

EVOLUTION OF POPULAR RELIGION

You have read about the various rituals and religions of people in class 6. You have read about hunter-gatherers, the people of the Indus valley, the Aryans, and so on. Try to remember them with the help of your teacher and discuss which of those early practices can still be seen today.

PART 1

GODS AND GODDESSES AND FORMS OF WORSHIP TODAY

Several religions are practiced in our country today. Each has its own beliefs, rituals and customs. Yet, people in their daily lives adopt the practices of other religions, too. They may worship Ram and Krishna, but also go regularly to the shrine of a *pir*. They may pray in a mosque, but also revere a *devi mata* and sing the bhajans of various saints. Having lived together for thousands of years, people have begun to share in each other's customs and beliefs. If you look carefully at the faith of our people, you will see how many different religions have been assimilated in it.

People worship gods and goddesses in many ways. Some may do this by lighting *agarbattis* and offering flowers to sacred idols. Sometimes a sacred fire may be lit and worshipped. This is also called a *yagna*. Sometimes a goat or a cock may also be sacrificed. Some may go to *samadhis* or *dargahs* to seek blessings. Flowers and *chadars* are offered there. Discuss in your class and fill up the table given below -

GODS AND GODDESSES

- 1. Which goddesses have you seen being worshipped around you?*
- 2. Which gods have you seen being worshipped around you?*
- 3. Which saints, pirs or babas have you seen people paying their respects to?*
- 4. Which animals have you seen people worship?*
- 5. Which trees have you seen people worship?*
- 6. Have you seen people worship rivers and hills too?*

1. At what points in their life do some people perform yagnas and give gifts to brahmins?
2. In honour of which gods are yagnas performed?
3. When are animals sacrificed?
4. In honour of which gods and goddesses are animals sacrificed?
5. Who is worshipped with agarbattis, dhoop, lamps and sweets?
6. For which gods and goddesses are fasts observed?

A lot of people in India pray to gods like Shiva, Vishnu, Rama and Krishna. They revere goddesses like Durga, Parvati, Kali, etc. and worship many plants and animals. They do *yagnas* at various times and give gifts to brahmins, make sacrifices and pray with agarbattis, flowers, lamps, etc. You may have wondered how all these religious practices may have started in our country. Do you think the people of our country have always worshipped in this way?

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PART 2

THE MAURYAN AGE AND AFTER

In the time of the Buddha and Ashoka

If we set out to find about the religion of people who lived 2000 or 2500 years ago, then what would we find? In those days many different kinds of people lived in India. They all had their own special ways of life, their own dresses, their own customs, languages and so on.

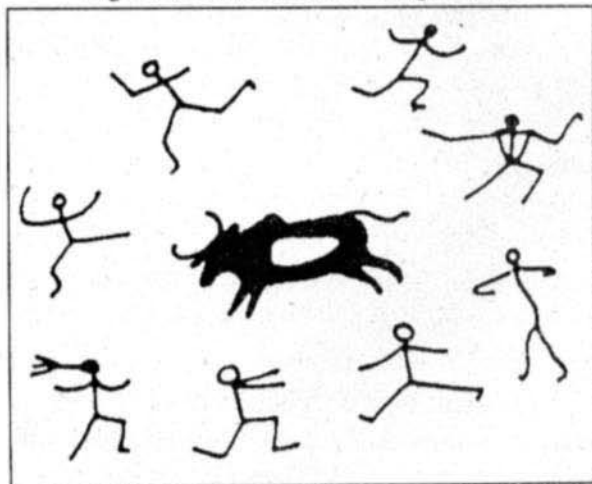
- First, take a look at the map given on page 168 and see which people lived in India at that time. Also see how they made their living. Fill in the table as follows in your copy-

People	Their work
1. Andhras	
2.	

All these people were our ancestors. They believed in different gods and goddesses and had different ways of worshipping them.

1. The Religion of Hunter-gatherers: What sort of religion did the hunter-gatherers who lived in forests follow? Every group of hunter-gatherers had their own gods and goddesses. Some worshipped snakes and some the *peepul*

Fig. 1 The dance of the hunter-gatherers



tree. Some groups worshipped the wild boar and some the fish, the elephant or the monkey. Some people would worship their gods and goddesses by dancing and singing. They did not perform *yagnas* or observe fasts.

2. The Religion of Agriculturists: Those days there were also tribes which cultivated land. What was their religion like? These tribes, too had different gods and goddesses. But it was common for the agriculturists to consider the earth as a mother goddess. It was the earth which gave grain, etc. which sustained their lives. They would often sacrifice animals like goats, buffaloes and cocks to soothen the anger of the mother goddess. Then they would eat the meat as the *prasad* of the goddess. This was their way of worshipping their goddess. These people did not worship Rama or Shiva or the sacred fire. Nor did they perform *yagnas* or other such rituals.

3. Vedic Religion: At the same time, there lived some other people who used to worship gods like Indra, Varuna, Agni by lighting sacrificial fires. The chanting of Vedic hymns was a basic ritual of these people. But these people did not worship the peepul tree or the earth goddess. You read about these people in the class 6 chapter 'The pastoral Aryans'. Try to remember what you read there.

4. Shaivite and Vaishnavite Sects: Very few people worshipped gods like Shiva, Vishnu, Rama or Krishna in the times of the Buddha and Ashoka. There were no temples in those times. A few people worshipped Shiva and a few people also prayed to Vishnu and Rama. A community by the name of Yadu or Shurasena lived to the west of the river Yamuna who worshipped Krishna. For them this meant making idols of Krishna, bathing the idols, offering them incense, flowers and sweets and chanting the name of their god. But the early Vedic people did not favour the worship of idols of Vishnu and Shiva.

5. Buddhism and Jainism: The followers of these religions did not worship any god and believed that it was by good behaviour alone

that one could get *moksha* or salvation. With time, however, the followers of these faiths began to worship Mahavira and the Buddha. The remains of the Buddha and other monks were buried in *stupas*. Their devotees would go around these *stupas* and offer flowers, etc. to them. Before long, people also started to make idols of the Buddha and Mahavira. It was considered a pious act to give alms to Buddhist and Jain monks.

<i>Match the columns:</i>	
<i>Worshipping the earth as a mother -</i>	<i>Buddhists</i>
<i>Performing yagnas -</i>	<i>agriculturist tribes</i>
<i>Offering incense and lamps to idols</i>	<i>Pastoral Aryans</i>
<i>Giving gifts to brahmins -</i>	<i>hunter-gatherers</i>
<i>Sacrificing animals before goddesses -</i>	<i>Pastoral Aryans</i>
<i>Dancing together -</i>	<i>Jainas</i>
<i>Worshipping buffaloes -</i>	<i>Buddhists</i>
<i>Making stupas -</i>	<i>Shaivites/ Vaishnavites</i>

Thus the people living in different places and in different ways had different gods and goddesses. They had different ways of worship. This was the state of affairs 2000 years ago. Now let us see what happened later.

The Intermixing of Religious Traditions after Ashokan Period

A lot of changes took place in the lives of the people of India after Ashokan times. Many hunting-gathering groups of different places took to cultivation of land. They intermixed with other agricultural tribes. Brahmins and *shramanas* from the Ganga-Yamuna plains came and settled in their midst. Small kingdoms also began to emerge among them.

Now people began to borrow the practices of one another. For instance, the cultivators began worshipping snakes, buffaloes and the *peepul* tree like the hunter-gatherers. They also began worshipping gods and goddesses with singing and dancing. But did they stop making sacrifices to the mother earth goddess? No, they would worship the snake and the *peepul* tree along with the mother goddess. The hunter-gatherers, in turn, began to worship the agriculturists' mother goddess.

The brahmins who came and settled among them began to spread their own religious practices. From them came the worship of gods like Indra, Varuna and Agni through *yagnas*, the reciting of Vedic hymns and the giving of gifts to brahmins. The *shramanas* spread the ideas of worshipping *stupas*, praying to the Buddha, non-violence and giving alms to monks. Those days brahmins and *shramanas* enjoyed a lot of respect. Many influential families adopted the practices of the religion of the brahmins. They began to do *yagnas* and give gifts to brahmins alongside their usual practices of worshipping the *peepul* and the cobra and the mother goddess. At the same time they would also give alms to the Buddhist and Jain monks and go to the *stupas*. Now the brahmins, too, began worshipping the *peepul* tree, snakes and the mother goddess. The Buddhists also started worshipping the *peepul* tree, snakes and the mother goddess in their *stupas*.

You must have also seen examples of how new practices are adopted in religions.

Fig.2 Yagna and brahmins in Satyanarayana puja



Very few people prayed to Santoshi Ma some years ago. Then the worship of this goddess expanded and was accepted by a large number of people.

- *Have you seen new gods or goddesses or babas becoming popular in recent times? Discuss how the worship of these gods or goddesses or babas spread in your area and how people accepted them.*

After the time of Ashoka, a lot of new people took to worshipping gods like Shiva, Vishnu, the Buddha, Mahavira and Krishna. A new way of worship, too, arose. Temples began to be built at many places with idols of Shiva and Vishnu. A lot of temples were established in the reign of the Gupta kings. The practices of bathing and decorating the idols kept in them and offering them incense, lamps, sweets, fruits, etc. began to gain popularity. The kings were also influenced by the brahmins to arrange *yagnas* for Shiva and Vishnu and the chanting of the Vedic hymns.

Examples of Composite Religious Behaviour

When Hindus worship Lord Shiva they also pray to the snake, the bull and to the mother goddess Durga. When the Satyanarayana Katha is done, then Vedic hymns are chanted along with the worship of Narayana (Vishnu). At the time of Navdurga festival, the sacrificial fire is lit side by side with the worship of the idol of mother goddess and the sacrifice of animals is performed.

- *From the above three examples choose-*
 1. *Which practices have been taken from the religion of the hunter-gatherers?*
 2. *Which practices have been taken from the Vedic religion?*
 3. *Which practices have been taken from the religion of the agriculturist tribes?*
 4. *Which practices are from the Vaishnavite-Shaivite sects?*

The Differences Between the Religions of the Rich and the Poor

The religion of all the people was still not the same. The rich and powerful people of towns and villages were more attracted to *yagnas* and the

worship of Shiva and Vishnu. These were the people who supported brahmins and temples.

In contrast to this, the poor and ordinary folk prayed more often to the snake, the *peepul* tree and the mother goddess. They were not wealthy enough to patronise the brahmins or do expensive *yagnas*. Then how could the religion of the brahmins spread among them? Wealthy and high caste people did not let the people they considered untouchable to enter their temples. This was another reason for the worship of Vishnu and Shiva not spreading so rapidly among the poor.

As a result while *yagnas*, temples and Vishnu and Shiva became very popular with the rich, the worship of the mother goddess, the snakes, the *peepul* and the buffalo, as well as the sacrifice of animals continued to hold sway among the poor.

- **Underline the most important sentences in the above section.**
- **Who supported brahmins and temples?**

The Exchange of Religious Ideas

When people of different religions met they would often argue to prove that their own respective religions were the best of all. But while they argued they also began to slowly understand each other's point of view. Gradually along with the customs and practices



Fig. 3 The worship of snakes, trees and mother goddesses remained popular with the poor

an exchange of ideas, too, began to take place.

You saw in class 6 that in the time of the Buddha new questions began to be raised about religion and life. You read about the ideas of the Upanishads, the thoughts of the Buddha and Mahavira and the beliefs of the other saints and thinkers. Initially there were a lot of disagreements with each other on these ideas, but slowly people began to understand and adopt a variety of ideas. Over time this led to the rise of a mixed, composite set of beliefs and ideas in the minds of the people.

You read about King Harsha and several kings after him. In that period, after 600 AD, there rose several *bhaktas* or *sants* who contributed to the creation of such ideas. They taught that while we worship different gods and goddesses actually they are all different forms of the same Truth. There is nobody who is high or low before It. Everybody is equal, whether it be a person called a brahmin or a person called an untouchable. This Almighty God is present in all living and non-living objects. That is why no harm should be done to anything. These saints taught that this Almighty God could be reached only by those who loved him with pure hearts, who immersed themselves in his worship. God could not be attained by chanting hymns or by rituals or by giving gifts to brahmins. Such teachings of saints influenced a lot of people. These ideas were especially popular among the poor.

While such ideas were spreading among the common people at the same time a new religion entered India which also believed that there was only one God and all human beings were its creation. This was Islam.

- **Choose the correct answers:**
- *The saints believed that the people of different castes should worship different gods and goddesses.*
- *The saints believed that to attain Almighty God it was necessary to do big yagnas and give gifts to brahmins.*
- *The saints believed that there was only one God who was in everybody and in everything.*

PART 3

ISLAM

Muhammad

The religion of Islam started in the Arab countries some 1400 years before today. The people who lived there used to herd animals and kept fighting amongst themselves. Muhammad was born in 571 AD in the town of Mecca. The followers of Islam consider Muhammad to be their prophet or the person through whom divine truths were revealed. Their prophet told them that there is only one God and all human beings are his creation. The way all children are equal before their parents, all human beings are equal before God. God or Allah has no shape and therefore it is considered to be wrong to worship idols. God should be worshipped in a very simple way, without elaborate rituals. The meaning of Islam is, to follow with humility. The followers of Islam, or the Muslims, believe that the various instructions given by Allah through the medium of the prophet are written in the Koran and that is considered to be a holy book.

- *What do you think is the most important teaching of prophet Muhammad?*

Initially the people of Mecca opposed the teachings of Muhammad. What he was saying was in opposition to the old ways of idol-worship and the division of society into high and low groups. At one point Muhammad was even forced to flee from Mecca to Medina. Slowly, however, all the tribes living in Arabia began to accept the sayings of Muhammad and became Muslims.

Having started from Arabia Islam soon spread to several other countries of the world. See in Map 1 the continents to which Islam had spread by 1000 AD.

- *Look at the map and name the continents to which Islam had spread by 1000 AD.*
- *On the shores of which sea are Mecca and Medina located?*

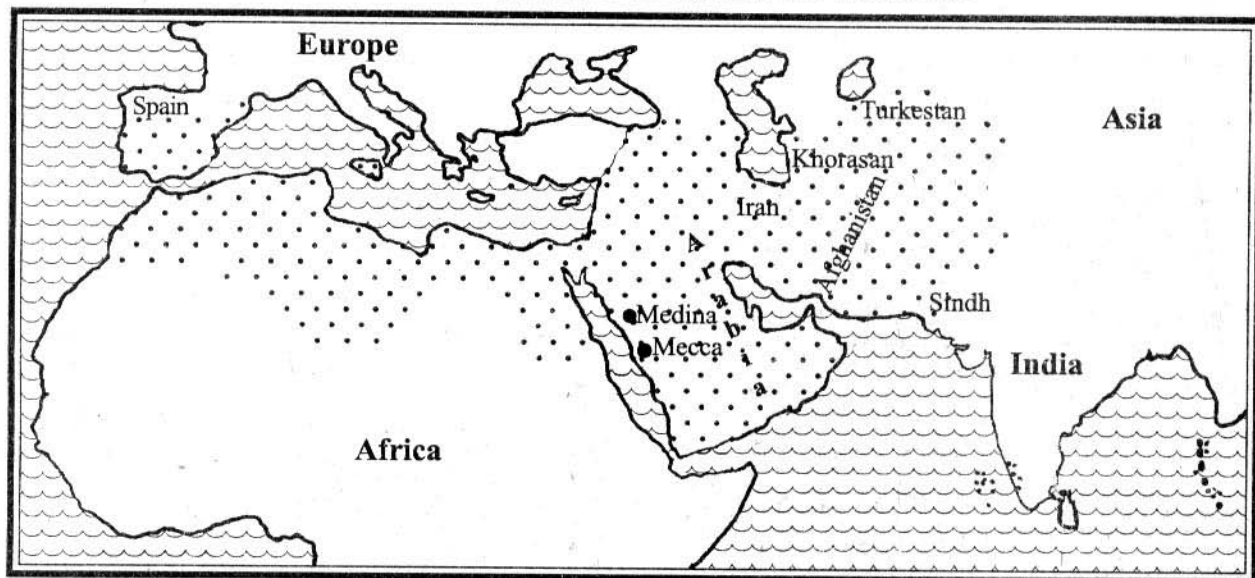
Muslims

All the Muslims of the world, wherever they may come from, believe in one god whom they call Allah. They believe that Muhammad was his prophet or messenger. However, there are several sects within Islam like the Shias, the Sunnis, the Ismailis, the Ahmadiyas, the Mahdi, the Roshaniya, etc. There are a lot of differences between them and sometimes even heated arguments may take place.

The Shias pay homage to Ali and Hussein, the descendants of Muhammad, because they gave their lives for the faith. Sunnis are opposed to this. The Ismailis believe that the Imam or religious leaders can also be worshipped. The rest of the Muslims believe that it is a sin to worship anybody other than Allah. The Mahdis believe that when the sins of the world become intolerable, Allah will send another prophet - the Mahdi - who will wipe out all sin to re-establish the true religion. Others believe that Muhammad is the last prophet and there can be no prophet after him.

- *Can you describe how the Shias remember Ali on the anniversary day of his martyrdom?*

MAP 1. THE SPREAD OF ISLAM BY 1000 AD



Islam Comes to India

Islam came to different parts of India at different times. Arab traders used to visit far-off places by sea long before Muhammad. Southern India had old links with such visiting Arab traders. They carried on as before even after the spread of Islam in Arabia. The Arab traders brought the new religion to Gujarat and South India where they built the new places of worship - the mosques. Inspired by these visiting traders a few local people thought the new religion to also be worth following. Even today the descendants of those first Indians to accept Islam live along the Kerala coast and they are called Moplahs.

An Arab general named Muhammad bin Qasim set up Arab rule in Sindh in 711-712 AD. Many Arabs settled in Sindh and Multan. The local people learnt about Islam from them. This area today has a large number of Ismaili Muslims.

The Turkish tribes attacked Iran around 900 AD. These Turks followed a different religion which was influenced by Buddhism. Many Iranians fled to India. There were many soldiers, craftsmen and saints among them. These Iranians were Muslims. Many people learnt about Islam by coming in contact with them.

The Turks began to rule parts of India after 1190 AD. By this time even the Turks had become Muslims. A large number of Iranian, Afghan and Khurasani Muslims came to India with them.

- *Make a list of the various groups which were following Islam when they came to India and explain why they came here.*

Many people in India begin to follow Islam

You read that the followers of Islam believed there was only one God and that it was wrong to pray to idols. Such a religion was quite different from all other religions of its time. As a result there were often conflicts between Muslims and people who followed other religions. However, just as had happened earlier in Indian history, slowly people began to understand each other in a better way. Some people liked the teachings of Islam so much that they became Muslims. Others adopted some of the teachings of Islam and carried on with their old ways for the rest.

Many people learnt the ways of Islam from the Muslim saints and sufis, the craftsmen and the other common folk. For instance, Sheikh Nuruddin of Kashmir (who is also

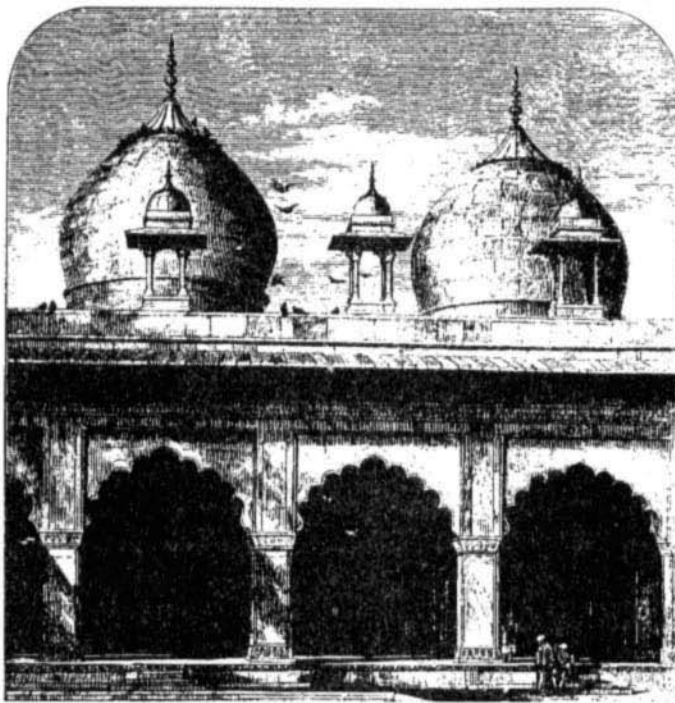
called Nand Rishi) helped to spread Islam. It is said that Islam came to Kashmir because of him. A lady Shaiva saint called Lalla Ded also used to preach at the same time as Nuruddin. Both used to respect each other and would learn from each other. The Muslims and Hindus of Kashmir even today pay homage to these two saints.

In Rajasthan many people learnt the teachings of Islam from saints like Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti.

East Bengal was largely a marshy, wild land in the early days of the arrival of Islam in India. Many Muslims began to cultivate land there. Under their influence others who came to settle there and cultivate land also slowly became Muslims. Thus, most of the farmers of east Bengal, which is today's Bangladesh, are Muslims.

You have learnt that when people adopted a new religion they still continued to practice many things from their old religion. Similarly, when people in India became Muslims they still held on to many old customs and practices. There are a lot of people in Rajasthan, for example, who pray in a mosque, go to ask for blessings at a *dargah* and also worship several gods and goddesses and saints.

Some medieval Indian kings also made people take to Islam by giving them inducements or even forced them to become Muslims. But still most people did not leave their old religion completely. This is proven by the fact that in Delhi or in Uttar Pradesh where the Muslim rule was the strongest, the number of Muslims is not very high. In comparison with



that, the number of Muslims in Bengal, Kashmir, Punjab and Kerala is very high.

The Sufi and Bhakti saints

India saw several saints between 1100 and 1600 AD whose names you would be familiar with even today. T u k a r a m , Ramanad, Kabir, Nanak, Tulsidas, Dadu Dayal, Raidas, Meera -

you would have read their poems in your Hindi books and also sung them at home. Their poems were composed in the language of the people and were full of devotion to god. This is why they are also known as the *bhakti* saints. Many of the ideas which they sang about continue to inspire people till now.

There were several Muslim saints, too, who sang of similar themes and they were called the Sufis. Ajmer's Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, Punjab's Baba Farid, Delhi's Hazrat Nizamuddin are some of the saints whose fame spread far and wide. The Urs celebrated on the death anniversary of the Khwaja of Ajmer is one of the most popular festivals of our country. Lakhs of Hindus and Muslims go to the Khwaja's dargah on that day and offer a *chadar* and ask for their wishes to be fulfilled.

The ideas of these bhakti and sufi saints were very similar to each other. The Sufis said that the way to Allah was by loving him with a pure heart and repenting for one's sins. The correct meaning of religion was to renounce all wealth, power and position and to serve the poor, needy and helpless. They were against any fanaticism or ritualism. For them only that ritual was important in which the devotee's

heart was filled with the love of god. People would dance and sing at the gatherings of Sufis. It is from here that the Qawwali became popular.

The Sufi saints would refuse to live in the middle of the town with the rich. Instead they would prefer to live with the poor. The rich and the poor, the Hindus and the Muslims, all would come to their houses and eat together. Many of the Sufis would keep themselves away from the kings. They believed that the kings did not follow the teachings of the Quran and only followed the ways of sin and crime. All these things drew people to the Sufis, be they Hindus or Muslims.

Like the Sufis, the bhakti saints, too, taught people that the best way to God was to love with a pure heart. They composed many songs in the language of the people which devotees would sing with great abandon. They, too, were against all the divisions of society,

be it between the rich and the poor, or into many castes. They said that they respected any devotee of god, be he a brahmin or an untouchable. These saints were deeply influenced by the Sufi saints and the Sufi saints by them. Many such saints began to say that the god of the Hindus and the Muslims was one and the same. The path to god, too, was the same.

Lalla Ded was a brahmin widow of Kashmir. Many Sufi saints considered her their teacher. She said, "Shiva is present everywhere and in everything. Then do not see Hindus and Muslims as separate. If you are wise you will try to understand yourself. This is the correct way to understand God."

These saints helped Hindus and Muslims to understand what was similar in each others' religions. The idea began to sink into people that there is only one god, even if he be called by different names like Shiva, Allah, Ram or Vishnu.

EXERCISE

1. Identify the correct sentences -

- a) People of just one tribe lived all over India at the time of King Ashoka.
 - b) At the time of King Ashoka the practice of worshipping Shiva and Vishnu had not spread all over India.
 - c) In the beginning the *peepul* tree, snakes, the buffalo, etc. were worshipped only in tribal religions.
 - d) The mother goddesses were worshipped in Vedic religion.
 - e) In the beginning *yagnas* for the mother goddess were done by agriculturist tribes.
2. What changes did agriculturist tribes adopt in their religion after the rule of King Ashoka?
 3. What were the new practices adopted by the followers of Vedic religion?
 4. What were the new practices adopted by those who worshipped Shiva and Vishnu?
 5. What were the new religious practices adopted by hunter-gatherers?
 6. Why do you think this kind of intermixing took place between the different religions?
 7. What were the differences between the religion of the rich and the poor and why?
 8. What do you know about these - Quran, Mecca-Medina, Prophet Muhammad and *dargah*?
 9. With whom did Islam first come to India?
 10. Why did Iranians come to India before 1000 AD?
 11. Did the bhakti and sufi saints have different ways of reaching out to god? What was their way?