

## Devotion and Love towards God

In the previous chapter we acquainted ourselves with various beliefs, traditions and rituals of people living in very ancient times in our subcontinent. During the Mauryan period and after, the religious lives of the people living in different parts of the subcontinent began to change rapidly. This was also the time when traders were contacting the small hunting and farming communities and empires were trying to gain control over all of them. At the same time Brahmins following the Vedas, Buddhist and Jaina Sramanas spread all over the country and interacted with these communities.

The Brahmins established *ashramas* in different areas and performed sacrifices and conducted religious discussions. The Sramanas too established *viharas* and *stupas* and preached the teachings of the Buddha or Jaina. At the same time the Brahmanas and Sramanas also adopted several features of the religion of the people they interacted with. Thus the worship of mother goddesses, snakes, animals, trees and dead ancestors were adopted by the Brahmins, the Buddhists and the Jainas. They also adopted the practice of using paintings or sculptures to worship, even though many of them discarded the idea of animal sacrifices as they believed in *ahimsa*. Thus gradually people began following mixed religious practices and beliefs.

- Can you see a similar combination of different religious traditions in the religion practiced in your own home? Discuss in the class.

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### Hindu Religion

Hindu religion as we know it today, evolved over thousands of years. Over these years it has assimilated several religious traditions and teachings of saints and thinkers. The term 'Hindu' actually came to be used only after 1000 CE. It derives from the word 'Sindhu' meaning the river Sindhu (or Indus) which has to be crossed to enter the Indian subcontinent from the North West.

However some of the main features of the Hindu religion had taken shape well before 500 CE - this consisted of Vedic yagnas, worshipping deities like Shiva, Vishnu and Durga, building temples, pursuit of Moksha through penance etc. The Vedas, Upanishadas, The Ramayana, The Mahabharata (of which the Bhagavad Gita was a part) and the Puranas came to be regarded as sacred books. In the following paragraphs we will study the Bhakti movement.

stories and the stories about Vishnu or Shiva were written down as *Puranas*.

These Puranas, besides combining various religious traditions also extolled one or the other god as the Supreme God who was all powerful, all knowing etc. They advocated worshipping of the God as the easy way to solve one's problems and attain salvation.

### Love for the supreme God – Bhakti Movement

About 550 Common Era, in Tamilnadu there arose a new movement of devotion to God. They were the followers of Vishnu or Shiva. They did not believe in performance of any elaborate ritual like yagnas or animal sacrifices. They were also very opposed to religions like Buddhism and Jainism which did not believe in any God. Instead they believed that intense love for Shiva or Vishnu and a desire for union with Him alone was the path for salvation. They did not pray for solving problems or for riches or power, but for union with God or a vision of the God. They also believed that anyone irrespective of their caste or community could love God. All devotees together sang songs of love for the God and danced in joy.

Some of the Bhaktas went to different temples and composed songs on the deity in the local language so that they are understood by the masses. These songs were sung by the devotees for several generations before they were finally collected and written down around 1100 CE. As a result of their efforts a large number of these temples became famous and important. Temples like Sri Kalahasti and



Fig: 18.1 Gudimallam Lingam

### Bhagavatas and Shaivas

The Bhagavatas worshipped Vishnu or Narayana. They believed that Vishnu was the ultimate god, who created this universe and was all powerful and all knowing. They also believed that Vishnu took birth on the Earth in various forms or incarnations (*avatara*) to save the world from evil. The most important *avataras* are Rama and Krishna. They became very popular in different parts of the country around 2000 years ago.

If you remember, the Buddhists or Jainas or Upanishadic thinkers did not emphasise worship of any god as the road to salvation or *moksha*. They advocated meditation, abandoning desires, or purifying oneself through penance etc. But the Bhagavatas believed that intense devotion and worship of Vishnu alone could relieve us from all problems and would lead to salvation. They thought that *yagnas*, or giving alms to Brahmins etc., or even reciting the Vedas was not necessary. They built temples and

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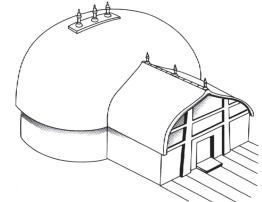


Fig: 18.2 An early temple of Krishna from Vidisha

worshipped images of Krishna. Archeologists have found remains of some of the earliest temples built some two thousand years ago in Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh and also in Rajasthan.

About the same time some other people began to worship Shiva in a similar manner. They too built small temples with images of Shiva or a *Lingam*. If you go to Gudimallam in Chittoor district you can see one of the earliest *Lingam* images of Shiva, probably carved more than 2000 years ago. Some people also worshipped goddess Durga in the same manner.

Even as Vishnu or Shiva or Durga was being worshipped as Supreme God, the Buddhists and Jainas also began worshipping the Buddha and the Tirthankaras (Earliest Jaina gurus). They made beautiful images of the Buddha and the Tirthankaras and set them up in *stupas* or temples called *Chaityas* and worshipped them. These were built in many places in Andhra Pradesh also, like in Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Jaggayyapeta, Bhattiprolu, etc. Even though the Buddha or Mahavira did not claim to be gods, they began to be treated as Supreme God's representatives by now.

- Can you see the similarities between the Bhagavatas, the Shaivas and the Buddhists?
- Have you seen worship of gods in temples? Describe the procedure of the worship in temples. Discuss what you know about them in the class with each other.

### Story tellers

You probably love listening to stories from your elders, from religious story tellers or performers like puppetry.

- Can you describe any such performance in the class?
- Have you attended any story telling in temples? If so, describe it.

People of ancient period also loved to listen to stories. In those days bards and religious story tellers (like *harikatha*) used to wander around telling stories of the various gods and goddesses like Shiva, Vishnu or Durga or stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Stories related to the Buddha were also told. People gathered in large numbers to hear them. These story tellers not only related the stories they had learnt from their elders but also learnt new stories from the people. Suppose some people worshipped snakes and had stories about snake gods, the story tellers learnt those stories and added them to their collection of stories. In this way the story tellers combined various stories of gods and goddesses, religious teachings and methods of worshipping. Gradually these began to be written down. The Buddhist stories were written down as the *Jataka*

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Tirumala are some such temples. It appears that under the influence of these Bhaktas, gradually people took worshipping Shiva and Vishnu.

- Can you compare the religious belief of hunter-gatherers and the Bhakti movement and point out the similarities and differences?
- Can you compare the religious beliefs of the Vedic period and the Bhakti movement?

### Alvars and Nayanars

Twelve main devotees of Vishnu were called the Alvars – the most important among them being Periyalvar and Nammalvar. And the daughter of Periyalvar is the only woman among them. Most of them travelled to different temples of Vishnu and composed and sang songs called *Pasurams*. Here we give you some of the songs of Nammalvar to think and understand its meaning.

#### Creation

*In that original moment (Vishnu), our lord and father*

*Made earth, water, fire, wind and sky*

*And the mountains;*

*Made the two lights, sun and moon,*

*And other such bodies;*

*Then the rain, and all that lives by rain,*

*And the gods of rain.*

In this verse you can see that Nammalvar considers Vishnu to be the creator of the universe, but at the same time talks of him as being his own father and lord. Thus the all powerful God is as close as a father to his son.

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### Hide and Seek

*You dwell in heaven*

*Stand on the sacred mountain, sleep on the ocean, roll around in the earth*

*Yet hidden everywhere, you grow invisibly;*

*Moving within numberless outer worlds*

*Playing within my heart, yet not showing your body*

*Will you always play hide and seek?*

In the above verse Nammalvar is pointing out that the Lord is present everywhere but is not appearing before him. He is desperately seeking a vision of God, but the God is not showing Himself to Nammalvar. He is unable to have a glimpse of God.

- Why does Nammalvar feel that God is playing hide and seek with him?
- In what way is Nammalvar expressing his intense love for Vishnu?

The Nayanars were 63 in number and were devotees of Shiva. They came from different castes, including Kannappa, a hunter and Nandanar, a *Pulaiya*, or an outcaste. Some of them like Appar, Sambandar, Sundarar and Manikka Vasakar went from one temple to another and composed songs in praise of Shiva. A couple of them like Karaikkal Arariyar were women. Here are some verses from *Tevaram* and *Tiruvasakam* composed by them.

We are not the subject of any king.  
we are not afraid of the god of death.  
we will not undergo torture in the hell.  
we will not suffer distress in this life.  
we will be feeling joy always.  
we will not know what diseases are.  
we won't submit to anyone.  
we will always enjoy happiness only;  
we have no suffering at any time.

(Appar)

In this verse Appar is saying that devotees of Shiva are neither afraid of any king nor of death, disease and hell. They are ever happy.

In another verse Appar is saying that he does not care for those who are offering him worldly riches. On the other hand he only respects those who are devoted to Shiva even if they are poor, sick or of low status.

Shiva grabbed me lest I go astray  
I bowed, I wept, danced, cried aloud.  
I sang, and I praised him...  
Love pierced me like a nail driven into  
a green tree.  
Overflowing, I tossed like a sea,  
Heart growing tender, body shivering,  
While the world called me mad and  
laughed at me,  
I left shame behind, took as an  
ornament.

(Manikka Vasakar)

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In this verse Manikka Vasakar is expressing the joy he felt on getting a vision of Shiva and how others could not understand his joy.

### Christianity

Just as people in the Indian subcontinent started worshipping a Supreme God and believed that love and devotion to God is the path for salvation, people in other parts of the world too developed similar ideas. In the Middle East in the region now called Israel and Palestine developed a new religion called Christianity started after Jesus Christ.

He was born at Bethlehem near Jerusalem (now in Israel) about 2000 years ago. Jesus Christ preached that all people are equal. He taught us to love one another. He taught the importance of peace, love and compassion. He advised the people not to follow the practice of "Tit for tat". He believed that even an enemy can be won over by love.



Fig. 18.3 St.Thomas Basilica, Chennai. This was built in 1523.

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The Bible is the holy book of the Christians and it contains the teachings of Christ. Read the following extracts from his famous teaching 'Sermon on the Mount':

- *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...*
- *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.*
- *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.*
- *Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.*
- *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*
- *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.*
- *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*
- *Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- *Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.*

Christ was arrested and crucified by the rulers of his time.

Saint Thomas a follower of Jesus Christ came to India with Roman traders and brought with him the teachings of Christ. St. Thomas propagated Christianity in South India.

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• Have you seen worship of god in a church? Describe the procedure of the worship.

### Islam

In Arabia around the same time of Appar and others in India a new religion arose which emphasised devotion to one God. The new religion was Islam which was founded by Prophet Mohammad.

Prophet Mohammad was born in Arabia at Mecca in 570 CE. Prophet taught that there is only one God and all human beings are His creation. The way all the children are equal before their parents all human beings are equal before god. God or Allah has no shape and therefore it is wrong to worship idols. He taught that all men are brothers. He emphasised the importance of love for the whole of humanity. Mohammad is considered as a Prophet or messenger of Allah. The teachings of Allah are written in a book called Quran. It is the holy book of Islam. Read some of the verses from the Quran in translation:



Fig. 18.3

Cheraman Mosque, in Kerala this is believed to be the first Mosque in India.

### Al fatiha

In the name of Allah the most beneficent the most merciful. All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds. The most beneficent the most merciful The lord of the day of Judgement. They alone we worship, they alone we seek for help. Guide us to the right path. The path of those, upon whom thou has bestowed favors. Not of those, who thou has cursed once; not of those whom have gone astray.

### Sura al ikhlas

"The truth is: Allah is One. Allah is Besought of all, needing none. He neither begot anyone, nor was begotten. And equal to Him has never been any one."

Islam was brought to India by Arab traders who visited the ports of India.

• Have you seen worship of god in a Mosque? Describe the procedure of the worship.

### The belief in a Supreme God

Can you see some common ideas emerging among the Hindus, Christians and Muslims? They all believed in the existence of one Supreme God and the need to worship Him. They also believed in equality, love and respect for all human beings irrespective of their wealth, education or social status. These ideas were

increasingly adopted by a very large number of people. Kings and rulers also adopted these ideas and started encouraging their subjects to practice these religions. They built vast temples, churches or mosques in which people could worship.

Historians try to understand why these new ideas came about during this period and why did they become popular among so many people. They feel that as tribes and small kingdoms were being merged into larger states, people were attracted to the idea of God of all people and not just of one tribe or caste or small kingdom. Kings and emperors also encouraged such ideas and often tried to claim to be representatives of those Supreme Gods themselves. In this way they may have tried to win the support of their subjects.

Historians also feel that as the difference between rich and poor, powerful and powerless increased, many people were very unhappy about this growing inequality and the suppression of the poor and the powerless. Perhaps they tried to assert the equality of all human beings through devotion to the Supreme God. Some historians feel that Buddhism and Jainism which emphasised meditation and control over ones desires lost their popularity as people preferred to have faith in Gods for solving their problems.

At the same time we should remember that a large number of people did not agree with these new ideas and continued to follow their old religious ideas. Some in fact did not believe in the existence of an all powerful God at all.

### Key words

Sculptures  
Incarnations

Salvation  
Jataka stories

### Improve your learning

1. Try to imagine a discussion between a Buddhist monk and a hunter-gatherer and how they learnt from each other. Write a short dialogue between the two of them.
2. Can you see any similarities and differences between the early and the Vedic religion?
3. In what ways were the early Bhagavata and Shaiva thinking different from that of the Buddhists and Jainas?
4. Discuss how the Puranas helped in bringing together different religious practices in the country.
5. Can you point out the most important difference between the early beliefs and the beliefs of the Bhaktas of Tamil Nadu?
6. Underline two lines of the Sermon on the Mount that you like the most. Give your reasons.
7. In what way did the Prophet Mohammad explain the equality of all human beings?
8. Can you list the similarities and differences between the religious feelings?
9. Point out the following in the world map:
  - (a) Jerusalem
  - (b) Mecca
  - (c) Keral State
  - (d) Chennai
  - (e) Sindhu River (Indus)

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