

XII: Chapter 1

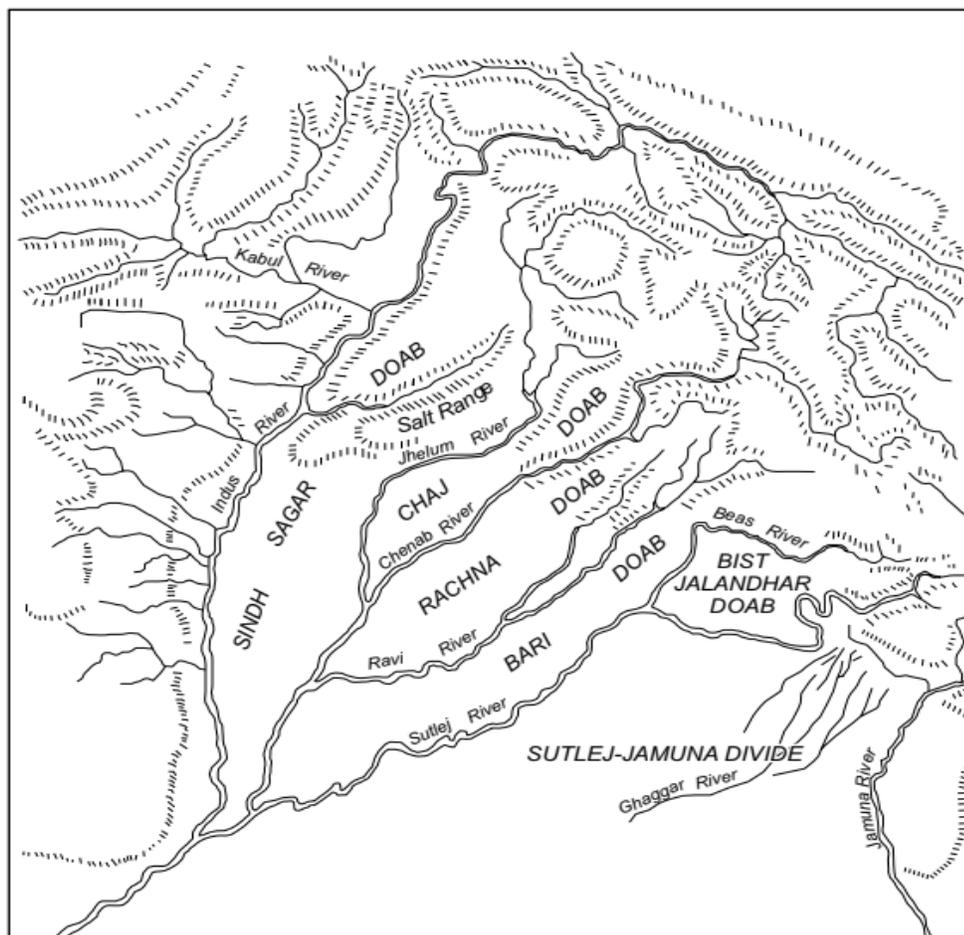
Politics, Society, and Religion in the Punjab (c.1450-1550 AD)

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1. Introduction

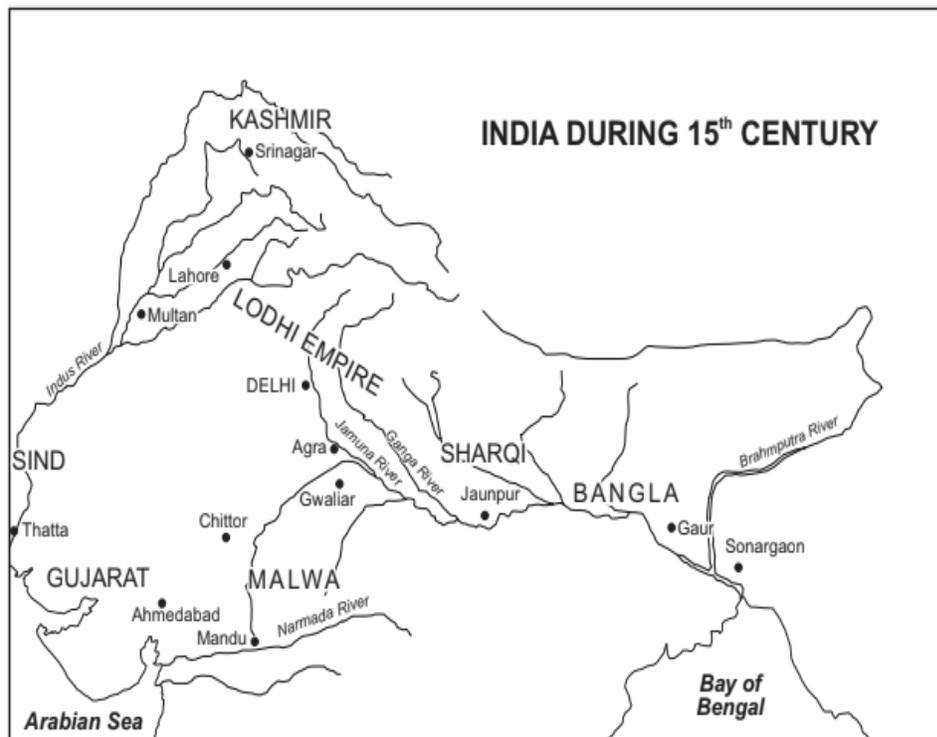
- 1.1 For the history of Punjab we are studying the geographical region between the Himalayas in the north, the Thar desert in the south, the river Jamuna on the east, and the Indus on the west. This region has five *doabs*, and the plain between the rivers Sutlej and the Jamuna is divided by the river Ghaggar into two more or less distinct parts. From about 1450 to the early sixteenth century, politics, society and religion in Punjab went through significant changes which had far reaching effects on the times to come. The most important change in the political sphere was the end of Lodi rule and the establishment of Mughal empire. In the social and religious sphere the foundation of Sikh religion and the Sikh Panth was the most important development which we shall discuss in the next chapter.

THE PUNJAB REGION



1.2 By this time Islam had become a very important part of Punjab. It deeply affected the politics, society, and religion of this region. The advent of Islam in Punjab goes back to its conquest by Mahmud of Ghazni. With him came the Muslim soldiers, administrators, scholars, writers, and learned and pious men who adopted Punjab as their home. More numerous than these immigrant Muslims were the people of the region who accepted Islam voluntarily or under pressure of the state. Islam in Punjab was represented mainly by the Sunni and Shia sects and the Sufis.

1.3 It may be noted that the Arab and Persian writers referred to the people of the subcontinent as 'Hindus', and called their country Hindustan, or the 'country of the Hindus'. Thus, the term 'Hindu' now came to mean those Indians who were not Muslim. There was no single system of religious beliefs and practices among the 'Hindus'. For the 'religion' of the 'Hindus' we talk of Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism, the traditional Brahmanical systems. The new movements among the 'Hindus' were represented by Gorakhnathi Jogis among the Shaivas, *bhakti* among the Vaishnavas, and the Sants among whom the most important was 'Bhagat' Kabir ji.



2. Political Developments and Administration

- 2.1 Delhi came under the control of Bahlol Lodi in 1451. On his death in 1489 he was succeeded by his son Sikandar (1489-1517). Upon his death in 1517 his son Ibrahim succeeded to the throne. Ibrahim died in the battle of Panipat in 1526. All the three Lodi rulers added new territories to the Sultanate of Delhi. The most notable conquest was that of the Sharqi Sultanate of Jaunpur. Bahlol conquered its western part in 1486, and Sikandar completed the process in 1495. He also conquered Dholpur, Chanderi and some territories in Rajasthan. Ibrahim Lodi lost Chanderi to Rana Sanga of Mewar. There was no warfare in the Punjab in the time of Bahlol and Sikandar. The most dramatic events in the Punjab were related to the Mughal invader Babur. He occupied the trans-Jhelum territories of the Lodis in 1519. In 1520 he occupied Sialkot and sacked Saidpur (Eminabad). In 1524 he occupied Lahore and sacked Dipalpur. His victory in the battle of Panipat in 1526 put an end to the Lodi dynasty. It may be mentioned here that Guru Nanak Dev Ji reacted strongly to Babur's invasions.
- 2.2 The Lodi Sultans acknowledged the authority of the Abbasid Khalifa (Head of the Islamic World). They were Sunni Muslims. Sikandar Lodi was considered a fanatic. He not only destroyed some temples, but also prohibited the annual procession of the spear of the legendary Muslim martyr Masud Salar, and forbade Muslim women

to visit the *mazārs* (mausoleums) of Muslim saints. He yielded to the pressure of the *maulavis* and allowed the execution of a Brahman who maintained that his faith was as true as Islam.

2.3 Sikandar's interest in judicial reform was due to his 'religious orthodoxy'. As a result of his belief in the Islamic judicial system, he established the *qāzi's* courts in a number of cities and towns which contained a considerable proportion of Muslim population. In such towns a *mufti* (the one who explained the Islamic law) was also appointed. In any case, justice was given according to the *sharī'at* (Islamic law) with or without the assistance of the *mufti*. It is not generally known that the *qāzi's* court was open to non-Muslims for matters relating to property.



Moth ki Masjid, built in the reign of Sikandar Lodi by his minister.

- 2.4 State patronage under the Lodi Sultans, as under their predecessors, was confined virtually to the learned Muslims (*‘ulamā*) and the Sufi *shaikhs* who received stipends in cash or revenue-free lands for the maintenance of mosques and *khānqahs*. Such patronage was extended to the descendants of Prophet Muhammad, and to the members of the tribe to which he belonged. They were known as Saiyyads. By contrast, the non-Muslim subjects of the Lodi Sultans and their predecessors suffered some disabilities. They were obliged to pay the poll tax, called *jizya*, as the price of their protection by the state. In some parts of the Lodi Sultanate, the Hindus had to pay a tax for going on pilgrimage.
- 2.5 The political and administrative power in the territories of the Lodi Sultans was almost exclusively the special privilege of Muslims. By far the most dominant among them were the Afghan tribal leaders. They were the real co-sharers of power with the Sultan. Notwithstanding occasional transfers, they tended to regard their territories (*sarkār*) as hereditary possessions.
- 2.6 Hindu participation in the revenue administration of the Lodi Sultans was very considerable, particularly on the middle and lower rungs. Brahmans and Khattris in the Punjab were encouraged to learn Persian. The local administrators often employed Hindu accountants and worked with the assistance of Hindu *qanungos* familiar with local customs, castes and clans. Many *chaudharis* (headmen of groups of

villages) were Hindu. In all the non-Muslim villages the village headmen (*muqaddams*) and were Hindu and so were many of the village accountants (*patwaris*).

3. Islamic Society

3.1 There were several classes of people in Islamic society in Punjab.

The titled nobility, Khans and Maliks, were next in importance to the Lodi Sultans. They lived a life of luxury and show off wealth in imitation of the Sultans. They had their armies, palace-like mansions, dancers, slaves, musicians and boon companions. They expressed their piety in raising mosques, patronizing the *'ulamā* (the learned men of Islam), and paying homage to holy men.

3.2 The *'ulamā* or the learned men of Islam formed an important section of the middling class. Apart from their role in the administration of justice as *qazis* and *mufftis*, they tried to guard the *shari'at* through public congregations and the traditional system of education. The major subjects of higher education in Islam were interpretation of the Quran (*tafsir*), tradition with regard to the sayings and actions of the Prophet (*hadis*), and the Islamic law. The Sufi *shaikhs* (to be discussed later) were venerated by all sections of the Muslim community. The descendants of *shaikhs* and *pirs*, known as *shaikhzada* and *pirzada*, were held in great respect, and many of them had large economic resources. Equally respectable were the *sayyids* whose social status was well recognized by the Afghans.

Then there were scholars, soldiers, clerks, traders, shopkeepers, physicians, scientists and writers among Muslims.

3.3 At the lower level there were masons, blacksmiths, dyers, weavers, leather-workers, shoe-makers, oil-pressers, water-carriers and the like. The slave was an important article of trade in the market, and the institution of slavery was an integral part of Muslim society in India as elsewhere in the world.

3.4 The cities and towns of the Punjab served as the centres of administration and Muslim culture. Known for their learned men were the cities like Lahore and Multan and the towns like Tulamba, Ajodhan, Jalandhar, Sultanpur, Sirhind, Thanesar, Panipat, Samana and Narnaul. Altogether, they studied areas of knowledge related to religion as well as medicine, astronomy and mathematics. They wrote in Arabic and Persian languages.

3.5 Those who wished to address themselves to the common people started making use of the local dialects. The Sufis adopted the language of the people among whom they lived and worked. Indeed, Shaikh Fariduddin Shakarganj, popularly known as Baba Farid, composed verses in Punjabi during the early thirteenth century for his message to reach the people of Punjab. There was an oral tradition of heroic poetry and *kissa* in Punjabi. This was the beginning of Punjabi as a literary language.

4. 'Hindu' Society

- 4.1 As in other parts of the Lodi Sultanate, the number of Hindus in the Punjab was larger than the number of Muslims, except in its western parts. Hindus lived in towns and cities as well as in the countryside. Even in towns founded by the Afghan administrators the proportion of Hindus was very considerable. They were predominant in the countryside, except in those areas where a whole tribe or a clan had accepted Islam.
- 4.2 The character of Hindu population had undergone a major change during the five centuries of Turkish and Afghan rule. The Rajput ruling classes had been dislodged from power. Their remnants among the Hindus in Punjab and who were called 'Rai', started collecting revenues on behalf of the government. Thus they became the intermediary *zamindars*. In a few pockets they enjoyed local power under the authority of the Lodi Sultans. The loss of Rajput sovereignty meant also the loss of traditional patronage to Brahmans. They acted as family priests to perform various religious rites, looked after the temples, and taught in schools (*pathshalas*). The Brahmans began to explain the sacred books to ordinary people whose number was very large. Some Brahmans continued to study religious and secular forms of knowledge. But many of them had taken to professions like trade and money-lending, agriculture or even petty

service. They were extremely careful about observing rites and ceremonies, whether personal, social or religious.

4.3 In the social sphere in Punjab the Brahmans were less important than the Khattris. Besides participation in the civil administration of the Lodis, the Khattris had taken to trade and banking. They made large profits as money-lenders and merchants and invested their earnings in landed property. They had probably gained much from the development of commerce during the fourteenth century and retained some of this advantage during the fifteenth. The Khattris even did shopkeeping and money-lending in the villages. They felt proud of their Kshatriya lineage, which was certainly older than the Rajputs.

4.4 In rural areas, there were large number of Jats, especially in the upper Rachna and Bari Doabs, the Bist Jalandhar Doab and the Satlej-Jamuna Divide. They had their *chaudharis* and *muqaddams* (headmen), many of whom were important as intermediaries between the cultivators and the rulers. But the bulk of the Jats were ordinary cultivators.

4.5 The cultivators of land needed the services of several categories of people in the village. They needed the carpenter, the leather-worker, the potter and the agricultural labourers for cultivation. They needed the services of many others for their social life, like the water-carrier and the barber who performed more than one service. There were several other categories, but their number varied from village to

village. One village could have a few weavers, and another one or two goldsmiths; one village could have a few shoe-makers, and another could have a few oil-pressers. Similarly, a distiller, a singer, a dyer or a tailor could be found in many villages.

- 4.6 The Hindus of Punjab during the late fifteenth century did not correspond to the four-caste *varna* order. Alberuni, who came with Mahmud Ghaznavi in the eleventh century and wrote his book called 'Kitabul Hind', noticed that in theory there were four *varnas* among the Hindus. But, below the four *varnas* there were several professional and crafts groups, like the shoe-maker, the weaver, the washerman, the basket-maker, the fisherman, the boatman, the hunter and the juggler. In the fifteenth century, strictly speaking, there were no Kshatriyas in Punjab. As we have mentioned above, the Brahman caste was no longer the most important or the most honoured. Nevertheless, the *varna* order was cherished as the ideal. The Rajputs, the Khatri and the Brahmans were proud of their lineage, and they thought of themselves as socially superior to the rest of the 'Hindu' population.
- 4.7 Some of the traditional 'sciences' were cultivated by Brahmans and Khatri. The study of the Vedas, Upanishads and the Puranas was an important part of Hindu learning. The branches of knowledge studied by the Khatri and Brahmans were mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and grammar. There was some interest in jurisprudence,

architecture and music, and also in astrology, palmistry and magic. Most of the scholars lived in cities and towns.

4.8 Women were respected as daughters, wives and mothers among the Rajputs, Khattris and the Brahmans but their position was clearly subordinate to that of men. A childless widow was expected to burn herself on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband to become a sati, and she who did not immolate herself was 'ill-treated' for the rest of her life. In no case was a widow supposed to remarry. The practice of child-marriage was common. All these practices were prevalent in northern India before its conquest by the Turks.

5. **Islam: Sunnis, Shias, and Sufis**

5.1 All Muslims formally subscribed to the belief that there was only one God, Allah, and Prophet Muhammad was His messenger (*Paigambar*). Sectarian division had appeared among Muslims before the advent of the Turks into Punjab. It is easy to identify two old sects: the Sunni and the Shia. A parallel interpretation of Islam was propagated by Sufis. Of all these groups the most important were the Sunnis and the Sufis.

5.2 The Sunni *'ulama* accepted and popularized the principle of the uniqueness of God (Allah). The Sunnis believed that Prophet Muhammad was the last of the prophets, and that the Quran was literally the speech of Allah. They believed in angels, the day of judgment, paradise and hell. They professed equal respect for all the

first four Khalifas (Representative of Prophet Muhammad). There were four practices which insured piety: five daily prayers (*namaz*), daily fast (*rozah*) during the sacred month of Ramzan, pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), and charity to brother Muslims (*zakat*).

5.3 The Shias recognized the authority of the Quran as the revealed word of Allah and they subscribed to the finality of Muhammad's prophethood. But they rejected the first three Khalifas and regarded Ali (son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad) alone as the true successor of the Prophet and, therefore, the first Imam. The twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, had disappeared from the world and he was expected to reappear to restore justice and truth. The Shias also believed that the martyrdom of Husain (Ali's son), had paved the way to paradise for them. Based on this belief was the great importance attached to the *ta'ziya* (deep mourning in processions) for the annual commemoration of his death.

5.4 More and more people were coming under the influence of the Sufis. If anything, the influence of the Sufis in Punjab was more widespread than anywhere else in the country. Lahore was known as the abode of many *shaikhs* since the time of Ali al-Hujwiri, the author of the *Kashf al-Mahjub*, who had settled in Lahore during the rule of the Ghaznavids. He was venerated by successive generations as Data Ganj Bakhsh (the bestower of treasures). The Chishti and the Suhrawardi Sufi orders or silsilahs (the chain of disciples of a

leading Sufi Shaikh) were oldest in Punjab. The *khanqah* of Shaikh Farid Chishti at Pakpattan remained an eminent centre from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. His successor in the early sixteenth century, Shaikh Ibrahim, was known as the 'Second Farid'.

5.5 There is a wide range of ideas in Sufi literature produced in India and abroad. Unlike Muslim orthodoxy, the most fundamental feature of the Sufi way of life was the mystical experience of the Sufis. The relationship between God and man was that of love, and this mutual relationship eventually led to unification. One had to die to one's human self to be able to subsist in God. The *shaikh* as a guide (*pir*), who showed the path to his disciple (*murid*), held a crucial position. One of the most important practices of the Sufis was 'remembrance of God' (*zikr*). Throughout the Islamic world the *shaikhs* thought of *sama'* or *qawali* as good for spiritual progress. This practice was never discarded by the *Sufi shaikhs* in India despite opposition from the '*ulama*.'

6. Brahmanical Religious Systems: Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Shaktism

6.1 There were pockets of Tantric Buddhism in the Punjab hills. In many towns in the plains, there were Jain monks with followers from among traders and shop-keepers. Even though the Jain monks were rather small in number but they had a distinct identity. They were known for their ascetical living and their deep faith in non-violence (*ahimsa*). They were known for their concern for non-injury to living beings,

both visible and invisible. The concept of a supreme God was not integral to their religious philosophy. For them Tirthankars had a special importance.

- 6.2 The majority of the 'Hindus' were associated with the Brahmanical systems represented by Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism. Temples dedicated to Shiva as the supreme deity were looked after by Shaiva Brahmans who also cultivated Shaiva literature, the Agamas and *Puranas*. There were Shaiva monks too, generally known as *sanyasis*. They belonged to several different orders, traditionally considered to be ten. They were known as Dasnamis. They generally wore ochre-coloured garments though some carried the skin of lion or tiger on their shoulders. Almost all of them wore ash marks on their foreheads, known as *tilak*. The *sanyasis* wandered from place to place, but they also founded establishments called *maths*.
- 6.3 Turning to Vaishnavism in Punjab we notice that the Vaishnava texts *par excellence* were known to Alberuni in the eleventh century: the *Bhagavadgita*, the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana*. Temples dedicated to Vishnu as the supreme deity, as Lakshmi-Narayan or one of his incarnations, were looked after by Vaishnava Brahmans. The ascetics among the Vaishnavas were generally known as *bairagis*. They recognized merit in ceremonial ritual and

pilgrimage to sacred places. They advocated abstention from meat and liquor.

6.4 The Shaktas worshipped the Goddess in her various forms. They believed that in the form of Shakti, the Goddess sustains the universe and the various manifestations of gods. The Shaktas considered animal sacrifice essential to the worship of Durga or Kali, or her other forms.

7. New Religious Movements: Goraknathi Jogis, Vaishnava Bhakti, and Bhagat Kabir Ji

7.1 Within Shaivism a new movement arose probably after the Ghaznavid conquest of the Punjab. It was initiated by Gorakhnath. He regarded Lord Shiva as the supreme deity and adopted difficult yogic practices. The protagonists and the followers of this movement came to be known as Gorakhnathi *jogis* or simply as *jogis* (from *yogi*). They figure frequently in Indian Sufi literature. In the fifteenth century they enjoyed great influence in Punjab. The Tilla of Gorakhnath in the Sindh Sagar Doab remained their premier establishment, but *jogi* centres (*maths*) were established at many other places. In the early sixteenth century there were twelve different sections known as *bhekh-bara*. The adept among the disciples were allowed to wear ear-rings (*mudra*), and they were known as *kanpata* (ear-torn). They were also allowed to use the epithet *nath* (master) with their names. The *jogis* kept with them a blowing horn (*singi*). An important feature of their monastic centres

was a continuous fire (*dhuni*). Their centres maintained a common kitchen (*bhandar*) for all the permanent and temporary inmates.



Babur visiting
Gorakh-hatri:
From the
Babur-Nama

7.2 The difficult psycho-physical techniques of the *jogis* were meant to attain to liberation-in-life (*jiwan-mukti*), a state of everlasting bliss (*saha*). It was considered a state of great power, because the *jogi* then became a *siddha*, believed to be possessing supernatural powers. The common people thought that the *siddha* could assume any shape or form he liked: he could become tiny or huge, light or heavy, and obtain everything at will; he could walk on water or fly in the air. In popular belief they were also associated with alchemy, possessing the knowledge of turning base metals or even ash into

gold. In reality, they practiced herbal medicine and disregarded the differences of caste in accepting disciples.

7.3 In Vaishnavism arose a new movement known as the *bhakti* movement. The path of *bhakti* came to be regarded as a valid path for liberation, like the path of knowledge (*jnana* or *gian*) and the path of correct observance of ritual (*karma*). In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Vaishnava *bhakti* began to be addressed to the human incarnations of Vishnu, that is Rama and Krishna, and it began to be claimed that *bhakti* was the only path to liberation. The consorts of Rama and Krishna, namely Sita and Radha, were associated with them; the idols of Sita-and-Rama and of Radha-and-Krishna were installed in temples dedicated to them.

7.4 The cult of Rama *bhakti* was popularized by Ramanand in northern India during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. His disciples established centres (*maths*) at many places. These *maths* increased the influence of the Ramanandi *bairagis* among the people. The integral part of these establishments was *pathshalas* for teaching and *goshalas* for cows. The cult of Krishna was popularized by Chaitanya in Bengal and Orissa and by Vallabhacharya in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. Chaitanya laid emphasis on the emotional side of Krishna *bhakti* through *kirtanas* or devotional poetry sung with musical instruments and in ecstatic dance. Vallabha developed the ceremonial side of Krishna *bhakti* in temples where the daily round of

his activities were ceremonialized from the early morning when the Lord awoke till he went to bed at night for sleep. Vaishnava *bhakti* was meant primarily for the upper or middling castes, though its protagonists made some use of the language of the people and they were more indulgent towards the lower castes.

7.5 For a really lower-caste movement we have to look to the Sants of northern India. In *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* they have been called 'Bhagat'. They were opposed to the idea of incarnation and the practice of idol-worship in temples. In fact, these 'Bhagats' did not address their devotion to Vishnu. Among them Sant Kabir Ji was the most important. He lived mostly in Benaras and denounced much of the religious belief and practice of his time. He said that the *mulla* and the *pandit*, the guardians of Muslim and Hindu orthodoxy, were 'pots of the same clay'. Sant Kabir also discarded the Hindu and Muslim revelational scriptures, the Vedas and the Quran. In unambiguous and uncompromising terms Sant Kabir denounced worship of idols in temples, purificatory bathings, ritual fasts and pilgrimage to places regarded sacred. His God, neither Hari nor Allah (but one may call Him Hari or Allah) does not reside in the east or in the west; He resides in the heart of man. Love for God involved sacrifice of self, and metaphorically of life. Sant Kabir's system came to possess the originality of a new faith.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji responded to contemporary politics, society and religion with a constructive criticism and initiated a new *dharam* and a new *panth*.

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EXERCISES

Part-A

1. Objective type questions (requiring answers in one or two words):

Multiples choice questions

- i) Tazia is associated with whom?
a) Sunnis b) Shias c) Sufis d) Jogis
- ii) Alberuni came in which century?
a) 11th b) 12th c) 14th d) 15th
- iii) Who was the successor of Bahlol Lodi?
a) Daulat Khan Lodi b) Sikandar Lodi

c) Ibrahim Lodi d) Sher Shah Suri

- iv) The most important sects of Islam were:
- a) Shaiv and Vaishnav b) Sunni and Shia
- c) Gorakhnathi and Kabirpanthi d) Sufi and Shakta

Fill in the blanks:

- v) Alberuni wrote the book called _____ .
- vi) Animal sacrifice was the practice of the _____ .
- vii) _____ believed in Avatars.
- viii) The cult of Ram Bhakti was popularized by _____ in north India.
- ix) The Vaishnavs ascetics were generally known as _____.
- x) Sant Kabir Ji opposed worship of _____ in temples.

True/False:

- i) The Sunnis believed in the first four Khalifas (True/False).

Questions requiring Answers upto one sentence:

- i) Who used the word 'Hindus' for the people of India?
- ii) What were the new religious movements among the Hindus?
- iii) Which areas did Babur occupy in 1519-24?
- iv) Why did Sikandar Lodi appoint a large number of *qazis*?
- v) Did non-Muslims use the qazi's court?
- vi) Whose authority did the Lodi Sultan acknowledge?
- vii) Who were the *muqaddams*?
- viii) What was the work of a *patwari*?

- ix) Who were the shaikhzadas and pirzadas?
- x) What are the four practices of Islam which insure piety?

Part-B

2. Questions requiring Short Answers (35-40 words):

- i) Which religions were practiced in the 15th century Punjab?
- ii) Identify the categories of people who received state patronage under the Lodis.
- iii) Describe the life of the nobility under the Lodi Sultans.
- iv) How did the position of the Rajputs change with the establishment of Turko-Afghan rule?
- v) What were Alberuni's observations on the caste system?
- vi) What was the change in the position of the Brahmins?
- vii) Identify the 'traditional sciences' studied by Brahmins and Khatrias.
- viii) What was the position of women in the 15th century?
- ix) What do you understand by Gorakhnathi Jogi?
- x) What were the differences between the Sunnis and the Shias?

Part-C

3. Questions requiring Long Answers (100-150 words):

- i) What do we mean by the geographical region of Punjab?
- ii) Describe the administration of the Lodi Sultans.
- iii) What was the structure of the Hindus society in the late 15th century?
- iv) Describe the various categories of people who formed the Islamic society in the 15th century.

- v) What do you know about the Sufis?
- vi) Who were the prominent leaders of Vaishnava Bhakti and what was their contribution?
- vii) What were the characteristic features of the Jogis?
- viii) What were the ideas of Sant Kabir Ji?

Part-D

4. Map Work: Mark any five of the following places on the map:

Sialkot, Saidpur, Dipalpur, Pakpattan, Lahore, Panipat and Delhi

Write about each of shown places.

Map on the next page...

