Turkish period were now replaced with domes. Arches are made in a variety of shapes, but in India the pointed form of the Islamic world was directly inherited, and sometime in the second quarter of the 14th century, another variant of the pointed form, the four-centerd arch, was introduced by the Tughlaqs in their buildings. It remained in general use till the end of the Delhi Sultanate (these forms have been illustrated in **Figure 2**).

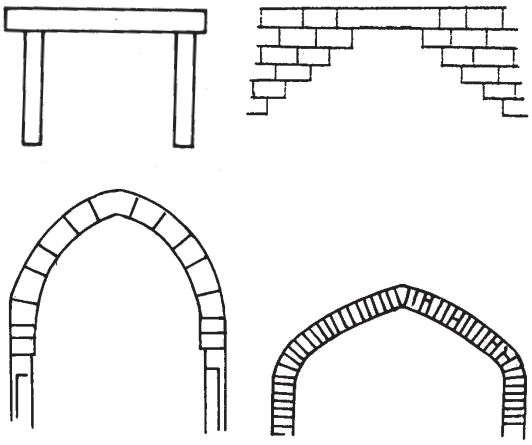

Figure 2

The pointed arch was adopted in the Islamic world quite early due to its durability and ease of construction. The usual method of raising a pointed arch was to erect a light **centering** and place one layer of bricks over it. This layer supported another thin layer of flat bricks over which radiating voussoirs of the arch were fixed in mortar. These two bottom layers of brick-work would, if needed, act as permanent shuttering for the arch (**Figure 3**). You will appreciate that the employment of bricks instead of an all-wood centering was a feature typical of regions deficient in reserves of wood such as West Asia and even India.

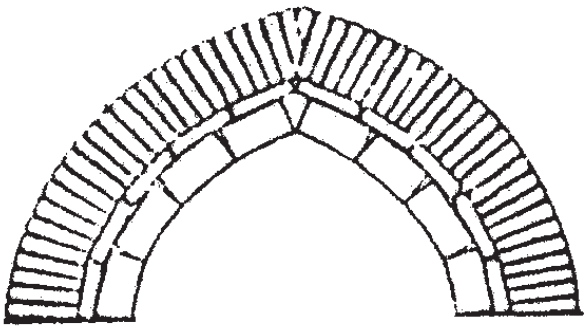

Figure 3

But the construction of dome demanded specialized techniques. The problem was to find a suitable method for converting the square or rectangular top of the walls of the room into a circular base for raising a spherical dome. The best way to overcome this problem was to convert the square plan into a polygon by the use of squinches across the corners (**Figure 3**). Later, in the 15th century, stalactite pendentives came to be used for the same purpose. For example, in Bara Gumbad Mosque, New Delhi.

ii) Building Material

It is a curious fact that there are very few instances of early Turkish buildings in India where newly quarried material has been used by the architects. The usual practice was to use richly carved capitals, columns, shafts and lintels from pre-Turkish structures as the building material. In India, it was only towards the beginning of the 14th century, when the supply of such material had exhausted, that buildings were raised by using originally quarried or manufactured material.

It is no surprise that, stone, due to its strength, has been used abundantly in the masonry work. The foundations are mostly of rough and small rubble or, wherever it is available, of river boulders, while the superstructure is of dressed stone or roughly shaped coarse stonework. However, in either case, the buildings were plastered all over. Percy Brown (1942) has noted that in the buildings of the Khalji period a new method of stone masonry was used. This consisted of laying stones in two different courses, that is headers and stretchers. This system was retained in subsequent buildings and became a characteristic feature of the building technique of the Mughals.

Buildings of this period were generally plastered with gypsum. Apparently lime-plaster was reserved for places that needed to be secured against the leakage of water, such as roofs, indigo-vats, canals, drains, etc. In the later period, i.e. around 15th century, when highly finished **stucco** work became common, gypsum mortar was preferred for plaster work on the walls and the ceiling.

iii) Decoration

Decorative art in the Islamic buildings served the purpose of concealing the structure behind motifs rather than revealing it. Since the depiction of living

beings was generally frowned upon, the elements of decoration were, in most cases, limited to:

a) calligraphy, b) geometry, and c) foliation.

It was by their manipulation that a rich and sumptuous effect was obtained in the Sultanate buildings. But characteristically enough no one type of decoration was reserved for a particular type of building; on the contrary, these Pan-Islamic decorative principles were used for all kinds of buildings in the Delhi Sultanate.

Calligraphy is an important element of the decorative art in the buildings of this period. The *Quranic* sayings are inscribed on buildings in an angular, sober and monumental script, known as Kufi. They may be found in any part of the building-frames of the doors, ceilings, wall panels, niches etc., and in variety of materials-tone, stucco and painting.

Geometric shapes in abstract form are used in these buildings in a bewildering variety of combinations. The motifs indicate incorporation of visual principles: repetition, symmetry, and generation of continuous patterns. It has been suggested by Dalu Jones (Michael, 1978) that the generating source of these geometric designs is the circle, which could be developed into a square, a triangle or a polygon. These forms are then elaborated by multiplication and subdivision, by rotation and by symmetrical arrangements.

Of the foliations, the dominant form of decoration employed in Sultanate buildings, is the *arabesque*. It is characterized by a continuous stem which splits regularly, producing a series of leafy secondary stems which can in turn split again or reintegrate into the main stem. The repetition of this pattern produces a beautifully balanced design with a three dimensional effect.

Check Your Progress-1

1) What was the main reason for a significant increase in masonry buildings after the 13th century?

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2) Identify the structural problem in raising a domed roof over a square building.

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3) What were the main elements of decoration in the Sultanate architecture ?

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17.2.2 Stylistic Evolution

i) The Early Form

The history of Indo-Islamic architecture proper commences with the occupation of Delhi by the Turks in CE 1192. The Tomar citadel of Lal Kot with its Chauhan extension, called Qila Rai Pithora, was captured by Qutbuddin Aibak. Here he began the construction of a Jami Masjid which was completed in 1198. According to an inscription on the mosque it was known as Quwwatul Islam and was built from the wreckage of twenty-seven Hindu and Jain temples demolished by the conquerors. Again, in 1199, an expansive screen with lofty arches was raised across the entire front of the sanctuary of the mosque. In both these constructions, the hand of the local architect is quite evident. The lintels, carved-columns and slabs, have been used liberally by only turning their carved sides inwards or using them upside down. The arches of the screen have been built by employing the method of corbelling; and the ornamentation of the screen, is emphatically Hindu in conception.

However, the borrowed elements of Hindu architecture were soon discarded and relatively little of this element was retained in the now maturing Indo-Islamic style. In later buildings of this phase, such as Qutb Minar (built 1199-1235), Arhai Din Ka Jhoupra (built *c.* 1200) and Iltutmish's tomb (completed 1233-4), though corbelling could not be replaced as the principal structural technique, decoration became almost fully Islamic in detail. In this connection, the principles employed in the construction of the domical roof of Iltutmish's tomb (built 1233-4, not extant now) are also of great interest. Though the domical roof was raised with the help of corbelled courses it was supported on squinches built at the corners of the square chamber. Here perhaps is the earliest attempt, says Percy Brown, of solving the problem of the phase of transition in India.

The culmination of the architectural style designated by us as the Early Form was the mausoleum of Balban built around 1287-88. It is in ruins now but occupies an important place in the development of Indo-Islamic architecture, as it is here that we notice the earliest true arch.

ii) The Khaljis

The Khalji period architecture, as revealed in Alai Darwaza (built 1305) at the Qutb complex, and the Jamat Khana Masjid (built 1325) at Nizamuddin, marks a change in the style. In the evolution of Indo-Islamic architecture, this phase occupies a key position as it exhibits a distinct influence of the Seljuq architectural tradition (a Turkish tribe ruling over Central Asia and Asia Minor in 11^{th}-13^{th} century) as also certain salient features of composition which were adopted in the succeeding styles. The characteristic features of this phase may be listed below:

a) Employment of true arch, pointed horse-shoe in shape.

b) Emergence of true dome with recessed arches under the squinch.

c) Use of red sandstone and decorative marble reliefs as new building materials.

d) Appearance of lotus-bud fringe on the underside of the arch – a Seljuq feature.

e) Emergence of new masonry-facing consisting of a narrow course of headers, alternating with a much wider course of stretchers – again a Seljuq feature.

In addition, the decorative features characterized by calligraphy, geometry and *arabesque* now became much bolder and profuse.

iii) The Tughlaqs

Another shift in the architectural style came in the buildings of the Tughlaq period. Judging from the remains, only the first three rulers of this house appear to have made important additions in architecture. The architecture of this period can be divided into two main groups. To the first group belong the constructions of Ghiyasuddin and Muhammad Tughlaq, and the other to those of Firuz Tughlaq.

The general features of the Tughlaq style of architecture are listed below:

a) Stone rubble is the principal building material and the walls are in most cases plastered.

b) The walls and bastions are invariably **battered**, the effect being most marked at the corners.

c) A hesitant and possibly experimental use of a new shape of arch – the four centered arch-necessitating its reinforcement with a supporting beam. This arch-beam combination is a hall-mark of the Tughlaq style. The pointed horse-shoe arch of the preceding style was abandoned because of its narrow compass and therefore the inability to span wider spaces.

d) Emergence of a pointed dome with clearly visible neck in contrast with rather stifled dome of the preceding style.

e) Introduction of encaustictiles as an element of decoration in the panels of the buildings.

f) Emergence of an octagonal plan, in the tombs of this period, which came to be copied and perfected by the Mughals in the 16^{th}-17^{th} century.

An additional feature was the element of reduced ornament, confined mostly to inscribed borders and medallions in **spandrels** executed in plaster or stucco.

iv) The Final phase

Within a decade of the death of Firuz Shah Tughlaq (1388), the Sultanate became politically unstable, and in 1398 was sacked and plundered by Timur. However, some semblance of central authority remained with the two succeeding dynasties of the Saiyyids and Lodis, although they ruled over a greatly shrunken Sultanate of Delhi between 1414 and 1526. A large number of tombs were built in and around Delhi so much so that over a period of time the area around Delhi looked like a sprawling *qabristan* (graveyard).

Yet some of these structures are important from architectural point of view and can be considered as heralding a distinct style. The more important of these tomb-buildings took two separate forms, the distinguishing features of which are given below:

a) Mausoleums designed on an octagonal plan incorporating the following elements:
   - main tomb-chamber surrounded by an arched *verandah*
   - one storey high
   - ***verandah*** with projecting **eaves** supported on **brackets**

b) The other type was built on square plan. These were characterized by the following elements:
   - absence of *verandah* around the main tomb-chamber

- exterior comprised of two, and sometimes three stories
- absence of eaves and supporting brackets

There is an original treatment of coloured tile decoration in these buildings. It is set sparingly in friezes. In addition, there are intricately incised surfaces of plaster.

The end of the Delhi Sultanate came in 1526 with the defeat of last of the Lodi Sultans at the hands of the Mughal invader, Babur. This also signalled an end of the Sultanate style of architecture, which had begun showing signs of stagnation in the 15th century.

17.2.3 Public Buildings and Public Works

You must have noticed that in our discussion of the development of the Sultanate architecture so far, we made references mostly to royal structures like palace-citadels, tombs or mosques. This, however, is not to suggest that other kinds of buildings were non-existent or that they were insignificant.

Contrary to the popular opinion that the number of structures other than royal buildings was abysmal, we in fact notice that such structures far outnumber royal buildings. The majority of these buildings comprised of *sarai*, bridges, irrigation-tanks, wells and ***baolis***, dams, *kachehri* (administrative buildings), prison-houses, *kotwali* (police-stations), *dak-chauki* (post-stations), *hammam* (public baths), and *katra* (market places), etc. Since almost all these types were intended for public and civic purposes, we group them collectively under public buildings and public works. They were available to the general public regardless of their religious affiliations.

Sarai is perhaps the most conspicuous of these public buildings. It was introduced in India by the Turks in the 13th century. The earliest mention of the existence of *sarai* is from Balban's time (1266). Among late rulers both Muhammad Tughlaq and Firuz Tughlaq are known to have built a large number of *sarais* in Delhi as also along the major land-routes of the Sultanate. The main features of these *sarais* may be listed thus:

- Square or rectangular disposition, enclosed on all four sides by masonry walls, with entry through one of sometimes two gateways,
- Series of rooms fronted by small vaulted spaces along all the four sides inside the enclosure. Warehouses were in the corners of the enclosure.
- Existence of a small mosque and one or more walls in the open courtyard within the enclosure (These feature may be seen in the plan of a *sarai* of Sher Shah's time).

Bridges were another important category of public buildings. However, only small and medium sized rivers were provided with masonry bridges. Major rivers such as the Ganga and the Yamuna were provided with bridges made of boats. We are fortunate in having at least two masonry bridges of this period surviving even today. One is located at Chittorgarh over the Gambheri river. The other was built over Sahibi, a tributary of Yamuna, at Wazirabad Delhi.

Sarais and bridges are only the two most common specimens from a rather rich and miscellaneous order of public buildings of the Sultanate period. Weirs and step-wells, too, are a part of the Delhi Sultanate architecture. For example, gandhak ki baoli built by Iltutmish at Mehrauli (Delhi) is one of the step-wells.

Apart from this Indo-Islamic architectural style, the regional styles of architecture came into vogue usually after these states had thrown off the allegiance to Delhi

and proceeded to develop a form suiting their individual requirements. They were distinct from the Indo-Islamic style practiced at Delhi and often displayed definitely original qualities. In the areas which had a strong indigenous tradition of workmanship in masonry, regional styles of Islamic architecture produced the most elegant structures. On the other hand, where these traditions were not so pronounced, the buildings constructed for the regional states were less distinctive. In some cases, totally novel tendencies – independent of both the indigenous and the imperial Sultanate traditions – are also visible.

Check Your Progress-2

1. Mark (✓) or (×):

   i) The arches in the screen of Quwwatul Islam Masjid are corbelled. ( )

   ii) Dome in Iltutmish's tomb was raised by placing crossbeams at the corners of the tomb-chamber. ( )

   iii) Openings in Balban's tomb are corbelled. ( )

2) List three main features of the Khalji architecture.

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3) Answer each of the following in two lines.

   i) Why was pointed horse-shoe arch abandoned in the Tughlaq period?

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   ii) How are the walls and bastions of Tughlaq period different from the preceding structures?

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   iii) What difference do you notice in the building material of the Tughlaq buildings?

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4) Write a note on the distinctive features of the Saiyyid and Lodi mausoleums.

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5) Define a public building and list some of the important public buildings of the Delhi Sultanate.

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17.3 MUGHAL ARCHITECTURE

The history of architecture during the 16th-18th centuries is in fact an account of the building activities of the Mughal Emperors, except for a brief interregnum of a decade and a half when rulers of the Sur dynasty ruled in Delhi.

17.3.1 Beginning of Mughal Architecture

It is true that the Mughal style of architecture took a concrete form during the reign of Akbar, yet the basic principles of Mughal architecture were provided by Babur and Humayun, the two predecessors of Akbar.

Buildings of Babur

Babur had a short reign of five years, most of which was spent in fighting battles for the consolidation of the newly born Mughal state. He is, however, known to have taken considerable interest in building secular works. It is unfortunate that very little of this work is extant today. The only standing structures of Babur's reign are two mosques, built in 1526, at Panipat and Sambhal. But both these structures are common place, and possess no architectural merit.

Babur's secular works mainly comprise the laying of gardens and pavilions. In one of the miniatures, he has been depicted inspecting the layout plan of a garden of Dholpur. Today, only the excavated ruins of this garden are visible. Two more gardens, Ram Bagh and Zahra Bagh at Agra, are also attributed to him. But the present layout of these gardens seems to have undergone many alterations. None of Babur's pavilions have been noticed as surviving today.

Buildings of Humayun

The surviving buildings of Humayun's reign have the same inconsequential character as that of Babur. The Mughal domination over India was too unsettled for the production of any great work of architecture. Moreover, Humayun had to spend fifteen long years of his life in exile in Persia during the ascendance of the Sur dynasty in Delhi. However, two mosques from among several other buildings erected during the first phase of his reign survive. One of these lies in ruinous condition at Agra. The other is at Fatehabad (Hissar). But both these structures are devoid of any architectural distinctiveness much in the same manner as the mosques of Babur.

Humayun's return to Delhi in 1555 was short-lived. There are in fact no notable buildings of this time. Mention may, however, be made of Humayun's tomb as a structure which was inspired by the Persian culture imbibed by Humayun during his exile. This building is in fact a landmark in the development of the Mughal style of architecture. The construction began in 1564 after Humayun's death under the patronage of his widow, Hamida Bano Begum. The architect of the building was Mirak Mirza Ghiyas, a native of Persia. He brought many Persian craftsmen to Delhi to work on the structure and their skills and techniques were liberally employed. The tomb has, thus, become representative of an Indian rendition of a Persian concept. It may be noted that Humayun's tomb, strictly speaking, is a building of Akbar's reign. But because of peculiar features, it has been treated separately.

Humayun's tomb is one of the earliest specimens of the garden enclosure and is raised high on an arcaded sandstone platform. The tomb is octagonal in plan and is crowned by a high dome, which is actually a double dome. It has two shells, with an appreciable space in between. The inner shell forms the vaulted ceiling

to the inner chambers, and the outer shell rises like a bulb in a proportion with the elevation of the main building. To the centre of each side of the tomb is a porch with a pointed arch providing entrance to the main chamber. The interior of this building is a group of compartments, the largest in the centre containing the grave of the Emperor. The smaller ones in each angle were meant to house the graves of his family member. Each room is octagonal in plan and they are connected by diagonal passages.

Double-dome

A double-dome is built of two layers. There is one layer inside which provides ceiling to the interior of the building. The other layer is the outer one which crowns the building. The devices of double dome enable the ceiling inside to be placed lower and in better relation to the interior space it covers. This is done without disturbing the proportions and effect of elevation of the exterior. The method of making double dome was practiced in Western Asia for quite sometime before it was imported into India.

17.3.2 Interregnum: The Sur Architecture

The Mughal rule in India was interrupted by Sher Shah Sur in 1540. For the next fifteen years the Empire came under the sway of the Surs who embarked on profound architectural projects. Their buildings, in fact, laid the ground work on which the Mughals built.

The architectural heritage produced under diverse conditions and in two separate localities of the Surs may be divided into two separate and distinct periods. The first phase emerged at Sasaram (Bihar) under Sher Shah between 1530-1540. The second phase lasted from 1540-1545 when Sher Shah had wrested control of the Empire from Humayun. Under his patronage, several architectural innovations were adopted which got reflected in mature form in the consequent Mughal style.

The first phase is represented by a group of tombs, three belonging to the ruling family and one to Aliwal Khan who was the architect of these tombs. Tile buildings reflect the ambition of Sher Shah to create monuments grander than anything in Delhi. The first project of this scheme was the construction of the tomb of Hasan Khan, Sher Shah's father, in 1525. But this was a conventional exercise in Lodi design. The major representative of this group was the tomb of Sher Shah (Sasaram), an architectural masterpiece. Here the architect considerably enlarged the normal proportions of the earlier building and set it in a beautiful tank approached by a causeway. In addition to this, he increased the number of stories thus producing a beautiful pyramidal structure in five distinct stages. This monument was constructed of the finest Chunar sandstone.

Sher Shah's tomb stands on a stepped square plinth on a terrace appreciated through a gateway via a bridge placed across the tank. There is an error in orienting the lower platform of the tomb on the main axis. But it is corrected by skewing the axis of the superstructure built over the lower platform. The main building comprises an octagonal chamber surrounded by an **arcade**. There are domed canopies in each corner of the platform. The proportions of diminishing stages and the harmonious transition from square to octagon and to sphere are elements which speak highly of the capabilities of the Indian architect.

The second phase of development took place in Delhi. Sher Shah built the Purana Qila intended to be the sixth city of Delhi. Today, only two isolated gateways survive. Far more important, however, was the Qila-i Kuhna Masjid, built about

1542 inside the Purana Qila citadel. In the architectural scheme of this mosque, the facade of the prayer hall is divided into five arched **bays**, the central one larger than the others, each with an open archway recessed within it. The facade is richly carved in black and white marble and red sandstone, and the central arch is flanked by narrow, fluted pilasters. The rear carriers of the mosque have five stair **turrets** with rich windows carried on brackets.

One notable feature in this building is the shape of the arches – there is a slight drop, or flatness, in the curve towards the crown. It is indicative of the last stage before the development of the four-centered 'Tudor' arch of the Mughals.

17.3.3 Architecture under Akbar

Akbar's reign can be understood as the formative period of Mughal architecture. It represents the finest example of the fusion of Indo-Islamic architecture.

Structural Form

The architecture of the reign of Akbar represents encouragement of the indigenous techniques and a selective use of the experiences of other countries. The chief elements of the style of architecture that evolved under Akbar's patronage can be listed thus:

a) red sandstone was used as the main building material,

b) widespread use of the **trabeate** construction,

c) the arches used mainly in decorative form rather than in structural form,

d) the dome was of the 'Lodi' type, sometimes built hollow but never technically of the true double order,

e) the shafts of the pillars were multifaceted and the capitals of these pillars invariably took the form of bracket supports, and

f) the decoration comprised of boldly carved or inlaid patterns complemented by brightly coloured patterns on the interiors.

Building Projects

Akbar's building projects can be divided into two main groups, each representing a different phase. The first group comprised buildings of fort and a few palaces mainly at Agra, Allahabad and Lahore. The second group related basically to the construction of his new capital at Fathpur Sikri.

a) The First Phase

One of the earliest building projects of Akbar's reign was the construction of a fort at Agra, conceived actually as a fortress-palace. Its massive walls and battlements convey an effect of great power. Inside the fort, Akbar had built many structures in the styles of Bengal and Gujarat. Except the Jahangiri Mahal, however, all the other structures were demolished by Shah Jahan as part of a later phase of remodelling. Today the Delhi Gate of the fort and Jahangiri Mahal are the only representative buildings of Akbar's reign.

The Delhi Gate of Agra Fort probably represents Akbar's earliest architectural effort. It formed the principal entrance to the fort. The architecture of the gate shows an originality signifying the start of a new era in the building art of India. The gate follows a simple plan; the different components are:

- a front consisting of two broad octagonal towers by the sides of a central archway,

- a back having arcaded terraces topped by **kiosks** and pinnacles, and
- an ornamentation consisting of patterns in white marble inlaid against the red sandstone background.

The Jahangiri Mahal was built by Akbar and is conceived as a robust building in red sandstone. It is the only surviving example in the fort of the domestic requirements of the ruler and is a fine specimen of fusion of the Hindu and Islamic building designs. It is planned in the form of an asymmetrical range of apartments. The facade on the eastern side has an entrance gateway leading to a domed hall with elaborately carved ceiling. As one crosses this hall one reaches a central open courtyard. On the north side of this courtyard is a pillared hall with a roof supported on **piers** and cross-beams with serpentine brackets. The southern side, too, has a similar hall. This symmetry is, however, broken on the east side by a set of chambers that lead to a portico facing the river Yamuna. The entire construction is mainly in red sandstone with the combination of beam and bracket forming its principal structural system.

The same style is manifested in the other palace-fortresses at Lahore and Allahabad. Only the fort at Ajmer represents a different class. Since it spearheaded the advancing frontier of the Empire, the walls of the fort were thickly doubled.

b) The Second Phase

The second phase of Akbar's architectural scheme coincides with the conception and creation of a ceremonial capital for the Empire at Sikri, nearly 40 kms. west of Agra. The new capital was named Fathpur. It is one of the most remarkable monuments in India. In its design and layout Fathpur Sikri is a city where the public areas like the courtyards, *Diwan-i Am* and Jami Masjid form a coherent group around the private palace apartments. The city was built in a very short span of time (1571-1585) and as such does not follow any conscious overall plan. The buildings were sited to relate to each other and to their surroundings. An asymmetry seems to have been deliberately incorporated into the setting-out and design of the complex. All the buildings are in characteristic rich red sandstone, using traditional trabeate construction. The pillars, lintels, brackets, tiles and **posts** were cut from local rocks and assembled without the use of mortar.

The buildings in Fathpur Sikri may be resolved into two categories: religious and secular character. The religious buildings comprise (a) the Jami Masjid; (b) the Buland Darwaza; and (c) the tomb of Shaikh Salim Chishti. The buildings of secular nature are more varied and thus numerous. These can be grouped under (a) palaces; (b) administrative buildings; and (c) structures of miscellaneous order. It is a curious fact that the religious buildings are invariably built in the arcuate style while in secular buildings dominates the trabeate order.

The Jami Masjid uses the typical plan of a mosque – a central courtyard, arcades on three sides and domed skyline. The western side has the prayer hall with three separate enclosed sanctuaries, each surmounted by a dome and linked by arcades. The usual entrance to the masjid is from the east where stands the structure of a big gateway projected in the form of a half hexagonal porch.

In 1596, the southern gateway was replaced by Akbar with a victory gate, the Buland Darwaza. It is constructed in red and yellow sandstone with white marble inlay outlining the span of the arches. The loftiness of the structure is enhanced by a flight of steps on the outside. The entrance has been formed by a piercing huge central arch which is crowned by an array of domed kiosks. The Buland Darwaza was built to commemorate Akbar's conquest of Gujarat in 1573.

The tomb of Salim Chishti stands in the courtyard of the Jami Masjid in the north-western quarter. It is an all architectural masterpiece as it exhibits one of the finest specimens of marble work in India. The structure was completed in 1581 and was originally faced only partly in marble. The serpentine brackets supporting the eaves and the carved lattice screens are remarkable features of the structure.

The palace complex in Fathpur Sikri comprises a number of apartments and chambers. The largest of these buildings is known as the Jodh Bai Palace. The palace is massive and austere in character. The wall outside is plain with principal buildings attached to inner side, all facing an interior courtyard. On the north side is an arcaded passage and a balcony. There are rooms in the upper storey in the north and south wings. They have ribbed roofs covered with bright blue glazed tiles from Multan.

A unique building of the palace complex is the Panch Mahal, a five storeyed structure, located south-east of the *Diwan-i Khas*. The size of the five storeys successively diminish as one goes upwards. At the top is a small domed kiosk. Some of the sides in this building were originally enclosed by screens of red sandstone. But none remain intact now. An interesting feature is that the columns on which the five stories have been raised are all dissimilar in design.

Of the administrative buildings, undoubtedly the most distinctive is the *Diwan-i Khas*. The plan of this building is in the form of a rectangle and is in two storeys from outside. It has flat terraced roof with pillared domed kiosks rising above each comer. Inside, there is a magnificent carved column in the center, having a huge bracket capital supporting a circular stone platform. From this platform radiate four railed 'bridges' along catch diagonal of the hall to connect the galleries surrounding the upper portion of the hall. The main architectural object in this interior is the central column. The shaft is variously patterned and branches out, at the top, into a series of closely set volute and pendulous brackets which support the central platform.

Another notable building of the same category is the *Diwan-i Am*. It is a spacious rectangular courtyard surrounded by **colonnades**. The Emperor's platform is towards the western end. It is a projecting structure with a pitched stone roof having five equal openings. The platform is in three parts, the center probably used by the Emperor and separated from the other two sides by fine stone screens pierced with geometric patterns.

Buildings of miscellaneous character are scattered all over the city complex:

i) Two *caravan sarais*, one located inside the Agra Gate, immediately to the right; and the other, the larger structure, is outside the Hathi Pol on the left side;

ii) *Karkhana* building located between the *Diwan-i-Am* and *Naubat Khana*, having a series of brick domes of radiating rather than horizontal courses; and

iii) The water-works, opposite the *caravan sarai* near Hathi Pol, comprising a single deep *baoli* flanked by two chambers in which a device was used to raise water for distribution in the city.

Check Your Progress-3

1. Match the following:

i)	Ram Bagh and Zahra Bagh	a)	Hamida Bano Begum
ii)	Humayun's tomb	b)	Tomb of Sher Shah
iii)	Sasaram	c)	Sher Shah
iv)	Purana Qila	d)	Babur

2) Discuss the characteristic features of Humayun's tomb in 60 words.

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3) Tick mark right (✓)and wrong (×) against the following statements:

i) Akbar used white marble as the building material in most of his buildings. ( )

ii) Akbar's buildings never used double dome. ( )

iii) Akbar's architecture is a combination of trabeate and arcuate styles. ( )

iv) Akbar used corbelling to cover the spaces. ( )

4) Write a note on the important secular buildings at Fathpur Sikri.

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5) Name the last of the religious buildings at Fathpur Sikri.

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17.3.4 Architecture under Jahangir and Shah Jahan

Akbar's death in 1605 did in no way hamper the development of a distinctive Mughal architecture under his successors. A secure empire and enormous wealth in legacy, in fact, permitted both Jahangir and Shah Jahan to pursue interest in the visual arts.

New Features

In the sphere of the building art, Jahangir and Shah Jahan's reigns were an age of marble. The place of red sandstones was soon taken over by marble in its most refined form. This dictated significant stylistic changes which have been listed below:

a) The arch adopted a distinctive form with foliated curves, usually with nine cusps,

b) Marble arcades of **engrailed arches** became a common feature,

c) The dome developed a bulbous form with stifled neck. Double domes became very common,

d) Inlaid patterns in coloured stones became the dominant decorative form, and

e) In the buildings, from the latter half of the Jahangir's reign, a new device of inlay decoration called ***pietra dura*** was adopted. In this method, semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli, onyx, jasper, topaz and cornelian were embedded in the marble in graceful foliations.

Major Buildings

The account of the major buildings of this period begins with a remarkable structure, i.e., the tomb of Akbar, located at Sikandra, eight kilometers from Agra on Delhi road. It was designed by Akbar himself and begun in his own lifetime but remained incomplete at the time of his death. Subsequently, it was completed by Jahangir with modifications in the original design. As it stands today, the entire complex is a curious mix of the architectural schemes of both Akbar and Jahangir.

The scheme of this complex envisages the location of tomb in the midst of an enclosed garden with gateway in the centre of each side of the enclosing wall.

The tomb building in the center is a square structure built up in three storeys. The first storey is in fact an arcaded platform making the basement. Within the platform, vaulted cells surrounded the mortuary chamber and a narrow inclined corridor in the south leads to the grave. The middle portion is in three tiers of red sandstone trabeate pavilions. The second storey, of white marble in contrast to the red sandstone elsewhere, has an open court surrounded by colonnades with screens. The tomb is linked by **causeways** and canals to the gateways in the enclosure wall. But it is the one in the south which provides the only entrance, the other three being false gateways added for symmetry.

The southern gateway is a two-storey structure with circular minarets of white marble rising above the corners. The entire structure of the gateway is ornamented with painted stucco-coloured stone and marble inlay. Interestingly, the decorative motifs include, besides the traditional floral designs, arabesques and calligraphy, *gaja* (the elephant), *hamsa* (the swan), *padma* (the lotus), *swastika*, and *chakra*.

The architectural importance of Akbar's tomb at Sikandra can be gauged from the fact that several mausoleums built subsequently reflect the influence of this structure to varying degree. Particular mention may be made of the tomb of Jahangir at Shahdara near Lahore and that of Nur Jahan's father Mirza Ghiyas Beg at Agra.

The tomb of Itimadud Daula, built in 1622-1628 by Nur Jahan on the grave of her father Mirza Ghiyas Beg marks a change in architectural style from Akbar to Jahangir and Shah Jahan. The transition from the robustness of Akbar's buildings to a more sensuous architecture of the later period is evident in the conception of this structure.

The tomb is a square structure raised on a low platform. There are four octagonal minarets, at each corner, with domed roofs. The central chamber is surrounded by a verandah enclosed with beautiful marble tracery. The main tomb is built in white marble and is **embellished** with mosaics and *pietra dura*. The central chamber contains the yellow marble tomb of Itimadud Daula and his wife. The side rooms are decorated with painted floral motifs. Four red sandstone gateways enclosing a square garden provide a splendid foil for the white marble tomb at its center.

It should be noted here that Jahangir was a much greater patron of the art of painting. His love of flowers and animals, as reflected in the miniature painting of his period, made him a great lover of the art of laying out gardens rather than building huge monuments. Some of the famous Mughal gardens of Kashmir such as the Shalimar Bagh and the Nishat Bagh stand as testimony to Jahangir's passion.

In contrast to Jahangir, his son and successor Shah Jahan was a prolific builder. His reign was marked by extensive architectural works, in his favorite building material – the marble. Some of these were:

a) the palace-forts, e.g. the Lal Qila at Delhi,

b) the mosques, e.g. the Moti Masjid in the Agra Fort and the Jami Masjid at Delhi, and

c) the garden-tombs, e.g., the Taj Mahal.

We shall describe here only the more important and representative buildings of Shah Jahan's reign: Lal Qila and Taj Mahal.

The Lal Qila is a regular rectangle with the north wall following the old course of the Yamuna river. There are two gate-ways – the Delhi Gate and Lahore Gate, and massive round bastions at regular intervals along the wall. The gates are flanked by octagonal towers with blind arcades and topped by **cupolas**. A moat runs all along the fort wall except the river side. Inside, there are several notable buildings of which particular mention may be made of *Diwan-i Am*, *Diwan-i Khas* and Rang Mahal. The *Diwan-i Am* and Rang Mahal are arcaded pavilions with sandstone columns in pairs, plastered with powdered marble. In the eastern wall of the *Diwan-i Am* is built the throne platform for the Emperor having curved corniced roof in the style of the Bengal architecture. Behind this structure on the eastern side is located the Rang Mahal fronted by an open courtyard. Further north, in alignment with the Rang Mahal is the *Diwan-i Khas*. All of these buildings have floral decorations on the walls, columns and piers.

In the Moti Masjid in the Agra Fort, Shah Jahan made experiment with an alternative scheme – an open arcaded prayer hall. Moreover, in this mosque the designer has also dispensed with the minarets. In their place, *chhatris* have been used on all four corners of the prayer hall. There are three bulbous domes rising over a cusped arcade. The entire building has been built in white marble with black marble calligraphy, heightening the elegance of the structure.

The Jami Masjid at Delhi is an extended and larger version of the Jami Masjid at Fathpuri Sikri and this becomes the largest building of its kind in India. It is built on a raised platfrom surrounded by arcades that have been left open on both sides. The building material used here is red sandstone with white marble for revetments and for inlaying the frames of panels.

The Taj Mahal is undoubtedly Shah Jahan's grandest and most well known project. The construction work began in 1632, and most of it was completed by the year 1643. The plan of the complex is rectangle with high enclosure wall and a lofty entrance gateway in the middle of the southern side. There are octagonal pavilions, six in all, at the corners and one each in the eastern and western sides. The main building of the Taj stands on a high marble platform at the northern end of the enclosure. To the west of this structure is a mosque with a replica on the east side retaining the effect of symmetry.

The Taj Mahal is a square building with deep **alcove** recesses in each side and its four corners **bevelled** to form an octagon. Above this structure rises a beautiful

bulbous dome topped with an inverted lotus **finial** and a metallic pinnacle. At the four corners of the platform rise four circular minarets capped with pillared cupolas. The interior resolves itself into a central hall with subsidiary chambers in the angles, all connected by radiating passages. The ceiling of the main hall is a semi-circular vault forming the inner shell of the double dome. The decorative features of the building consist of calligraphy and inlay work in the exterior and *pietra dura* in the interior. Marble, the main building material, is of the finest quality brought from Makrana quarries near Jodhpur. The garden in front of the main structure is divided into four quadrants with two canals running across, forming the quadrants. The cenotaph in the main hall was enclosed originally with a screen in golden tracery. But it was later replaced by Aurangzeb with a marble screen.

17.3.5 The Final Phase

This section is divided into two Sub-sections. The first one deals with the building activities undertaken during the reign of Aurangzeb; and the second tells us about the buildings of the post-Aurangzeb period.

Buildings of Aurangzeb

Aurangzeb had none of his father's passion for architecture. Under him, the generous encouragement given by his predecessors to the arts was almost withdrawn. The architectural works during the reign of Aurangzeb were less numerous and of a lower standard than those executed under any previous Mughal emperor. In Delhi itself, the capital city of the empire, very few buildings are associated with his name. The major buildings include the mausoleum of his wife Rabia ud Dauran in Aurangabad, the Badshahi Masjid in Lahore and the Moti Masjid at Lal Qila, Delhi. The Badshahi Masjid is comparable to the Delhi one in size and architectural composition. It has a vast court, a free standing prayer hall and minarets at each comer of the hall. There are four smaller minarets at each angle of the sanctuary. The cloisters run on the both sides with arched entrances at regular intervals. There is only one **portal**. The building material is red sandstone with the use of white marble as a relief to the red sandstone. Atop the prayer hall, three bulbous domes in white marble rise beautifully.

The other important building of this period is the Moti Masjid in the Lal Qila, Delhi. The marble used in its construction is of a very fine quality. The plan is similar to the Moti Masjid built by Shah Jahan in Agra fort; only the curves are more prominent. The three bulbous domes cover the prayer hall which is designed in the form of three cupolas in same alignment.

The mausoleum of his wife at Aurangabad, is an attempt at emulating the Taj Mahal. But a serious miscalculation on the part of Aurangzeb's architects in providing the corners of the mausoleum, too, with minarets upsets the harmony of the entire building. These minarets, which are superfluous in the overall scheme of the building, are the only major deviation in copy from the original scheme of the Taj Mahal.

The Safdar Jang's Tomb

After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, the collapse of the empire was only a matter of time. The few buildings that were built during the first half of the 18th century amply testify the decadent conditions that ensued.

The Safdar Jang's tomb at Delhi is the most important building of this period. It is located amidst a large garden and copies the plan of the Taj Mahal in the same manner as was done in the Rabia ud Dauran's tomb. One major change in the

design, however, is that the minarets rise as an adjunct to the main building and not as independent structures. The main building stands on an arcaded platform. It is double storey and is covered by a large and almost spherical dome. The minarets rise as turrets and are topped by domed kiosks. The building is in red sandstone with marble panelling. The cusps of the arches are less curved, but synchronize well with the overall dimensions of the building.

Check Your Progress-4

1) Mark right (✓)and wrong (×) against the following statements:

   The characteristic feature of Jahangir and Shah Jahan's architecture is:

   i) Red sandstone is replaced by marble as building material. ( )

   ii) Use of multi-foliated curves in arches. ( )

   iii) Double dome replaced by the single one. ( )

   iv) Inlay work is replaced by fine carvings and geometrical designs. ( )

   v) Introduction of *pietra dura*. ( )

2) Write a note on the architecture of the Taj Mahal.

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3) Discuss the architectural activities during Aurangzeb's reign.

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4) Write a note on the Safdar Jang's tomb.

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17.4 PAINTING UNDER DELHI SULTANATE

In this Section we will discuss the development of different styles of paintings during the Sultanate and the Mughal periods.

The history of painting in the Sultanate period is obscure compared with its architecture. This is primarily due to the non-availability of any surviving specimens for at least the first hundred years of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate.

Equally surprising is the absence of illuminated books, an art carried to supreme height in the Islamic world by 1200. However, the researches during the last 20-25 years have unearthed new and some crucial evidence, forcing the scholars to change their opinion radically. Not only book illumination but murals too were executed during the Sultanate period. The art of painting may thus be divided

into the following three categories each of which will be discussed separately: a) Murals; b) Quranic calligraphy; and c) Manuscript illustration.

17.4.1 Literary Evidence for Murals

The closest view that one may have of the murals as a flourishing art form during the rule of the Delhi Sultanate is through a large number of literary references occurring in the chronicles of this period. These have been compiled and analyzed by Simon Digby (1967).

The earliest reference to murals in the Sultanate period is in a *qasida* (*Tabaqat-i Nasiri*) in praise of Iltutmish, on the occasion of the gift of *Khila't* from the Caliph in 1228. The verses in this composition make it clear that human or animal figures were depicted upon the spandrels of the main arch raised to welcome the envoy of the Caliph.

The most important single reference to painting in the Delhi Sultanate occurs in the context of un-Islamic observances of earlier rulers inviting a ban by Firuz Tughlaq (*Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* by Afif). It indicates the existence of a continuous tradition of figural painting on the walls of the palaces of Delhi, which was sought to be banned by Firuz Tughlaq.

This tradition of painting was not confined to the murals alone. In a reference relating to the entertainment parties thrown by Qutbuddin Mubarak Khalji (1316-20), mention is made of a profusely painted open-sided tent: the decorations would therefore appear to be on painted cloth (*Nuh Siphr* by Amir Khusrau).

In contrast, there did survive a tradition of wall painting in the houses of the common people, especially the non-Muslims. It is testified by:

- a stanza from a 14th century Hindi poem *Chandayan* written by Maulana Daud in 1379-80, which describes the painted decoration of the upper rooms of the house where Chanda, the leading lady of this poem, sleeps with her female companions.
- an actual painting from one of the illustrated manuscripts of this poem belonging to the 15th century and showing the bedchamber of Chanda, on the walls of which are painted scenes from the Ramayana.

17.4.2 The *Quranic* Calligraphy

Calligraphy was the most revered art in the Islamic world and was used as a decorative feature both on stone and on paper. In the hierarchy of craftsmen, a calligrapher was placed above the illuminator and painter. However, the calligraphy of the *Quran* became one of the foremost forms of book art, where copies of *Quran* were produced on a majestic and expansive scale.

The earliest known copy of the *Quran* is dated 1399. It was calligraphed at Gwalior, and has a variety of ornamental motifs, derived both from Iranian and Indian sources. The geometrical frontispiece of this manuscript seems to be in the Sultanate style and suggests the following as prominent features of the Delhi ateliers in the 14th century:

- The work produced here is in line with the Iranian tradition.
- The script used in the headings and inscriptional panels of the *Quran* is invariably Kufi.
- The illumination of geometrical frontispieces was the speciality of this school.

The state of book-art in the 15th century, under the Saiyyid and Lodi dynasties, remained a sad shadow of its former self as it became incapable of supporting artistic endeavor on a large scale. The initiative seems to have been wrested by provincial dynasties.

17.4.3 Manuscript Illustration

Manuscript illustration in the Sultanate period is a hotly debated and disputed subject. There is very little concurrence among scholars on terminology and provenance. Thus, deciding the traits of Sultanate manuscript illustrations is a cumbersome job. On the contrary, though a good number of illustrated manuscripts in Persian and Awadhi, from the period between 1400 and the advent of the Mughals, are now known some of these manuscripts appear to have been produced at the provincial courts. However, there is a distinct, although small, group of manuscripts which was probably not connected with any court. They seem to have been produced for patrons, presumably independent but located somewhere in the Sultanate. They have sometimes been termed as representing a 'bourgeois' group and are attributable to the period 1450-1500. Two of these manuscripts forming the 'bourgeois' group are *Hamzanama* and *Chandayan*.

Check Your Progress-5

1) Describe the tradition of wall-painting in the Delhi Sultanate.

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2) When and where was the earliest known copy of *Quran* made?

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3) Define the 'bourgeois' group of paintings.

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17.5 MUGHAL PAINTINGS

The 16th century, especially its second half, marks a watershed in the development of the art of painting in India. Akbar gave liberal patronage to the growth of fine arts during his rule. His successors also showed great interest in these arts, so that by the end of the 17th century painting in the Mughal court reached unparalleled height.

Simultaneously, in the Deccan, was evolving another great tradition of painting, somewhat independent of the Mughal influence. Later, in the 18th century, the patronage to painting shifted from the Mughal court to regional kingdoms, such as Rajasthan and Punjab.

In this Section, our focus will be on the pre-Mughal and Mughal developments in the field of painting rather than on the regional styles of painting.

17.5.1 Antecedents: Painting in the Fifteenth Century

In this Section we will discuss the development of painting in the pre-Mughal period.

Until recently it was believed that the art of painting did not flourish during the rule of the Delhi Sultans and that the illuminated manuscripts of the Mughals were, in fact a revival of painting after a lapse of several centuries from the end of the 10th century. Lately, however, enough evidence has come to light suggesting the existence of:

- a lively tradition of murals and painted cloth during the 13th and 14th centuries (**Sub-section 17.4.1**),
- a simultaneous tradition of the *Qur'anic* calligraphy, lasting upto the end of the 14th century (**Sub-section 17.4.2**),
- a tradition of illustrated Persian and Awadhi manuscripts, originating probably at the beginning of the 15th century (**Sub-section 17.4.3**).

Of this last tradition, a notable number of illustrated manuscripts from the period between the 15th and 16th century have become known. Some of these works were commissioned by independent patrons in the Sultanate located outside the court. From the former category mention may be made of:

a) the *Bostan* of S'adi, illustrated by the artist Hajji Mahmud, and

b) *Ni'mat Nama* (a book on cookery)

c) *Miftah-al Fuzala* by Muhammed Shadiabadi

These manuscripts were illustrated at Mandu (Malwa) during the second half of the 15th century. A fine example of the latter category is the illustrated manuscript of *Laur Chanda* (in Awadhi) executed for a patron seemingly not related with the court.

It is, thus, evident that at the time of the advent of the Mughals in India there did exist a live tradition of painting focussed mainly on illuminating manuscripts, made possible by the use of paper as the new material.

17.5.2 Painting Under Early Mughals

Babur, the founder of Mughal rule in India (1526), ruled for four years only. He was not able to contribute anything to the growth of painting. His successor Humayun was mostly engaged in containing his rivals till he was forced out of India by Sher Shah in 1540. It was, however, during his refuge at the court of Shah Tahmasp of Persia that Humayun acquired love for the art of painting. Humayun was so influenced by the art practiced there that he commissioned Mir Syed Ali and Khwaja Abdus Samad, two Persian masters, to illustrate manuscripts for him. These two painters joined Humayun's entourage on his triumphant return to India.

Humayun's contribution to the evolution of Mughal paintings is very important. There are several important features of the Mughal School which seem to have originated in the paintings done during Humayun's period. An important painting from Humayun's period is titled 'Princes of the House of Timur' and dated *c.* 1550. It has been executed on cloth, quite large in size, measuring approximately 1.15metre square. Such a large format is unusual even for paintings in Persia, and it has been suggested that it probably relates to the Mongol tradition of having paintings in their tents.

17.5.3 Evolution of the Mughal School Under Akbar

The emergence of the Mughal School of painting as distinct from all other styles was mainly due to the deep interest Akbar took in the promotion of this art.

Akbar's views on the Art of Painting

Drawing the likeness of anything is called *tasvir*. His majesty, from his earliest youth, has shown a great predilection for this art, and gives it every encouragement, as he looks upon it as a means, both of study and amusement. Hence, the art flourishes and has obtained great reputation. The works of all painters are weekly laid before by the *daroghas* and the clerks; he then confers rewards according to excellence of workmanship, or increases the monthly salaries. Much progress was made in the commodities required for painters, and the correct prices of such articles were carefully ascertained. The mixture of colours has especially been improved. The pictures thus received a hitherto unknown finish. Most excellent painters are now to be found, and masterpieces, worthy of a Bihzad, may be placed at the side of the wonderful works of the European painters who have attained world-wide fame. The minuteness in detail, the general finish, the boldness of execution, etc., now observed in pictures, are incomparable; even inanimate objects look as if they had life. More than a hundred painters have become famous masters of the art, whilst the number of those who approach perfection, or of those who are middling, is very large. This is especially true of the Hindus; their pictures surpass our conception of things. Few, indeed, in the whole world are found equal to them.

Source: Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*

Establishment of the Royal Atelier

The first major project undertaken during Akbar's regime was that of illustrating the *Hamza Nama*. It began in1562 for which several artists were employed at the court. The place where the painters worked was known as *Tasvir Khana*. Although Abul Fazl enumerates the names of only seventeen artists, we now know that the number was very large. S.P. Verma (1978) has prepared a list of 225 artists who worked at Akbar's **atelier**. These artists belonged to different places, but among them the majority were Hindus. Interestingly, several low caste people, due primarily to their artistic skill, were also raised to the status of royal artist. The case of Daswant, who was the son of a Kahar (palki-bearer), may be especially cited. The painters were assisted by a set of **gilders**, line-drawers and pagers. The artists were salaried employees. S.P. Verma opines that the lowest paid worker in the atelier received an amount between 600 to 1200 *dams* (40 *dams*= one *rupaya*).

There are paintings which bear the names of two artists. Sometimes even three artists worked on a single painting. On one painting from *Akbarnama* four artists have worked. The painting was thus a collaborative team work. The **sketching** of figures and colouring were done by a team of two different artists. In cases where three artists have worked the outlining was done by one artist, the other artist coloured the faces and a third one coloured the remaining figure. It is however not known to us as to how was such a complex arrangement worked out. Probably in such a team work the sketching and colouring were done by separate artists.

As has been noted above, the atelier was supervised by *daroghas* with the assistance of clerks. They were responsible for making materials of painting easily available to the artists and to oversee the progress of their work. They also arranged for periodical presentation of the artists' works before the Emperor.

Style and Technique

The illustration done at Akbar's court are considered as representative works of the Mughal Art. Notably, however, in these paintings, there is evident a gradual

evolution in the style and technique. The illustrations of the early phase are clearly influenced by the Persian tradition, the identifying features of which are listed below:

- symmetrical compositions,
- restricted movement of figures,
- fineness of the lines of drawings,
- flat depiction of architectural columns, and
- profuse embellishment of buildings in the manner of jewels.

Later, the paintings acquired a distinctive character of their own. They assumed a more eclectic character composed mainly of the Persian and Indian traditions with touches of European influence.

Distinctive Features

The Mughal style became recognizable within a span of fifteen years since the setting up of royal atelier under Akbar. In the next decade or so, i.e. by about 1590 it acquired a distinctive form which was marked by:

- naturalism and rhythm,
- clothing objects of daily use assuming Indian forms,
- picture space having subsidiary scenes set in background,
- extraordinary vigor of action and violent movement, and
- luxuriant depiction of foliage and brilliant blossoms.

It should be emphasized here that the identity of the Mughal paintings under Akbar was as much made of an original style as a fusion of the Persian and Indian traditions. Specific mention may be made here of the depiction of action and movement which is not to be found in either the pre-Mughal art of India or the art of Persia (Qaisar and Verma, 1993).

Painting under Akbar's period distinguishes itself as a tradition from Persian painting as well as from Indian styles particularly by the presence of historical subject matter. The two most commonly used themes are:

- daily events of the court, and
- **portraits** of leading personalities.

While portrait painting was known in Persia, painting as a chronicle of actual events was certainly a new emphasis. Painters used familiar formulas for hunting or battle scenes regardless of the fact that the literacy reference for the scene was historical or purely imaginary. Moreover, specific events illustrated are frequently reworking of scenes recording quite different events in the earliest known historical manuscript of this period, for instance the *Timur Nama* of about 1580 CE. Possibly, painters conceived scenes according to a repertoire of types e.g. the seize of a fortress, crossing a river, an audience or battle scene. In the working of whole volumes such as the *Akbar Nama*, the artistst seem to have reworked or adapted these compositional types. Painters usually crated new compositions only when no prototypes existed, and only a few artists were capable of such invention.

We have listed below, in chronological order famous illustrated manuscripts of this period:

Manuscript	Date
Hamzanama	*c.* 1562-1580
Anwar-i Suhaili	1570
Tutinama	*c.* 1570-1580
Tarikh-i Khandan-i Timuriya	*c.* 1570-1590
Baburnama	*c.* 1570-1590
Akbarnama	*c.* 1570-1600
Tarikh-i Alfi	*c.* 1570-1600
Razmnama	1582

Check Your Progress-6

1) Write a note in 50 words on the art of painting under the early Mughals.

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2) How did the concept of teamwork operate in the Royal Atelier?

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3) List four distinctive features of Mughal School of painting.

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17.5.4 Developments under Jahangir and Shahjahan

During the reigns of Jahangir and Shahjahan, Mughal painting reached its zenith. Jahangir took a deep interest in painting even as a prince. He maintained his own studio apart from Akbar's large atelier. Jahangir's preference was for paintings of hunting scenes, birds and flowers. He also continued the tradition of portraiture. Under Shahjahan, the colours of the paintings became more decorative and gold was more frequently used for embellishment. In the following Sub-sections, we shall study the introduction of new styles and thematic variations in Mughal paintings during Jahangir and Shahjahan's reign.

Introduction of New Styles

In the period of Jahangir's rule (1605-27), manuscripts became less important than individual pictures. Milo Cleveland Beach (1992) is of the opinion that Jahangir, with his personal involvement, may have functioned effectively as the head of the royal studio. Therefore, artistic decisions were made by the Emperor himself consequently introducing his own stylistic preferences in the paintings. Two important new elements in the style of Mughal painting during the first half of the 17th century have been identified as below:

- Jahangir's paintings seem to **accentuate** a formalist style, i.e., making the work realistic and preferring the precise recording of contemporary reality.
- The paintings of this period have broad margins which are gorgeously decorated with the depiction of flora and faces of human figures, and designs from plant motifs.

Thematic Variations

Jahangir was a keen naturalist. Whenever he came across a strange animal or bird, his artists painted the same immediately. We have paintings of birds and animals in the most realistic fashion.

Shah Jahan was a great patron of architecture, but he did not neglect painting. Under him, the previous tradition of doing portraits, preparing albums, and, illustrating books was continued. Additionally, we find the paintings depicting charming love scenes and portraits of female members. Another important theme chosen for painting was super imposition of animals and the scenes of performing acrobats.

17.5.5 The Final Phase

During Aurangzeb's regime, who succeeded Shahjahan, the arts were ignored. Painting did not stop altogether, though it lost the patronage of the Emperor and became confined to the studios of the nobles. There exist some commissioned portraits of the nobles and their relations from the courts of the Rajput principalities. Large number of *karkhana* records (on paintings) are located in the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner. There also exist a few interesting pictures of the emperor himself during his campaigns. The skill of the painters is evident, though the paintings are more formal and seem to have lost their earlier liveliness.

Later, under Muhammed Shah (1719-48), interest got renewed in depicting pleasure loving scenes. But by this time many of the painters of imperial studio had begun migrating to provincial courts. The loss of the Mughals, thus, was the gain of the provincial styles.

17.5.6 European Impact on Mughal Painting

In its later phase, specially during the 17th century, the Mughal painting was influenced by the European art. Some of the themes of European art were incorporated by Mughal painters and they also adopted a few of the techniques of European artists. According to A.J. Qaisar (1982) a large number of European paintings were either copied or adapted or even reinterpreted, sometimes, by Mughal painters. At the same time many original prints from Europe were collected and preserved in the albums of Jahangir and Dara Shikoh and several Mughal nobles.

The contact Mughal court painters had with European paintings prompted them initially to make exact copies in their own hands. Such imitations, as noted by contemporary European travellers, were impeccably done. But Mughal painters also made experiments by making new paintings on the subjects chosen from European paintings.

One important feature that becomes noticeable in some Mughal paintings is the attempt to make them three dimensional. Clearly it speaks of the impact of European technique. Another European convention acceptable to the Mughal painters was the effect of light and shade, mostly utilized in night scenes. The depiction of 'halos', winged angles and roaring clouds in Mughal paintings was again under the influence of European paintings. One important technique – that

of oil painting from Europe – somewhat did not attract the Mughals. There is no work from this period that was executed in oil.

Check Your Progress-7

1) What important thematic variations become noticeable in Mughal painting in the 17th century?

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2) Name two members of Mughal ruling class who made collections of European paintings in their albums.

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3) Which European motifs were incorporated by Mughal painters?

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17.6 SUMMARY

Architecture

On the basis of the features discussed above, it is evident that the development of art and architecture in the Delhi Sultanate followed an uneven pattern. While growth of architecture occupied paramount position, other art forms like painting did not get equal attention. Individual initiative, a full-blooded support for their growth is found missing. Much of the artistic impulse came to be expressed in architecture enriching it both structurally and stylistically. It also gave rise to a rich heritage of civic buildings – public buildings and public works.

Informed interest in these constructions is relatively recent, but they must claim a place in any comprehensive survey of Indo-Islamic architecture.

- Much of this architecture appears within the urban setting, the main building types being mosques (*masjid*), tombs (*maqbara*), palace-citadels as well as structures of public utility, such as *sarais*, bridges, step-wells, and water reservoirs.
- There are no specific architectural forms for specific functions. Most can be adopted for a variety of purposes. As an illustration of this feature one could think of the four-cloistered courtyard structure which served equally well as palace, mosque, *sarai* and *madrasa*.
- An important element of this architecture is the emphasis on the enclosed space generally defined by walls, arcades and vault.

- The decoration in architecture is mostly of a kind which suggests spaces existing beyond the decorative frames, atectonic in nature. Its chief elements are arabesque, geometry and foliation.

Babur and Humayun were too busy to tackle the political problems to pay much attention to the building activities. However, Babur himself was a deep lover of gardens and he laid out a number of gardens in India during the short span of his reign. The main Mughal architectural activities took place under Akbar. His buildings are mostly of red sandstone. Akbar's buildings show a fine blend of trabeate and arcuate forms. Jahangir was more interested in paintings rather than architecture. However, his interest in paintings, animals and floral designs affected the contemporary architecture as well and a new decorative style – *pietra-dura* – was introduced during his reign. During Shah Jahan's reign the Mughal architecture reached its zenith with the predominant use of marble. Shah Jahan immortalized the Taj Mahal, a pure white marble structure. Its double domes, minarets, multi-foliated arches, etc. – all speak of the perfection and the climax. His successor, Aurangzeb, had little time for building activities, and very few buildings were, therefore, constructed during his reign. The post-Aurangzeb's period can also be termed as a period of decline. Owing to disturbed political scenario later, the Mughal Emperors could hardly pay any attention to huge building projects. The only monument of note that can be identified is the Safdar Jang's tomb at Delhi.

Painting

A lively tradition of wall-painting deriving inspiration from the Ghazanavid kingdom survived in Delhi Sultanate upto at least 1350. It had a wide repertory, the subjects depicted ranging from the themes of the *Mahabharat* and *Ramayana* down to popular folktales. Another important tradition that grew during this period was of illuminated manuscripts. But it was independent of court patronage and for that reason the manuscripts have been termed as 'bourgeois'. Manuscript illustration and the art of writing the *Quran* flourished only till Timur's invasion. The influence of Iranian School was quite prominent. This tradition died soon after 1398 – the year of the sack of Delhi. But it sprouted and flourished in the provincial courts.

- A tradition of figural painting in the form of murals and painted cloth during the 13th and 14th centuries derived mainly from the Ghaznavid kingdom.
- A simultaneous tradition of the *Quranic* calligraphy in Kufi script which lasted upto 1398 – till Timur's sack of Delhi. This kind of painting developed with the introduction of paper in India.
- Another tradition was that of illustrated Persian and Awadhi manuscripts originating probably at the beginning of the 15th century and growing independently of the imperial court.

In the last Section of the Unit, we have seen how painting came to prosper under the Mughals. The keyword in this development was eclecticism. Painting assimilated indigenous traditions as well as from Persia. In the 17th century another significant influence, that from Europe, made an impact on Mughal paintings.

17.7 KEYWORDS

Architecture

Alcove A vaulted recess

Arcade	A range of arches carrying a roof or other superstructure
Arch	A self-supporting structure made of bricks or of stone blocks and capable of carrying a superimposed load over an opening
Baoli	Step-well
Batter	A slight inward inclination of a wall from its base upwards
Bay	Deep recess
Bevel	A slopping surface
Bracket	A support projecting from a wall
Cenotaph	Commemorative building
Centering	Atemporary support facilitating the construction of an arch
Colonnade	A row of columns
Causeways	Passage across water
Cupola	A domical roof over a polygonal space
Dome	A convex roof built over a square, octaganal or circular space in building
Eaves	The lower edge of a sloping roof, overhanging the face of the wall
Engrailed arches	Foliated arch
Finial	The top of a pinnacle
Kiosk	An open pavilion having roof supported by pillars
Pier	A mass of stone or brick which supports a vertical load
Pietra Dura	An ornamental mosaic of lapis lazuli, marble, etc.
Post	Long timber supporting vertical thrust of some part of a building
Portal	Frontage
Spandrel	Space between two adjacent arches
Stucco	Designing in plaster
Trabeate	An architectural form in which the main openings are made by beams supported on pillars
Turrets	Side minarets attached with the building

Painting

Accentuate	Intensify
Atelier	Workshop or studio of artists
Calligraphy	The art of decorative writing
Embellish	Beautify
Gilder	Artist marking with golden colour
Mural	Wall painting

Portrait	Painting of the face or bust
Sketch	Line-drawing

17.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

1) See Section 17.2
2) See Sub-Section 17.2.1
3) See Sub-Section 17.2.1

Check Your Progress-2

1) (i) ✓ ; (ii) × ; (iii) ×
2) See Sub-section 17.2.2
3) See Sub-section 17.2.2 (i) Because of its inability to cover wide areas; (ii) They are battered; (iii) they use stone-rubble and plaster to cover the surfaces.
4) See Sub-section 17.2.2
5) See Sub-section 17.2.3

Check Your Progress-3

1) i) d; ii) a; iii) b; and iv) c
2) See Sub-section 17.3.1
3) i) ×; ii) ✓; iii) ✓; and iv) ×
4) See Sub-Section 17.3.3
5) See Sub-Section 17.3.3

Check Your Progress-4

1) i) ✓; ii) ✓; iii) ×; iv) ×; and v) ✓
2) See Sub-Section 17.3.4
3) See Sub-Section 17.3.5
4) See Sub-Section 17.3.5

Check Your Progress-5

1) See Sub-Section 17.4.1
2) See Sub-Section 17.4.2
3) See Sub-Section 17.4.3

Check Your Progress-6

1) See Sub-Section 17.5.2
2) See Sub-Section 17.5.3
3) See Sub-Section 17.5.3

Check Your Progress-7

1) See Sub-Section 17.5.4
2) See Sub-Section 17.5.6
3) See Sub-Section 17.5.6

17.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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17.10 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Architecture of the Delhi Sultanate | CEC-UGC
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cv2kz6UaB5E

Mughal Paintings | CEC-UGC
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DEalF4Nr1o&list=PLAPZM4wTDYedUlslZfqTwjRFstp_KjYX2&index=38

Talking History |14| New Delhi: The Capital City| Rajya Sabha TV
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axD6pVOWzD4

UNIT 18 WOMEN AND GENDER*

Structure

18.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will discuss about Women and **Gender** in Medieval India, i.e. the timespan between *c.* 1206-1750. During this period, India was predominantly ruled by two major dynasties – the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals, which ruled alongside several indigenous kingdoms and states. The aim of this Unit is to put women and their-stories as a vantage point for understanding this period since the story of Indian past has largely been penned by men, and owing to that perhaps can easily notice that the focus of majority of written history revolves around 'his story' – the story of men, their exploits and their roles. In this male dominant narrative, the lives and actions of women have largely gone unnoticed. However, lately many historians are revisiting the past with an attempt to unearth the role of females, and through their narratives one is surprised by the presence of so many women who were actively involved in that era but have so far remained sidelined in the historical works. It is crucial to learn about such women and their stories not just to understand the position of women in that era but to also get a deeper insight on the evolution of Indian society from the 13th through the 18th centuries.

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- explain the concept of gender and the nature of gender relations in India during the medieval period,
- describe the position of women during the medieval period in India,
- discuss the structure of **patriarchy** and the intersection of political and domestic spaces during this period, and
- narrate the various roles performed by women during the period of our study.

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18.1 INTRODUCTION

During the medieval period in India i.e. around the 13th-18th centuries, on a general level, gender relations were complex and unequal. While most people are born either male or female which characterizes their sexual orientation, gender characterizes the norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It is a social construct that varies in societies across time periods and defines how people should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within the households, communities and public spaces. Gender relations thus refer to the interactions between different sexes, including men, women, gay, lesbian, transgender, etc. However, in this Unit the focus is on the positioning and interaction between men and women during the medieval Indian period of history.

During the period under focus, the status of women in social, economic and political domains was secondary to males and at most times, females were oppressed and subdued. This suppression traced its origin from the emphasis on the physical distinction of women from men. Since women bore the capacity of reproduction and were carriers of bloodline and lineage, women and their bodies were deemed as markers of community identity and they were most often seen as symbolic objects for upholding the male honour.

Out of this outlook, free movement of women in public spaces was restricted and they were required to observe a *purdah/ghoonghat* (veil) in public. It also led to the emergence of dedicated and protected spaces for women in the elite households. Women, specifically at the elite homes, had to also adjust in **polygyny** wherein men had multiple female partners. In addition, self-immolation in the form of *sati* and *jauhar*, female infanticide, discrimination in legal discourses on marriage, property rights, etc. all contributed to the subordinated status of women during the period.

Caste was another axis that bolstered social inequality between men and women and a male's control over 'other' caste women was one of the dominant means through which the hierarchy between high-born and low-born was maintained. For instance, one of the ways through which Mughals maintained their social superiority was by the well-known process of one-sided marriage relations with the Rajputs where they married Rajput women but did not give females of their own blood stock to Rajputs in marriage. Similarly, women from socially inferior castes were regularly incorporated in the aristocratic houses in subordinate service capacities to maintain a social hierarchy of females in the elite houses.

Such subordination, however, did not restrict women from exercising their **agency** and as you shall read further in this Unit, several women executed remarkable actions during this period. Unfortunately, women have not received their due space in historical writings yet and that is because their stories are only marginally evident in the primary sources. An important reason for their relatively lesser presence in primary documents lies in the fact that most of these were penned by men and one of the ways to build the masculine superiority was by silencing, side-lining and marginalizing the actions of the other dominant gender – the females.[1] However, by re-reading the conventional sources against the grain, understanding even the marginal information on women that they provide; recovering the limited sources penned by women; and alongside comparing insights from sources such

[1] For example, Ziauddin Barani (the court historian of the 13th and 14th centuries and a political theorist)saw history exclusively as the domain of great men of faith and state, in which women had no place. (Karuna Sharma, 'A Visit to the Mughal Harem: Lives of Royal Women', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies,* Vol.XXXII, no,.2, August 2009: 155-169).

as architectural structures, painting, literary and medicinal texts, several historians are gradually helping to weave and represent the life-worlds of women in the medieval Indian story.

18.2 WOMEN AND GENDER DURING THE ERA OF DELHI SULTANATE

As you learnt in previous Units, the Delhi Sultanate was an Islamic empire based in Delhi that stretched over large parts of the Indian subcontinent. The Sultanate was ruled sequentially by five dynasties, viz. the Mamluk dynasty, the Khalji dynasty, the Tughlaq dynasty, the Sayyid dynasty, and the Lodi dynasty. In their rule of more than three hundred years, which has yielded significant sources on the dominant Muslim and the local Hindu kingdoms, the information about women remains scanty. With an evident predominance of the political affairs, the sources of the period however provide a picture of the then social order which does offer an understanding of women's position in those times.

Bringing to India, the nomadic traditions of their ancestors, who roamed from place to place over the pasture lands of Central Asia, the Turkish women under the Sultanate seem to have enjoyed a relative measure of freedom vis-à-vis the women in many indigenous communities. One states this because most of the local communities were ridden with several social injunctions for women about which you shall learn in the course of this Sub-section. The institution of polygyny was however widely practiced, especially by the members of noble and aristocratic families. Apart from the wives, the polygynous households of the times included a man's numerous concubines who were recognized sexual partners but did not have the legal sanction of arriage. Concubines were usually initiated from secondary or inferior communities and women ascribed with this position were devoid of several rights including disenfranchisement of their sons to contest for the throne. The ruling and most wealthy households also included female members such as wet nurses and slaves.

Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveller who visited India during this period, informs us in his travelogue that female slavery was a prevalent institution under the Sultans in India. Slave girls were procured in wars, as gifts and through purchases. Once a girl was brought under the fold of slavery, she was severed of her family ties and became the exclusive property of the owner. Female slaves were of two kinds, those employed for domestic and menial work and others, who were brought for the company of their masters under various forms of concubinage. The latter by virtue of their intimacy with the ruler held a relatively higher and sometimes even a dominating position in the household. The former, lacking education and skill, were employed in rough domestic work and also worked as spies for their monarch. The *Lekhapaddhati* documents from early medieval Gujarat inform us that the household chores for the female slaves usually included grinding, cutting, mopping the floor, sweeping the floor, fetching water, milking cattle, agricultural work, etc.

Women employed as female entertainers were another category that formed the elite households of the period. The Sultans of Delhi, as the Indian rulers, with few exceptions, were great lovers of music. According to Ibn Battuta, during the period of Alauddin Khalji (r.1296-1316), musicians and singers were settled in Tarababad (city of joy) located on the side of Hauz-i Khas (the lake built by Sultan Alauddin Khalji) in Delhi. While procuring and gifting renowned entertainers was a well-known practice among royalty, often young slaves were trained by

professionals in the arts of dance and singing in the elite homes. The entertainers performed in private and public – in rituals and festivities, and the presence of dancing and singing girls became a symbolic marker of the glory of royal courts during this period. There was, however, an evident anxiety attached to a woman performing musical arts. This can be gleaned from the fact that Amir Khusrau, the famous medieval poet, in his writings expressed that singing and dancing was good and amusing in the early stage of a woman's life but warned women not to patronize it for it could bring ill fame to them. An extension of the same anxiousness was prevalent in the ruling Hindu households, where women of the ruling or superior castes were restricted from learning the arts of dance and singing which was deemed against elite behaviour, and seen fit only for women hailing from secondary castes and communities.

Having said that, the large clique of females attached to a monarch including his mother, sisters and daughters were collectively referred by the term *harem* in the ruling Muslim household. The term '*harem*' is of Arabic origin, meaning sanctuary and during the Sultanate period, the term signified the totality of the female inmates. The word *janana* – derived from *jananis* (females) – was a Hindu counterpart, referred for the group of women at the indigenous aristocratic households, such as that of Rajputs. The Hindu households maintained a strict demarcation between the wives and other females intimately associated with a man, whereas the Muslims did not proscribe lower ranked women such as female slaves from climbing the social ladder. Shah Turkan, the Turkish wife of Shams-ud-din Iltutmish (r.1211-36) is one such example who was bought as a slave but rose to the status of Iltutmish's chief queen. Minhaj-i Siraj, the 13th century Persian historian, credits her rise to her own merit and charm.[2] Slave manumission was also a prevalent practice in the Muslim households wherein slaves were set free as an act of charity. However, not all slave girls could achieve manumission or escalation and they were often subjected to all sorts of discriminations in the aristocratic houses.

Other social evils also marred the position of women. Prominent among these was the prevalence of self-immolation by women through *sati* and *jauhar*. The act of self-immolation was performed by women both with the dead body of the husband or master and without it.[3] Although a Hindu custom, Muslim chroniclers such as Amir Khusrau expressed awe and amusement for such practices. The extent of the evil in this social practice does not need explanation but the fact that Ibn Battuta fainted on the site where a woman was undertaking *sati* is one indication of the same.

Sources suggest that there was however no compulsion upon the widows to perform *sati* as widow remarriage was largely prevalent and accepted except by the upper-class Hindus. Muhammad bin Tughlaq (r.1325-51) insisted that widows should take the consent of the royal authority before undertaking *sati*. With regards to their maintenance, before the reign of Balban (r.1266-87), the widows of men who held *iqtas* (territorial land assignments) in the state could retain them after the death of their husbands. The practice was stopped by Balban who replaced it with a fixed allowance for the upkeep of the widows. Widows, as other women, were exempted from paying the religious tax, *jiziya*. Despite these provisions,

[2] For more details read, Mohammad Wahid Mirza, (1974) *The Life and Works of Amir Khusrau* (Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delli).

[3] The term *Jauhar* is used for mass self-immolation by women, not necessarily performed at the death of the husband or their master unlike *sati* which was undertaken by women at the funeral pyre of their husband/master.

which were although minimal, the practice of *sati* nevertheless continued till the early 19th century, and rather blatantly in the indigenous kingdoms as a display of the honour and chastity of lineage.

Concern with a woman's chastity in this period is also evident in the ethical codes outlined by Amir Khusrau. For instance, advising women on their conduct, Khusrau wrote that the eye was the chief cause of all vice and women should keep their gage low and preserve them like pearls which lie safe in the shells. He further goes on to advice women to not stare at unknown persons, to avoid conversations with males and on being alone not to sit near anyone except their husband.[4] Similarly, Isami, the 14th century court poet in the Bahamani kingdom, stressed that the place of women was the home and instead of wearing the crown they should take interest in spinning and weaving.[5] Khusrau also considered spinning to be the chief activity of women. There was thus an emerging concern with the movement and conduct of women during the era of the Delhi Sultans. Their spaces came to be securely guarded and controlled through injunctions, for the protection of women became the order of the day. Firuz Shah Tughlaq (r.1351-1388) even went on to prohibit women from visiting holy shrines. Despite such patriarchal boundaries, many women however performed outstanding roles during the Sultanate period, details of which are elaborated in the following Sub-section.

18.3 WOMEN AND POLITICAL AUTHORITY

Participation in politics and public offices was largely dominated by men during this period. Yet, several women not only created a direct space for themselves in the political affairs, but many exerted a crucial political role as **regents** (representatives) and advisors to the rulers. In the following two Sub-sections, we will study about some of the leading female political leaders of the time.

18.3.1 Raziya Sultan

The Turkish traditions did not restrict women from assuming the throne. In the 12th century, the Khitai Turkish women ruled certain principalities.[6] However, as is evident through the writings of the period, the ruling elites in the Sultanate did not encourage women to participate in politics. Despite that, women of the royal household negotiated political authority in several ways. The most direct and well-known role in this sphere was exercised by Raziya Sultan (r.1236-40).

Raziya was the only daughter among the four children of Iltutmish, the third ruler of Delhi Sultanate. Her mother was Turkan Khatoon, the daughter of Qutbuddin Aibak (r.1206-10) – the first ruler of Delhi Sultanate. Iltutmish nominated Razia as his successor after the death of his most capable son, Prince Nasiruddin Mahmud. Various sources confirm that Iltutmish selected Raziya as she was the eldest of his surviving children and had already displayed her deserving political insights. However, after the death of Iltutmish, his another son named Ruknuddin Firoz, occupied the throne which was made possible through the negotiations exerted by his mother Shah Turkan. Despite the significant power that Shah Turkan commanded, within seven months Raziya secured her rightful claim and ascended the throne in November 1236 CE.

[4] For details read, Amir Khusrau, *Matla-ul Anwar*, Naval Kishore, Lucknow, 1302 A.H.

[5] Husain, A. Mahdi, (Ed.) (1976) *Isami, The Futuh-us Salatin,* Tr. Agha Mahdi, Vol. I (Agra: Asia Publishing House), pp. 129 and 255.

[6] Examples include Safiya Khatun of Aleppo (Syria) and Shajar al-Durr of Egypt, amongst others.

Raziya Sultan was the first female Muslim ruler of South Asia. She was from Turkish Seljuk's ancestry and came to be the fifth Mumluk Sultan of Delhi Sultanate. Raziya's accession to the throne was solely based on her merit and was a significant departure in the then political climate where the throne was considered a male monopoly. That Muslim theologians approved her ascension and most of the Turkish nobility, army and people of Delhi accepted her on the throne is a testimony of the politico-cultural spirit of that age. At the same time, many could not reconcile with the idea of a woman ruler. For example, Minhaj-i Siraj, a reputed lawyer and *qazi* (judge) of the empire under Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud, writing more than twenty years after Raziya's accession, regrets in his *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, that Raziya with all her eminent qualities fit for a sovereign was not born as a man (*Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, Vol. I. pp. 458- 59), a statement supported by Isami as well. One notes in such statements the prevalent attitude towards gender roles for no one questioned the ability of Razia, but the resentment was against a woman ruler as affairs of sovereignty were thought to be an exclusive male prerogative.[7] In addition to that, the provincial governors, who constituted a very powerful section of the Turkish governing class, did not have a voice in Razia's selection and they felt ignored and thus, objected her rule. Once on throne, Raziya carefully dealt with her opposition, whether by removing or replacing some officers and carried on her administration successfully for about four years.

A significant constituent factor for Raziya's strength was the support from the people of Delhi who were offered a sort of contract by Raziya which promised that she would abdicate her throne if she was unable to solve their problems. To that end, she dispensed justice without discrimination. She held a court every week in which the earlier arrangement of female guards and the screen was done away with. Soon after her accession, Raziya also gave up the *purdah* (veil) which she realized was an impediment for effective handling of administrative affairs and discarding the traditional female attire, she adopted the male wardrobe. Her official name and one in which she is generally referred to in the chronicles was Sultan Razat al-Dunya wal Din bint al-Sultan. She continued the coin types of Iltutmish and issued coins in silver, bullion and copper. In addition to her administrative prowess, Raziya was an accomplished poetess and she patronized men of letters. Madarasa-i Nasiriya of Delhi became the centre of learning during her reign.

On the military front, she was successful in winning over most of the nobles to her side but the appointment of non-Turks to important posts created animosity amongst the Turkish nobles who began to conspire to overthrow her. The hostility of the nobles heightened when Raziya elevated Jamaluddin Yakut, an Abyssinian slave, to the office of *Amir-i Akhur* (commander of the cavalry), primarily to curb the power of Turkish nobility. This appointment also stirred Persian chroniclers such as Isami for whom the alleged intimacy between Razia and Yaqut was the causative factor for this administrative decision. The contemporary historian Minhaj however does not say anything about this intimacy, which should lead us to ponder on the issue of morality in that age and whether it remains the easiest way to question a woman's assertive decisions?

Owing to the hostilities towards her, in April 1240 CE. Raziya had to face the revolt of Altunia, the governor of Tabarhinda. To suppress the revolt, she made elaborate arrangements but about half-way towards the encounter the Turkish nobles in her army rebelled against her, leading to her defeat. Yakut was killed in this fight and Raziya was captured and sent to the fort of Tabarhinda. Raziya's

[7] Her political acumen has been admirably recognized by chroniclers like Minhaj and Ferishta of the Sultanate period.

brother, Bahram Shah took the opportunity to ascend the throne with the help of nobles who distributed the fruits of victory amongst themselves by occupying offices of importance, ignoring completely the services of Altunia. Taking advantage of the situation, Raziya consoled Altunia who offered to marry her. A purely political move, this marriage was her only way to retrieve her throne and therefore she agreed to the proposal. After the marriage, Raziya along with Altunia collected an army of Khokhars, Jats, Rajputs and a few Turkish nobles, and marched towards Delhi in the month of September-October 1240 CE. In the ensuing battle, Razia's army met with defeat and while riding back to Kaithal, she and Altunia were killed.

A small shrine is said to have been erected over her grave much later, but its place remains a matter of historical debate. According to some historians, it is at Kaithal while others say that it lies in Delhi.

Ibn Battuta's description of Raziya's death

when she was defeated and driven back to Kaithal, she was hungry and overcome by fatigue; she asked for food to a man who was busy in cultivation. He gave her a piece of bread and she fell asleep. She was dressed like a man. While she was asleep the peasant's eye fell upon her *quba*, studded with gold and pearls. Realizing that she is a woman, he killed her, stripped off her valuables, drove away her horse and buried her corpse in his field. And then carried some of her garments to market for sale. But the dealer suspected him and took him before the *shihna* (magistrate). The cultivator acceded to his role in the crime and admitted his guilt. They exumed Raziya's body from the field, washed it and after wrapping in a shroud, buried it again at the same place.

***The Rehla* of Ibn Battuta, tr. Mahdi Husain: 35**

Despite her tragic end, Raziya remains one of the most significant icon of women power in the history of India. Her chief merit lies in her fearless assertive decisions, her ability to rule by integrating all walks of people and to rise above the prejudices of her age and times. According to Minhaj, 'Raziya was the ablest of the successors of Iltutmish'– a statement which can hardly be denied.

18.3.2 Naika Devi and Rudrama Devi

While Raziya exerted a direct role in the political culture of Delhi Sultanate, other women, not just the Muslim but also Hindu royal households performed significant roles in the social and political life of the period. One important example of this is Naika Devi, the mother of Mularaja II of Gujarat who performed an active political role as the regent of her minor son after the death of her husband. She demonstrated her admirable administrative ability by defeating Muhammad Ghori (1149-1206), the Ghurid ruler of Ghazna who had marched on a raiding expedition towards Gujarat, by launching on him a surprise attack near Mount Abu in 1178 CE. Naika Devi hailed from Goa and her victory is chronicled in both, Hindu and Muslim records.

Similar abilities were demonstrated by Rudrama Devi (1245-1289), famously known as the warrior queen who hailed from the Kakatiya dynasty in the Deccan Plateau of Southern India.

Rudrama Devi is known to have commanded power from a very tender age, beginning in 1259 when she was appointed as a co-regent to jointly rule alongside her father, King Ganapati (r. 1199-1262). Ganapati had no sons and he gave her daughter the male name of Rudradeva and formally declared her to be his male heir, an image which was created owing to the prevalent attitude against a woman monarch. She did nothing to deter this image and like Raziya, dressed in male

clothes. She did however marry, to Veerabadra, a prince of Nidadavolu, with whom she had two female children, but he suffered an early death.

The first few years of Rudrama's conjoined rule with her father saw a Pandya invasion which though repelled yet left the kingdom in a weak state. As a result of these failings, Ganapati withdrew from public life and passed full control of the kingdom to Rudrama. Subsequently, in 1269 Ganapati died and Rudrama was officially crowned as the ruler of Kakatiya kingdom.

Like Raziya, Rudrama had to struggle with a lot of male protest who refused to submit to a woman's authority, but she also successfully managed to crush such rebellions. Having secured her kingdom from internal revolts, Rudrama spent the rest of her rule defending it from external threats. The Kakatiya were one of the four major powers in Southern India who were frequently at loggerheads with each other. From 1268 to 1270, the Yadava king Maha Deva launched a sustained invasion on the Kakatiya, culminating in a siege of the Kakatiya capital of Orugallu (now Warangal). At this instance, Rudrama launched a fierce attack that lasted for fifteen days and resulted in her victory over the Yadavas. A later invasion by the Odias was also defeated by Rudrama's generals. To protect her kingdom, Rudrama invested in completing the Orugallu Fort by adding a second wall and a moat to the structure, which protected the city against numerous future sieges. Marco Polo, a Venetian traveller, visited Orugallu during Rudrama's reign and described her as a lady of discretion who ruled with justice and equity.

In 1280 Rudrama passed the crown to her grandson, Prataprudra, as she was growing old and had no male children of her own. However, in 1285 the kingdom was faced by a new threat from a Kayastha chief, Amba Deva who had allied with the Pandyas and Yadavas to destroy the Kakatiya empire. At this instance, despite her old age, Rudrama undertook the charge of an army but was killed in the ensuing battle. The Katakiya empire collapsed in the following years but Rudrama's legacy stands tall in Southern India.

Check Your Progress-1

1) Sketch an outline of the position of women in medieval India explaining the meaning of gender and gender relations.

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2) Explain the reasons for the predominance of men in written history.

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3) Briefly explain the status of women during the rule of Delhi Sultanate in India.

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4) Describe and assess the role of women in the political sphere of Delhi Sultanate.

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18.4 THE MUGHAL HAREM AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN

As you have read in the earlier Units, in 1526, Babur (1526-1530), a direct descendant of Timur and a conqueror from Central Asia laid the foundation of the Mughal Empire in India. The Mughal Empire lasted from 1526-1858. Babur, as well as his son Humayun (r. 1530-40, 1555-56), did not have a settled reign. In fact, the size of their kingdoms waned and waxed throughout their lifetimes and it was not until the rule of Humayun's son Akbar (1556-1605) that the lives of the Mughal emperors became more stable. Owing to the peripatetic nature of the early Mughal Empire, for long historians neglected studying the *harem* and position of women, often with a haste assumption about the lack of information from this period. Indeed, the information on women is rather marginal from the early Mughal rule yet through a thorough rereading of sources, historians such as Ruby Lal have brought forth important facets about women and gender from this period.

Babur never discussed the *harem* as an institutionalized entity and as during Sultanate, the *harem* meant simply, 'women' in the early Mughal period. By Humayun's time, the word was being used more frequently but it still referred to the imperial women, connoted by the term *haraman-i padshah*. In this early Mughal era, royal women had a due place in the construction of the monarchy as they were not only the carriers of the new dynasty, but they also socialized among new members and played a crucial role in brokering peace. In doing so, the elderly women acquired an exalted position for their experience and wisdom. Humayun, in particular, frequently took advice from his senior female relatives during his struggle for throne with his brothers. *Ahwal-i Humayun Badshah*, the memoirs of Gulbadan Banu Begum, sister of Humayun who chronicled her memories from the reign of Babur and Humayun at the insistence of his nephew Akbar, provides the names of several women in this context.[8] Gulbadan's account informs us that, in addition to their active involvement as advisors to the ruler, senior women made dynastic linkages through establishing marriages for the younger generation. The establishment of a female hierarchy is also most notably iterated by Gulbadan's memoir, among other texts of the period, which reveals that such hierarchy took shape in not just crucial matters but also quotidian affairs such as in organisation of tents for women during Mughal campaigns and the distribution of gifts to the ladies of the house. Within the boundaries of this hierarchy, a clear intersection of the interests of men and women undermined any conception of a separate and independent domestic sphere during this period.

[8] For examples, see Ruby Lal's *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World.*

In contrast to his predecessors, Akbar was able to establish a firm Mughal empire in India. His authority was not dependent on an exalted ancestry as he claimed to be divinely ordained and therefore, needed to display a unique grandeur. To this end, he paid definite attention to bodily behaviour and gender relations in his kingdom. This was done through three main efforts: first, by disciplining his own body, including his sexual behaviour, through which he popularized and emphasized on hetero-social and masculine sexual ethical comportments. Second, by carefully constructing and separating spaces for different activities and rituals. Third, through a network of marriages as adjuncts to bolster his imperial power and control. In these efforts to establish a splendid monarchy, Akbar paid great attention to the women of his household and in his reign, *harem* became an institutionalized space, just as the royal court. This manifested in his construction of a new capital at Fathpur Sikri with carefully assigned spatial divisions for different categories of people, wherein women came to occupy designated and demarcated spaces. The scheme was implemented to maintain a sanctified image of the royal household and its women and as a part the scheme, the neatly compartmentalized spaces were guarded by *khwajasaras* (eunuchs) who being castrated males could not exploit women sexually but were able to carry out domestic works. In accordance with its sacred aura, Abul Fazl gave Akbar's *harem* the name of *shabistan-i khas* or *shabistan-i Iqbal* (literally meaning the fortunate place of sleep or dreams). The word *harem* now referred not only to women but also came to denote the spaces they occupied. The invisibility of women was further achieved through the complete obliteration of the names of the mothers of future heirs in the Mughal annals. By making the private apartments and its dwellers sacred and, therefore, invisible to those outside the immediate family, the monarchy thereby created for itself an aura of being beyond the reach of its subjects.

The rise of the Mughals also affected gender equations and position of women in indigenous kingdoms. As the Mughals emerged as a dominant power, the indigenous rulers in their rage to contest or collaborate with them sought a strict vigilance over women. Control over women now became an important medium to display the masculine strength for many local rulers and the number of women in their household, a further medium to display that strength. Elite households thus came to maintain a growing, hierarchical and varied *janana* which was securely segregated from the *mardana mahals* (halls reserved for males). As in the Mughal house, the *jananas* were usually guarded by eunuchs who were called *khojas*. Although, segregation of women here was just one sided because women could view men and most political proceedings through a *jali* (screen) that guarded the female spaces. But, women of the royal households were to be protected from public view because their bodies were seen as sites of male and lineage honour. A strict display of lineage and bloodline in the local kingdoms was also emphasized through endogamous marriages among the aristocratic households.[9] Social evils such as polygyny, *purdah*, *sati*, *jauhar*, dowry, female transactions and female infanticide were prevalent and often rampant amongst the elites and the common and tribal masses. Many of these were carried out in the name of *ritiriwaj* (social customs) and denied women access to several human rights. Women had however access to a regulated economic independence through allowances and land grants and through this and their wisdom, several women negotiated the patriarchal boundaries.

[9] Endogamy refers to marriages within a specific social caste or community.

18.5 WOMEN'S AGENCY DURING THE LATER MUGHAL PERIOD

While the seclusion of the *harem* led to a subjugation of the royal domestic sphere, it however does not mean that women of this period were sedentary and secluded. In fact, in November 1575, during Akbar's reign, a large group of Mughal women undertook the famous *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca and Medina which lasted for seven years, making the *hajj* four times. Since it displayed a pious image of his kingdom, the emperor not only gave permission for this religious voyage but also funded the travel of all those who desired to go. The entourage of women included young and old females, and was organized and led by the elderly Gulbadan.

Women in this period also gained a central role at various junctures of political rife. Primacy to age and wisdom continued as in early Mughal empire and senior women were sought for intercessions and often trusted with authority. For example, in 1581, when Akbar's half-brother Muhammad Hakim Mirza, who was serving as a governor of Kabul, rebelled against him, Akbar ceded the charge of Mughal territories to his mother and sister till he quelled the rebellion. After the rife, Akbar's half-sister Bakht al-Nisa Begum was appointed as the official governor of the critical province of Kabul. Young women were also active political participants. In fact, during the reigns of Jahangir (r.1605-27), Shah Jahan (r. 1628-58) and Aurangzeb (r.1658-1707), in particular, the young wives, daughters and sisters of the emperors frequently intervened in dynastic politics and as members of the imperial family their right to involve themselves was duly acknowledged. Shah Jahan, for instance, relied heavily upon his eighteen-year old daughter Jahanara to run the imperial house after the death of his wife and her mother Mumtaz Mahal. Jahanara was called Padshah Begum and she held finances which she had accumulated through her own and her mother's trading activities with the foreign merchants. Trade, both overseas and domestic, was an important avenue of wealth pursued by several women of the imperial household in this period. Products such as indigo and embroidered cloth formed an important component of their exports. Many women also owned ships. Jahangir's mother Maryam-us Zamani, for example, owned a ship named Rahimi which in that period was the largest ship trading in the Red sea.[10]

Through their accumulated wealth, several women created lasting structures of their legacy on the political geography of the country. Jahanara, for example, used her wealth to modify the landscape of Shahjahanabad, her father's new capital city outside Delhi. The most important of her structures was the beautiful square known as Chandni Chowk and a garden outside the city walls, named as the Tis Hazari Bagh.[11] Jahanara's younger sister, Roshanara, also laid out a garden outside the walls of Shahjahanabad which was named after her – Roshanara Bagh and became her eventual resting place.

The wives of Shahjahan were also involved in sponsoring buildings. For example, after the death of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, Shah Jahan's chief consort was Akbarabadi Begum whom he presented a garden that had been laid out at some distance from Shahjahanabad, in the north-west. This garden was known as Bagh Aizzabad (now known as Shalimar Bagh) wherein Akbarabadi Begum built a *sarai* (rest house) for the aid of the *caravans* and travellers. A landmark event that later took place in the garden was the coronation of Aurangzeb on 31st

[10] The capture of this ship by Portuguese in 1614 had led to a war between the two sides.

[11] The *chowk* was a bustling public and commercial space, with many shops and coffee houses. After the Revolt of 1857, the British demolished the *chowk* and the buildings around it.

July 1658. Similarly, Fatehpuri Begum, another wife of Shah Jahan, built the Fatehpuri Masjid which stands at the western end of the street leading from the Red Fort. The Sirhindi Masjid, just outside the wall of the city, to the west, was built by Sirhindi Begum, another wife of Shah Jahan.

The next generation of Mughal royal ladies also continued the tradition of sponsoring construction activities. Aurangzeb's wife, Aurangabadi Begum is recorded to have sponsored a mosque near the Lahore gate of Delhi. Her sister Zinat-un Nissa extended her patronage to the construction of a grand mosque in the south of the Red Fort. Built in 1700, it was called Zinatul Masjid, and is today popular by the name Ghata Masjid. Her tomb was laid to the north of this mosque, which was demolished in the aftermath of the 1857 Revolt.

An important reason for sponsoring buildings by women was to accumulate private property because women could hold rights over the immobile properties sponsored by them. Such ownership and rights to bequeath their immobile property were practised in Muslim and non-Muslim households. Women often gained economic power through imperial orders (*farmans*) and the grants of territorial assignments in the form of *jagirs* that provided them with economic security. During the Mughal period, women held exclusive individual rights as well as collective ownership over property. Often rights to sublet and transfer portions from their territorial land grants was also permitted. It was also common for women to possess her own jewellery and cash, often acquired in marriage and through gifts, but in aristocratic Hindu households such ownership was limited as often the movable property, especially of the secondary ranked female groups, was confiscated by the state, after the termination of their services, whether due to death of the female or any other reasons. Several documents from the period however reveal that women, both elite and in common houses, maintained active cognisance of their wealth and property and often voiced for such rights in legal and royal courts.

The agency of Mughal women can further be located in their patronization to arts and religion. For example, Jahanara, at the insistence of her brother Dara Shukoh, was indoctrinated into the Qadiriyyah sufi order and as part of this leaning, she composed *Risala-i Sahibiya*, an exploration of the sufi ideas and the biography of Mu'in al-Din Chishti.[12] She also used her wealth to patronize commentaries on Maulana Rumi's Masnavi. Like Jahanara, Aurangzeb's daughter, Zeb-un Nissa was a spiritual and well-educated woman, skilled in Arabic and Persian, and wrote both prose and poetry. She is believed to be the author of many poems composed under the pen-name 'Makhfi'. The princess was a skilled calligraphist and patronized many writers, poets, calligraphists and learned men and commissioned several important books and tracts. When she died, she was buried in the Tees Hazari Bagh, which she had inherited from Jahanara.

Like these remarkable women, other women of the royal family were also well educated and female tutors called Atun Mama were employed to teach them comportment and Persian, Arabic, theology, history and classical literatures. Gulbadan who wrote *Humayunnama* is said to have possessed a huge library. In the Hindu aristocratic households, female education was centred on the basic knowledge of letters and religious scriptures, which was imparted by Brahmins.

Through this overview, you would have by now understood that, women at the Mughal house were proactive and many carved a distinguished place for

[12] Owing to her inclination towards the sufi order, she was buried as per her wishes in the courtyard of the shrine of Nizam al-Din Auliya.

themselves. An important point to remember here is that, in addition to their mothers, wives and sisters, the Mughal rulers held special respect for their foster or milk mother who were accorded the same rights and privileges as the monarchs' birth mothers and were often treated with greater respect than the stepmothers. Akbar, for instance, was profoundly attached to Maham Anaga, his milk mother, and when he was still a teenager, she was effectively his regent, ruling the nascent empire with her stern hand. In a similar vein, several women, aside from the ones detailed in this Sub-section exerted crucial power and challenged patriarchal authority through different ways in the Mughal house and the local kingdoms during this period.The details of few such women are discussed in the following Sub-sections.

18.5.1 Nur Jahan

The most famous of the Mughal women, Nur Jahan married the fourth Mughal emperor Jahangir as a thirty-six-year-old widow with a young daughter. Jahangir and she did not have children, but he did not marry after her and preferred her companionship to all others at court.

She displayed exceptional political acumen which quickly earned her the trust of her husband who even went on to grant the right of sovereignty to her. She had the privilege of issuing royal orders (*parwanahs* and *hukms*) generally reserved for royal princes and also held the authority to sign *farmans* with her seal. Coins were struck in her name and she held the right to direct public audience on her own. She regularly went on hunts with her husband where she did not hinge from displaying her shooting skills. In fact, of all the imperial court members, it was Nur Jahan's shooting skills combined with her political ability that enabled her to rescue Jahangir when he was captured by the rebellious Mahabat Khan in 1626.

To add to the prerogatives which she earned from her husband, Nur Jahan invested in overseas trade through her ships and dealt with Europeans, Portuguese as well as the Dutch. The English merchants also sought her protection and support to obtain trade permissions in Jahangir's court. She utilized her accumulated wealth to sponsor a series of private palaces for herself in different parts of the empire, where she is also known to have sponsored feasts and celebrations. Contemporaries of the period expressed concern over her active political life and some even accused Jahangir of abdicating all authority to her. Nur Jahan, nevertheless, actively exerted her command as a co-sovereign to her husband and in her every act ensured that her name was permanently stamped in public memory and in history.

18.5.2 Chand Bibi

Chand Bibi was the princess of Ahmadnagar who was married to Ali Adil Shah I (1558-79) of Bijapur on the eve of the battle against Vijayanagar in 1565. The marriage between the ruling members of the two states was a political alliance but that did not deter Chand Bibi from commanding power. Chand Bibi had grown up in a household where her mother exerted considerable authority during the rule of her father. She was thus adept in court politics and would have never relegated to the background. A sitar player and fluent in five languages, she often accompanied her husband on military campaigns and owing to her political acumen, he entrusted her advice in the matters of the state.

Ali's controversial assassination around 1580's brought for Chand Bibi a central role in the political affairs. With no son and a young nephew placed on throne, she took care of the state by acting as a regent of the Bijapur Sultanate from 1580-

90. Her rule was, however, always fraught with conspiracies from a section of nobles and soon the rivalries between Bijapur and her natal state Ahmadnagar also resumed. At this juncture, she was often questioned of her loyalty. Since the Bijapur heir by now was of age she thus decided to go back to Ahmadnagar that was fraught with political chaos in that period.

Without a ruler, the Ahmadnagar kingdom was on the verge of a Mughal attack in 1595 but Chand Bibi took an active control of her natal state from 1595-99. She played an important role in saving the kingdom from Mughal forces in the beginning of the 17th century. Her bravery was acknowledged even by the rival Mughal forces who gave her the popular title of Chand Sultan. She could not, however, repulse the factional politics in her own kingdom and the ambitions of powerful nobles led to her assassination on the charges of secret alliance with the Mughals. She is however well remembered for her valour and administrative abilities especially for relentlessly inspiring the army to fight the Mughals who nevertheless eventually conquered Ahmadnagar.

18.5.3 Umabai Dabhade

17th century Deccan witnessed rise of the Marathas. The Marathas had many warrior women who fought on behalf of their men folk. For example, Jijabai and Ahilya Bai Holkar played significant roles as advisors, regents and warriors safeguarding the interests of their state. Remarkable amongst such women was Umabai Dabhade, particularly because she did not hail from the ruling family. She was the daughter of DevraoThoke, a Deshmukh of Abhonkar. At a young age she was married to Khanderao Dabhade, the eldest son of Yesaji, the bodyguard of the Maratha Chattrapati (emperor) Shivaji. She was Khanderao's third and youngest wife but after her husband's death, her eldest son Trimbakrao took charge as the senapati(military commander) but soon he entered into a conflict with the then Peshwa Bajirao I concerning the rights over *chauth* tax.

Umabai became a rallying force to resist the lapse of their community's rights and she fearlessly continued the resistance after the death of her elder son. She rallied with the Maratha queen Tarabai to fight for their dues against the Peshwa and at the instance of a war between Tara Bai and Peshwa, Umabai along with other Maratha women rallied strong forces to side with their queen. But owing largely to the deceit by their army commander, the battle resulted in the defeat of the women leaders. In her resistance, however, Umabai and other women voiced their opinions, involvement and concerns with the affairs of their times.

18.5.4 Meerabai

As other domains, the pursuit of religion became a powerful form of women's self-assertion during this period. With the spread of Vaishnavaite and Shaivite devotional religions in Medieval India, many women rejected familial pressures and embarked on spiritual journeys. For many, the spiritual path was a platform to voice their opinion about hierarchies of gender, caste, and religion and they did so with the use of vernacular language which made them an integral part of the popular culture. In the process, they simultaneously reconceptualized religion and carved out a space for themselves in the existing social order.

Meerabai, also known as Meera, of Rajasthan was the most prominent of the female mystics who emerged as a radical saint-poet by treading the path of Bhakti devotion. Bhakti was a religious movement which promoted the belief that salvation was attainable by everyone. As you learnt in previous Unit (**Unit 16**), Bhakti challenged all orthodox beliefs, rebelled against caste distinctions

and disregarded Brahmanic (high-caste based) rituals declaring them unnecessary for the attainment of salvation. Bhakti movement gave rise to several male saint-poets like Kabir, Namdev, Tulsi Das, Tukaram and Basava. Akin to these, the period saw several female Bhakts like Akka Mahadevi, Janabai and Bahinabai, apart from Meera.

Female poet-saints played a significant role in society as they raised theirvoice against patriarchal boundaries in various spheres including an equal space in religion. Women like Meerabai were extraordinarily radical in their rejection of social norms and values, leaving their families behind, in order to exalt their love for God. Others attempted to fit into more traditional roles in society by pursuing spirituality while maintaining their responsibilities as wives and mothers. All, however, wrote or sang poetry that acted to challenge the constructed norms of gender.

Meerabai is placed among the most famous Bhakti poets throughout the world. In her poems, she raised her voice against the injustice which was executed at various levels. Her poetry carried more force perhaps owing to her aristocratic background. She was a Rajput princess, the only child of Ratan Singh who was the younger brother of the ruler of Merta. She was married in 1516 to Bhoj Raj, the crown prince of Mewar. Her husband died in 1521 and thereafter, she was the victim of much persecution at the hands of her husband's family, particularly her brother-in-law who ascended the throne after her husband's death.

Her devotion for Lord Krishna is said to have developed since childhood. As a child, Meera is known to have pestered her mother to tell her the meaning of bridegroom and to escape her questions, her mother would reply that her groom was Lord Krishna. Meera is said to have accepted this as truth and revered Krishna as her husband. With the passage of time, her belief grew stronger and at one stage, she lost herself completely merging with the Lord. This aspect became complex after her marriage as she refused to adhere to the traditional familial laws and stepped out of her house to sing in temples and dance in public. Her resistance was not for traditions but against the orthodox restrictive customs that sought to regulate and control the lives of women. Bhakti and her poetry became a device for her to challenge the masculine ideas. At one point, she left her marital home, returning to her maternal home in Merta.

Although her family was also inclined to Vaishnavism, but they opposed Meera's ways of devotion leading her to take to the streets. When she wandered, her devotion entered the public domain. She travelled nearly to all places which were considered sacred by Krishna, but she had to encounter a lot of resentment from public and even from many *bhaktas*. To be a woman *bhakta* was not easy as women were foremost viewed through their body and therefore a constant anxiety about their safety and honour prevailed. Owing to this, travelling alone by women was always considered a risked issue. Some women saints confronted this issue in early medieval India. Examples include the 12th century Kannada poet Akka Mahadevi and the 14th century Kashmiri mystic Lal Ded. In the 15th century, spiritual male leaders such as Guru Nanak also supported the claims to equality by women and fervently wrote against relegating of women to an inferior position merely based on her sex. In the following centuries, other Gurus supported and furthered the stand taken by Guru Nanak, and raised their voice against evil practices as dowry, seclusion and female infanticide. Like these social revolutionaries, Meera also handled all the resistance with grace and continued her defiance of patriarchal society through her poetry.

Her poems are predominantly derived from her lived experiences and encompass simple expressions of her joys, sorrows, devotion and rebellion. She knew that she was transgressing boundaries, but she ceased to care by trusting her own self and her belief in Lord. Her fearlessness is apparent in her poems, particularly in the way she expressed them and the language that she used to portray her inner strength. Her self-assertiveness is simply evident in the frequent employment of phrases like 'I will', 'I will not', 'I do', 'I am' and 'I have' in her songs (Kishwar &Vanita, 1989: 82). The use of such language was an expression of her belief in herself and an indifference for public opinion against her decisions. Meera not only countered the Rajputs with as much valour as they themselves were known for, but she also remains an embodiment of female fearlessness for the public, then, now and even for times to come.

18.5.5 Women in Medieval Bengal

Although fragmentary, evidence from medieval Bengal indicates that women, especially those hailing from upper class, had several opportunities to assume leadership roles. These opportunities were most abundant among the hill tribes to the north, where a remarkably egalitarian system seems to have prevailed. Even before the 16th century, we have from this region the evidence of Visvasadevi of Tirhut, who successfully served as regent during her husband's lifetime. Along with her administrative abilities, she is known to have compiled a treatise on the worship of Ganga followed by commissioning the famous court poet Vidyapati to compile a similar treatise on the worship of Siva.

In the late 18th century, the lesser known Candraprabha was another queen of the northeast who demonstrated effective administration and was a patron of learning. Candraprabha was the wife of Tamradhvaja of Cachar (now in Assam), who ruled her husband's kingdom when he was taken captive by a rival and later as a regent before her son took over as king. The queen promoted the spread of Sanskrit language and culture in her kingdom.

Scholars of this region have argued that the spread of the devotional Chaitanya movement with its expression in Sanskrit and vernacular literature served as a powerful stimulus to literacy during the queen's reign wherein woman of the lower castes also found access to fairly good education. Such patronage also brought to the fore many female teachers in this region. The name of Hati Vidyalankara of Sonai is prominent among these who lived in the 18th century West Burdwan. She had her own Sanskrit school.

Our evidence about such non-aristocratic women is certainly limited. Yet the available evidence, despite being fragmentary, does suggest of a social order where notwithstanding male domination, women were neither docile nor complacent and exerted their agency in multiple ways.

Check Your Progress-2

1) Explain the changing connotation of *harem* from the early Mughals to the reign of Akbar.

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2) Discuss the ways in which aristocratic women used their finances during the Mughal period.

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3) Explain how women used religion to cross patriarchal boundaries during medieval India.

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4) Describe and assess the role of women in the political sphere of the Mughals.

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5) Discuss the contribution of women to literature and architecture of Mughal India.

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18.6 SUMMARY

Through this Unit, you would have understood that unlike the popular perception about the hidden position of women in medieval India, women in this period rather exerted an active agency. Indeed, patriarchy and its associated norms restricted the movement and activities of women, and not all women got access to express themselves or their abilities. Moreover, gender relations remained complicated and inequitable because control and regulation of women was continually sought to display power by men. Yet, despite the constructed boundaries around them, several women were able to negotiate their status and spaces in politics, economy and socio-cultural domains and have even left lasting structures of their legacy. Having said that, one must remember here that, whether as active agents or invisible nameless subjects, women, as men, were a significant contributor in the making of medieval India.

18.7 KEYWORDS

Agency Capacity of individuals to act and make their choices

Gender Socially constructed characteristics of women and men. These include norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. Gender roles vary

	from society to society affecting the dynamics of gender relations in different cultures
Patriarchy	A social system in which men hold a dominant position
Polygyny	A practice entailing marriage of a man with several women
Regent	A person who administers a state/kingdom when the legal monarch is a minor or unable to rule due to other reasons

18.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

1) See Section 18.1 and 18.2
2) See Section 18.2 Most sources are penned by men, patriarchy and its associated constructs
3) See Section 18.2
4) See Section 18.3

Check Your Progress-2

1) See Section 18.4
2) Trade, literature, religion, buildings. See Section 18.6 for examples
3) See Section 18.5, and Sub-Sections 18.5.1, 18.5.2, 18.5.3, 18.5.5
4) See Sub-Section 18.5.4
5) See Section 18.5, including all Sub-sections

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PDF:

https://www.sahapedia.org/women-patrons-and-the-making-of-shahjahanabad

18.10 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Once Upon a Sultan
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpcW1KIpYjo&t=1249s

Story of NurJahan, the most Powerful Woman of Mughal Era - (BBC Hindi)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61griQIxNdc&t=32s

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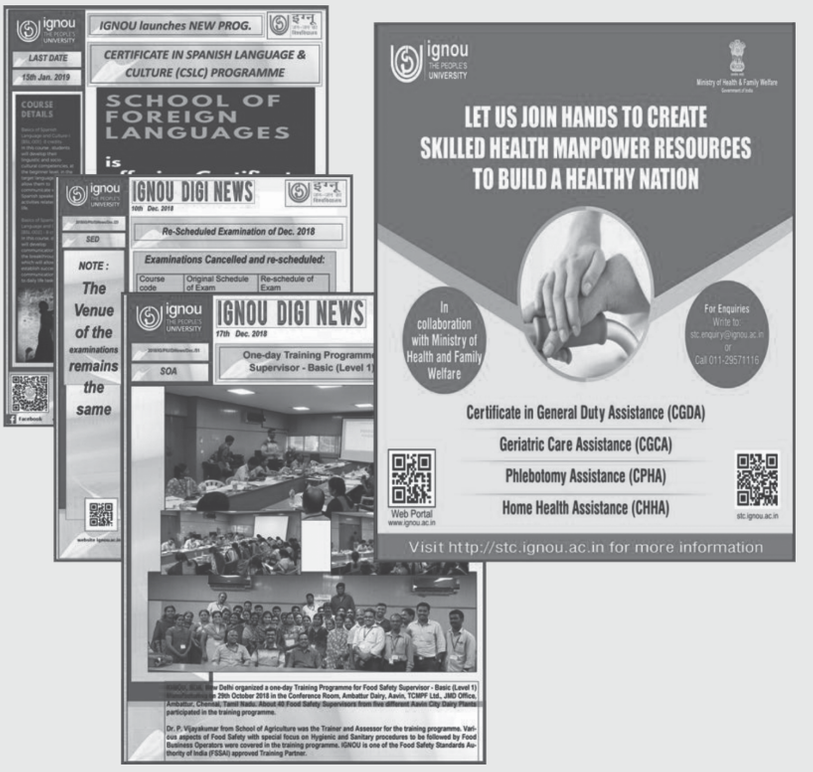

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