
UNIT 24 MEDIEVAL RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS I — BHAKTI AND SUFISM

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24.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you will understand

- two religious movements that were found to prevail in India during the medieval period
- Hindism and its basic tenets in a very general way
- the **bhakti** and **Sufi** traditions and what they evoked
- the interaction and interchange between **Sufism** and the **Bhakti** tradition.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

We have examined various religions in the previous Block 5 in our units on religions pluralism. In these units we have also covered units on Hinduism (Unit 19) and Islam (Unit 22). These units form an essential backdrop to our present unit on **Bhakti** and **Sufism** which are medieval religious movements.

We begin by introducing the structure of the unit and describing the background of the development of **Bhakti** and **Sufism**. We then go on to examine the **Bhakti** Tradition, including the three paths of **Bhakti** and the two pillars of **Bhakti**. We then turn to the **bhakti** tradition in the South and then examine the **bhakti** tradition in the North. Our next section (24.4) compares **Sufism** and **Bhakti**.

This section includes the growth of medieval mysticism, **Sufi-bhakti** interaction and **Bhakti-Sufi** teachings. We therefore provide an adequate picture of the **bhakti** and **sufi** movements in medieval times.

Let us now also introduce the necessary background of these medieval religious movements. Thus **Bhakti** emphasizes a personal devotion for one god. It may be pointed out that the Alvar **bhakti** saints of South India composed their devotional

poetry between 5th and 9th century AD. They were worshippers of Krishna. They approached him with a love based on parental, filial, friendly and devotional attitudes. The **acharyas** who followed the **Alvars** had an intellectual approach treated dependence on god as logical rather than emotional.

Vallabha formed a sect based on Sri Krishna-Radha in the 16th century AD. Krishna-Bhakti was also given much attention by Sri Chaitanya (AD 1485-1533) who was a contemporary of Vallabha. However Sri Chaitanya's worship was of the ecstatic kind and popularization of the chanting of Hari (Sri Krishna), as a way to spiritual liberation. Namdeva (end of 14th century AD) and Ramananda were further important **Bhakti** Saints. The North Indian school was popularized by the disciples of Ramananda such as Kabir who used local language for preaching. Mirabai herself was initiated by Ravidas as disciple of Ramananda.

Let us now turn to **Sufism**, which is a discipline which aims at the personal experience of the unity of God. **Sufism** began around the 8th century with Saints such as Hadrat Habib Ajami (AD 738). Some scholars feel that **Sufism** is not against the Islami law. In fact the process of **Sufism** is closely interwoven in the Islami law. **Sufism** can be explained from the viewpoint of three basic religious attitudes found in the Quran. These are the attitudes of **Islam**, **Iman** and **Ihsan**.

The attitude of Islam is that of submission to the will of Allah and the teachings of the Quran. Iman designates a further penetration into the religion and strong faith in its teachings. Ihsan is the highest stage of spiritual ascent. These are the three stages of religiosity in Islam.

We may point out in our introduction that the Sufi and the Bhakti movements coalesce in various areas. Let us now turn first to the Bhakti tradition.

24.2 THE BHAKTI TRADITION

In medieval India it was caste structures that governed the lives of men and the networks of relations that they could enter into. The structure of social divisions that arose thus was, as mentioned, a rigid, inflexible and unequal one that created extremes of inequality, privileges and disprivileges between men and social groups. Although this was an extremely unfair system, little could be done or said against it as it was supported by Hindu religious ideology, particularly the notions of high and pure birth and occupation as against the low and impure. In other words, Hinduism was as much a social system as it was a religion, and provided an ideological framework on the basis of which Hindu society arose.

In other words. **Hinduism was both religion and social framework and governed the lives of Hindus.** To be a Hindu meant that one's life was governed by factors such as being born in a caste, being subject to one's actions or **karma**, to be a part of **Brahman** and aim at achieving **moksha** or Liberation of one's soul or salvation. Further, it must be remembered that Hinduism was not a revealed religion that had just a single text. With every phase in the development of Hinduism came new scriptures and texts. Thus we have the **Veda**, the **Upanishad**, the **Purana** and the **Bhagavad Gita**. Even though we have stressed that the caste system was a system that formed the basis of life in Hindu India and was rigid and unchangeable, there nevertheless occurred many anti-caste movements in the course of the development of the religion. We already mentioned in Block 5 (Unit 20 : ESO-05). Buddhism and Jainism in the 6th century B.C. that spoke up against caste divisions and social inequality. This struggle was carried forward and saw its culmination in the rise of the medieval movement of **bhakti** or 'selfless' devotion to a single God, with which this unit is primarily concerned.

Hinduism was greatly criticised and faced many movements against it (see Unit 19 on Hinduism in Block 5 of this course ESO-05 which will provide a background). Of these, the **bhakti** movement has great significance. This is so because even though the **bhakti** movement was against some of the tenets of Hinduism, much of what is a part of Hinduism in later ages developed as an outcome of the bhakti tradition. This tradition was widespread, in fact from North to South India. We will outline its development in the South and North separately.

24.2.1 Paths and Pillars of Bhakti

From a modern historical standpoint the development of **bhakti** is the coming together of considerably earlier theistic tendencies in three major religious traditions of ancient India:

- i) the sacrificial cult of the invading Aryans and the recitation of the Brahmana priests that become the foundation of the Vedas;
- ii) the practice of bodily mortification and groups known as Sramanas probably continuing traditions of earlier inhabitants of India but soon adapted by some of the Aryans; and
- iii) the pre Aryan cults of spirits and village goddesses inhabiting trees and rocks and protecting special people or special groups.

Those who worship Vishnu as the Supreme deity are known as **Vaishnavas**; likewise those who accord the Supreme place to Shiva are known as **Saivas**; and those who are devotees of the Goddess of Power are known as **Saktas**. Each sect is subdivided into lineages of teachers and teachings. The major forms of **bhakti** are divided according to the various mood of the devotees. Raw emotion or bhava is transformed in drama to a refined mood or **rasa**. Each combination of **bhava** or **rasa** uses a particular human relationship, or devotional stances such as servant to master or child to parent or friend to friend, parent to child and beloved to lover. While **bhakti** stresses passionate attachment it is in striking contrast with Yoga which stresses detachment. Yet many forms of **bhakti** do talk of detachment such as that taught in the **Bhagavad Gita**. The bhakti movements stand religiously between the extreme ascetic paths and popular Hindu religiosity. Bhakti generally shares the ascetic concern for **moksa** — release from finite existence and realization of transcendent beatitude. What is primary is communion with the lord.

A few **bhaktas** make the total commitment of time and style of life characteristic of Hindu 'renouncers' spending whole days in chanting and singing the praise of their Lord. **Bhakti** shares with popular Hinduism the basic ritual of **puja**, worship



Kabir Das a prominent Bhakti saint.

of the diety in image form with fruit, flower and vegetables which are returned after worship as **prasada** that is material substance filled with the Lord's grace. Such puja may take place in the home shrine or local temple. The worship could be for any spiritual or mundane purpose. There are also distinctive **bhakti** rituals — communal singing of hymns and chants, performance of dramas, dances and chants and recital of heroic deeds of Vishnu.

These three paths of **Bhakti** that Lord Krishna offered to Arjuna were:

- i) the path of knowledge or **jnana**;
- ii) the path of action or **karma** and
- iii) the path of devotion or **bhakti**

The Sanskrit term **bhakti** is most often translated as “devotion” and **bhaktimarg** as “path of devotion”. **Bhakti is the divine-human relationship as experienced from the human side.** There are at least three major forms of **bhakti** that is Vaisnavas, Saivas, and worshippers of the great power (Sakti). Each sect is divided into many subjects. Bhakti is between popular religion and asceticism. **Bhakti** shares the concern for **moksa**, that is release from the bondages of life on earth. The ritual of **puja** is very important. There are other rituals too — communal singing of hymns and chants; recitations of epics; recounting of sacred lore.

It is this last path of devotion that forms the basis of a religious tradition that survives and proliferates today even across international boundaries. The basic teaching of this tradition was the idea of ‘loving devotion’ by concentrating upon the image of a single God and without any thought for oneself, as being the way of liberation of ones soul. Any God could be the focus of one's devotion. This God was then seen as ones personal God or **ishta deva**. **Ishta deva** is a deity that the worshipper chooses as a personal diety and accords it personal devotion. The most often chosen God for ones devotion we find, has been Krishna and most of the bhakti tradition has evolved around him. It is particularly his character as the incarnation of Vishnu and his relationship to the Gopis and Radha in particular, which are of central importance here. Gopis is the name given to the ladies who were worshippers of Krishna and with whom he played many of his divine games (**lila**). In fact, the love that the Gopis had for Krishna has been regarded as the best example of the devotion of the individual for God. The idea of ‘self abandonment’ or the forgetting of everything in the presence of one's God, is also seen as an important part of the **bhakta** or devotee's devotion to God.

This particular form of relationship between the God and devotee has been called **viraha bhakti**. **Viraha bhakti** is the name given to exclusive personal devotion to Sri Krishna where feeling of separation or longing is felt for the deity by the devotee. The devotion to Krishna and the **bhakti** cult that arose around him became prominent in South India around the 8th century. We now turn to the pillars of **bhakti**.

The two main pillars of the bhakti tradition are ‘love’ and ‘meditation’. The ‘love’ is for God, and it is ecstatic in nature as well as symbolising a feeling of bliss or happiness that is unparalleled; and an intimacy or closeness with God like that with ones beloved. The idea that is being conveyed here is to be lost in the love of God as though He were a beloved. At the same time the relationship that arises here may be one of dependence upon the God. On the other hand, as far as the aspect of meditation is concerned, there are two kinds of meditation in **bhakti**. These are:

- i) **saguna bhakti**, where one meditates on God as a separate being, through disciplined practice;

- ii) **nirguna bhakti**, where God and self are merged into one and little distinction is made between self and God.

24.2.2 The Bhakti Tradition : South

The Krishna cult arose in South India around the 8th century. We now trace here, the development of the **bhakti** tradition in the South. The 8th century saw the rise, in the Tamil country, of persons who called themselves the Alvars .e. men who have intimate and intuitive knowledge of God. They claimed to have an intensely personal relationship with God. They rejected the caste system by recruiting saints to their movement, from all divisions of society and refusing to use Sanskrit as a language, as it was Brahmanic in nature. An important saint here was **Nam'alvar** who spoke of the oneness of God and the individual soul. He also stressed that unleashed passionate spirituality among people was the only way to show one's devotion to the **ishtadeva**. There were also other followers such as **Yamunacharya** and **Nathamuni**, through whose efforts, the bhakti movement spread and developed. Besides the Alvars, the Southern **bhakti** movement also found expression in the work of **Ramanuja** in the 13th century. He primarily made the contribution of stressing, devotion to a personal deity and saw the Bhagvad Gita as a major work in the **bhakti** of Krishna. He represented the **saguna** tradition.

Unit 25 on Veerashaivism deals with aspects of Veerashaivism and **Bhakti**. We would like to mention aspects of it in this unit. In all there were 12 Alvars and a



Lord Vishnu with adoring devotees.

major form of their contribution to the **Bhakti** tradition was in the hymns that focused on the divine lord as the recipient of one's devotion. Other than the rise of the **Krishna bhakti** in South India, we also find a major tradition arising around the worship of Siva as the main deity or **ishta deva**. It was in the 12th century that we find the rise of this tradition in the form of a left handed sect of Vira Saivas or Lingayats. The founder of this sect was **Basava**, a Brahmin prime minister of the principality of Kalyan. This tradition denounced both the caste system and image worship. Very interestingly, even though the founder was a Brahmin, this movement was anti-Brahmin. The Lingayats were identified by the wearing of an image of the **lingam**, enclosed in either silver or brass, around the neck. This **lingam** was worn by all Lingayats irrespective of sex, age or caste. The wearing of the **lingam** was symbolic of the oneness of all who worshipped Siva as the **ishta deva**. **This was a tradition that clearly rejected the idea of inequality that Hinduism professed between men.** It was open to all castes and social divisions and recognised all as equal in the worship of the Siva **lingam**. Once again, like the Alvars, much of this **bhakti** tradition was in the form of lyrics and hymns and 'sayings' or **vacana**, in the Kannada language. These were essentially **bhakti** poems of personal devotion to a God and clearly rejected the great tradition of Vedic religion. These mocked orthodox beliefs and recitations and questioned the classical belief systems, social customs, Vedic rituals and so on.

Activity 1

Talk to several Hindus from the North and the South of India about the **Bhakti Tradition**. Record what they say about the similarities and differences between the two types of Bhakti traditions. Write down your findings in two to five pages of your notebook and discuss them, if possible, with other students at the Study Centre.

To put it simply then, Veerashaivism or Lingayatism was a protest movement that through the method of **bhakti** and selfless abandonment, lashed out against the orthodox and polytheistic nature of Hinduism. It stressed the oneness not just of God and devotee, as in the Krishna cult but also of oneness of the devotee with the people. Thus we have the famous legend about a **Saiva** saint called Ghantakarna, who realising the supremacy of Siva as the sublime God, offered his body to Siva. This is the supreme sacrifice, to offer oneself in toto to a deity. That is to lay down one's life at his feet. Thus, the legend goes, Ghantakarna's body became the threshold of a temple to Siva, his limbs became the frames of the door, and his head, the bell of the temple. Such was the extent of a devout **bhakta's bhakti**. The main



A Hindu prayer room decorated with pictures of various deities on the wall.

reason for the popularity of this tradition of **bhakti** in the South was the social change it signified in terms of social upliftment of the low and poorer divisions of society in all spheres of life. Further, since central to the **bhakti** tradition in South India was the use of devotional songs in the language of the people, it reached out to a larger population and contributed to the unity of the people on various social and cultural levels.

24.2.3 The Bhakti Tradition : North

From the South of India we find that the **bhakti** tradition spread to Central and North India. Each added its own local traditional beliefs and devotional forms to both the Vaishnava and Saiva **bhakti** traditions. Thus we find in Central India, particularly in the Marathi belt, Krishna **bhakti** finding a stronghold. Its most famous saint here was Tukaram (1598-1649). He and his followers worshipped Krishna in the form of 'Vitobha' or 'Vithala'. The main theme here was that of seeking liberation within oneself, by becoming one or merging with the Lord. It was around the 15th century that a spiritual descendent of Alvars, Vallabhacharya (1479-1531) went further North and gave life to the Krishna cult in the Mathura region. This survives even today as probably the most vital centre of Krishna **bhakti**. The three major figures associated with **bhakti** in this period are Surdas (1485-1563) who spoke of losing oneself in Krishna; Mirabai (1500-1550) who abandoned her position as Queen of Mewar for her **bhakti** to Krishna as 'Girdhar Gopal'.

All of us are familiar with the **bhakti** of Mirabai. It is believed that such was the intensity of her devotion that Krishna absorbed her soul into his own. Finally we have the significant role played in this period by Chaitanya (1485-1533). Chaitanya played a major role in the establishment of Mathura as a **bhakti** centre. He professed that the highest knowledge of all was the knowledge of devotion to Krishna and the greatest of sorrows was separation or **viraha** from Krishna. Further, he taught that the longing that Radha and the Gopis had for Krishna should be duplicated in the soul of every devotee in his search for oneness with Krishna. Although the movement now was open to all social groups and castes it could not totally do away with the caste system.

Box 24.01

Chaitanya was born in 1485 in a Brahmin family in Bengal. When Bengal had been under Muslim control for almost 300 years. Hindu religion under Muslim retreated into an orthodox pattern of living and worship. Chaitanya learned Sanskrit as a matter of course in his childhood. When he grew up he became a schoolmaster and disapproved of **bhakti**. He was not interested in religion. However he could not ignore the fact that all his eight elder brothers and sisters had died before him. His meeting with the ascetic Isvara Puri also changed his life at the shrine in Gaya. He began having mystic visions that he could not fully describe in words. Isvara Puri initiated Chaitanya into a mantra and Chaitanya became a worshipper of Krishna.

Even so we find today in Mathura and specifically Vrindaban, how the lives of the people are totally tied up to their worship of Krishna (at home and in the temple), as a child or as the young lover of the Gopis. In this small town near Mathura, the people wake when Krishna awakes in the temple, they eat when he eats, they sleep when he sleeps, and their every moment is devoted to thoughts of Krishna to the extent that they even greet each other with a "Radhe-Radhe". So totally enwrapped are their lives with that of God. It is this form of Northern **bhakti** that represents the best example of **Saguna bhakti**.

The **bhakti** movement reached further North-east from here and was carried to Assam in the 16th century where the Meiteis, a local tribe, are Vaishnavites.

Besides the Vaishnava tradition coming North we also find that the Siva **bhakti** tradition also found a foothold in North India, particularly in Kashmir. Its greatest follower and proponent was Abhinavagupta and later one of the Kashmiri women saints, Lalla. Although Siva **bhakti** found many followers here, they found the renderings of the tradition difficult to follow, even so their numbers did not diminish and 'Shivaratri' is one of the most celebrated occasions in Kashmir. It may once again be noted, why the **bhakti** tradition became so popular in North India. Against the strict and orthodox character of Hinduism that stressed the inequality of men before God and thus did not allow all men and women equal access to the divine and to religion, the **bhakti** tradition offered an alternative. It was an alternative path of worship through devotion, open to all sections of society and offering all of them equality before God and in the access to the divine. Since it used local idioms, language and songs, it reached out to a far larger population and appealed to all sections of society. It celebrated the relationship of the individual to God, as a very personal relationship and rejected the Vedic form of worship through intermediaries. Moreover, its rejection of the caste system and the inequalities subscribed by it, were openings that a large section of society were looking for. **Bhakti** thus offered a way of relating to the divine that was personalised, unique and fulfilling.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What were the basic teachings of Hinduism that the **bhakti** tradition protested against? Answer in 5-10 lines.

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- 2) What is **bhakti**? How was it an alternative to the prevalent religious trend? Answer using 5-10 lines.

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3) Briefly describe the three types of bhakti: **viraha**, **saguna** and **nirguna**. Answer using 10 lines.

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24.3 SUFISM

Having examined the basic teachings of **bhakti** and how it created a new path for devotion or religious worship, we now proceed to consider the influence of Islam on the Indian subcontinent, and the consequence that it had for the **bhakti** tradition in particular. As an offshoot of this influence we have the role of the Sufi movement in India.

Islam as a world religion confronted Hinduism in full force rather than getting absorbed into it. Historically, we find that the beginning of the 10th century there were Muslim invasions. This is the time when Mahmud of Ghazni invaded the Indian subcontinent 17 times. In early 16th century, the Moghuls invaded India. It was in the later half of the 17 century that the Hindus launched a counter offensive. It was particularly in the struggle by the Maratha King Shivaji, that the moral power of Hinduism received impetus and the **bhakti** tradition resurged as a response to the impact of Islam. The Indian tradition tried to find a response within its own spiritual condition since the Muslim ruler discriminated against the Hindu who were their subjects. Further, with tis contact between the two different social and cultural traditions, interaction and synthesis began particularly on the level of social custom, tradition and practice of the Hindus and the Muslims. At the same time we find that the Islamic, mystic and ecstatic, tradition of Sufism greatly influenced the **bhakti** saints. To understand the nature of this influence let us briefly consider what **Sufism** was about.

24.3.1 What is Sufism?

In the beginning **Sufism** developed in Mesopotamia, Arabia, Iran and modern Afghanistan. It was formalized by the end of the 8th century. Right from the beginning there was a hiatus between the **ulemas** and the mystics. The latter claimed to be delving into the interior of religion, which depended on the heart. The **Sufi** and **bhakti** traditions are characterised by adherence to religious text, governmental authority and opposed to external ritualism of prayer. The **Sufis** aim for a direct relationship with God and thus their basic features incorporate strands from various sources including Hinduism.

Ritu Dewan has pointed out that as a consequence of the 12th century Mongal invasion many Sufis took shelter in India, especially in Multan, Punjab, and Sindh. One of the greatest Sufi mystics Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273) was very influenced by Indian folklore and even wrote a poem dedicated to the

flute of Krishna. He founded the Maulavi Sufi order in which music and dance were spiritual methods. Soami ji Maharaj founder of the Radha Soami sect was much influenced by Rumi who he often quoted in his discourses. Guru Nanak too was inspired by Rumi. Rumi and Baba Farid's compositions (1173-1265) have been included in the Granth Sahib together with those of Kabir.

Guru Nanak was called guru of the Hindus and pir of the Mussalmans. By the end of the 16th century the **Bhakti** movement had covered the entire north India resulting in an intermingling of Hindu mysticism with Sufism. Kabir's following verse illustrates this:

The Mussalmans accept the Tarifat
The Hindus, the Vedas and Puranas
but for me the books of both religions are useless
(Kabir, 1440-1518).

Sufis were also against external ritualism in religion. Prayers and fasting were held to be inferior to works of charity. And Jihad not external war but a fight against the lower self of man. Some Sufis like Shah Abdul Latif and Sachal Sarmast called upon people to "strike the Mullahs".

In Bengal the influence of Chaitanya was felt on a popular level, specially on the Baul movement. Muslim Bauls followed the Sufi tradition and Hindu Bauls the Vaishnavite. Both of these traditions expressed themselves saying:

You have been to Gaya,
Bcnares and Vrindavan,
and have travelled through
many rivers and forests and
other places of pilgrimáge
But away have you seen in all
these anything of Him of Whom
you have heard?

Sufi literature of Rumi and Hafiz (d. 1389) influenced Raja RamMohan Roy and Devendranath Tagore, and Rabindranath Tagore. Sufi literature remains fresh today though long years have passed since it was first penned:

Is there one God in the **peepul** tree and
another in the **babool**?
If Islam was created by Allah
then who created Kufir
If Ka'ba be the House of God
Why find fault with the temple?
The same light burns bright
within the temple and the mosque.
(Sufi Bhai Dalpatram 1768-1842)

Thus we see that there was a commingling of the Bhakti and Sufi movements.

Sufism, specialises in the spiritual dimension of Islam. It believes in revelation as a source of contact with the sacred and attempts to get a personal experience of the unity of God. This leads to a realization that God alone is to be adored. This is basic to Sufism. While orthodox priests of Islam feel that this desire to merge in the unity of God is anti-Islam the Sufis do not feel this is so. In fact they feel it is closely related to Islamic doctrine. The two are interdependent. An analogy given to clarify the relationship is that of the kernel of the walnut and the shell. Neither can possibly do without the other.

Another example is that Islamic doctrine is like the circumference of a circle at the centre of the centre of which lies the ultimate Reality (Haququat). Sufism is a mediator between Islamic doctrine and Ultimate Reality.

Sufism can be explained through three basic religious attitudes of

- 1) **Islam**
- 2) **Iman**
- 3) **Ihsan**

Islam is the attitude of submission to the will of Allah.

Iman designates a firm faith in the teachings of the Islam.

Ihsan is to adore Allah though one may not see him. Sufism is the spiritual progress of a devotee from the initial stage of **Islam** to the ultimate stage of **Ihsan**.

As **Islam** in India, it came to enfold in its cloak, the system of monasticism and a defined way of community life. The **Sufi** mystic however was in no way forced to live a defined and organised life. By the 9th century, these **Sufis** who had come to form a brotherhood and a definite way of community life, also began wearing a particular kind of coarse woollen garment known as **sufi** and thus came to be called **sufis**. **Sufis**, though Muslim, are considered to be pantheistic mystics. This was a basic difference with orthodox Islam but in common with the bhakti school of the Hindus.

The **Sufis** followed the Quran, and sought to reveal their purpose in life through their sayings, actions and the path that they followed. This path was often shared by different mystics and came to be called **tariqah** or **sufism**. The path of 'unselfishness' through either renouncing the world and one's possessions and desires or by adopting an attitude of patience, humility and charity, towards God, were essential to being a **sufi**. The **sufis** also had a special method of their own for producing the state of mind in which they would have revelations. They called this **dhikr**.

Its simplest form is the continual repetition of the name of Allah with intense concentration on the thought of God, and losing one's individuality in this. If we examine these teachings closely we can see how the idea of **dhikr** which was central to Sufi thought is similar to the idea in **bhakti** tradition of concentrating on the **ishta deva**, in one's quest for liberation particularly in the **saguna** tradition. Thus, **Sufism** mainly professed mysticism and upon this the **Sufis** built the basic theological doctrines of their religious movement. A major practice devised by the **Sufis** for stimulating religious emotion was listening to music and song or **sama**. These songs are capable of sending one into a trance. The subject of the songs was love, which was often erotic. One could not clearly distinguish whether the love being talked about here was human love or the love for the deity. Once again this is similar to the love in the **bhakti** tradition between the **bhakta** and the God as was expressed for Krishna by the Gopis.

We find, many attempts were made to define the **Sufi** in different ways. *In general it was however agreed that the Sufi had metaphysical, social and philanthropic characteristics.* Further, the **Sufi** doctrine we find was moulded by different influences such as the developments in Muhammadan monotheistic ideas or the influence of Greek and Indian philosophies. Moreover, we can also include here, political, social and intellectual conditions that favoured the growth of mysticism. The **Sufis** were very strict about accepting disciples or **murid**. Slowly however, as

followers flocked to them, many **Sufis** became recognised as teachers of **Shaikhs** and **Pirs** and 'orders' arose within **Sufism**. The four major orders that arose were the (a) Qudiri (b) Suhrawardi (c) Chisti and (d) Naqshbandi. By the 13th century, **Sufism** had become a movement in its own right in India.

24.3.2 The Spread of Sufism in India

Sufism mainly flowed into Indian from Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Iran. We have accounts of the various saints of different orders spreading **Sufi** teachings in different parts of India: To name a few, we have the well-known Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti who had established himself in Ajmer and Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya whose teachings and followers spread all over India.

As far as the spread of **Sufism** in India is concerned, its character changed to adapt to the Hindu environment. Thus, the metaphysical aspect was avoided and personal instruction of disciples was undertaken. Not all **Sufis** however took disciples. Those who did were called **Shaikhs**. The **Shaikh** besides being a teacher was regarded as a protector, friend, companion and benefactor or **Wali**. The teacher was also believed to possess supernatural powers or **Karamah**. The **Shaikh** or **pir** was regarded as the spiritual guide of the disciple or **murid**. We find that most of the people who came to the Sufi saints, desired to use their spiritual powers to cure an illness or fulfil a wish. Even today we find that of the many devout who may visit the resting place of a **pir**, i.e. his **dargah**, come there to seek the fulfilment of a wish or a blessing.

There were as mentioned earlier four main orders among the **Sufis**. Each of these we find different from the other in the emphasis of its teachings and the extent to which it spread in India. All four orders however regarded the **Shariah** as the spiritual guide. All four believed that a **Sufi** should have no worldly possessions. Each order had over time found devout disciples who in turn had reached the stature of being capable of having their own disciples and were known as **Khalifahs**. These **Khalifahs** played important roles in the spread of their order's teachings.

Of the four orders, the Suhrawardis, were the most orthodox and played a leading role in the spread of **Sufism** in the North-West of India. They believed that to be



Sufism is an eclectic faith and borrows ideas and ways of worship from both Hinduism and Islam; for example Sai Baba of

able to perform their functions better, they had to maintain good relations with the political authority of the time.

Of these orders, it is however the Chisti Sufis who are best known. They spread all over the country and their principal Shaikh Nizamuddin, settled in Delhi and gave the order its expansive character. The Chistis consistently maintained that the political authority was an influence to be avoided. By the time Nizamuddin died in 1325 and his successor Nasiruddin took over, in 1356, a spiritual empire had begun to form. It reached its peak in the personality of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya. By this time the Chisti order had spread to Bihar and Bengal and had an even older order in Rajasthan that began with Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti in Ajmer in the 1190s. The expansion of this order into the Deccan was carried out by Shaikh Gesu-daraz.

Box 24.02

Sufism is one of the creative manifestations of **Islam**. It is a mystic sect which developed out of Islam. **Sufism seeks mystical union**. Many **Sufi** saints who were responsible for developing **sufism** include **Hasan al-Basvi, Ibrahim Ibn Adham Rabiati Adawiyah, Dhu al nun al Misri**. Each of these saints developed **Sufism** in their own way. For example Al-Hallaj was initiated into **sufism** while still a teenager. He lived in relative seclusion (for twenty years) and was trained by many masters. His basic teaching was moral reforms and intense Union with the Beloved. In mystical ecstasy he cried out loud: "Ana-al-Hagg!" ("I am the Divine Truth"). Al-Hallaj was decapitated and burnt by his detractors but he died with dignity and grace believing it to be the will of God (Encyclopaedia of Religion).

It is imported to note that because of the presence of differences between the order and individualistic approach of many of the Shaikhs, a single Muslim unified community of disciples could not be formed. Instead, each order had its devout disciples who together formed a united brotherhood. Overtime, Sufism lost its spiritual intensity and became missionary in character. By the end of the 14th century, Hinduism had evoked a response in the Sufis. The devotional character of Hindi songs and the language, had brought the Sufis and Hindu closer. An intermixing of the two people on a cultural level had begun to take place. In fact we find that a common ground had opened up in which the mutual acceptance of the aesthetic values of the Hindus and Muslims had come to be accepted by each other. This interchange of cultures will be discussed in the following section that specifically deals with the meeting of Sufism and the bhakti tradition.

24.4 SUFISM AND BHAKTI : A COMPARISON

Having outlined what the tradition of **Sufism** entailed let us now consider the role of **Sufism** in the **bhakti** tradition. You may have already noticed that much of what the **Sufis** taught was very similar to the **bhakti** teaching of concentrating upon a God and the significance of sacred music and song. This interaction between the two (as mentioned earlier in sub-section 24.3.1) it is believed to have led to the creation of a medieval mysticism which was independent of sectarian or orthodox practices and **disclaimed particularly caste practices and atrocities**. The first **Sufi** teacher who came to India was, as mentioned earlier, Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti, who arrived in Delhi in 1193 and settled in Pushkar in Ajmer. He had both Hindu and Muslim followers. We are all familiar with the 'Urs' at his **dargah** in Ajmer, to which flocks of followers come, treating it as a major pilgrimage centre even today. *As mentioned, these Sufis, were Islamic mystics who sought the path of salvation through an ardent and passionate love for God.* The teachings of the **Sufis** greatly influenced not only followers but many saints of the **bhakti** tradition who came to combine in themselves, **sufi** and **bhakti** teachings. The two

most significant figures here from the 15th/16th century, were Kabir and Guru Nanak. We will briefly consider their role in the development of medieval mysticism.

24.4.1 Growth of Medieval Mysticism

An important role in the growth of medieval mysticism was played by Ramananda (1370-1440) who himself was a follower of Ramanuja. Ramananda challenged caste divisions, questioned traditional ceremonies and accepted the Hindu philosophy of divisions, questioned traditional ceremonies and accepted the Hindu philosophy of **jnana** or knowledge, meditation or **yoga** and devotion or **bhakti**. He had many disciples of which twelve were the more important and came from low castes. The most famous of these disciples was Kabir, the son of a Muslim weaver. It is believed that though, he early in his life abandoned the Muslim faith, he retained the strict monotheism of **Islam** and an aversion to the caste system. He saw religion as a personal concern and stressed relationship between man, God and his teacher or **guru**. He combined in him, elements of both the **Sufi** and **bhakti** traditions, claiming that both Allah and Rama were the same thing.

Since he was trying to reach out to the common people he used the dialect or its variant as the language of communication. He stressed the importance of both material and spiritual things in one's life. He had both Hindu and Muslim followers and was non-sectarian. It is possible however that his Hindu followers are greater in number. Much of Kabir's life and work is derived from reconstructing its course from the **dohas** or **sakhis** rendered by him. These were essentially rhymed poems, set to music. There is much debate however about how many of these **dohas** were written by Kabir himself and how many of his followers or the Kabir **panthis**. Thus, there is doubt about the legitimacy of some of the sayings that are attributed to Kabir. Many it is believed are those of his devotees. These **dohas**, it is believed were very often included by the **Sufi** saints into their **sama**.

Important among Kabir's followers was Dadu (1544-1608) who also belonged to a Muslim family. He made the important contribution of seeking a unification of faiths, and founded the **Brahma-Sampradaya** where God would be worshipped without ritual or orthodoxy. As a mystic he contributed to the idea of the beauty of the world to be discovered not by becoming a recluse or an ascetic but by living a full life and enjoying what it had to offer.

Activity 2

Find out from some of your Muslim friends about the **Sufi** orders and their belief patterns. Ascertain from them whether **Sufis** are non Muslims or a different type of Muslim. Who have been the famous **Sufis**? If possible try to visit one or more of their commemoration sites where their graves are. Write down your findings and experiences in two to five pages of your notebook and discuss the same if possible with fellow students in the Study Centre.

At the same time as Kabir we have, the contribution of Guru Nanak of Punjab (1469-1538). There is greater certainty about his dates and origins than those of Kabir. Like Kabir, he too was a monotheist and was greatly opposed to the caste system. His disciples, the Sikhs, were organised into a close knit community. His teachings and writings and those of the subsequent Gurus were compiled together by the fifth Guru, Arjun, into the sacred book of the Sikhs, the **Adi-Grantha**. The Sikhs represented a **bhakti** sect, where their **bhakti** was sung in the form of the **Gurbani**. Guru Nanak's religious renderings we find, also incorporated the best of **sufi** influence and much of his teachings reflect the union of **bhakti** and **sufi** practices.

24.4.2 Sufi-Bhakti Interaction

This interaction of the Sufi and bhakti traditions occurred to give to the lives of Kabir and Nanak a peculiar flavour. Kabir was linked to the **Sufis**, not just in terms of the mystical nature of his renderings but also on the level or organization of thought. In the **Khazinat al-asfiya**, by Ghulam Sarvar Lahori, we find that Kabir is identified, rightly or wrongly as a **Sufi** and related to the Chistis. Scholars have argued in recent times that this, however, presents a chronological error. In these writings, he is believed to have visited many **Sufi** centres and is even believed to have debated with **Sufi** saints. None however denies the significant position that his **dohas** had come to occupy. Guru Nanak too it is believed had encounters with **Sufi** teachers or **Shaikhs** of which a single encounter, with a **Shaikh** Ibrahim, of Pakpattan near Multan is considered authentic by scholars.

On most fronts, however, the available documentation on contact between **Sufi** mystics and the Hindu **sants** or saints, are contradicted. The most convincing field for the consideration of an inter-change between the **Sufis** and the **sants** can be found in the themes of their poetry and devotional songs particularly the attitude of the two traditions towards the “love relationship” between disciple, God and teacher which is central to both traditions. Thus, both traditions shared the nature of the pain and suffering of the devotees in their relationship to the divine. This suffering, which we earlier called **viraha**, in ones love for the God as beloved, is found in Kabir’s writings too. Scholars compare this **bhakti** notion of **viraha** to the **Sufi** notion of **ishq** which is expressed not through **viraha** but **dard**. It leads to an experience that is called **atish** which is similar to the experience of **agni** or burning of one’s soul in **viraha**. The ideas in Kabir’s **dohas** about love, separation and suffering are found revealed in the lyrics of **Sufi** poetry as well (see sub-section 24.3.1), as we can see. Both, Kabir’s **nirguna** bhakti and the **Sufi** tradition, also speak of the idea of how without Lord and devotee, there can be no devotion. There is in fact another sphere of the **bhakti** tradition where the **Sufi** influence is seen. This is in the context of hagiographic writing about the **bhakti** saints. Here the influence of the **Sufi** tradition is revealed in the style of writing. This tradition of biographic writing about the lives of saints had existed in the **Sufi** tradition from the 15th century and before.

24.4.3 Bhakti-Sufi Teachings

It is important to remember that the relationship between the **Sufi** and **bhakti** saints was reciprocal and the **Sufis** too were influenced by the **bhakti** tradition. Thus, besides this major similarity in terms of the method of devotion and its expression, we find that the **Sufi** tradition also produced its saints such as the Shah Karim and Shah Inayet from the 17th century in whose teachings little distinction was made between the divine as Allah or Rama or Hari, similar to what Kabir sought to say, and revealing the influence of the **bhakti** tradition.

In the section above, we have tried to point out how medieval mysticism revealed a certain sycretism between the Hindu and Muslim traditions of **bhakti** and **Sufism**. The two reveal a major similarity in the nature of devotion and openness to all sections of society which made both, relatively more egalitarian. The influence of **Sufi** thought on the lives of Kabir and Nanak is seen very clearly. Guru Nanak on many of his journeys is believed to have been wearing **Sufi** robes. In fact so significant was his attempt at bringing the **bhakti** of **gurbani** and **sufi** teachings together, that when he died, **his last rites were performed according to the customs of both the movements Sufi and Bhakti**; and two different religious structures mark his resting place. Kabir’s life was also devoted to teachings about salvation, liberation, true love and suffering in ones devotion to the Lord. We also saw how there were major similarities between Kabir’s or the **bhakti** traditions

notions of **viraha** and **agni** and the **Sufi** ideas of **ishq**, **dard** and **atish**. Further both **Kabir** and **Nanak** though mystical, were also concerned with the inequities represented by caste society and Hindu orthodoxy in general and spoke up against it.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What are the main teachings of **Sufism** ? State in 5-7 lines.

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2) Point out in 10 lines some similarities between the **Bhakti** and **Sufi** traditions, which would reveal interaction having taken place between them.

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24.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed **Bhakti** and **Sufism**. We began by examining the **Bhakti** tradition, both in the South (from where it began) and the North (to where it spread). We then focused on the **Sufi** tradition and explained what **Sufism** is, and described its spread in India. Finally we made a comparison between **Sufism** and **bhakti**, covering the growth of medieval mysticism, **sufi-bhakti** interaction and **Bhakti-Sufi** teaching. In this way we have clarified **Bhakti** and **Sufism**.

24.6 KEY WORDS

Bhakti : means an act of devotion where one forgets everything except one's worship of the **ishta deva**.

Ecstatic : that which makes one feel joyous and may even send one into a trance.

Hagiography	: refers to the writing of a saint's life.
Incarnation	: means to give concrete or visible form to a spiritual notion. It is believed that Vishnu had 10 incarnations each of which appeared at a moment of social crisis. Of these Krishna was one. Some of the others include Varaha, Mohini, Parashurama. The Hindi word for incarnation is avatar .
Ishta Deva	: a personal God to whom one dedicates ones worship in search of salvation.
Lingam	: is the idolic representation of Siva that we find in temples. This Siva lingam is made very small and then kept in a metal container that the Lingayats were around their neck.
Mystic	: that which deals with things of spiritual significance. A person who lives the life of a mystic, seeks to obtain unity with the divine or God through contemplation and selfless devotion.
Polytheistic	: essentially refers to belief in more than one God.
Salvation	: means the saving of the soul or a belief that one can be delivered of one's sins, and reach heaven. It is a religious notion used extensively in Christianity as well.
Selfless	: without thinking of oneself. So 'selfless' devotion' would be devotion where one thinks only of the God and not of oneself and what one will get out of such devotion.
Sufi	: refers to the mystic saints that are a sect in the Islamic tradition.
Syncreticism	: the unification of different schools of thought or sects or beliefs.
Tenets	: refers to basic doctrine, dogmas or principles of a religion.

24.7 FURTHER READINGS

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Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The basic teaching against which the **bhakti** tradition protested was the Hindu belief in society being divided into many social groups that were unequal in nature and gave rise to the caste system. This inequality meant that these men were unequal even in the eyes of God and were not allowed to worship God as others could. It also lashed out against the orthodox and polytheistic nature of Hinduism.
- 2) **Bhakti** is a reference to the act of devotion or worship of a particular deity without consideration for oneself or any other deity. One is believed to become totally involved in one's worship to a chosen deity. It developed as a movement in the medieval period in India. Lord Krishna and Shiva have been the main deity's around whom the **bhakti** tradition arose. The movement offered an alternative to the orthodox nature of Hinduism. It particularly stressed the idea of the equality of all men in the eyes of God and rejected the unfair nature of the caste system.
- 3) The three types of **bhakti** can be described as follows:
 - i) **Viraha** : The word viraha means separation. The main aspect therefore of **viraha bhakti** is the devotion of the devotee to the God, in the absence of the deity or, the feeling of loss that arises when the God goes away and the devotion that arises out of this. It is called **viraha bhakti** as it is a particular form of deep devotion that arises in the absence of someone.
 - ii) **Saguna** : This is **bhakti** where through disciplined practice the devotee comes to worship God as an entity separate from the devotee and above him. This is possible through the worshipping of a personal deity or **ishta deva**. This form is mostly found in the South of India.
 - iii) **Nirguna** : This is **bhakti** where the aim is to seek union or fusion with the deity whom one is worshipping. This is once again possible only through worship and years of devotion. It is believed that the deity through such devotion becomes so pleased that he absorbs his devotee into his own body. As for example, the texts tell us that Mirabai was absorbed by Lord Krishna into his body. This form of **bhakti** is found mostly in North India.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Sufism is a mystic movement. The **Sufis** are mystic teachers and for centuries have had disciples. **Sufis** follow the Quran and believe in a life of unselfishness and renouncement of worldly possessions. They also believe in an attitude of patience, humility and charity. The basic teachings include the devotion to God or Allah through a concentration on his being and by repeating his name. This is known as **dhikr**. It encourages the listening of music and song to create religious emotion. This is called **sama**.
- 2) If we closely look at the nature of **bhakti** and **Sufi** traditions we find many similarities between them. To begin with in both traditions there is an emphasis on concentrating attention upon a single deity. In **Sufism**, this is called **dhikr** and **ishq** in **bhakti**, it is the idea of the **ishta deva**. Secondly, the notion of **viraha** in **bhakti** can be compared to what the **Sufis** call **dard**. Just as **viraha** leads to experiencing **agni** (fire in the soul) **dard** leads to **atish**. Finally, both the traditions as we see talk about a love between the devotee and the deity and in both cases this lover for the deity resembles the love that one feels for one's beloved and the nature of pain and suffering of the devotee in his relationship to the divine, are found in both traditions. Thus, we can say that these similarities do point to the two traditions having interacted with each other.

UNIT 25 MEDIEVAL RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS I — VEERASHAIVISM

Structure

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 What is Veerashaivism ?
- 25.3 Socio-Historical Background of Veerashaivism
 - 25.3.1 Origin of Veerashaivism
 - 25.3.2 Social Conditions Prevailing in Medieval Times
 - 25.3.3 Emergence of Veerashaivism
 - 25.3.4 Bhakti Movement and Veerashaivism
- 25.4 Essential Features of Veerashaivism
 - 25.4.1 Worship of the Linga
 - 25.4.2 Anti-ritualism
 - 25.4.3 Anti-pollution Ideology
 - 25.4.4 Shatsthala, Astavarana and Panchachara
 - 25.4.5 Kayaka
- 25.5 Organisational Framework
 - 25.5.1 Jangana
 - 25.5.2 Mathas
- 26.6 Subsequent Developments and Contemporary Status
 - 25.6.1 Dilemmas and Divisions
 - 25.6.2 Contemporary Status
- 25.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 25.8 Key Words
- 25.9 Further Readings
- 25.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

25.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to

- define the social movement of the Veerashaivas of the 12th century A.D
- describe the socio-historical background of Veerashaivism list and elaborate the basic features of Veerashaivism
- point out the dilemmas and contemporary developments within Veerashaivism.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit (Unit 24) you looked at the **Sufi** and **Bhakti** movements. In this unit we are going to describe the social movement of the Veerashaivas. We will begin section 25.2 with a simple description of what the movement is all about. This will be followed by section 25.3 which traces some important aspects of the socio-historical background of Veerashaivism. In the next section (25.4) we will list out and elaborate the essential features of Veerashaivism. The organisational framework of the movement will be described in section 25.5. This will be followed by a brief observation on developments within the movement and a note on the contemporary status of Veerashaivism.

25.2 WHAT IS VEERASHAIVISM ?

Veerashaivism was a socio-religious movement which emerged around the middle of

the 12th century in north Karnataka. This movement of the Veerashaivas (meaning heroic Shaivas) challenged certain traditional Hindu beliefs and practices relating to caste, ritual pollution, and status of women. The movement projected for its followers a new social order which was based on ritual equality (in terms of worship and belief), sanctity of all work, and universal ritual purity i.e. purity of all followers irrespective of sex, age and occupation. This movement utilised Kannada, the spoken language of the masses, to communicate its ideas. The movement is closely linked with the name of Basaveswara (1105-1167) who is identified by many as the founding father of the movement. He was instrumental in popularising it in the Kannada speaking region of south India. Veerashaivas are also popularly known by another name, the Lingayats. Lingayats means bearers of the “Linga”, the symbol of Lord Shiva. The Veerashaivas or Lingayats worship only Lord Shiva in the form of a **Linga**. Veerashaivism holds that all Linga worshippers were equal and gained equal access to salvation. Salvation according to the Lingayats, came through hard work and dedication to remove social evils. In the following sections of the unit we will elaborate these aspects in a more detailed manner.

25.3 SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF VEERASHAIVISM

In the previous section we described Veerashaivism in a nutshell. In this section we will describe the origin and social conditions and factors associated with the emergence of this social movement. We will also point out the common grounds covered by Veerashaivism and the **Bhakti** movement.

25.3.1 Origin of Veerashaivism

Veerashaivism claims to have an ancient origin. It is believed to have emerged from Shaivism which centres around the worship of **Lord Shiva**. There is uncertain information about Veerashaivism until about the 12th century A.D. when Basava entered the scene. Many believe that it was he who propounded the ideas and practice of Veerashaivism as distinct from Shaivism, and other religious systems. It was since his time that Veerashaivism also came to be known as Lingayatism because the most important component of the faith was the **Ishtalinga** (phallic image of Shiva worn on the body). Veerashaivites were also called Lingayats since the 12th century, as every Veerashaivite wore a **Linga**, the image of Lord Shiva on his/her body.

Box 25.01

Some claim that Veerashaivism is much older than Basava. They insist that Basava was only reviver of the faith. They claim that Lingayat traditions were founded by five ascetics — **Ekorama, Panditaradhya, Revana, Marula and Viswaradhya** — who were held to have sprung from the head of Lord Shiva. Since there is little information about Veerashaivism as a broad social movement until about the 12th century, we can, for all practical purposes, say that Veerashaivism emerged around the 12th century during Basava's time. Since the 12th century, the terms Veerashaivism and Lingayatism became interchangeable. In the next sub-section we will look into the condition and factors which helped this movement to emerge in a big way.

25.3.2 Social Conditions Prevailing in Medieval Times

Hinduism was the dominant religion in the Deccan Plateau (which included Karnataka) in medieval times. The Hindu religion had its own distinctive characteristics in every area of life and experience. Worship of numerous Gods and

Goddesses, idol worship, complex religious rituals, visits to temples and pilgrim centres, and an elaborate system of life-cycle rituals were an important part of Hindu social life.

A caste system that was based on unequal rights, status, duties privileges and obligations prevailed. The high castes exercised authority over the low castes. Magico religious practices perpetuated by Brahmin priests helped in building up a system of exploitation of groups and individuals who were placed in low status and esteem. Brahmins by and large had access to both material resources and spiritual knowledge.

In the Brahmanical caste system, the ritual status of caste and individuals within the caste depended on a host of criteria. One of the most important criteria was the maintenance of ritual purity, as opposed to 'ritual pollution'. The 'pure' and the 'impure' status of individuals and groups were clearly and rigidly defined. Life crises such as birth and death were considered polluting, hence the need for purification. Castes were graded in terms of purity with the upper twice born castes graded as ritually higher in status than other castes. Large groups of people termed as Shudras were assigned low ritual status and denied access to many things. Women were also considered ritually impure as compared to men, especially due to the pollution arising from menstruation and childbirth. Women were assigned a very low status in society and could not participate in many activities that men could.

Hereditary specialisation of occupations were also noticeable. Some occupations were graded as ritually higher than others. Differential power, prestige and esteem were assigned on that basis. For instance priesthood, ministerial assignments in the kings court were high status occupations. Barbers and sweepers, on the other hand were assigned very low status in society. Reciprocal interactions between members were also dictated by notions of purity and pollution. Interaction between castes was highly restricted and a clearly defined network of rules prevailed, which inhibited interaction and intermarriage between castes. On the whole we can say that inequality — social, religious and economic — prevailed during this time. Exploitation and oppression of high castes over the low castes were witnessed in many areas of life.

25.5.3 Emergence of Veerashaivism

It is not merely in the existence of these social conditions like the inequality created by the caste system, that gave rise to this social movement. A host of inter-related factors aided the emergence of Veerashaivism as an important social movement. Prof. C.N. Venugopal outlines these factors to be i) royal patronage combined with the missionary zeal of the activists ii) the spread of vernacular Lingayat religious literature iii) the enthusiastic response from the low castes to the new life conditions offered by the movement.

Let us examine these factors one by one.

i) Royal patronage

From the 2nd century A.D. to 12th century A.D. Jainism was another major religio-political force in Karnataka apart from Hinduism. Successive Hindu kings had fostered Jain trade religion and architecture. But by the 12th A.D. due to internal conflicts and external aggression in the political area in Karnataka, the Jains lost their political royal patronage at this point of time. Vigorous and effective propagation by the leaders of this movement drew the attention of the royalty which began to give material and moral support and patronage to the leaders. The trading castes in Karnataka also began supporting the movement. Basaveswara (popularly known as Basava) held a key position in the kingdom of Bijjala. Political office backed by

royal support was helpful in promoting the ideology of the movement. Several rules of Karnataka like the King of Vijayanagar, Mysore, the royal family and rajas of Coorg put material and morality to the movement that was emerging.

ii) **Leadership combined with the missionary zeal of the activists.**

As mentioned earlier, the emergence of Veerashaivism as a powerful social movement is mainly ascribed to the leadership provided by Basava. He with a band of loyal followers like Allamma Prabhu, Cennabasava, Siddharama and others gave shape and vigour to the movement. At this point, it is essential that we look in greater detail at what Basaveswara or Basava did for this movement.

Basava was born in 1125 A.D. in a Brahmin family in Karnataka. Right from his early age he was critical of the beliefs and practices perpetuated by high caste Hindus in society. He saw beyond his times. He began articulating the ideology to protest and reform from an early age. He wanted to restructure the social order on an egalitarian basis.

Box 25.02

The Veerashaivite movement seems to have begun in Kalyana in north Karnataka. Basava proclaimed that Lord Shiva was the Supreme Being and all those who worshipped him are equal irrespective of sex, age or caste. In order to become a member of this movement Basava insisted, that everyone must wear a 'linga' on his/her body and worship it daily. Also he said that everyone must give up their caste, sex and community based status differences. Basava also greatly emphasized the devotional element of the faith he was trying to establish. He said everyone was equal in the eyes of God and there must be free interaction in every sphere between all members who believed in Veerashaivism.

One of the most important steps taken by Basava to popularise this movement was the establishment of the Anubhava Mantapa (Hall of Discussion of Experience) at Kalyana. Members drawn from various social and economic backgrounds met here and discussed many things, mainly the various aspects of Veerashaivism. The discussion was carried on under the guidance of leaders and conducted in Kannada, the local language of the people. The ideological format of Veerashaivism was drawn from these discussions held at the Anubhava Mantapa.

Basava's teachings were simple and easily understandable. He wrote, in simple verse form known as **Vachanas** which could be easily memorised. He was assisted by a band of devoted followers like Allamma Prabhu, Cennabasava, Siddharama and others Basava personally initiated newcomers into the movement.

The leaders converted many people to **Linga** worship. They advocated and allowed open recruitment to their movement. Most of the energies of the leaders were spent on clarifying and outlining the ideology of protest and reform. They emphasised on Bhakti or personal devotion and insisted that all are equal and pure in the eyes of Shiva. Such as emphasis on equality in worship, equality of salvation, and work, was highly attractive specially to the lower castes. The fact that the leaders spread the message of their faith in Kannada greatly helped in stimulating a positive response from the masses.

iii) **The spread of vernacular lingayat religious literature**

The leaders of the movement wrote and spoke their ideas and beliefs in Kannada. They preferred to write in the prose medium. Even before the emergence of

Veerashaivite literature the Jains had contributed to the development of Kannada language and literature. Basava and his contemporaries brought into existence Veerashaiva literature in simple prose. It was in a language that could be easily understood even by the common man. This greatly helped in popularising the movement. There emerged innumerable writers and many women among them. One of the popular women writers was Akkamahadevi. The composition of the verses in Kannada put vigour and support to the movement. The simple prose lines consisting of not more than three or four lines could be easily memorised by the people. Many of **Vachanas** are collected in the book "**Sanya Sampadava**". They form guides to human conduct from the time the **Vachanas** have emerged till today. Lingayats pay homage to thinkers and saints especially women saints and thinkers by reciting their work during festive and ceremonial occasions.

iv) **Enthusiasm of the low castes for taking to Veerashaivism**

As mentioned earlier, Veerashaivism opened its gates to all. It held no barriers of castes, class, age or sex. The movement waged a fierce battle against those beliefs and practices that discriminated one man from another and a woman from a man. Basava and his followers emphasised that both manual and mental work was equal in status and one must be devoted to work.

The movement attracted and secured many adherents among low castes who were by profession potters, barbers, or washermen. Conversion to this faith did not require that these castes should give up their previous occupation. People from the farmers harding and trading occupations were also drawn towards this movement. The social groups in which the movement was anchored exhibited predominantly lower caste social status. For instance some of the members who were active Veerashaivites were Chennaiya who was a scavenger by profession and **Appanna** who was a barber by professions Basavas three close associates were untouchables. The untiring efforts of activists and the appeal of the new faith which promised a life without restrictions or inequality was instrumental in promoting Veerashaivism in a big way among many groups of people spread across Karnataka and its neighbouring places.

Activity 1

Visit a Hindu matha nearest to the place where you live and compare it with the mathas of Veerashaivism. If you do not have a matha near your place, visit a gurudwara or church or a mosque and list out its activities. Compare them with the activities of the Lingayat mathas. What similarities do you find ?

25.3.4 Bhakti Movement and Veerashaivism

In the context of our discussion of the socio-historical background of **Veerashaivism** it is pertinent to mention a few lines about the **Bhakti** movement. The **Bhakti** movement had come into prominence. It provided a kind of spiritual forum for people from different socio-economic background. The main features of the **Bhakti** movement were (i) cultivation of personal devotion of God (ii) the emphasis on rituals (iii) monotheism and (iv) participation as a collectivity with a feeling of brotherhood and equality. In the previous unit we have described in greater detail the **Bhakti** movement. The movement provided a macro-land link for the Hindus and non-Hindu masses scattered over towns and villages. The **Bhakti** movement also linked the elite and the masses at many levels i.e. intellectual, literary, religious and so on.

Veerashaivism too shared some of these characteristics. It emphasized the element of bhakti to one God, Shiva. It repeats ritualism. Both leaders and followers were

linked together in an equal relationship with God. The social background of the devotees to Lord Shiva also varied. It included men, women rulers, ministers, trading groups, barbers, potters, scavengers and so on. **The emphasis was on dignity of labour and equality was promised to all significant changes in a society which was rooted in inequality and exploitation.**

Now we will turn our attention to the essential features of Veerashaivism in the next section.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Veerashaivism emerged in the 12th century in
 - a) Tamil Nadu
 - b) West Bengal
 - c) Karnataka
 - d) Assam
- 2) Veerashaivites are also popularly known as
 - a) Lingayats
 - b) Nayanars
 - c) Vaishnavites
 - d) Alvars
- 3) The emergence of Veerashaivism as a social movement is associated with the name of
 - a) Nayak
 - b) Meera
 - c) Surdas
 - d) Basava
- 4) What are the four factors which aided the emergence of the movement ? Your answer must be within 8 lines.

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25.4 ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF VEERASHAIVISM

To re-emphasise what we have said before, **Veerashaivism was a social movement of protest and reform.** It protested against the beliefs and practices upheld by Brahminical Hinduism. It wanted to reform Hindu society of its social evils like exploitation of the upper castes by the lower castes, of the unjust treatment meted

out to women and so on. It projected a society where all were considered equal in all spheres of life.

The essential features of Veerashaivism are:

- i) rejection of the worship of multitude of Gods and Goddesses;
- ii) anti-ritualism;
- iii) anti pollution ideology;
- iv) **Shasthala ashtavaranas and panchacharas;**
- v) **Kayaka.**

Let us know describe the features.

25.4.1 Worship of the Linga

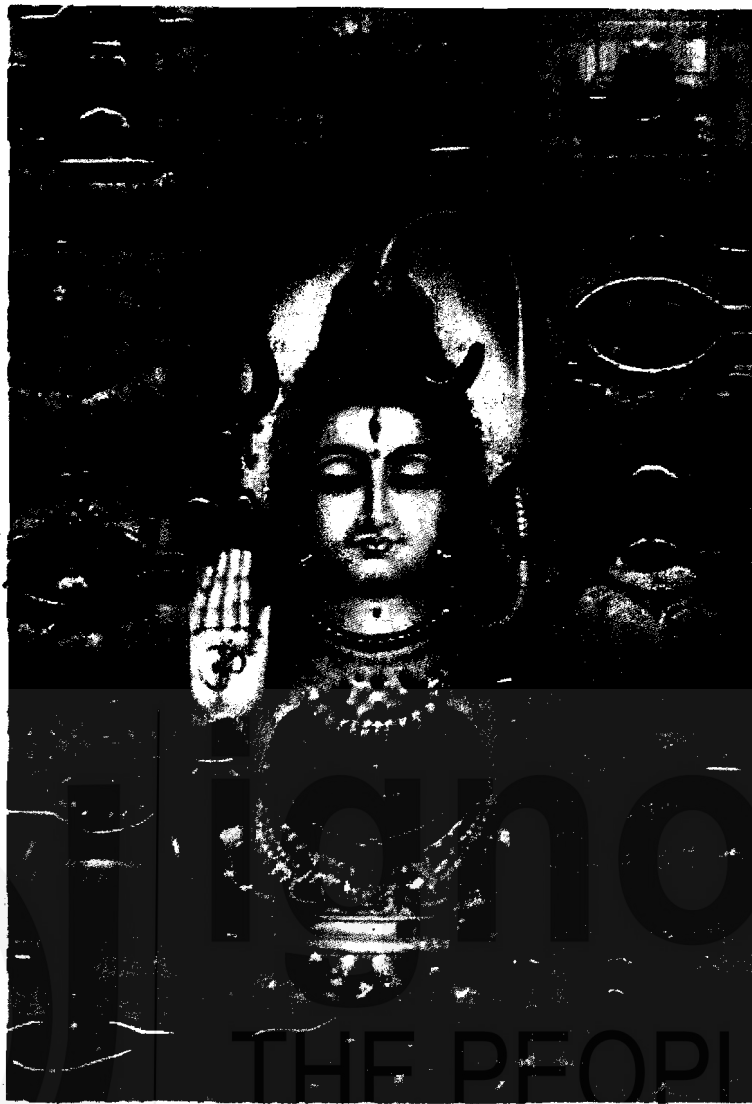
Veerashaivism did not advocate the worship of idols, and the worship of a multitude of Gods and Goddesses. It emphasised the worship of only one God namely Lord Shiva. Shiva was the only Supreme Being to be worshipped in the form of a **Linga**. Every man or woman who became a Veerashaivite became a Lingayat or a bearer of Lord Shiva. He or she had to wear the image of Shiva on his/her body and worship it daily. This one of the most important features of Veerashaivism consists in the wearing of the personal **lingam** or **Ishtalinga**, the emblem of the God Shiva on the body of member of the faith. This applied to both men and women to all age groups irrespective of their social status.

The utterance of "**Namah Shivaya**" was the most important simple form of salutation to Lord Shiva. The **Ishta Linga** or the personal Lingam was an inseparable part of Veerashaivites life and remained with the devotee till death. For the woman, it was her spiritual husband and for the man his spiritual consort. The Linga was the source and goal of all things. The Linga helped to grant all objects desired and ward off the undesirable.

This emphasis on the **Ishtalinga** can be noted as a symbol of equality of membership in the community. Since both men and women, young and old were required to wear a personal **Lingam**, there was sense of equality of sexes and age groups. Anyone who wore the **Ishtalinga**, irrespective of his occupational subgrouping was regarded an equal. **Linga** was the ultimate reality to one and all in the Veerashaivite community.

25.4.2 Anti-ritualism

Veerashaivism also protested against many of the rituals perpetuated by Brahmanical Hinduism. It was against temple worship sacrifices and pilgrimages. Veerashaivites were forbidden to visit temples where a statue **Linga** had been installed. They were discouraged from participating or undertaking sacrificial ceremonies which involved slaughter, and elaborate offerings to Gods and Goddesses. Endowment to temples were also forbidden because Veerashaivism believed that such acts as these encouraged inequality between one devotee and another. Veerashaivism also discouraged visiting holy places as, such visits did not ensure inner purity according to them. Visiting holy places did not have any ritual significance for the Veerashaivite. To this day, Lingayats as a group do not participate in the Kumbha Mela festivals which are an important attraction to several Shaivite groups in Hindu society. Veerashaivism discouraged its followers from praying to idols of village deities. Meat eating and drinking of liquor was tabooed. Listening to oracles, believing in



Lord Shiva with characteristic trident and snake. Note that there is a variety of Shiva-lingas all around Shiva.

the efficacy of village exorcists and participating in the rites to witchcraft were also forbidden.

The anti-ritualistic nature of Veerashaivism was seen in the simple codes of conduct it laid down for its members. Every Lingayat by offering his daily prayers to Istalinga was expected to find peace and liberation without the help of a priest temple, or sacrifice. Veerashaivism advocated vegetarianism and whatever little rituals it adopted in the course of time which were similar for both men and women belonging to any caste or professing any occupation. All **Linga** wearers were equal free and pure from the taints of birth and death. This point leads us to the next important feature namely the antipollution ideology of Veerashaivism.

25.4.3 Anti-pollution Ideology

The Veerashaivism doctrine enjoined upon its members to desist from observing the "**Pancha Sutakas**" or Five Pollutions namely the pollution arising from (i) birth (ii) death (iii) menstruation (iv) spittle and (v) caste contact i.e. contact with the so-called inferior castes. These five pollutions were an important part of the belief systems and practices of Brahmanical Hinduism. All Hindus have definite obligations to observe during birth and death which includes the performance of purificatory rites. The childbirth of a Lingayat woman however, is free from the pollution of birth; so is the mother who has delivered the child. Death, according to Veerashaivism was considered as a merger with Lord Shiva. It was an event to be rejoiced not

to be mourned, an event which needed no purification for a Veerashaivite who wore the **Linga** on his body was mentally and physically pure. The dead are buried and not burnt among the Lingayat till this date.

The observation of menstrual pollution was looked upon by Veerashaivism as a hinderance to the daily worship of Lord Shiva which was obligatory for every Lingayat woman, child and man. Among many orthodox Hindu groups, women were deined access to God and participation in many social activities during their monthly menstrual period. **Veerashaivism did not advocate the observance of segregation of women from religious and other social activities during menstruation.**

The observance of spittle pollution (pollution arising from touch or contact with the spit especially observed by Brahmins) was again looked upon as unessential by Veerashaivism. All were equal in the eyes of Shiva hence one man could not pollute another man in any way. Thus caste contact, pollution, and orthodox beleif and practice was also totally rejected by Veerashaivism.

Veerashaivism believed in mental purity which was essential for the attainment of personal salvation. This mental purity, according to Veerashaivism, was not based on any ritual purity as orthodox Hinduism demanded.

Box 25.03

Many of the **Vachanas** of Basava and his followers point out the limitations placed on the human mind and body by the observation of these five ritual pollutions. For instance, the elaborate purificatory rites related to birth and death observed by the high castes were very expensive and often led to a great degree of economic stress. This economic strain was felt specially by poor and middle class families. The core of the Veerashaiva teachings is their refusal to recognize the concept of ritual pollution basic to Brahmanical Hinduism. The **Ishtalinga** worn by a Lingayat ensured ritual purity. These aspects of Veerashaivism are consistent and fundamental to the faith, and deemed essential for salvation.

25.4.4 Shatsthala, Astavarana and Panchachara

So far, while describing the essential features of Veerashaivism we have focused mainly on those aspects of Brahmanical Hinduism that Veerashaivism criticised and tried to reform. Now let us look at some of the important components of its belief systems from the viewpoint of the individual.

The three most important were **Shatsthala**, **Astavarana** and **Panchachara**. The **Shatsthala** consisted of six steps which an individual had to take in order to attain a merger of his self with Lord Shiva. The **Astavarana** serve as covers which protected an individual from dangers which came in the way of his spiritual pursuits. The eight covers were the:

- i) **Linga** — The emblem of the Supreme i.e. Lord Shiva which was not only an object of worship but also that which had to reside in the body of the devotee for ever.
- ii) **Guru** — the spiritual perceptor who initiated a new comer into the spiritual knowledge of Veerashaivism. Lingayat men, women and children wore Linga through initiation by a Guru. This initiation ceremony whereby an individual took a spiritual birth in the Guru's hands was extremely significant in that the individual was freed from the clutches of caste and entered a society where he was equal to all and inferior to none.

- iii) **Jangama** — devoted person who was endowed with excellent knowledge and he moved from place to place preaching the doctrines of Veerashaivism. The **Jangama** guided the devotee in his spiritual activities.
- iv) **Padodaka** — This meant 'thirtha' or holy water which served to integrate the devotee and the preceptor. The holy water "purified" the devotee who partook of it.
- v) **Prasada** or the returned offerings indicated that those objects offered to God during worship become sacred. The **Padodaka** and **Prasada** were taken with great devotion in same place by devotees coming from different social backgrounds. The distinctions of caste, sex, creed or colour ceased to exist and a sense of fraternity among fellow faith members was promoted.
- vi) **Vibhuti** was the sacred ash that was applied on the forehead of the devotee.
- vii) **Rudraksha** referred to the sacred chain worn around the neck of the Veerashaivite, and
- viii) **Mantra** — the simple form of salutation to Lord Shiva through the utterance of the mantra "Namah Shivya".

Box 25.04

The **Panchachara** were five religious stances or postures which a Veerashaivite had to take in order to protect the faith from disintegration. The five positions were the **Lingachara**, **Sadachara**, **Shivachara**, **Ganachara** and **Brityachara**. The **Lingachara** was the acknowledgement of the absolute equality of all Lingawearers. The **Sadachara** was the adoption of **Kayaka** (toil with a sense of duty, devotion and service) as the guarding principle of life. **Shivachara** was the pursuit of the tenets of Veerashaivism with a pure heart while **Ganachara** was the adoption of militancy to fight off any threats to the integrity of the religious community. **Brityachara** was the implementation of 'dasoha' to sustain the religious community. **Dasoha** implied community sharing of one's labour i.e. an individual rendered service to his community by donating generously from his resources. The service to others was based partly on the income derived from his toil.

All these three components reflected the principle and practice of equity of worship and salvation that Veerashaivism was trying to promote. The beliefs and practices were/are applicable to all **Linga** wearing men, women and children. Veerashaivism insisted on the sanctity of all work, mental and manual emphasised equal opportunities for all in society to pursue their goals. This was keeping in mind the good of the society. The belief in equality of worship and salvation was also seen in the emphasis on **Kayaka** or toil.

25.4.5 Kayaka

Veerashaivism considered all work as equal and important. **Toil, with a sense of duty and dedication was considered essential for the livelihood and good of the individual and the welfare of the community.** Lingayatism made no hierarchical discrimination between occupations. The social consequences of this ideology relating to toil was a promotion of an affirmative attitude and constructive approach to the problems of work and labour in society. It preached a worldly rational and liberal attitude to work as compared to the attitude promoted by Brahmanical Hinduism. Brahmanical Hinduism did not uphold the pursuit of worldly activities. Veerashaivism advocated that one can attain salvation by finding Heaven in one's work and by devotion to work. No occupation was to be looked down upon and an individual could change his occupation whenever he wanted. By working hard, he could earn wealth, improve his standard of living, and at the same time he

had to contribute some of his earnings to the service of the community. Today there are many educational institutions, and charitable trusts started by the Lingayats for the welfare of both Lingayats and non-Lingayats.

The principle of **Kayaka** was implemented as early as Basava's time. In the **Anubhava Mantapa** built by **Basava** there was absolutely no distinction between persons holding high office and those earning lower income. The engagement of **Kayaka** was conceived in two ways. (i) if a person was already gainfully employed he was advised to send physical and social help to support the communal services such as feeding and sheltering needy people (ii) If there was an unemployed person he was encouraged to take up a job.

Thus we can see that **Veerashaivism** tried to integrate the personal and social aspects of an individual life on the principle of religious and social equality. People from different castes and occupations were attracted towards this movement. The beliefs and practice it stood for served as guides for day to day behaviour. For women, **Veerashaivism** offered liberation and equality with men. **Veerashaivism** advocated widow remarriage, discouraged child marriage and encouraged women to be the active participants in the promotional activities relating to the faith. Since both men and women were required to wear a personal **Lingam** and worship it daily, a sense of equality of sexes in the religious sphere was created.

Now we move on to another aspect of **Veerashaivism**, the organisational framework developed by it in order to propagate uphold and sustain its doctrines.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) List out the essential features of **Veerashaivism**.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)
 - e)
- 2) Select the correct answer:
Personal **Lingam** is to be worn by
 - a) only men
 - b) only women
 - c) only priests
 - d) men, women and children
- 3) Select the right answer.
All **Linga** wearers were free from the pollution caused by
 - a) birth, death and menstruation
 - b) birth, death, menstruation, spittle and caste contact
 - c) birth and death only
 - d) interaction with inferior castes
- 4) What are the three most important components of the **Lingayat** religious ideological structure ? Answer in less than 5 lines.

lineage. It was this process of splitting into two divisions that mainly laid the foundations of caste like groupings, within the **Lingayat** community. What is important to remember is that the **Jangama** was not a hereditary priest who enjoyed high status because he was born in a caste that enjoyed high ritual status. He performed both religious and secular tasks and could be drawn from any social and economic background.

25.5.2 Mathas

Mathas or religious centres have always been an important of Hindu religious organisation. Since **Veerashaivism** did not believe or encourage in temple worship, **mathas** served as institutional alternatives to temples. **Veerashaivism** established large **mathas** which had small branches all over Karnataka and neighbouring regions. The heads of the larger **mathas** were celibate and commanded respect among the people. In all matters relating to the **mathas** the people in that area were invited to participate in decision making. This practice of involving people from diverse backgrounds to discuss religious as well as secular matters can be traced to Basava. In his **Anubhava Mantapa** (Hall of Discussion) people from different backgrounds met to discuss ideas relating to **Veerashaivism**.

The notable activities that the **mathas** have been following are, propagation of **Lingayat** doctrine, sheltering and feeding the needy and educating the laity in secular subjects. While propagating the ideas of **Lingayatism** the **mathas** did not specifically recommend celibacy or asceticism (giving up worldly desires and possessions). They emphasised the purity of heart, cultivation of piety and engagement of good deeds as the right steps to reach God. There was supposed to be no show or glamour attached to the heads and members of the **mathas**. The hierarchy within a **matha** was to be kept at a minimum and the succession in the headship of a **matha** was done by nomination or by seniority.

Activity 2

In your own family or neighbourhood or community, look out for those individuals who have departed from traditional caste rules and expectations. To what extent have they succeeded in being a deviant — an outcaste — a rebel ? Keeping in view the dilemma faced by newcomers in **Veerashaivism**, list out the dilemmas faced by the individuals you have observed.

The **Lingayat mathas** all over Karnataka became a source of help to people in despair. While grants were often received from the patronage of rulers and local chieftains, there were also voluntary donations made by the public. The resident guru of a **matha**, known as the **ayya** (elder) not only provided shelter and food but also maintained discipline in the local community. Those who were attached to **mathas** had to follow his instructions. The **mathas** provided help not only to **Lingayat** groups but also to **non-Lingayats** on different occasions. They were closely associated with the political processes in Karnataka right from the 12th century.

Especially during turbulent times, the **mathas** were used as sounding boards for assessing public opinion. This was so particularly between 15-18 centuries A.D.

In the next sections we will focus on some of the dilemmas and lapses which developed within the **Veerashaivites** community in the subsequent periods after its emergence. We will also outline the contemporary status of **Veerashaivism**.

25.6 SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CONTEMPORARY STATUS

We now turn to developments which have taken place since medieval times in Veerashaivism.

25.6.1 Dilemmas and Divisions within the Veerashaivite Community

From the 12th century to the 16th century, Veerashaivism grew as a powerful social movement in Karnataka, winning numerous followers. The quick conversions, it brought about gave rise to frequent lapses amongst its members. New converts found it difficult to give up their old ways of thinking and acting specially relating to caste and worship. They were caught between the old and the new values. Within a single household some converted to Veerashaivism while other did not do so. This led to interpersonal fractions within a family. At a larger level, Veerashaivism faced strong opposition from orthodox sections of Hinduism, specially the Brahmins whose position and power came to be challenged by the new faith. In spite of these pressures, due to the writing efforts of the activists and the appeal of its ideas and practices, Lingayatism became a force to reckon with in Karnataka. According to Professor Venugopal the greatest numerical expansion of the **Lingayats** was in the 15th and 16th centuries. Many feudal chieftains of Karnataka specially south Karnataka converted to the **Lingayat** path. This feudal patronage while adding prestige and economic strength to the faith also introduced divisions within it.

After the 16th century **Veerashaivism** slowed down its conversion activities. The closing the boundaries to outsiders began and rifts within the community emerged. Hereditary status groups of washermen, barbers, artisans and traders began to develop and these groups became endogamous. Their loyalties were given to different **mathas**. The device to acquire power and control over the vast resources accumulated over the years, led to divisions within the **Veerashaivite** community.

Many departures from the ideals and practices propounded by **Veerashaivism** began to be seen. For instance, there was no provision for a priestly group as found in Brahmanical Hinduism, among the **Lingayats**. The **Lingachara** was the acknowledgement of equality of all **Linga wearers**. But in course of time the **Guru** and the **Jangama** order among the **Lingayats** began to assume hereditary class characteristics which was not foreseen by the early **Lingayats**. The growing number of **mathas** provided a convenient place for recruiting the desired members into the **Guru** or **Tangama** order. Control over monasteries, properties attached to them such as buildings and educational trusts created by the charities of the public, became an important source of hereditary succession. The existence of a priestly group not only created inequality among worshippers but also led to a neglect of the principle of **kayaka**.

As mentioned earlier in sub-section 25.5.1 **mathas** were divided into **Guru** and **Virakta mathas**, and each **Lingayat** had its own set of followers. The **Guru** order claimed that their traditions were much older than the 12th century **Lingayat** creed. This order blamed Basava and his followers for hastily converting low castes into **Lingayatism** and thereby **weakening** its discipline. The **Virakta** followers claimed that Basava and Allama Prabhu were of divine origin. They claimed that the **Guru matha** were encouraging Brahmanical traditions which led to the oppression of castes and priestly dominance. By the 17th century the **Guru** and **Jangama** amity felt apart in the struggle for power and control. Though these internal divisions did weaken the community strength, **Lingayats** became a powerful community in Karnataka's political, social and economic life.

25.6.2 Contemporary Status

Keeping in view the belief and respect **Lingayats** had for the principle of **Kayaka**, we find that till about the first quarter of the twentieth century, **Lingayat** groups did not make any drastic change in their occupations. In the 1970's the Miller Committee set up by the King of old Mysore classified **Lingayats** as backward in some respects and recommended reservations for them in education, government service, and other professions. The **Lingayats** made use of these opportunities and today we find them in many high-status positions in the Karnataka government. The Miller Committee did not consider them economically backward as capital was available to the community for many occupations like agriculture and trading. There was a concern for the political future of the **Lingayats** and till today old and new occupations exist side by side within the community as there is little inferiority attached to occupations.

After Independence in 1947, there was a movement to reorganise Indian States on a linguistic basis. Even before Independence, the **Lingayat mathas** of north Karnataka were actively involved in Kannada speaking districts. In 1956 when the Kannada speaking districts were incorporated into the State Karnataka, the **Lingayats** took great initiative in the political integration of the State. Till date the **mathas** play an active role in State politics. **Lingayats** have become chief ministers in Karnataka and the resources of the **mathas** are used during elections.

Today **Lingayats**, according to Professor Venugopal are a weakly knit aggregate of status groups and individuals. A number of **Lingayat** writings point out the discontinuities and contradictions within the community. The writings, conferences and the **Sabhas** organised by the **Lingayats** appeal at reform of the contradictions within the sect. The Liberal approach of the leaders, has appeal both to **Lingayat** and non-**Lingayat** men and women.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What are the two important elements in the **Veerashaivite** organisational framework ? Answer in 2 lines.

.....

2) Select the right answer:

The **Tangamas** could be recruited

- a) only from the Brahman priestly caste
- b) from any socio-economic background but they should be converted to **Lingayatism**
- c) only from low castes
- d) only from the royalty.

3) What are the two important weakening factors in the development of **Veerashaivism** ? Answer in about 8 lines.

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25.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the socio-religious movement of the Veerashaivas which emerged in Karnataka during the medieval period. We first defined it in terms of “where, what and who” components of the movement, then we described the socio-historical background of the movement in terms of origin, social conditions and factors associated with its emergence. We also pointed out the common grounds **Veerashaivism** covered with the **Bhakti** movement. The bulk of our discussion was then shifted to the essential features of **Veerashaivism**. This was followed by a description of its organisational framework. We concluded the unit by outlining the subsequent developments within **Veerashaivism** since its emergence and its contemporary status.

25.8 KEY WORDS

Ishtalinga	: the phallic image of Lord <i>Shiva</i> worn on the body of the <i>Lingayat</i> .
Vachana	: a saying in simple verse form.
Shatsthala	: the six steps which helped the individual to progress towards the attainment of merger of his soul with Lord Shiva .
Astavaranas	: the eight protections or covers essential to Veerashaivites .
Panchachara	: the five postures or stances adopted by every Veerashaivite to protect the disintegration of the faith.
Ideology	: a system of beliefs.
Kayaka	: toil with a sense of dedication, devotion and service.
Tangama	: a person who spreads and consolidates the tenets of Veerashaivism . As a collective term it refers to the priestly order among the Veerashaivite .
Mathas	: religious centres or monastic centres.

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25.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) c.
- 2) a.
- 3) d.
- 4) The four factors which aided the emergence of the movement were royal patronage, charismatic and committed leaders, spread of Kannada religious literature and the enthusiastic response from low castes.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The essential features are
 - a) Rejection of worship of numerous Gods and Goddesses and worship of **Linga**
 - b) anti-ritualism
 - c) anti-pollution ideology
 - d) **Shatsthala, astavarana and Panchachara**
 - e) **Kayaka**
- 2) d.
- 3) b.
- 4) The most important components of the **Lingayat** ideological structure are **Shatsthala, Astavarana and Panchachara**.
- 5) **Kayaka** meant hard work or toil in **Veerashaivism**. A person who is gainfully

employed was expected to serve others also with the fruits of his labour. Idleness was not encouraged by **Veerashaivism**. Devotion to work was emphasised.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The two most important elements are the **Jangama** and the **mathas**.
- 2) b.
- 3) The two most important weakening factors are
 - 1) inability of the individual to accept the new faith totally when he is still under the group of old values and practices.
 - 2) internal divisions and feuds within the mathas and members of the faith.



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UNIT 26 MODERN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS II — ARYA SAMAJ

Structure

- 26.0 Objectives
- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 Need for Reform
- 26.3 Foundation of the Arya Samaj
 - 26.3.1 Organisation of Arya Samaj
 - 26.3.2 Rules of the Arya Samaj
 - 26.3.3 Members of the Arya Samaj
 - 26.3.4 Publications of Vedabhashya
- 26.4 Arya Samaj Movement and Reform
 - 26.4.1 Three Challenges to Hinduism
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26.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have studied this unit, you should be able to understand

- socio-economic conditions that needed reforms
- foundation, organisation and rules of Arya Samaj
- teaching of Arya Samaj
- major contributions of Arya Samaj
- Arya Samaj Movement and Modern India

26.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we point out the need for reform in Indian society that was noticed and acted upon by the Arya Samaj. We start with the founding of the Arya Samaj, the rules of the Arya Samaj, and who were the first members. We then go on to the Arya Samaj movement with respect to reform. This is with reference to the challenges to Hinduism, the emancipation of women, and the role of Arya Samaj in politics. The material for this unit is derived from the books given in **Further Reading** at the end of the unit.

26.2 NEED FOR REFORM

Swami Dayanand the founder of the Arya Samaj was born in 1824, when India was ruled by the British. Dayanand was the son of a Brahmin father and mother. His education started at the age of five and in his 8th year he was invested with the sacred thread. Dayanand's religious transformation occurred when at the age of 14 he was asked to observe the fast of Shivaratri. Dayanand and his father went to a temple for the prayer and chanting mantras. As Dayanand watched a mosque climbed the statue of Shiva and then began eating the offerings. This set Dayanand off on his religious quest. He realised that the idol itself could not be the god himself. It was an age when means of transportation and communication were relatively primitive. There were few printing press or good news papers. The initial

fear of the British government was that press and modern education would create an atmosphere ripe for sedition.

During that period the Britishers adopted the policy of producing economically cheap English educated clerks on a mass scale to run the British administration in India. The basic motive behind this policy was to de-culturise and de-humanise English educated persons.

The important problems of those days was the problems created by British rule, and a host of other evils that branched out from colonial oppression of India. These included the threat of mass level conversion of the Indians to Christianity, the custom of untouchability that condemns Shudras to a sub-human existence, the low status of women, the purdah system, child marriage, illiteracy and also the most unfortunate Sati-system. These problems made Dayanand restless and uneasy. Further there was the problem of the growing pauperisation of masses as a result of the policy to reduce India to an agricultural colony of industrialised England.

Box 26.01

Dayanand's education was Vedic and his father was one of his teachers. His education began with the Yajur Veda (one of the four Vedas) and continued in Sanskrit learning the rules of grammar and their application. Logic, philosophy, law, and ethics etc. were also taught. But Dayanand was more than a student. He was a seeker after enlightenment. He brooded over the problem of life and death.

To help him get over his brooding a marriage was fixed for him, but a week before his marriage he ran away from home at the age of 21. He became a **sadhu** and never regretted it. For 15 years (1845-1860 A.D.), Dayanand wandered all over India, quenching his thirst for knowledge, by meeting scores of other **sadhus** and pandits. Dayanand completed his education when he met Swami Virjanand Saraswati. Swami Virjanand charged Swami Dayanand to purge Hinduism of all the evils that existed in it. He told Dayanand that he must enter the world as an independent teacher. He took a pledge from Swami Dayanand that he would devote his life to the dissemination of truth. Thereafter Dayanand spent his life honouring the pledge he had given to his **guru**.

The idea was that India would only produce raw materials for British factories, and serve as the captive market for their machine made goods. This was made possible due to India's backwardness, superstitions, multiplicity of sects, gurus and sub-faiths, each running down the other. Finally there was the predominance of the Brahmin priests who made other movements like **Bhakti** initially difficult to follow by their reprobation. This plethora of problems started Dayanand straight in the face, and he felt that he must do something about it.

For a proper understanding of the emergence of Arya Samaj we have to transport ourselves mentally to the period when colonisation was at its zenith.

India was governed by foreigners for more than ten centuries. Such a prolonged spell of domination demanded the spirit of India and weakened her. This whole period was of decadence and anaemic activity with an exception of bright patches such as the rise of Marathas, Peshwas and Rajputs, in the south, and the rise of Chalukyas, Cholas and Maharaja Ranjeet Singh in the Punjab. Foreign rule led to a great degree of dependence among Indians. The Brahmin priests were the final authority for all matters, including rituals and customs. The householder could not do anything without consulting them. The Brahmin was often very educated, but he carried his "**patra**" or "**panchang**", and nobody could question either his book or

his authority. The Brahmin priest pontificated in all ceremonies from birth to death. He had to be well fed, paid handsomely and kept in good humour. Ignorance, superstition and blind faith in all rituals of the past held supreme sway. However it must be pointed out that not all Indians were under the blind rule of Brahmins and also that movements such as **Bhakti**, **Sufism** and **Veerashaivism** had grown and flourished during the period.

Untouchability held away among the Hindus who did not touch millions of their own brothers — the Shudras for fear of pollution. If they did, they had to take a cleansing bath. There was a question of interdinning with them. The Hindu world was divided into a large number of sects and subsects, each with their own Guru and their main scripture. Questioning and enquiry was not their method; whatever was written in their sacred books and interpreted by their Guru became their creed. The scriptures were graded as sacrosanct, however any clever pandit could add his own invention to promote his own group-vested interests or special privileges in the name of the “Rishi” who was the original author. Such interpolations, though few in number, distorted the meanings of the original text and created total confusion in the interpretation of such texts. Swami Dayanand sought to unite all Hindus under the banner of the Vedas. He felt that so far as the Vedas were concerned interpolations were impossible.

Box 26.02

Dayanand preached his own vision of Hinduism. He entered into many debates with learned Pandits. He travelled far and wide in Northern India. In 1872 a meeting with Brahma Samaj leaders made him change his mode of address from Sanskrit to Hindi and was thus able to get a better response from the middle classes of the Hindu community. He founded schools and periodicals with the help of the Hindi speaking middle classes. Numerous books and pamphlets were also published. In 1875 the Arya Samaj was founded in Bombay (See 26.3 of this unit). This continued to exist but it was North India that really welcomed Dayanand's message.

26.3 FOUNDATION OF ARYA SAMAJ

Swami Dayanand took an important and far reaching decision during his tour to Bombay in 1875. This decision was regarding the foundation of “Arya Samaj”. This organisation was founded to plant his message and bring reform firmly to the soil of north India. It went on to have an enormous impact on the development of Hinduism and of Indian nationalism.

The idea of an organisation had been in Dayanand's mind for some time. He had tried several times earlier to form a society. Once in Arrah in 1872 and again at Banaras in 1874, but both attempts had been short lived. On January 16, 1875 he set up the Arya Samaj at Rajkot but it did not flourish. Again in January 1875 he set up another Arya Samaj at Ahmedabad, but this attempt too failed. But on April 10, 1875 he set up the Arya Samaj at Bombay. It proved very successful. In Bombay a combination of factors created the right atmosphere for his renewed attempts to spread the influence of Arya Samaj. It may also be considered that by now Dayanand had a better preparation for setting up an organisation than earlier times. His ideas on reform had by now fully matured. There was his book the *Satyarth Prakash* in which he starts with his philosophy of education. He stresses that it is parental duty to make their children educated and of high moral character. He proposed that from the age of five children should learn Sanskrit and Hindi and foreign languages as well. His was thus a three language formula. He was also for parents disciplining their children and socializing them properly. Dayanand was for rigorous education from the age 8 years for both girls and boys, but was not for

co-educational institutions. All students are required to observe Bhramacharya. Dayanand was however for equality of men and women through education. He vehemently opposed child marriage and said that marriage should not be before the age 16 for girls and before the age 25 for boys.

One of the most important and unconventional steps that Dayanand took was to offer to “reclaim” Hindus who had changed their religion to Islam, Christianity and so on. This was often done *en masse* in what was known as the “**Suddhi**” ceremony or ceremony of purification.

The establishment of Arya Samaj raises a number of important questions. How did Dayanand conceive the role of the Samaj in society, and how did he see his own function in the Samaj? Who were the people interested in joining this organisation, and what were the reasons behind it? What kind of institution emerged (Arya Samaj) and what were its models? We will turn to these questions now.

It may be considered that Dayanand wanted to bring together all Hindus who agreed on a couple of very broad issues: (i) a dedication to religious and social reforms and (ii) a conviction in Hinduism that reform was to come through a revival of Vedic religion. Being organised as a body, these people would be more effective in helping one another in influencing the whole society. Swami Dayanand was not interested in creating a body of followers to propagate his ideas. He held the opinion that reform had to come from the people themselves. It is the task of the people to work for their personal improvement and for the upliftment of society. Dayanand would always be available to the people for advice—either in person or through his publications, but he would not be their leader. He had recognised the limitations of his own knowledge and refused to become the Guru of a group of devotees not even of a single individual.

On the basis of several statements of his we can conclude that from the very beginning Dayanand conceived his own role in the Samaj as anything but a dominant one. It was not his idea that the Samaj should become the esoteric heaven of a selected few, but rather that it should be a broad based and open association that could unite all Hindus of goodwill, around the unifying centre of their religion namely the Vedas. These fundamental attitudes of Dayanand towards the Samaj gradually became stronger as the organisation itself grew in later years.

The meeting and discussions that led to the establishment of the Samaj did not take much of Dayanand’s time, which was mostly devoted to his usual work that is preaching, teaching, writing books and establishing Arya Samajis all over India. The public lecture had become the main instruments of his teaching. He had mainly concentrated on the positive side of his message—the history of Aryan people, Vedic revelation, the doctrines of God and soul, ethics and the upliftment of the nation. He had always been reluctant to let the flow of his lectures be interrupted or to have long question and answer sessions after the lectures.

26.3.1 Organisation of Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj had an effective organisational structure. Every branch of the Arya Samaj is a unit in itself, and these are located in villages, towns and cities.

- i) Membership involved acceptance of the ten principles or rules (See Section 26.3.2 for a description of these), the payment of one per cent of monthly or yearly income to help the cause and general cooperation and participation in meetings etc. Such weekly meetings comprised of the **homa** ritual, bhajans and prayers. A lay person regardless of caste conducts these meetings.
- ii) The Executive Committee governed the affairs of the Arya Samaj. The office

bearers were five in number and additional members all elected by the members themselves. The officers are (a) President, (b) Vice-President, (c) Secretary, (d) Accountant, (e) Librarian. These members are supposed to actively participate in the activities of the Samaj.

These members as said are elected annually by ballot, and re-election is permissible.

- iii) Next there is the Provincial Assembly where representatives of the Samaj play an important part. Each Arya Samaj is to give 10 per cent of its gross income to the assembly. The assembly could raise funds of its own.
- iv) The apex body however is the All-India assembly. This is formed by representations from all provinces and links them together.
- v) There are young men's Arya Samajis which are liberal in admitting members who believe in god and pay a nominal monthly subscription for membership.
- vi) It may be pointed out that the Samaj has its meeting places anywhere it can organise them, whether they are their own building or any other place which will suffice and is available.

26.3.2 Rules of the Arya Samaj

The Bombay Arya Samaj started with 28 rules which touch religious, social, educational and organisational matters. Some of these rules are as follows: The Arya Samaj is necessary for the good of all the people. Each province shall have a principal Samaj with branches at as many places as possible. Once a week there shall be a meeting of the Samaj where Sam Veda Mantra shall be sung. There may be lectures and songs in praise of god with the accompaniment of instrumental music. The Samaj shall maintain a library of Sanskrit and Hindi books; shall maintain accounts (member to pay 1% of their earnings), publish a paper, run Arya schools separately for boys and girls (at the girl's school only women staff shall be appointed). Learned men would be sent about to preach truth at other places. Members should love other members as they love themselves. All ceremonies (including marriages and funerals) shall be performed according to the Vedas. Any dishonest and wicked member could be expelled, but not through prejudice or partisanship. Apart from the President and the Secretary, there would be an executive. There would be recognition and reward for outstanding work. The Samaj would work for the reformation of the country—both spiritual and material. For a job in Arya Samaj institutions, an Arya



Dayanand

Samajist would be given preference. When a donation is to be made at the time of marriage, it should go to the Arya Samaj. The prime religious rule was that Vedas are supreme and have self evident authority; other books from the teachings of the Rishis have secondary authority. Formless God is to be worshipped.

The 28 rules are exhaustive and detailed; also these were numerous and could not be remembered. Hence their number was cut down to ten at Lahore. June 24, 1877 was an important day in the history of Arya Samaj since it was on this day that the foundation of Arya Samaj was laid down in Lahore.

This was not an affiliate of the Bombay Arya Samaj. The Lahore Samaj was a new chapter in its history — it meant almost a transformation of the old Samaj. For instance the 28 (**niyamas**) rules accepted at Bombay were carefully revised, reworded and educated to a manageable “Ten Principles”. It was as if the Arya Samaj had got a New Constitution. The number of founding members of Lahore Arya Samaj was about a hundred. This number went up to about 500 by the end of July.

The ten rules were adopted on July 24, 1877. These are the fundamental tenets of Arya Samaj and all Aryas are expected to conform to them. The first two are related to God and the third to the Vedas. God and the Vedas are the bases of Arya Samaj. The rest are a guide to the conduct of a moral man. These ten rules are as under:

- i) **God is the primordial root (source) of all true knowledge** and of all things that can be known through knowledge.
- ii) **God is all Truth, All knowledge, All Bliss.** He is Bodyless (Formless), Almighty, Just, Merciful, Unborn, Infinite, Unchangeable, Beginningless, Incomparable, Support and Lord of all, All pervading, knower and controller of all form within, Imperishable, Immortal, Fearless, Eternal, Holy and the creator of the whole universe. He alone is worthy of worship.
- iii) **Vedas are the books of all true knowledge.** It is the prime duty of all Aryas to study and propagate the Veda, to hear and preach it.

After God, the Veda is the most important constituent of Dayanand's ideology. His call “Back to the Vedas” means that we are to reject all changes that may be found in the scriptures, that may be at variance with the teachings of the Vedas. The Veda is God's own word, revealed to mankind through the Rishis (sages). They are thus of non-human authorship.

- iv) **We should always be ready to accept Truth and reject untruth.**

This is an important dictum. We should not stick to any opinion, merely because it has the sanction of time. If it is untrue, we should have no hesitation in abandoning it.

- v) **All actions should be performed according to Dharma** and after considering the right and wrong of each. Do the right, shun the wrong that is the formula.
- vi) The principal of this Samaj is **to do good to the world** — physical, social and spiritual.

This means that Arya Samaj is no sectarian or parochial institution working for the good of only its own members, as some of closed societies claim to be. The Samaj is created for the good of the whole world. This is a far cry from the old Hindu approach of extreme individualism, where each aspirant sought only his own “Mukti” or salvation. In fact it was the early goal of young Dayanand

too, before Swamy Virjananda widened his horizon and commanded him to work for the good of the country and the whole world.

vii) **We should deal with people with love, righteousness and consideration of their merit.**

The basis of our behaviour with all fellow beings should be of love, and goodwill, not snobbery, hate, ill will or jealousy. A society based on universal love will bring the kingdom of heaven on earth. Also a person of superior merit would receive superior regards.

This is the character of human dignity, but it does not preach blind equality, irrespective of a persons virtues or vice, genius or mediocrity, worth or otherwise. This is Vedic socialism.

viii) **We should work for the liquidation of ignorance and promotion of knowledge.**

Illiteracy, ignorance and superstitions are the mother of all ills and evils, while knowledge brings joy and all round welfare. The preachings at myriad Arya Samaj platforms and the network of D.A.V. and Gurukul institutions are translating this rule into practice.

ix) **No one should be content with his own upliftment but should feel his own good in the good of all.**

This means that all human beings, being the image of God are one entity. The whole emphasis is from selfish to altruistic good. No man or group can be happy if all round people are starving or miserable, as they would only bring down the whole social structure. To do good to others is no favour but enlightened self interest.

x) **All men are obliged (unfree) in having to obey the social laws that have been framed for the good of all; but everyone is free to work for his own welfare.**

For instance, one is not free to break the traffic laws or commit theft or murder, for all such laws are there, for the good of all. **But in all personal matters, concerning one's individual good, one has freedom. That means one has freedom of action but not at the cost of the well being of others.**

Check Your Progress 1

i) **What kind of role did Dayanand conceive for himself in the Arya Samaj ? Answer in about two to three sentences.**

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ii) **How many rules did the Lahore Arya Samaj conceive for its members ? Enumerate any five of them.**

a)
b)
c)
d)
e)

To conclude we can say these ten rules are the principles for a noble and happy society as conceived of by Swami Dayanand. These rules would apply to people in all countries and all ages. Except for rule 3 which gives primacy to Vedas.

Activity 1

Make a list of the ten principles of the Arya Samaj in Lahore (1877). Ask any Arya Samajis you know what they can summarize about them. Write down their comments in your notebook and discuss with other students in the study centre, if possible.

26.3.3 Members of the Arya Samaj

Accordingly a committee of 22 was elected and the list is very impressive one. Half of the members have a university degree : five M.As; three doctors, one lawyer and two B.As. By 1877 not more than a dozen Punjabis could have gained that degree. It means that nearly half of that number were on the Samaj Committee. If half of the committee could boast of a university degree, the presumption is that many other Aryas had matriculation and higher degrees. **Thus we can conclude that Lahore Arya Samaj Committee was indeed representative of the cream of educated Punjabis.**

Of the twenty-two committee members, only one was a Brahmin, whereas probably over eighty per cent were Khattris. That was in sharp contrast to the **educational qualification** of Bombay Arya Samaj membership. Swami Dayanand was lucky in bringing in such intellectual stalwarts as had the capacity to greatly elevate the Samaj and its programmes to a very high standard. Lahore proved to be a take off stage for the Samaj in every way.

Box 26.03

The social ideals of the Arya Samaj were meant to reflect the ideals of the Vedas and these were:

- i) Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man
- ii) The equality of the sexes
- iii) Justice and fairplay between peoples and between nations
- iv) Equal opportunity to all according to their merit
- v) Love and charity towards all.

26.3.4 Publication of Vedabhashya

Swami Dayanand always swore by the Vedas, but whenever some one quoted any mantra from the Vedas giving traditional meaning to it, Dayanand always put his own interpretation on it. On persuasion of some of his friends Dayanand started working on his “Vedabhashya” (commentary on Vedas) with enthusiasm. He said that most of the Vedic mantras had a triple meaning:

- i) one relating to sacrifices and rituals (traditional interpretation of Sayana etc.);
- ii) spiritual and philosophical meaning (Dayanand’s contribution); and
- iii) scientific meaning (again his innovation).

Swami Dayanand devoted some of the last years of his life to the activities that

involved him and his Samaj with the wider world of Hinduism. His public notice at Hardwar has clearly stated the policy; consensus not controversy was to be the guiding motto. The Arya Samaj which was already showing some leanings towards sectarianism, had to become the rallying point of all Hindus of goodwill and had to be accepted by Hindus as such. The collaboration with the theosophists was promoted by these intentions and so was the composition of the board of trustees of the “Paropkarini” sabha. But the most significant move in that direction was the involvement of the Aryas in the following three successive agitations i.e. for

- i) Indramani case (for violating Samaj’s conduct);
- ii) Cow protection; and
- iii) popularization of Hindi.

Each of these causes brought many Hindus together across the barriers of caste, sect and provincialism. By its enthusiastic participation the Arya Samaj could project the image of being the protagonist of broad Hindu nationalism. In fact these movements or agitations were not originally launched by Dayanand, but he came to the assistance of these movements that were well launched and to which a large number of Hindus were deeply committed. Thus Dayanand steered his Samaj towards closer cooperation with orthodox and sectarian Hindus, and anticipated the movement of “Sangathan” consolidation and integration of the whole Hindu community.

Activity 2

Visit an Arya Samaj Centre in your town and ask the members to explain you the contemporary role of Arya Samaj.

Another important indication of the widening of Dayanand’s outlook is that in the last year of his life, for the first time he paid attention to South India. To him “Aryavarta” has always meant the region—north of the Vindhya range. But with the passage of time his concern broadened and acquired national and political dimensions and he turned towards the south of India. But this all-India dream was shattered by Dayanand’s untimely death.

26.4 ARYA SAMAJ MOVEMENT AND REFORM

The Arya Samaj opened a vast number of educational institutions for boys and girls all over north India. Orphanages were opened and thus Christian missionaries were prevented from converting people to Christianity. Arya Samaj’s worked on earthquake relief. In 1923 when the Moplas of Malabar forcibly converted Hindus to Islam it was the Arya Samaj’s who reconverted them to Hinduism. Before Mahatma Gandhi took up the cause of untouchables it was the Arya Samaj’s who had tried to get them recognised as equal members of Hindu Society. They also carried on a ceaseless effort to remove their superstitions and teach them the fundamental doctrines of religion.

Dayanand formed many Gurukuls as part of the Arya Samaj educational programme. The first D.A.V. (Dayanand Anglo-Vedic) College was founded in Lahore to commensurate Dayanand’s memory after his death in Ajmer in 1883. This institution became a focal point of national education in the country. The idea of the Founders of Lahore College was to induce the scientific temperament in the students without uprooting them from their spiritual, cultural, religious moorings. Till then only the British Government or foreign Christian missionaries had established such English medium colleges. However, some followers of Dayanand e.g. Swami Shardhanand did not agree with the medium of instruction and set up a parallel institution called

Gurukul in Kangri, near Hardwar in U.P. which also flourished. It was based on the ancient ideal of a residential school where teachers and students lived as a family. Today Gurukuls in India number over 50, most of them in Haryana. There was a dispute between both parties (DAV and Gurukul) as each claimed to be the genuine followers of Dayanand. The educational centres were completely free of Government control and considered to be anti-British. Again it was the politically moderate wing of the Arya Samaj represented by the D.A.V. College movement which made a greater impact on the educated middle class. This middle class was at the vanguard of the Indian Renaissance in the 19th century. **The Arya Samaj's educational policy was thus totally at variance with that of Lord William Bentinck (policy of 1834) and that of the Christian missionaries which was to make either clerks for administration or converts into Christianity.**

26.4.1 Three Challenges to Hinduism

The Hindu religion grew and flourished and had the capacity to absorb any new religious force and its perpetuity was taken for granted. But thrice in recorded history, it had faced decisive challenges — once from Buddhism and Jainism, later from Islam and lastly from Christianity.

Arya Samaj has performed an important social mission during the third and latest crisis in Hinduism which came with the British rule. Arya Samaj successfully stopped the tide of mass conversions to Christianity. In defending Hinduism Arya Samaj had played a significant role.

26.4.2 Arya Samaj and Emancipation of Women

Women, like Harijans have been called 'Slaves of the slaves'. In the British era men were the slaves of the British and women were the slaves of these enslaved men. Women had few rights, little freedom and were rarely considered as equals to men.

Dayanand, the founder of Arya Samaj was among the pioneers of women's rights and equality in modern times. He advocated the equality of sexes. **Dayanand encouraged women to study the Vedas — a revolutionary step at that time.** They were allowed to recite "Gayatree" mantra while tradition did not permit them this privilege. Dayanand forcefully put forward the argument that women "rishis" account for 200 mantras in the Rig-Veda alone.

He also carried on a crusade against child marriage. Dayanand ordained that no girl should be married till she was 16 and boys should marry at 25 or above. Thus he confronted the so called 'Shastric' injunction that, if a girl had her menses in her father's house, the father and brother would go to hell. This idea was ridiculed by Dayanand. His argument was why should anyone go to hell because of a natural function.

Dayanand's stand was that men or women should marry only once. For a young widow, his prescription was for 'Niyoga', rather than widow marriage. To him "Niyoga" meant temporary union with the dead husband's brother or other kin to get a child or two but not more than two. But his concept of Niyoga was not accepted by the Aryas; Dayanand in a true democratic spirit did not press his point. In fact, Arya Samaj in the Punjab advertised for and arranged some widow remarriages and Dayanand acquiesced.

Arya Samaj took up the cause of and improved education in general and women's education in an impressive way. As mentioned earlier it has organised a network of schools and colleges in the country both for boys and girls where education was imparted in the mother-tongue. Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (D.A.V.) colleges were

founded. Some of the Conservative Arya Samajis were of the opinion that education imported in these colleges were not sufficiently Vedic in character, therefore in the leadership of Munshi Ram they started Gurukul at Hardwar, where education in its method and content was given in the ancient Vedic manner. Being the pioneer in opening women's schools, colleges and Gurukuls, Arya Samaj founded the first Kanya Mahavidyalaya in Jallunder in 1896.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Write a note on the educational qualifications of the members of the Lahore Arya Samaj. Use about 3-5 lines for your answer.

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- 2) Elaborate the role of Arya Samaj for the emancipation of women. Use 5-7 lines for your answer.

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26.4.3 Politics and the Arya Samaj

Dayanand was not just a social and religious reformer. He was also a forerunner in the national and political awakening of India. The Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 a decade before the Indian National Congress. Dayanand had prepared the ground and declared that foreign government is no substitute for self-rule. **Lala Lajpat Rai has mentioned that the British had always viewed the Arya Samaj with suspicion. This often took the form of deportations prosecutions etc. of its members.** The Arya Samaj was considered a seditious body. Members were dismissed from civil and military service solely on the grounds that they were members of the Arya Samaj. The open declaration of the desire for political freedom at a time when jailing was common for such utterances showed a great deal of moral courage from its members. The Arya Samaj however always mentioned it was a religious, social and cultural organisation.

In bringing about the transition of the loyalist character of the Indian National Congress to a mass political movement (moderate to radical approach) by Mahatma Gandhi, Arya Samaj Movement played a significant role as admitted by Dr. Rajendra Prasad the first President of India. The Congress also took over most of the social reforms as advocated by the Arya Samaj as part of the National Movement.

The Arya Samaj stand on political freedom and socio-cultural changes was indicated when the Congress adopted the removal of untouchability, the emancipation of women, and other reforms. A large number of the members of Arya Samaj became

active supporters of Mahatma Gandhi. However the Arya Samaj remains away from power politics and is a social reform movement. It is a non-political organisation.

According to D. Vable, the post independence scenario saw the inroads of power politics into the Arya Samaj. While in 1915 it was on the rise subsequently from 1920 onwards, as the Congress became popular under Gandhi, and it began to decline. The political resurgence of the pre-independence days much reduced its influence. Further the influence of Hinduism also threatened its very identity. At present 65 years or so after the warning given by Lala Lajpat Rai the Arya Samaj faces its own erasure by Hinduism, which it once purported to defend. The Arya Samaj in fact would do well to think of its own identity, rather than defend the Hindus.

Swami Dayanand and Arya Samaj movement have contributed in the National movement in the following ways:

- 1) support of the Hindi language
- 2) Swadeshi and Khadi were supported
- 3) opposition to salt taxes, was agreed upon and supported.

Some critics have dubbed Swami Dayanand as a reactionary, looking back towards the dead past because he gave the call "Back to Vedas". Yet Dayanand ushered in modern action in India just as Gandhiji did half a century later.

26.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we described the Arya Samaj as a social movement. We began with the need for reform in the 19th Century and went on to the founding of the Arya Samaj, its organisation, principles/rules, early members and the publication of *Vedabyasa*. In the next section we discussed the Arya Samaj movement and reform. This includes the Samaj's response to the challenges to Hinduism, emancipation of women and its role in politics. We have therefore provided a clear picture of Arya Samaj as a modern religious movement.

26.6 KEY WORDS

Arya Samaj	: literally the "Society of Aryans" it came to existence in 1875 under the aegis of Swami Dayanand.
Gurukul	: a teaching institution based on the ideals of Arya Samaj.
Interpolations	: interpretations and extensions of a holy text (in this case, the Vedas).
Mantras	: sacred words, chants, spells.
Monotheistic	: a belief in one God only.
Nyamas	: rules and regulations.
Niyoga	: where a widow is allowed to get children by her brother-in-law.
Mukti	: spiritual liberation.

Orthodox	: traditional views often without substance.
Panchang	: Hindu calendar of auspicious and inauspicious dates.
Parochial	: narrow and partisan views.
Suddhi	: Rites of reconversion of Hindus back from the religion of their conversion.

26.7 FURTHER READINGS

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26.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Dayanand conceived of himself as a guiding light of the Arya Samaj. He did not think of himself as a leader or a guru to be followed.
- 2) The Lahore Arya Samaj simplified the original 28 rules to simply ten. Five of these rules for members were:
 - i) God is the source of all true knowledge.
 - ii) God is Truth, Knowledge, and Bliss.
 - iii) Vedas are the books of all true knowledge.
 - iv) Accept Truth, reject untruth.
 - v) Each man should follow his **Dharma**.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The members of the original Lahore Arya Samaj were highly educated and had among them lawyers, doctors, B.As and M.As. Thus the members of the Samaj were highly educated.
- 2) Women in Colonial India were 'Slaves of slaves'. Dayanand fought against this slavery. He fought against child marriage and reintroduced Niyoga, and countered many deep entrenched superstitions. He arranged widow remarriages. For women's education Dayanand's followers started womens educational institutions called "Gurukuls".

UNIT 27 MODERN RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS II : RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Founding of Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.2.1 Beginnings
 - 27.2.2 Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi
 - 27.2.3 Swami Vivekananda
- 27.3 Ideology of the Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.3.1 Ideology and Objects
 - 27.3.2 Activities of the Mission
- 27.4 Organisational Structure of Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.4.1 Math and Mission
 - 27.4.2 Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission
 - 27.4.3 The Governing Body
- 27.5 Financial Support and Activities
 - 27.5.1 Financing the Activities
 - 27.5.2 Social Welfare Activities
 - 27.5.3 Participation of People
 - 27.5.4 Cultural Activities
- 27.6 Birthday Celebrations
 - 27.6.1 Concept of Trinity
 - 27.6.2 Birthday Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna
 - 27.6.3 Birthday Celebration of Sri Sarada Devi
 - 27.6.4 Birthday Celebration of Swami Vivekananda
 - 27.6.5 How are the Birthdays Celebrated ?
- 27.7 Other Activities of Ramakrishna Mission
 - 27.7.1 Other Celebrations
 - 27.7.2 Bhak a Sammelan
 - 27.7.3 Challenges that Confront the Mission
- 27.8 Ramakrishna Mission as a Modern Movement
 - 27.8.1 History of the Mission
 - 27.8.2 The Present Position
- 27.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.10 Key Words
- 27.11 Further Readings
- 27.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

27.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have gone through this unit we hope you will be able to

- get a clear idea of how the Ramakrishna Mission began
- identify the prominent personalities who contributed to the development of the Ramakrishna Mission
- form a general idea of The Ramakrishna Mission's various socio-religious-cultural activities
- know clearly about the organisational structure of the Ramakrishna Mission — its headquarters organisation and sub-organisations
- see the utility of such organisations for the betterment of the living conditions of our people and the suffering humanity of the world

- get an awareness of the challenges that confront this religious organisation; and its problems and prospects as a religious movement of the modern times in our strife torn world.

27.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we are going to discuss the Ramakrishna Mission — a modern religious movement. Its inspirer Sri Ramakrishna was unique, so was its founder Swami Vivekananda.

From your study of the earlier units (17, 23, 24, 25, 26) we hope you are aware of the nature of religious pluralism, and the rise of religious movements in India. After a study of the religious movements in the medieval age, you would have grasped the essence of the medieval movements of Bhaktism and Sufism.

You would have also been able to grasp how the religious movements came to develop under various organisations, as medieval religious movements, like, Veerashaivism in the Karnataka region of the South; and Sikhism in Punjab in the North; and the modern religious movements like the Arya Samaj in the Punjab in the North, and the Ramakrishna Mission in Bengal in the East. By and by, these modern religious movements spread far and wide, and covered various parts of India and the world.

In this unit we will deal with the Ramakrishna Mission: the founding of the Mission, its ideology and organisational structure; and the various activities of Ramakrishna Mission. We also deal with the symbolic significance of birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. Finally we touch upon Bhakti Sammelan and other sundry activities. It is pointed out here that the unit is based on the further reading listed at the end.

27.2 FOUNDING OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

You will be interested to know how and when the Ramakrishna Mission was founded; by whom it was founded, and how it gradually spread.

27.2.1 Beginnings

Sri Ramakrishna, a householder saint of Bengal was born at Kamarpukur in 1836. He died in the early hours of August 16, 1886.

Shortly after he had left his mortal frame, a monastic order bearing the name of Sri Ramakrishna was organised in 1886, at the Math, Baranagore, about three kilometers North of Calcutta. This monastic order was organised by his Sannyasin disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda. In fact, no one really “founded” this order. It was the master Ramakrishna himself who brought it into being during his illness. He instructed Swami Vivekananda as to how this order was to be organised and conducted.

27.2.2 Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi

The spiritual inspiration of Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna was a great inspiration behind the Math and the Mission.

In 1899, the Math was transferred to its present home at Belur across the Ganga, about six kilometers north of Calcutta.

27.2.3 Swami Vivekananda

However, the year 1897, the month of May, will go down in the history of modern religious movements in India as the year when the Ramakrishna Mission was started by Swami Vivekananda and his handful of associates. It was registered on the 4th of May in 1909 under Act XXI of 1860, with registration no. S/1917 of 1909-10 in the name of Ramakrishna Mission. For the link between Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna, see Box 27.01.

Box 27.01

By 180 Sri Ramakrishna had a few followers. He himself, initially the priest of Dakshineswar Temple, went far beyond the priestly role and indicated the attributes of a yogi and sanyasi. Although married to Sarada Devi, the marriage was never consummated. For Ramakrishna, the God of every religion was the same, but could be worshipped in different ways, as prescribed by the religions themselves.

Sri Ramakrishna's message was that God can be realized only by renunciation of "women and God". Ramakrishna monism reduced all other views and paths into the experience of the unity of truth. Sri Ramakrishna converted Swami Vivekananda to his views by giving him many experiences of truth.

27.3 IDEOLOGY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

The Ramakrishna Mission was established with some basic ideas which are now discussed.

27.3.1 Ideology and Objects

The ideology and objectives of the Ramakrishna Mission were:

- i) **to impart and promote the study of the Vedanta** and its principles as propounded by Ramakrishna and practically illustrated by his own life, and of comparative ideology in its widest form. Vedanta is a Hindu philosophy which teaches that there is Oneness of all Truth. That all evolves from Truth and returns to Truth. Thus all appearances are deceptive, unless apprehended through the Truth.



Shri Sarada ma the consort of Sri Ramakrishna.

- ii) to impart and promote the study of the arts, science and industries;
- iii) to train teachers in all the branches of knowledge mentioned above and enable them to reach the masses;
- iv) to carry on educational work among the masses;
- v) to establish, maintain, carry on and assist schools, colleges, universities, orphanages, workshops, laboratories, hospitals, dispensaries, houses for the infirm, the invalid, and the afflicted, famine relief works, and other educational and/or charitable works and institutions of a like nature;
- vi) to print and publish and to sell or distribute, gratuitously or otherwise, journals, periodicals, books or leaflets that the Association may think desirable for the promotion of its objects;
- vii) to carry on any other work which may seem to the Association capable of being conveniently carried on, in connection with the calculated and directly or indirectly to promote any of the before mentioned objects.

You may put these ideas of the Ramakrishna Mission under the following heads:

- i) **Ideal** : Freedom of the self and service of mankind.
- ii) **Aim** : Preaching and practice of **Sanatana Dharma**, the eternal religion as embodied in the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.
- iii) **Motto** : Renunciation and Service; Harmony of all religion.
- iv) **Method** : Work and worship.

27.3.2 Activities of the Mission

By providing an idea of the practices which the Mission is engaged in we hope to indicate its wide range of activities.

- i) **Worship**: This includes specialized training of monastic aspirants and religious preachings.
- ii) **General and technical education with an ethical and spiritual background; other general services include:**
- iii) **medical service;**
- iv) **famine and distress relief work;**
- v) **rural upliftment;**
- vi) **work among the toiling and emerging people of all classes; and**
- vii) **other cultural activities.**

Now that we have listed the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission, you would be curious to know how these various activities of the Mission are being organised. This list makes it clear that the Mission has a comprehensive plan of activities ranging from the transcendental to the practical.

Box 27.02

This box indicates that it was a holy man (Sri Ramakrishna) and his followers who were responsible for creating the Mission. Ramakrishna inspired the movement for a Mission and Vivekananda and his fellow disciples founded it and spread its teachings.

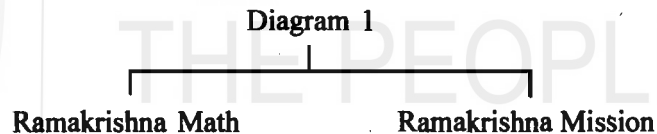
Sri Ramakrishna died in 1886 after appointing Vivekananda as his successor. **Bhakti** had been the main ritual during the lifetime of Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna puja was added to Kalipuja. The **bhaktas** were therefore dedicated to guru and kali. Vivekananda did not approve of this and a split developed between him and most of the disciples. The principles upon which Vivekananda rested his faith were **monism, monasticism, universalism, toleration, liberalism, humanitarianism, progressiveness, and the scientific world view**. Vivekananda believed vedanta was the only scientific religion and that it was completely compatible with science.

27.4 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

There is an elaborate organisational structure to organise and regulate the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

27.4.1 Math and Mission

Let us now turn to a description of this. The following diagram will illustrate the organizational structure:



It should be understood that the Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math are closely connected in the following ways:

- i) both have their headquarters at Belur Math in Calcutta.
- ii) the Governing Body of the Mission is made up of the Trustees of the Math.
- iii) the administrative work of the Mission is carried on by the monks of the Ramakrishna Math.

Yet, Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math are distinct legal entities having their own branches.

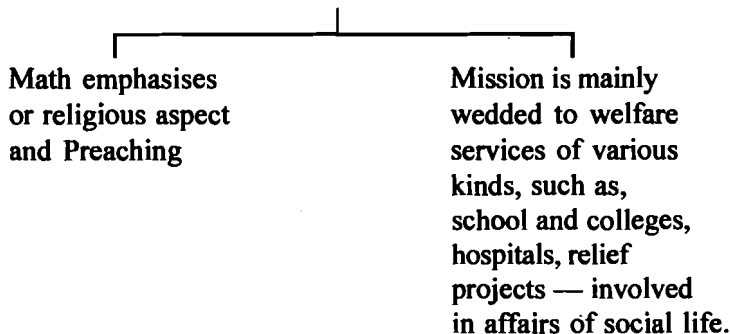
You may like to know how the Mission and the Math are distinct entities. As a matter of fact, the Math and Mission are distinct entities in the following manner:

- i) The Math organisation is Constituted under a Trust with well-defined rules of procedure.

The Mission on the other hand is a registered society.

- ii) While both the Math and the Mission take up charitable and philanthropic activities, the Math lays emphasis on religious aspect and preaching, while the Mission is wedded mainly to the welfare services of numerous types.

Diagram 2
Activities of Math and Mission
(Charitable and Philanthropic)



To distinguish the Math from the Mission, Christopher Isherwood very aptly used the terms '**Contemplative Math**', and '**Socially Active Mission**'. The Math is oriented to religion and preaching through contemplation, while the Mission is oriented to various types of social welfare activities.

We hope you will bear this point of distinction in mind although people often loosely associate Ramakrishna Mission with Math activities also.

It is equally necessary for you to bear in mind that the appropriation of the name of Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda by any institution does not imply that it is affiliated to either Ramakrishna Math or Ramakrishna Mission which have their headquarters at the Belur Math.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Name the three main inspirations for the founding of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
- 2) Mention the objects of the Ramakrishna Mission.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)

27.4.2 Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission

As in the case of other religious organisations, there is a new tendency of divisiveness in the Ramakrishna Mission. Owing to some ideological differences in the main Ramakrishna Mission, a breakaway group known as Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission emerged, laying its main emphasis on ideals as contained in the following words of Swami Vivekananda:

“Ye, I be born again and again and suffer a thousand miseries, if I can worship the only God I dream of, my God the afflicted and my God, the poor of all Races, of all Nations”.

Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission inspired by the ideals of '**Serve God in Man**' and '**Work and Worship**' came to emerge as a separate organisation and was registered, under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961, with registration

No. 5/18606 of 1976-1977, with its headquarters at 7, Riverside Road, Barrackpore, District 24-Parganas in West Bengal, about 25 kms North from Calcutta city, and 24 kms North-West of Calcutta Airport. Its Governing Body was made up of 14 members with Swami Nityananda as its founder-Secretary. There are several such institutions in India and abroad appropriating the names of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Activity 1

Go to the Ramakrishna Mission closest to your residence and ask the people the difference between 'Math' and 'Mission'. Write a note in your notebook outlining your findings.

These Missions are not to be confused with Ramakrishna Mission having its headquarters at Belur Math. Even these organisations, particularly the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission of Barrackpore, having its own branches in various places, are dedicated to numerous types of Welfare services, particularly in areas of general education, non-formal education, vocational training, rural development work, medical services etc. for the poor, underprivileged, destitute children and women in distress irrespective of their caste or religion.

Like Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, they have established Vivekananda Math and Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission which are inseparably connected. While the Vivekananda Math provided the field for spiritual preparation, the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission created the venue for "liberation from bondage through selfless service to the suffering humanity irrespective of any distinction in their caste, creed, religion and region".

The Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission is a philanthropic public charitable organisation registered on 1st November, 1976 under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act, 1961. It is both legally and constitutionally different from the main organisation, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at Belur on the one hand, and Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission at Dakshineswar on the other.

27.4.3 The Governing Body

The Ramakrishna Mission which was registered as an Association on the 4th of May 1909, under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1909 had its headquarters at Belur. Apart from the headquarters organisation at Belur, Ramakrishna Mission has now more than 127 branches in all, spread over the whole world, in countries like, India, Argentina (South America), Bangladesh, Canada, England, Fiji, France, Japan, Mauritius, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, United States of America, etc.

It is an international organisation having 127 branches (as on 31 March, 1989), with 96 centres in India and 31 centres outside India. Out of these 127 Branches, 54 are Ramakrishna Mission Centres, 50 are Ramakrishna Math Centres, and 23 are both Mission and Math centres.

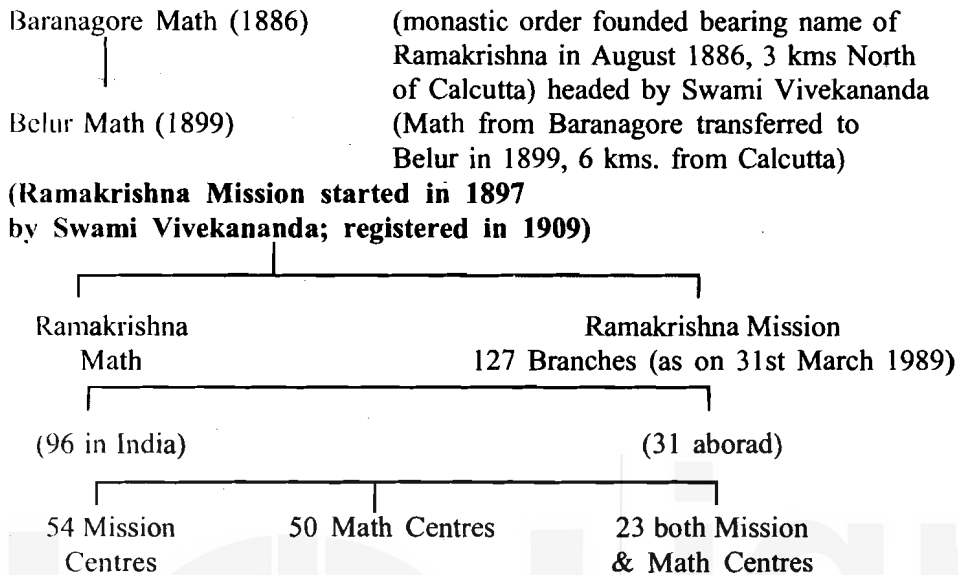
In India, these centres are spread far and wide over the various regions of Andhra Pradesh; Arunachal Pradesh; Assam; Bihar; Delhi; Gujarat; Haryana and Punjab; Karnataka; Kerala; Madhya Pradesh; Maharashtra; Meghalaya; Orissa; Rajasthan; Tamil Nadu; Tripura; Uttar Pradesh; and West Bengal.

West Bengal alone has over two and a half dozen centres. Almost all important metropolitan cities in India, like Hyderabad, Bangalore, Bombay, Madras, Kanpur, Lucknow, Calcutta, Jaipur, Chandigarh etc. have been covered by the branches of Ramakrishna Mission.

An illustrative organisational chart may help you to understand the elaborate organisational structure of the Ramakrishna Mission. It will also help to give you

a precise view of the impact of the Ramakrishna Mission as a religious movement of modern times.

Diagram 3
**Organisational Structure of
Ramakrishna Mission**



Note: As diagram 3 shows that initially the Baranagore Math was founded in 1886 bearing the name of Sri Ramakrishna by his disciples including Swami Vivekananda.

About 12 years later this was moved to Belur Math about 6 kms from Calcutta. On the other hand Ramakrishna Mission started in 1897 by Swami Vivekananda and registered in 1909.

As of 1989 Ramakrishna Mission and Math had 127 branches of which 96 were in India and 31 abroad of these there were 54 mission centres, 50 math centres and 23 both Mission and math centres. This information can be seen at a glance from diagram 3.

27.5 FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND ACTIVITIES

After discussing the organisational structure, we now show how the various social welfare activities of Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math are financed.

27.5.1 Financing the Activities

Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math have their own separate funds and keep their separate accounts. Their accounts are audited by qualified auditors.

To organise their various social welfare activities both Ramakrishna Mission and Math receive grants-in-aid from three sources, viz.,

- i) Central Government,
- ii) State Governments, and
- iii) Public Bodies

The other activities of the Math are financed from:

- iv) offerings, and
- v) sale of publications etc.

The Mission is also supported by

- vi) fees from the students, and
- vii) public donations etc.

As can be seen the Mission and Math do not depend totally on Central government, State government and public bodies for their finance. They are also financed by individuals who offer donations, fees from students sale of publications etc.

27.5.2 Social Welfare Activities

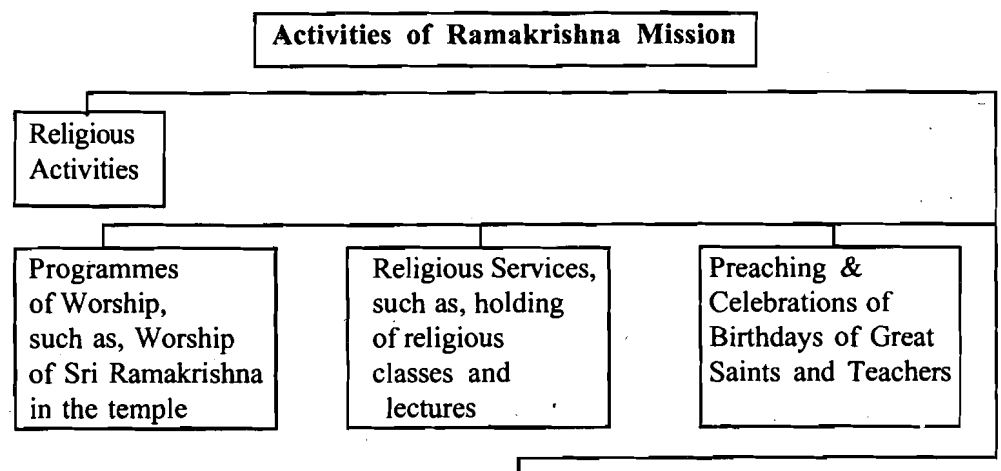
We hope you are aware of the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission related to the social welfare services. Many of you may also be associated with some of them. The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission maintain a number of Ashrams and temples with their programmes of worship, religious services, and preachings. They are also running several schools, colleges, libraries, students' homes, sevashrams (Hospitals) with indoor facilities, clinics, dispensaries, invalid homes etc.

Apart from creating a religious revival based on the principles of Vedanta as preached by Swami Vivekananda, the Ramakrishna movement has contributed a great deal for the upliftment of the downtrodden. Many of you we hope, are quite familiar with its services particularly in the field of education, running of hospitals, and undertaking relief work in the hour of need. If you take an over-all view, you will find that the various activities of the Ramakrishna Mission may be classified into two broad categories, viz.,

- i) those related to the various types of religious services, such as, regular worship, preachings etc., and
- ii) those related to the various types of social welfare activities, particularly in the fields of education, health etc.

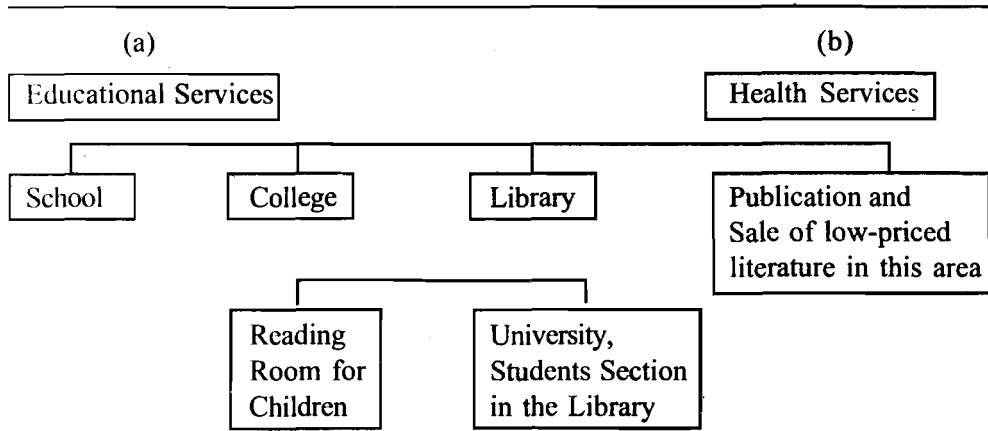
For a quick grasp and understanding you may also illustrate these various types of activities through the following diagram :

Diagram 4
(I)



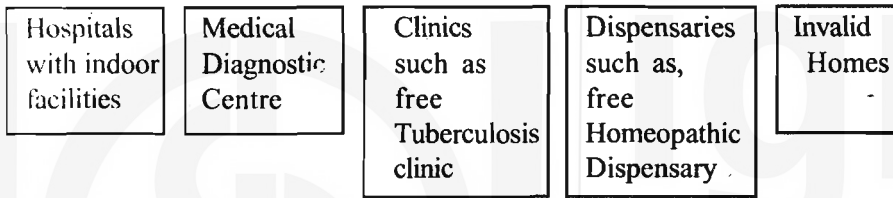
(II)

Social Welfare Services



(III)

Health Services



Check Your Progress 2

1) Write 5-7 lines on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Mission.

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2) Mention some of the Activities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

27.5.3 Participation of People

Any movement can sustain itself only through the participation of the people. The Ramakrishna Mission is spreading their life-giving ideas of vedanta, and the inspiring

messages of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda through regular discourses and occasional lectures which stimulate the spiritual aspirations of the people through their participation in the celebrations of Birthdays of the Great Teachers, bhajans, worship, Ramanama Sankritanam or Ekadasi days, and weekly discourses on Ramcharit Manas in Hindi, and on Vivekachudamani in Bengali and occasionally on Vedanta in English.

In all religious programmes, people of various walks of life, students, teachers, government servants, businessmen, politicians, doctors, professionals and common people, rich and poor, all participate.

Of educational and health services, people of all types are the beneficiaries. Let us enumerate a few of these services.

- a) To fight the scourge of tuberculosis in an organised way, the Ramakrishna Mission has provided some free tuberculosis centres in some areas. These clinics have the following functions:
 - i) to diagnose individual cases;
 - ii) to treat cases fit for treatment at the clinic;
 - iii) to get admitted in other hospitals, cases which require prolonged hospitalisation or special surgical treatment;
 - iv) to treat patients at home, under the Domiciliary Service Scheme, prior to admission and after discharge from hospitals; and
 - v) to examine contacts of patients with a view to detecting early cases as a preventive measure.

The Tuberculosis clinic run by the Ramakrishna Mission in Delhi is a clinic fully equipped with facilities for diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis. Various medicines like anti-T.B. drugs, antibiotics, vitamins are supplied free to all patients except those covered by the Central Government Health Scheme.

The clinic is well equipped with physician, medical officer, paramedical staff, nursing staff, dispenser, laboratory assistants etc.

- b) The Domiciliary Service Scheme has the Domiciliary Service Unit having staff members deputed from the Delhi Municipal Corporation in pursuance of their tuberculosis control programme. Under this scheme, a close liaison between the patient and the institution is maintained whereby the patients and their contacts are advised on matters of isolation and disinfection at home; and they are also brought to the clinic for necessary examination, advice and treatment if necessary.
- c) The Medical Diagnostic Centre renders service to the community particularly the poor and needy, in pursuance of the spirit and ideal of the Mission.
- d) The clinical wing is in the shape of a Polyclinic providing facilities and health services of numerous types.
- e) The free Homeopathic dispensary is run by the Ramakrishna Mission to serve the people, particularly the poorer section, in the neighborhood.
- f) Special Educational Services

Free library and reading room facilities, provided by the Ramakrishna Mission in its premises in Delhi are utilized by hundreds and thousands of people every year. Facilities of reading room and separate lending section, and a separate section for the children exist in the library for use by the people.

University Students' Section Library maintained with the financial assistance from the University of Delhi which only the students of Delhi University are eligible to use, on becoming its member, is also run by the Ramakrishna Mission in its premises in Delhi.

27.5.4 Cultural Activities

The Ramakrishna Mission also organises regular discourses and exposition of scriptures and deliberations on various other allied topics. The monks of the Math and Mission are important men of the public conduct them.

Discourses are conducted in Hindi on Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, on Sri Ramcharit Manas. Classes are held in Bengali on Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, and Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasang; in English on Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, on Srimad Bhagavad Gita; on Vivek Chudamani; and on the Patanjala Yoga Sutras.

27.6 BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

While dealing with the various types of social welfare services rendered by the Mission, there is an underlying concept of Trinity which guides the whole philosophy and activities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

27.6.1 Concept of Trinity

I.	Sri Ramakrishna	The teacher The Preceptor the Guide	Who as father leads and illumines the path
II.	Sri Sarada Devi	Holy Mother	Symbol of Motherhood Divine purity Virtue, ethereal Love and source of divine energy
III.	Swami Vivekananda	The Disciple The Soul inspired and awakened	Symbol of Messenger of Love & Service Divine through the message of universal brotherhood.

The trinity is at once symbolic of the Divine and the Human. The three Great personalities inspired the spirit and ideal of this modern religious movement called the Ramakrishna Mission. Sri Ramakrishna as the Preceptor; Sri Sarada Devi as the inspirer (Holy mother); and Swami Vivekananda as the founder and messenger — lit a beacon light of Divinity, Humanity and Service through the currents of a modern religious movement led by the Ramakrishna Mission with its dedicated bands of disciples and followers — the leaders and the led.

The Birthday celebrations of the three great personalities are important occasions in the religious order of the Ramakrishna Mission. This is a tradition which is handed down from generation to generation inspiring the ideals of Divinity, Humanity and Service.

27.6.2 Birthday Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna

The 156th Birthday Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna was held on the 27th of February 1991. He was born before the day-break of February 18, 1836 in a remote village named Kamarpukur in the District of Hooghly in Bengal. On this day there is much worship, prayer and celebration. He was named Sri Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya.

Since childhood, on several occasions, he gave clear evidence of Divine inspiration in his thoughts and activities. These come strongly to worshippers as also his blessings. He had an inner urge to know if the Divine Power really exists and manifests itself through everything of this creation. He practised penance and ultimately realized that God exists. Birthday worship is specially auspicious. *He followed instructions of different religious faith at different stages of his life and realised that all religions are but different paths leading to the same goal, the God.* Ramakrishna's birthday creates purity and auspiciousness for worshippers.

27.6.3 Birthday Celebration of Sri Sarada Devi

The 139th Birthday of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother was to be celebrated in December 1991. Her birthday celebrations gives strength to worshippers. She was born on December 22, 1853 at Jayrambati — a remote village of Bankura District in West Bengal. Sri Sarada Devi is an ideal of womankind who served her husband with her very life and renounced the world rather than renounce her husband. There is much joy and happiness among worshippers on her birthday. She was married to Sri Ramakrishna at the young age of six years, and ultimately became the source of strength and inspiration to Swami Vivekananda and other young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in establishing and running the Great organisation — Ramakrishna Mission. The essence of her teachings is contained in these lines:

“If you like to be happy in life do not find fault with others”.

“Remember, whatever you do and wherever you go you are always protected by God — Father in Heaven”.

Activity 2

In what way do the Birthday celebrations of Ramakrishna Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda differ from a regular birthday celebration ? Study the text and your own observations to write a note in your notebook and discuss your written views with other students at the Study Centre closest to you.

27.6.4 Birthday Celebration of Swami Vivekananda

You are perhaps aware that the 128th Birthday celebrations of Swami Vivekananda was observed as the National Youth Day. Swami Vivekananda, the most prominent disciple and messenger of Sri Ramakrishna, the carrier of the message of Vedanta, the harbinger of the links between the East and the West, was the founder of a new monastic order.

He was the towering leader of the modern religious movement — the Ramakrishna Mission. It was on January 12, 1863, that he was born in Calcutta. At the very first sight (1881) Sri Ramakrishna discovered in him a spiritual giant. It was after his historic speech at Chicago in the Assembly of World Religions in the year 1893 that he became highly famous. **He dedicated himself to the service of the suffering humanity, and for all his life tried to raise the dignity of man.** He reconciled beautifully the ideal of Bhakti with the knowledge of Vedanta. Worshipers during Vivekananda's birthday celebrations experience the power of devotion and love just as Vivekananda felt towards Sri Ramakrishna.

His ideals of service are contained in these words:

“You can please God more by taking care of His Children than by offering thousand tonnes of flowers and fruits at His Holy Feet”.

“Who loves all beings —

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Indicate the birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna in 5-7 lines.

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- 2) Elaborate the Concept of the Trinity.

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He was a harbinger of a new chapter of relationship between the East and the West. It could be a relationship based on fair exchange and mutuality. The West should come out with its scientific and technological development, and affluence, and material prosperity to help and support the poor, depressed and suffering humanity of the East, so that they could come out of this condition of stark poverty; and in exchange, the East should provide spiritual sustenance and guide through their ancient Vedantic wisdom and knowledge to the West. **The miseries of the East arise from poverty; the miseries of the West arise from affluence. Both need each other.** The West can provide material support to the East; and the East can provide spiritual sustenance to the West. Thus, they need to move together and help each other to help the suffering humanity. For one the cause of suffering is poverty, for the other the cause of suffering is affluence.

27.6.5 How are the Birthdays Celebrated ?

You all know there are many ways of celebrating birthdays in India. The birthdays of Great Personalities bring their own flavour.

These Birthday celebrations take place in the premises of the Ramakrishna Mission and also outside, in numerous public places and institutions.

These celebrations involve two aspects viz., (i) the socio-religious and (ii) social services.

The religious component of celebration is usually marked by

- i) janmatithi Puja,

- ii) mangalarati,
- iii) meditation,
- iv) vedic chanting,
- v) reading from the lives of these great men
- vi) bhajan,
- vii) special puja and haven.

The monks, the disciples, the followers and also other people participate in these.

The social component of these celebrations is marked by

- i) public meetings,
- ii) programme of service to the lepers called Narayan Seva,
- iii) service of the poor and the destitutes by distributing food, cloth etc.
- iv) various types of competitions in schools and colleges, particularly on the eve of Swami Vivekananda's birthday celebrations as National Youth Day.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India often provides funds as grant-in-aid to cover the expenditure in these celebrations by the Ramakrishna Mission.

For example, you may like to know that during 1989-90, the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India, paid a sum of Rs. 48,000/- as grant-in-aid to cover the expenditure incurred in connection with the 125th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

27.7 OTHER ACTIVITIES OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

We now turn to some other activities and celebrations.

27.7.1 Other Celebrations

The Ramakrishna Mission observes a number of other celebrations as well. These include:

- i) Guru Purnima,
- ii) Shri Krishna Janmashtami,
- iii) Shri Durga Ashtami,
- iv) Shri Kali Puja,
- v) Maha Sivaratri, and
- vi) Christmas Eve, etc.

with due solemnity, special puja, bhajan, and reading from the scriptures.

27.7.2 Bhakta Sannam

While studying the Ramakrishna Mission as a modern religious movement it is of interest to you to know that sometimes the Mission organises religious conferences known as **Bhakta Sannam**. For example, one such **Sannam** was organised on 31st December 1989 in the premise of Ramakrishna Mission in Delhi in which 336 delegates participated.

Apart from being a spiritual retreat, this sort of **Sannam** provides an opportunity to the monks and the householder devotees to come together and practise spiritual discipline to reflect on the Ramakrishna movement, and give sustenance and strength to it to keep the movement going in the right direction. The role of the householder devotees is particularly important to keep the movement going as a source of spiritual strength to this strife torn age, and as a means of service to the suffering humanity, the down-trodden, the destitute, the leper, the women and children in need of care, the victims of riots, and natural calamities. If it could help the values to prevail in wider social, professional and organisational life in India our problems would be greatly lessened.

As a religious movement of the modern age, the Ramakrishna Mission is faced with challenges of poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, disease, ignorance, and corruption suffered by the teeming millions at the national level; challenges of war clouds degradation of environment, over-powering greed of materialism, loss of peace to the suffering humanity at the global level.

27.7.3 Challenges that Confront the Mission

The real challenge lies in how the modern religious movement (started through the Ramakrishna Mission by its founder Swami Vivekananda) will be able to meet the crisis to the suffering humanity. *This will mean a reawakening and revival of the values of Divinity, Humanity and Service through the wisdom and knowledge of Vedanta.*

The *Katopanishad* says,

“**Uttishthat, Jagat, Prapya; Varannibodhat**”. That is to say: Arise, Awake, Achieve, that wisdom at the holy feet of the Great man by which material and spiritual sufferings of the humanity of the East and the West might go; revive the Divinity in man through service of the suffering humanity.

It is a question more of practice and not merely preaching. The Ramakrishna Mission as a religious movement brings much of preaching and practice together. Various religions are but different paths to the same Divinity, and the Divinity becomes glorified through service to humanity.

27.8 RAMAKRISHNA MISSION AS A MODERN MOVEMENT

We will now finally turn to an important aspect of our analysis — i.e. why should the Ramakrishna movement aspire to be called a **modern** religious movement? Let us see why this happens to be a fact.

27.8.1 History of the Mission

While examining this question you should bear the following points in mind :

- i) First, the history of the Ramakrishna Mission runs into the span of this century and the last quarter of the last century which is not even a hundred years old now

- ii) In such a short span, the Mission has spread its branches globally, far and wide, and covered a large part of the materially and spiritually suffering humanity of the world.
- iii) In the religious sphere it has brought about a revival in worship and faith through the approach that all religions lead to the same Divine Force, the same God. God exists in man, man must try to realise God through service to the suffering humanity. These sufferings are physical-material; and non-physical-emotional-mental-spiritual. These sufferings afflict humanity irrespective of their narrow framework of caste, colour, creed, religion, region and ethnicity. The Ramakrishna Mission as movement is advancing to provide a succour of hope.
- iv) The Ramakrishna Mission adopted a number of activities related to social services for the poor, the downtrodden, the destitute, the women and children in need of care, and those afflicted by natural calamities.
- v) At the national level, through service oriented programmes of activities in the fields of education and health etc., the Ramakrishna Mission is trying to integrate the various people and groups through its spiritual force and faith in Divinity, service and humanity.
- vi) At the international level, the Mission is trying to bring together the multi-national, multi-religious communities through spiritual force, through service to the suffering mankind, through message of peace and service to all sections irrespective of their caste, creed, religion and region.
- vii) The Ramakrishna Mission has the strength of a well-knit organisational structure fed by both the Math and the Mission from the headquarters level to the regional and local levels. It is fed by such ideal, ideology, objective, motto which are inspired by Divinity and service to humanity. It is supported by activities which take care of the physical-material, and religious-spiritual. The force of the Trinity consists of

Sri Ramakrishna — the preceptor

Sri Sarada Devi — The Holy Mother, inspirer

Swami Vivekananda — The founder, humanist inspired by Vedantic wisdom.

27.8.2 The Present Position

The Ramakrishna movement continues to the movement through the leadership of its bands of monks, and the following of its householder disciples and devotees of all religions and regions.

The method of work and worship continues to fill it with inspiration and life-giving force.

Shri Ramakrishna was inspired by 'Bhakti' and 'renunciation'. No great thing can be done without sacrifice. The spirit of sacrifice that sustained the fiery young souls of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda (Rakhal), Balaram, Surendera, Mahendra and Chuni etc. (who all became monks of the order) in those early days of desolation, must continue to sustain the monks, devotees and followers of the Ramakrishna Mission in the present hours of material and spiritual crisis facing the suffering humanity today.

The spirit of renunciation that illumined the heart of Sri Ramakrishna, the spirit of sacrifice that welled up into the minds of Swami Vivekananda and his associate young monks in the beginning, the divine virtue that awakened Sri Sarada Devi; the

same spirit must continue to stir the minds and hearts of the men and women who have joined this religious movement under the Ramakrishna Mission. It is to be hoped that the spiritual lamp that was lit by Paramhans Sri Ramakrishna a century ago will always illumine and show the path to human beings.

27.9 LET US SUM UP

We started this unit indicating the beginning of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission under the aegis of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. We then went on to outline the ideology of the Mission, the objects and activities of the Mission. We then described the organisational structure of the Math, Mission and governing body. We turned finally to the financial support structure of the math and the mission. This includes the funding of social welfare and cultural activities. We have therefore dealt with the topic adequately.

27.10 KEY WORDS

Belur Math	: Headquarters of Ramakrishna Mission.
Holy Mother	: Sri Sarada Devi
Math	: Contemplative order
Mission	: Socially active order
Sanyasin	: one who renounces the world and turns of God
Sanatan Dharma	: The Eternal Religion
Vedanta	: A philosophy of Hinduism preaching monistic. Unity of all phenomena with Godhead.

27.11 FURTHER READINGS

Swami Gambhirananda, 1957. *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, (with a foreword by Christopher Isherwood) Advaita Ashram, Calcutta.

Ramakrishna Mission, 1990. *Ramakrishna Mission*, New Delhi.

John Yale, 1961. *A Yankee and the Swamis*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London.

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, translated by Swami Nikhilananda with a foreword by Aldous Huxley (in two volumes). Ramakrishna Math, Calcutta.

27.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) Sri Ramakrishna
b) Sri Sarada Devi
c) Swami Vivekananda
- 2) a) Freedom of self, service of mankind.
b) Preaching and practice of Sanatana Dharma as exemplified in the Lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

- c) Renunciation, service and harmony of all religions should be strained towards.
- d) Work and worship should be treated at par and done with utmost seriousness.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Ramakrishna — Vivekananda Mission is a breakaway group from the main Ramakrishna Mission. It emphasized Swami Vivekananda's desire to be born repeatedly among the poor of all races and nations. This mission came to be in 1961 when it was registered and has its headquarters in Barrackpore some 25 km. North of Calcutta city.
- 2) a) Religious activities like worship, religious services; preaching and celebration of birthdays of great saints.
b) Social Welfare Services like educational and health services like hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centres, dispensaries and invalid homes.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The birthday of Sri Ramakrishna falls on 18 February, 1836. On this day there is much worship, prayer and celebration. Ramakrishna's thoughts and blessings are said to accrue to all worshippers.
- 2) The Ramakrishna Mission philosophy sees the Trinity as comprising Sri Ramakrishna the Father, the teacher-preceptor-guide. He illumines the path, Sri Sarada Devi is the Holy Mother a Symbol of love and purity and source of divine energy. Finally Swami Vivekananda is seen as the disciple of the awakened soul — a messenger of love and divine service.

The Trinity is held to be at once Divine and human.

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