

Explanation of some important terms

1. **Sufi/Sufism:** It is an Arabic word which refers to mystics (a person who seeks spiritual union with god) in Islam. The way of striving to achieve the inner unity of soul or mind with the ultimate divine reality or Allah by arousing intuitive and spiritual faculties through prayer, fasting, invoking god's name (zikr), dancing to religious music (sama) as practiced by the sufis is called sufism. It is often suggested that the term *sufi* has been derived from the word *suf* which means wool. This derivation is suggested keeping in view the practice among the sufis who wore wollen garments instead of finer cotton or silk clothes as a mark of asceticism and self denial. As a practice sufism lays greater importance to the activities of the inner self than on the observance of outward religiosity. Historically the development of sufism as a system of thought in Islam found special favour in Persia (modern Iran). Although its genesis (begining) is traced to the prophet and his companions.

2. **Alvar:** It is a Tamil term which means 'one who is absorbed in the divine'. It denotes 12 devotees of Vishnu (c. 7th - 9th centuries CE) whose devotional songs were collected by Nathamuni in the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* (4000 holy hymns). In *Alvar bhakti*, the relationship between the devotee and God was often expressed in terms of the lover- beloved relationship. In some cases, the mother - child relationship was also a form of worship. However, the focus was entirely and exclusively on the love of the God. The *Alvars* came from diverse social backgrounds. Andal was the only woman *Alvar* saint.

3. **Nayanar:** This is a Tamil term which refers to 63 devotee saints of Shiva who lived between 5th and the 10th centuries CE in South India. Their lives were depicted in a work called the *Periyapuranam* compiled in the mid 12th century. Their devotional hymns were called *Tevaram*. In Shaiva bhakti, the relationship between the god and his devotee was sometimes expressed as analogous to that between master and slave. Nayanars hailed from diverse social backgrounds ranging from Brahmans to artisans and cultivators and even from castes considered untouchables such as Nandanar, the Pariah saint. The foremost Nayanars were- Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar. Three women

Nayanar saints were- Karaikkal Ammaiyar, Mangaiyarkkarasiyar and Isainaniyar.

4. **Virashaivism:** The 12th century religious reformation movement associated with the worship of Shiva which originated in the north western part of the modern state of Karnataka is known by the name of Virashaivism. Led by Basaveshwara, (popularly known as Basavanna) it is also known as the Lingayata movement. Traditionally Virshaivism is said to have founded by five mythical acharyas who took birth from the five faces of Shiva and had established the five great sthavara –lingas at Balahalli(Karnataka), Ujjayini(Madhya Pradesh), Sri Shailam(Tamilnadu), Kedara (Uttarakhanda)and Kashi(Uttara Pradesh). Historically, however, it was Basaveshwara who has been credited with the beginning of this movement with the establishment of the Shivanubhava-Mantapa, which became the centre of the propagation of its reformative ideas through ‘Vachnas’ (compositions in Kannada giving expressions to the mystical ideas of devotion to Shiva). In its practice, Virshaivism emphasized on panch-achara(five codes of conduct laid down for the members of the Lingayata community) and ashta-avarana(eight fold shields that protect the devotees from evils of the worldly life and secure their spiritual progress). A distinctive mark of Virshaivism is the wearing of a linga by its followers which symbolizes the presence of god in the body energizing and purifying it continuously. In its heydays, the movement popularized the ideas of equality of all (men and women of all classes) and devotion to god without rituals.

Source: NCERT (2017) *Dictionary of History for School Children (Trilingual)*, National Council of Educational Research & Training, New Delhi.