

Medieval Literature, Persian, Urdu, Hindi & Bhakti Movement

April 28, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



Medieval literature refers to the writings produced during the Middle Ages (5th to 15th century). It includes poems, stories, religious texts, and historical writings. Most works were influenced by religion and often aimed to teach moral values. Many stories were first shared orally and later written down. Overall, Medieval Literature reflects the beliefs, culture, and everyday life of people of that time.

Persian Literature in Medieval India

- **Arrival and growth of Persian language in India:** Persian is an ancient language like Sanskrit, but it came to **India mainly with the Turks and Mongols around the 12th century**. Over time, it became very important and was widely used in royal courts, administration, and official communication.
- **Persian as the court language:** During the **Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal period**, **Persian** became the **main language** of governance, education, and literature. Kings and nobles supported Persian writers, which helped the language grow rapidly in India.
- **Famous poet Amir Khusrau:** One of the most well-known Persian poets was **Amir Khusrau**, also called the **“Parrot of India.”** He wrote many beautiful poems and works like **Nuh Sipihr** and **Masnavi Duwal**

Rani Khizr Khan, and his Diwan (poetry collection) is highly respected.

- **Important historians of the time:** Historians like **Zia-ud-Din Barani** wrote **Tarikh-e-Firuz Shahi**, which gives details about rulers and events of that time. Another historian, **Minhaj-i-Siraj**, also contributed important historical records.
- **Travel accounts and social life:** Travelers like **Ibn Battuta** visited India and wrote detailed accounts about society, politics, and daily life, which help us understand that period better.
- **Growth during the Mughal period:** Persian literature reached its peak during the Mughal Empire, as emperors actively supported writers, poets, and scholars, leading to a rich collection of books, histories, and poetry.
- **Important Mughal literary works:** **Tuzuk-i-Babari (Babur's autobiography)** gives insight into early Mughal history, while **Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri** tells us about **Jahangir's rule**. **Humayun-nama**, written by **Gulbadan Begum**, describes Humayun's life and struggles.
- **Akbar's contribution to literature:** Emperor Akbar greatly promoted literature. His court historian **Abul Fazl** wrote **Akbarnama** and **Ain-i-Akbari**, which are very important historical sources. Akbar also encouraged the translation of many Sanskrit texts like the Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita, and Upanishads into Persian. The **Mahabharata** was **translated as Razmnama**.
- **Other famous works and writers:** **Hamzanama** is a beautifully illustrated text telling the story of **Amir Hamza**. **Malik Muhammad Jayasi** wrote **Padmavat**, a famous poetic work. Writers like **Badauni** and **Faizi** also made important contributions to Persian literature.
- **Literature during later Mughal rulers:** During Shah Jahan's time, works like **Padshahnama** by **Abdul Hamid Lahori** and **Shah Jahan-nama** were written, describing his reign. During Aurangzeb's rule, writers like **Mir Jafar Zataili** composed satirical poetry collections.

Urdu Literature in Medieval India

- **Origin and development of Urdu language:** Urdu developed through the **mixing of Persian and Hindi languages**, especially in the camps and army barracks of Turkish rulers. Over time, it became a unique language with its own identity, combining Indian vocabulary with Persian style and expression.
- **Early growth and structure of Urdu:** The **grammar of Urdu is mainly based on Hindi**, while its script and writing style come from Persian. In its early stage, it was not fully developed and was still evolving as a literary language.
- **Dakkani Urdu in the South:** Urdu was first popularly known as **"Dakkani"** because it was widely used in the Deccan region, especially in states like **Ahmedabad, Golconda, Bijapur, and Berar**. This version of Urdu played an important role in shaping modern Urdu literature.
- **Contribution of early writers:** **Amir Khusrau** is considered one of the early contributors who used a mix of languages, including early Urdu, in his writings, helping in its gradual development.
- **Famous Urdu poets and their works:** **Mirza Ghalib** is one of the greatest Urdu poets, known for his Diwan (collection of poetry), which is still widely read today. Other important poets include Mir Taqi Mir, Sauda, and Khwaja Mir Dard, who enriched Urdu poetry with deep emotions and themes of love and spirituality.
- **Urdu literature in the modern period:** In the 20th century, Muhammad Iqbal became a major literary figure. His work **Bang-i-Dara** and the famous patriotic song **"Saare Jahan Se Achha"** made him widely

respected and influential.

- **Role of rulers and patrons:** Urdu literature received strong support from rulers like Bahadur Shah Zafar, who himself was a poet. The Nawabs of Awadh also encouraged Urdu writers and poets, helping the language grow further.
- **Contribution of reformers and modern thinkers:** Sir Syed Ahmad Khan played a key role in promoting Urdu in modern times. He wrote educational and social reform texts in Urdu and English, giving the language a new direction and importance.

Hindi Literature in Medieval India

- **Origin and development of Hindi language:** Hindi developed gradually from **Apabhramsa**, which itself came from Prakrit, between the 7th and 14th centuries. Over time, it evolved into a more structured and widely used language, becoming the base of modern Hindi.
- **Role of the Bhakti Movement:** The **Bhakti movement** played a major role in promoting Hindi. Saints and poets avoided Sanskrit because it was mostly used by educated elites, and instead chose simple local languages so that common people could easily understand their teachings.
- **Growth of regional languages:** From the 12th century onwards, many regional languages like Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, and Gujarati started growing rapidly. This made literature more accessible and helped people connect better with religious and social ideas.
- **Early Hindi literature:** For a long time, Hindi literature remained less important compared to Sanskrit. However, **Prithviraj Raso, written by Chand Bardai**, is considered one of the earliest Hindi works, describing the life and bravery of Prithviraj Chauhan.
- **Contribution of Bhakti poets:** Much of medieval Hindi literature is in the form of poetry, especially devotional poetry. Kabir is famous for his simple and meaningful dohas (couplets), which are still widely remembered and used in everyday life.
- **Works of Tulsidas:** Tulsidas made a huge contribution by writing Ramcharitmanas in simple language, making the story of Lord Rama accessible to everyone. His writing style mixed local dialects like Braj with some Persian influence.
- **Krishna Bhakti literature:** The **life and stories of Lord Krishna became a popular theme**. Surdas wrote **Sur Sagar**, beautifully describing Krishna's childhood and his playful moments with the gopis. Other poets like **Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khanan (Rahim), Bhushan, and Raskhan** also expressed deep devotion to Krishna.
- **Contribution of Mirabai:** **Mirabai** is one of the most famous female Bhakti poets, known for her deep love and devotion to Lord Krishna. She left royal life and dedicated herself completely to spiritual poetry.
- **Other important works and traditions:** Works like Satsai from Bihar also became popular, adding to the richness of Hindi literature. Many poems and songs from this period focused on devotion, love, and moral values.

Status of Sanskrit & Sanskrit Literature in Medieval India

- **Sanskrit as a prestigious language:** Sanskrit was considered a very important and respected language in medieval India. It was mainly used by educated people, especially Brahmins, and was seen as the language

of knowledge, religion, and scholarship. However, it was not commonly spoken by ordinary people in daily life.

- **Role of Sanskrit in literature and religion:** Sanskrit was widely used to write important religious and philosophical texts like the Vedas, Puranas, and Upanishads. It remained the main language for learning, rituals, and higher education across India.
- **Contribution of the Pala Empire:** The **Pala rulers greatly supported Sanskrit literature**. During the rule of Madan Pal, scholars like **Sandhyakar Nandi** wrote **Ramcharit**, and **Sridhar Nandi** composed works such as **Nyayakandali**, **Tattvaprabodh**, **Tattvasangbadini**, and **Tattva Sangraha Tika**, which focused on philosophy and logic.
- **Important scholars and their works:** Scholars like **Chakrapani Datta** contributed to medical science through works like **Chikitsa Sangraha** and **Ayurveda Deepika**. **Jimutavahana** wrote **Dayabhaga**, an important text on Hindu law and inheritance.
- **Sena dynasty contributions:** During the Sena period, **Ballala Sena** wrote important texts like **Dan-Sagara**, **Advut-Sagara**, and **Pratistha-Sagara**, which added value to Hindu religious and legal knowledge.
- **Famous literary works of the time:** **Gita Govinda by Jayadeva** is one of the most popular Sanskrit works, known for its devotional poetry on Lord Krishna. Another notable work is **Meghaduta** by Dhoyi, which reflects poetic beauty and emotions.

Status of Tamil & Tamil Literature in Medieval India

- **Tamil as one of the oldest languages:** Tamil is one of the oldest and most respected languages in India, with a very rich and continuous literary tradition. It has been used for thousands of years and has preserved both ancient culture and evolving modern ideas.
- **Strong role in Bhakti literature:** Tamil played a major role in the Bhakti movement, where saints and poets used simple language to express devotion to God. This made religious ideas easy to understand and helped connect deeply with common people.
- **Wide use and continuous growth:** Unlike some classical languages, Tamil continued to be widely spoken and read by people. Over time, it developed by blending its ancient roots with new styles, making it both traditional and modern at the same time.
- **Golden period during the Chola dynasty:** Tamil literature reached its peak during the rule of the Chola kings, when art, culture, and literature were highly supported. Many great works were produced during this time.
- **Famous Tamil literary works:** One of the most well-known works is **Ramavatharam**, written by **Kamban**, which beautifully presents the story of the Ramayana in Tamil and is still highly respected today.
- **Important Tamil writers and contributions:** **Avvaiyar** wrote **Aathichudi**, a simple yet meaningful work that teaches moral values. **Bhimbkavi** wrote **Raghav-Padaviya**, inspired by great epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- **Influence of epics and devotion:** Many Tamil works were inspired by stories of gods like Rama and Krishna, as well as Indian epics. These works combined devotion, storytelling, and moral teachings, making them popular among people.

Role of Religion in Shaping Medieval Literature

- **Rise of religious traditions:** During this period, Brahmanical religion became stronger, while **Buddhism** and Jainism declined. Literature started focusing more on temple worship, rituals, and devotion.
- **Different sects shaping literature:** Sects like Shaivism, **Vaishnavism**, and Shaktism influenced many religious texts and poems, leading to diverse devotional writings.
- **Role of Puranas:** Texts like the Bhagavata Purana and Markandeya Purana spread religious stories, myths, and values, shaping people's beliefs and culture.
- **Sacred idea of India:** Epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata described India as a holy land, helping create a shared religious identity among people.
- **Mix of myth and real life:** Literature included both divine stories and real-life experiences, making it more relatable and meaningful.
- **Influence of philosophers:** Thinkers like **Adi Shankaracharya** and Ramanuja shaped religious ideas, which were reflected in literature.
- **Overall impact:** Religion became the main theme of medieval literature, influencing culture, values, and the way people understood life and spirituality.

Influence of Bhakti Movement on Medieval Literature

- **Focus on devotion and personal connection with God:** The Bhakti Movement mainly focused on deep love and devotion towards a personal god like Krishna or Rama. Poets expressed this devotion through simple songs and poems, often showing God as a friend, lover, or parent, which made spirituality easy to understand for common people.
- **Promotion of unity and religious harmony:** The movement helped bring people of different religions closer by spreading messages of equality and unity. Saints like Kabir and Guru Nanak taught that God is one and lives in every human being, reducing differences between Hinduism and Islam.
- **Growth of regional languages:** Bhakti poets wrote in local languages instead of Sanskrit, which helped common people understand religious ideas easily. This led to the growth of languages like Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, and others, with writers like Tulsidas, Mirabai, and Basavanna making major contributions.
- **Challenge to caste system and social inequality:** The Bhakti Movement strongly opposed the rigid caste system. It taught that anyone, regardless of caste or background, could worship God. Many Bhakti poets came from lower castes and used literature to speak against social injustice.
- **Importance of personal spiritual experience:** Instead of focusing on rituals and complex practices, the movement encouraged people to have a direct and personal experience with God. This made literature more emotional, meaningful, and spiritually rich.
- **Development of new poetic styles:** The **Bhakti Movement** gave rise to simple, lyrical, and musical forms of poetry. These poems often combined local traditions with themes from epics, creating a wide variety of devotional literature.
- **Role of women in Bhakti literature:** Women also played an important role in this movement. Poets like Mirabai and Lal Ded expressed their devotion through powerful poetry and challenged social restrictions, giving voice to women in spiritual and literary fields.

- **Overall impact on literature and society:** The Bhakti Movement made literature more people-friendly, emotional, and inclusive. It not only changed the way literature was written but also helped bring social reform, equality, and a deeper connection between people and spirituality.
- **Influence of the Bhakti Movement:** The Bhakti movement encouraged the use of regional languages so that spiritual ideas could reach common people. This also led to differences within religious groups, such as Thenkalai (supporting Tamil) and Vadakalai (supporting Sanskrit) among Vaishnavas.

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