

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

The term “Bhakti” symbolises devotion or a passionate love for the divine. The Bhakti movement stresses the mystical union of the individual with God. Although the seeds of Bhakti can be found in the Vedas, it was not emphasised during the early period. The process of adoration of a personal God developed during the course of the 6th century BCE, with the rise of the heterodox movements of [Buddhism](#) and Jainism. For instance, under Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha began to be worshipped in his gracious (avalokita) form. The worship of Vishnu too started around the same time, which was popularised to a great extent by the Gupta kings.

Vaishnava and Shaiva devotionalism were given new emphasis and expression by the Alvars and Nayanars saints of South India in the early medieval period. As per the tradition, there were 12 Alvars and 63 Nayanars. Using devotion to achieve salvation was a key component of the Bhakti movement which was started as a religious reformation in medieval India. The period of the 8th to 18th century is dedicated to the Bhakti movement where a number of saints (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh) evolved as the messiah of Bhakti (devotion), teaching people the transition of life from normalcy to enlightenment through salvation.

Bhakti Movement



The Bhakti movement in South India

The development of the popular Bhakti movement took place in south India between the 7th and 12th centuries CE. It was based on religious equality and broad-based social participation. The Shivaite Nayannars and the Vaishnavite Alvars, who preached the Bhakti cult under the Pallavas, Pandyas and Cholas disregarded the austerities preached by the Jains and the Buddhists. They preached personal devotion to God as a means of salvation. They disregarded the rigidities of the caste system and carried

the message of love and personal devotion to God to various parts of South India with the help of local languages.

The Bhakti movement in North India

The Bhakti movement gained importance in the northern parts of the country during the 12th-17th century CE. The Bhakti movement in north India is sometimes seen as a continuation of the movement that originated in the south. Despite the similarities in the tradition of the two regions, the idea of Bhakti varied in terms of the teachings of each of the saints. The northern medieval Bhakti movement was influenced by the spread of Islam in India. The main features of Islam like belief in one God (monotheism), equality and brotherhood, and rejection of rituals and class divisions greatly influenced the Bhakti movement of this era. The movement also brought certain reforms to society.

Origin of Bhakti Movement

Some scholars believe that the rise of the Bhakti movement was a reaction against feudal oppression and against Rajput-Brahmin domination.

- Another group of scholars believe that the socio-economic changes in the early medieval period led to the emergence of this movement. During the 13th and 14th centuries, the demand for goods increased which led to the migration of artisans into cities. The Bhakti movement gained support from these classes of society as they were not satisfied with the low status given to them by the Brahmanical system and hence, they turned towards Bhakti since it focussed on equality.

Though there is no single opinion about the origin of the Bhakti movement, there is unanimity of thought over the fact that the Bhakti movement was based on equality and devotional surrender to a personally conceived supreme God.

Saguna and Nirguna are the two different ideological streams of the Bhakti movement.

Saguna	Nirguna
Saguna represented those poet-saints who composed verses extolling a god with attributes or form.	Nirguna represented those poet-saints who extolled god without and beyond all attributes or form. They are also known as Monotheistic Bhakti saints.
Tulsidas, Chaitanya, Surdas and Meera were the main proponents of Saguna.	Nanak and Kabir were the main proponents of Nirguna.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Saguna poets were in favour of the dominance of Brahmins and supported the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Nirguna poet-saints rejected the supremacy of the Brahmins and all conventions based on caste distinctions along with the practice of idolatry.

<p>caste system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They preached a religion of surrender and simple faith in a personal god while also supporting idol worship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They gave importance to the personal experience with god and even though they called their god using different names and titles, yet their god was formless, eternal, non-incarnate and ineffable.• It seemed that their ideas were a synthesis of the three traditions; the Vaishnava concept of Bhakti, the Nanpanthi movement and Sufism. Thus, though they had adopted the notion of Bhakti from Vaishnavism, they gave it a Nirguna orientation.
---	--

Though Saguna and Nirguna are two different ideologies, they have similarities as is evident in their verses wherein they frequently mention each other's teachings and influence. Such as:

- Both laid stress on a personal relationship with the divine and believed in singular devotion and love for God.
- Both were against the ritual observances as were encouraged by the Brahman priests, and many poet-saints, particularly in northern regions, were of low caste lineages.
- Both used the vernacular or regional languages of the masses, as opposed to the sacred language of Sanskrit of the elite priests. This helped them to transmit their ideas among the various lower classes.

Salient features of Bhakti Movement

1. The Bhakti movement was based on the principles of monotheism and it generally criticized idol worship.
2. The Bhakti reformers believed in freedom from the cycle of life and death and preached that salvation could be attained only by deep devotion and faith in God.
3. They emphasised the importance of self-surrender for obtaining the bliss and grace of God and also valued the importance of Gurus who acted as guides and preceptors.
4. They preached the principle of universal brotherhood.
5. They were against rituals, pilgrimages and fasts. They strongly opposed the caste system which divided the people according to their birth.
6. They also emphasised on the singing of hymns with deep devotion and without considering any language as sacred, they composed poems in the language of the common people.

Alvars and Nayanars of Tamil Nadu

The Alvars and Nayanars led some of the earliest Bhakti movements (c. sixth century).

- Alvars - those who are “immersed” in devotion to Vishnu.

- Nayanars - those who are devotees of Shiva.
- They travelled from place to place singing hymns in Tamil praising their gods.
- The Alvars and Nayanars initiated a movement of protest against the caste system and the dominance of Brahmanas or at least attempted to reform the system. This is supported by the fact that bhaktas or disciples hailed from diverse social backgrounds ranging from Brahmanas to artisans and cultivators and even from castes considered “untouchable”.
- The Nalayira Divya Prabandham (“Four Thousand Sacred Compositions”) is one of the major anthologies of compositions of the 12 Alvars collected and compiled in the 10th century by Nathamuni.
- Tevaram – a collection of the first seven volumes of Tirumurai (Saiva devotional poetry) contains the work of Tamil poets - Appar, Sambandar, and Sundarar.

Prominent Leaders of the Bhakti Movement

Shankaracharya (c. 788 - 820 CE)

- One of the mystic Bhakti poet-saint leaders who gave a new orientation to Hinduism.
- He was born in Kaladi in Kerala. He propounded the **Advaita** (Monism) philosophy and the idea of Nirgunabrahman (god without attributes).
- In Advaita, the reality of the world is denied and Brahman is considered the only reality. It is only Brahman at its base that gives it its reality.
- His famous quotes include, ‘Brahma Satyam Jagat Mithya Jivo Brahmatra Naparaha’ meaning, “The Absolute Spirit is the reality, the world of appearance is Maya” and ‘Ekameva Adviteeyam Brahma’ meaning, “The absolute is one alone, not two”.
- He laid emphasis on knowledge (gyan) as that can alone lead to salvation.
- Upadesahasri, Vivekachudamani, Bhaja Govindum Stotra are some of the works authored by Shankaracharya. He also wrote commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita, the Brahma Sutra and the Upanishads.
- He set up mathas at Dwarka, Puri, Sringeri and Badrinath.

Ramanuja (c. 1017 - 1137 CE)

- In the 12th century, Ramanuja, who was born at Sriperumbudur near modern Chennai, preached **Vishista Advaitavada** (qualified monism). According to him, God is Saguna Brahman (with attributes) and the creative process including all the objects in creation are real and not illusory as was held by Shankaracharya. Therefore, according to Ramanuja, God, soul, and matter are real. However, God is the inner substance and the rest are his attributes.
- In Vishista Advaitavada, the universe and Brahman are considered two equally real entities, as in dualism, but here the universe is not separate from Brahman but is formed out of Brahman. The Brahman is considered as a personal god with omniscient qualities who has created the world out

of his own self. Thus, the world bears to Brahman the relation of the part to the whole, or the relation of a 'qualified effect' to the base (hence qualified monism).

- The famous analogy given for this is the sea and wave - Brahman is the sea and the objects of the world, both living and nonliving are the waves upon this sea.
- According to Ramanuja, Brahman is an entirely personal god and is considered to be Vishnu or one of his avatars. He believed that Vishnu has created the world out of his love for humans, and he also controls the world at every step. He also held that Vishnu has all the qualities of a personal god - omniscient, omnipotence, etc.
- The difference between Dualism and Vishista Advaita is that "mankind enjoys higher status than in pure dualistic worship and is nearer to God". In Vishista Advaita, both the world and Brahman are considered equally real; they are not considered to be two separate entities as in Dualism.
- Ramanuja advocated prabattimarga or the path of self-surrender to God. He invited downtrodden people to Vaishnavism and advocated salvation by Bhakti.
- He authored Sribhashya, Vedanta Dipa, Gita Bhasya and Vedantasara.

Madhavacharya (c. 1238 - 1317 CE)

- Madhava from Kannada preached Dvaita or the dualism of Jivatma and Paramatma. According to his philosophy, the world is not an illusion but a reality and full of real distinction.
- God, soul and matter are unique in nature, and are irreducible to each other.
- He founded the Brahma Sampradaya.
- He considered Brahman and the universe to be two equally real entities that are not related in any way. The God of dualism is Vishnu who has created the universe, and the universe is separate from God and in an inferior position to God with no link between the two. Vishnu controls all worldly affairs and to worship and pray to God is the duty of all persons.

Nimbarka

- He was the younger contemporary of Ramanuja who propounded the Dvaita Advaita philosophy and the philosophy of Bheda Abheda (difference/non-difference). The Bheda Abheda philosophy, like Vishista Advaita, also believes that the world and the Brahman are both equally real and that the world is a part of Brahman. The difference is in emphasis only.
- He was the preacher of Vaishnavite Bhakti in the Telangana region.
- He also founded the Sanak Sampradaya.

Vallabhacharya (c. 1479 - 1531 CE)

- He was born in Benaras to a Telugu Brahmin family. He propagated his doctrine of Bhakti (devotion) through god Krishna whom he fondly addressed as Shrinath Ji.
- He founded pustimarga (the path of grace) - a path that teaches a devotee how to offer selfless love and devotion to Shrinath Ji without expecting anything in return but love.

- He propounded the philosophy of Shudh Advaita (pure monism) which forms the basis of the pushtimarg devotional practice. Shudh Advaita like Vishista Advaita too indicates that the entire universe is the manifestation of Brahman. It is like the two sides of the coin, with Brahman as one side and the universe another side. There is no change - the universe is a part of the coin that is Brahman. Hence, this is called “Shudh Advaita” because it is said that there is only one and there is no change.
- He also founded Rudra Sampradaya.
- He along with his disciple Surdas was largely instrumental in popularising the Krishna cult in north India.

Vidyapati (c. 1352 - 1448 CE)

- Vidyapati was known for his poetry dedicated to Shiva, whom he fondly addressed as Ugrha.

The Bhakti Movement in Maharashtra

- The Bhakti movement in Maharashtra centred around the shrine of Vithoba or Vitthal, the residing deity of Pandharpur, who was considered the manifestation of Krishna. This movement is also known as the Pandharpur movement and it influenced the social and cultural developments in Maharashtra. For instance, it led to the development of Marathi literature, elevated the status of women, helped in breaking caste distinctions, etc. In Maharashtra, the Bhakti movement drew its inspiration from the Bhagavata Purana and the Shiva Nathpanthis.
- The Bhakti movement is divided into two sects:
 - Varakaris - The mild devotees of God Vitthala of Pandharpur, who are more emotional, theoretical and abstract in their viewpoint.
 - Dharakaris - The heroic followers of the cult of Ramadasa, the devotee of God Rama, who are more rational, concrete and practical in their thoughts.

However, the realisation of God as the highest end of human life is a common aim of both. The great saints belonging to the Vithoba cult were Jnaneswar/Jnanadeva, Tukaram and Namdeva.

Jnaneswar or Jnanadeva (c. 1275 - 1296 CE)

- A 13th-century mystical poet-saint of Maharashtra who wrote a commentary of Bhagavad Gita called Jnaneswari which served as a foundation of the Bhakti ideology in Maharashtra.
- He was strictly against caste distinctions and believed that the only way to attain God was through Bhakti.
- He also composed “Amritanubhava” (immortal experience), based on the philosophy of the Upanishads and “Haripatha”, a song admiring Hari (Vishnu).

Namadeva (c. 1270 - 1350)

- A Maharashtrian saint, who flourished in the first part of the 14th century. Namadeva was a tailor who is said to have taken to banditry before he became a saint.
- His poetry which was written in Marathi breathes a spirit of intense love and devotion to God.
- He is considered one of the five revered gurus in the Dadupanth tradition within Hinduism, the other four being Dadu, Kabir, Hardas and Ravidas. It is believed that his Abhangas were included in the Guru Granth Sahib.
- Namadeva is said to have travelled far and wide and engaged in discussions with Sufi saints at Delhi.

Sant Eknath (c. 1533 - 1599 CE)

- He was a scholar of Varkari sampradaya and Vaishnavism, the branch of Hinduism that is characterised by devotion to God Vishnu and his incarnations (avatars).
- He is known to have enriched Marathi literature and had translated various Sanskrit texts into Marathi.
- He also tried to shift the emphasis of Marathi literature from spiritual to narrative composition and introduced a new form of Marathi religious song called Bharood.
- He was a family man and emphasised that staying in monasteries or withdrawing from the world are not necessary for leading a religious life. He was known for resolving conflicts between householder duties and the demands of religious devotion.
- He was against caste distinctions and spread the message that there was no distinction in God's eyes between Brahmin and outcaste or between Hindu and Muslim.

Tukaram (c. 1608 - 1650 CE)

- A 17th-century poet-saint who was a contemporary of Maratha ruler Shivaji Maharaj and saints like Eknath and Ramdas. His poetry was devoted to Vithoba or Vitthala, an avatar of the Hindu God, Vishnu.
- He is known for his Abangas (dohas) in Marathi which are a rich heritage of the Gatha - devotional poetry and was also responsible for creating a background for Maratha nationalism (Parmaratha).
- He laid emphasis on community-based worship with spiritual songs called Kirtans. He preached the virtue of piety, forgiveness and peace of mind.

Ramdas (c. 1608 - 1681 CE)

- He was a renowned spiritual Guru and has contributed to building the Maratha empire under Shivaji.
- He wrote Dasabhoda, a treatise on the Advaita Vedanta in the Marathi language which deals with a wide range of topics on the spiritual life, characteristics of Guru, the necessity of Guru, the qualifications of a true disciple, Maya, importance of spiritual disciplines, true and false

knowledge, bhakti and liberation. His other works are Karunashtaken, Janasvabhavagosanvi and Manache Sloka.

- He was strictly against caste distinctions and encouraged women to take part in religious work.

Non-Sectarian Bhakti Movement

In the 14th and 15th centuries, Ramananda, Kabir and Nanak emerged as the great proponents of the Bhakti cult. They helped the common people to shed age-old superstitions and attain salvation through Bhakti or pure devotion. Unlike the early reformers, they were not linked with any particular religious creed and were totally against rituals and ceremonies. They condemned polytheism, believed in one God and were against idolatry. They also laid stress on the fundamental unity of all religions.

Ramananda (c. 1400 - 1476 CE)

- Ramananda was a 15th-century poet-saint who was born at Prayag (Allahabad) and preached his principles at Benaras and Agra. His followers are called Ramanandis.
- He was originally a follower of Ramanuja. Like other monotheist bhakti saints, he opposed the caste system and chose his disciples from all sections of society, irrespective of caste. His disciples were:
 - Kabir, a Muslim weaver.
 - Sena, a barber.
 - Sadhana, a butcher.
 - Raidasa, a cobbler.
 - Dhanna, a jat farmer.
 - Narahari, a goldsmith.
 - Pipa, a Rajput prince.
- He is regarded as the founder of the Ram cult in north India as his object of Bhakti was Ram since he worshipped Ram and Sita.
- He rejected the monopoly of the Sanskrit language over the teachings of religious texts. He preached in local languages to popularise his teachings.

Kabir

- One of the most famous disciples of Ramananda who belonged to the 15th century. His iconic verses are found in the Sikh holy scripture, Adi Granth.
- According to tradition, it is believed that he was born near Benaras to a Brahmin widow who abandoned him after his birth and was brought up in the house of a Muslim weaver.
- He possessed an inquiring mind and while in Benaras learnt much about Hinduism. He became familiar with Islamic teachings and Ramananda initiated him into the higher knowledge of Hindu and Muslim religious and philosophical ideas.

- He strongly denounced idol worship, pilgrimages, rituals, caste system especially the practice of untouchability and laid great stress on the equality of man before God. The mission of Kabir was to preach a religion of love that would unite all castes and creeds. He was quite familiar with yogic practices and regarded devotion to God as an effective means of salvation. He urged his disciples that to attain salvation one must have a pure heart, free from cruelty, hypocrisy, dishonesty and insincerity. He considered neither asceticism nor book knowledge important for true knowledge. He also did not consider it necessary to abandon the life of a householder for the sake of saintly life.
- Kabir's object was to reconcile Hindus and Muslims and establish harmony between the two sects. He emphasised the essential oneness of all religions by describing Hindus and Muslims "as pots of the same clay". To him, Rama and Allah, temple and mosque were the same.
- Kabir is regarded as the greatest mystic saint and his followers are called Kabirpanthis. Raidas (a tanner), Guru Nanak (a Khatri merchant) and Dhanna (a Jat peasant) were some of his important disciples. Most of the compositions of Kabir are compiled in Bijak.

Also read: [Sant Kabir Das Jayanti](#)

Guru Nanak (c. 1469 - 1539 CE)

- The first Sikh Guru and the founder of [Sikhism](#), who was also a Nirguna Bhakti saint and social reformer.
- He was born in a Khatri family in the village of Talwandi (now called Nankana) on the banks of the river Tawi in c. 1469 CE. He had a mystic contemplative bent of mind and preferred the company of saints and sadhus.
- He preached about the unity of God and strongly denounced idol-worship, pilgrimages and other formal observances of the various faiths. He advocated a middle path in which a spiritual life could be combined with the duties of the householder.
- "Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world", was one of his famous sayings.
- He aimed at bridging distinctions between the Hindus and the Muslims in order to create an atmosphere of peace, goodwill and mutual give and take.

Nathpanthis, Siddhas, and Yogis

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

Vaishnavite Movement

- Apart from the non-sectarian movement led by Kabir and Nanak, the Bhakti movement in north India developed around the worship of Rama and Krishna, two of the incarnations of God Vishnu. **Tulsidas** was a worshipper of Rama and composed an epic poem - the Ramacharitamanaas popularly called “Tulsi Krita Ramayana” in which he portrays Sri Ram as most virtuous, powerful and the embodiment of the supreme reality (Parambrahma).
- In c. 1585 CE, the followers of the Krishna cult founded the RadhaBallabhi sect under Hari Vamsa. A popular bhakti saint, **Vallabhacharya** popularised the Krishna bhakti cult in the Telangana region. **Surdas** was a disciple of Vallabhacharya and he popularised the Krishna cult in north India. He wrote Sursagar in Brajhasha which is full of verses on the charm of Lord Krishna and his beloved Radha. **Mirabai** was a great devotee of Krishna and she became popular in Rajasthan for her bhajans.
- **Chaitanya** was another well-known saint and social reformer of Bengal who popularised the Krishna cult. Chaitanya is said to have travelled all over India, including Vrindavan where he revived the Krishna cult. He popularized the Sankirtan/kirtan system, group devotional songs accompanied with ecstatic dancing. He believed that through love and devotion, song and dance, a devotee can feel the presence of God. The biography of Chaitanya was written by Krishnadas Kaviraj. He accepted disciples from all classes and castes and his teachings are widely followed in Bengal even today. He did not reject the scriptures or idol worship though he cannot be classified as a traditionalist.
- **Narsingh Mehta** (c. 1414 - 1481 CE) - He was the saint of Gujarat who wrote songs in Gujarati depicting the love of Radha-Krishna. He authored Mahatma Gandhi's favourite bhajan, “Vaishnava jan ko”.
- **Saint Tyagaraja** (c. 1767 - 1847 CE) - He is regarded as one of the greatest composers of Carnatic music, who had composed thousands of devotional compositions, mostly in Telugu in praise of Lord Ram. He is also considered as one of the precious jewels of the Carnatic trinity, the other two being Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri. He composed the famous Pancharatna Kritis (meaning five gems).
- **Tallapaka Annamacharya** (c. 1408 - 1503 CE) - He was a pioneer in both devotional music sankirtans and also in the field of opposition to social evils such as the practice of untouchability. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Venkateshwara.

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

Women in the Bhakti Movement

Women poet-saints also played an important role in the Bhakti movement and many of these women saints had to strive harder to gain acceptance within the otherwise largely male-dominated movement. In many cases, the women saints rejected traditional women’s roles and societal norms and left their homes to become wandering bhaktas while in some other instances, they got involved in the Bhakti movement while performing their household duties.

Some of the prominent female bhaktas are:

1. **Akkamahadevi** - A 12th-century bhakti saint who belonged to the southern region of Karnataka. She earned the title “Akka” meaning elder sister from great philosophers of her time - Basavanna, Prabhu Deva, Madivalayya and Chenna Basavanna. She was an ardent devotee of Shiva.
2. **Janabai** - She was born into the Shudra caste, around the 13th century. She worked in the household of saint Namdeva, one of the most respected Bhakti saints. Though she had no formal education, she composed over 300 poems, mostly pertaining to her life - domestic chores or about the restrictions she faced being a low caste woman.
3. **Mira bai or Mira** - Mira belonged to a high class ruling Rajput family and was married to the son of Rana Sanga of Mewar at an early age but she left her husband and family and went on a pilgrimage to various places. Her poetry portrays a unique relationship with Lord Krishna as she is not only being portrayed as the devotee bride of Krishna, but Krishna is also portrayed as in pursuit of Mira.
4. **Bahinabai or Bahina** - A 17th-century poet-saint of Maharashtra, who wrote different abhangas, women’s folk songs that portray the working life of women especially in the fields.
5. **Andal:**
 1. Only female Alwar
 2. Andal saw herself as the beloved of Vishnu; her verses express her devotional love for the deity.
6. **Karaikkal Ammaiyar**
 1. One of the 3 women Nayanars amongst the 63 Nayanars
 2. This devotee of Shiva adopted the path of asceticism in order to attain her goal.

Sikh Movement

The Sikh religion was founded by saint Guru Nanak in the medieval period. It started as a minor religion but developed into a prominent one over the centuries. The ten recognised living Gurus in the Nanak line were -

Guru Nanak (c. 1469 - 1539 CE)

- He was the founder of Sikhism. He was born in Talwandi near Lahore.
- He preached - God is supreme, all-powerful, formless, fearless, universal, self-existent, everlasting, creator of all things, the eternal and absolute truth. He rejected the authority of the Vedas.
- He was against casteism and rituals like bathing in holy water. He advocated equality of all human beings irrespective of caste, gender, etc.

- He encouraged people to live a life of honesty, truth and kindness. He advised people to give up falsehood, selfishness and hypocrisy. He guided people to follow the principles of conduct and worship; sach (truth), halal (lawful earning), khair (wishing well for others), niyat (right intentions) and service to the Lord.
- His philosophy consists of three basic elements - a leading charismatic personality (the Guru), ideology (Shabad) and organisation (Sangat).
- He denounced idol worship and rejected the theory of incarnation.
- He introduced the concept of langar (community kitchen).
- He conceptualised God as Nirguna (attributeless) and Nirankar (formless).
- His main teachings can be summed up as:
 - Faith in one true Lord.
 - Worship of the name.
 - The necessity of the Guru in the worship of the name.

Know more about [Guru Nanak](#) in the linked article.

Guru Angad (c. 1539 - 1552 CE)

- Guru Angad was born with the birth name of Bhai Lehna.
- He standardised and popularised the Gurumukhi script of the Punjabi language.
- He made extensive efforts to spread the teachings of Guru Nanak far and wide. He established new religious institutions and also opened new schools.
- He popularized and expanded the institution of Guru ka langar.
- He also established the tradition of Mall Akhara for physical as well as spiritual development.

Guru Amar Das (c. 1552 - 1574 CE)

- He strengthened the langar community kitchen system.
- He divided his spiritual empire into 22 parts called Manjis, each under a Sikh, and also Piri system.
- He asked Akbar to abolish the pilgrims tax (toll tax) for non-Muslims while crossing Yamuna and Ganges rivers.
- He preached against the sati system of Hindu society, encouraged widow remarriage and asked the women to discard the purdah (veil worn by women).

Guru Ramdas (c. 1574 - 1581 CE)

- He composed the four Lawans (stanzas) of the Anand Karaj, a distinct marriage code for Sikhs separate from the orthodox and traditional Vedic system.
- The Mughal emperor Akbar granted him a plot of land where the Harmandir Sahib was later constructed.

- He laid the foundation stone of Chak Ramdas of Ramdas Pur, now called Amritsar.
- He strongly denounced superstitions, pilgrimages and the caste system.

Guru Arjun Dev (c. 1581 - 1606 CE)

- He compiled the Adi Granth, i.e. Guru Granth Sahib and installed it at Sri Harmandir Sahib.
- He completed the construction of Taran, Amritsar and Kartarpur.
- He is considered the first martyr of the Sikh religion as he was executed by Jahangir for helping his rebellious son, Khusrau.

Guru Har Govind (c. 1606 - 1644 CE)

- He fought against rulers Jahangir and Shah Jahan and defeated a Mughal army at Sangrama.
- He was titled “Sachcha Padshah”.
- He transformed Sikhs into a militant community, established the Akal Takht and fortified Amritsar.
- He was the proprietor of the concept of miri and piri (keeping two knives).

Guru Har Rai (c. 1644 - 1661 CE)

- He gave shelter to Dara Shikoh, brother of Aurangzeb who was his rival to the throne, and thus was persecuted by Aurangzeb.

Guru Har Kishan (c. 1661 - 1664 CE)

- He became the youngest Guru in Sikhism who succeeded his father Guru Har Rai at the young age of five. According to tradition, he died at the age of eight due to smallpox, which he contracted while healing sick people during an epidemic.

Guru Tegh Bahadur (c. 1665 - 1675 CE)

- He appointed Banda Bahadur as the military leader of the Sikhs.
- He is credited with spreading Sikhism to Bihar and Assam.
- He was executed by Aurangzeb, as he revolted against him. He was beheaded before the public in Delhi's Chandni Chowk in c. 1675 CE. The Sis Ganj Sahib Gurudwara stands at the site of his martyrdom today.

Guru Gobind Singh (c. 1675 - 1708 CE)

- Last Sikh Guru who was born in Patna and organised the Sikhs as community warriors and called them Khalsa in c. 1699 CE.

- Guru Gobind Singh started some practices which were to be followed by Sikhs in order to create a sense of unity among the Sikhs. These were: initiation through baptism by the double-edged sword, wearing uncut hair, carrying arms and adopting the epithet Singh as part of the name.
- He compiled the supplementary Granth of Deswan Padshan Ka Granth.
- He selected five persons known as the Panj Pyare (the five beloved), and requested them to administer the pahul (amrit chakha) to him.
- He passed the Guruship of the Sikhs to the Guru Granth Sahib. He died of complications from stab wounds inflicted by an Afghan, believed to have been sent by the Mughal governor, Wazir Khan.

Importance of the Bhakti Movement

The Bhakti movement provided a spur for the development of regional languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Kannada, etc.

- The lower classes rose to a position of great importance.
- The Bhakti movement gave equal importance to men and women.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Bhakti Movement

Who were the propagators of the Bhakti Movement?

One of the leaders of this Hindu revivalist movement was Shankaracharya, a great thinker and a distinguished philosopher. And this movement was propounded by others like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Namadeva, Tukaram, Jayadeva.

What were the principles of the bhakti movement?

The main principles of the Bhakti movement were: (1) God is one, (2) To worship God, man should serve humanity, (3) All men are equal, (4) Worshipping God with devotion is better than performing religious ceremonies and going on pilgrimages, and (5) Caste distinctions and superstitious practices are to be given up.