
UNIT 21 CHANGING SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN PENINSULAR INDIA

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21.0 INTRODUCTION

There were certain factors that accelerated changes in society during the medieval period in the region of Deccan and South India. These factors were related to political, economic and religious developments that often led to the rise of new social groups and changed the nature of the pre-existing one. The decline of the Yadavas around tenth century AD, rise of the Kakatiyas in eastern Deccan, the establishment of the Bahamani kingdom in the fourteenth century followed by the establishment of the four Deccani sultanates of Adil Shahi, Nizam Shahi, Qutub Shahi and Barid Shahi and Imad Shahis, the Mughal invasion and expansion of Deccan in the seventeenth century and finally the establishment of the Marathas-all led to changing political configurations that influenced the society at the village and urban levels. Marathi, Kannada and Telugu speaking groups apart from having their individual spheres of interaction also interacted and influenced each other. The development and growth of Dakhani language and culture that began even before the establishment of the Bahamanis in 1347 AD was accelerated with its establishment and introduced new aspects in the social life. Dakhani Urdu emerged as the local language in the Deccan region and was influenced by Marathi, Kannada and Telugu linguistic and cultural forms. In order to enhance their resource base, the state polities expanded agricultural areas and activities. The expansion of agriculture in the hilly and the forested areas and the settlement of new villages influenced the social composition significantly. (This has been discussed in the Unit 18, Block 5) In Eastern Deccan, in the region of the Kakatiyas of Warangal (1000-1326 AD) in Andhra Pradesh, the expansion of the agrarian base and transformation of the rural society involved construction of new temples. Numerous donations of land, especially the uncultivated forested ones, were made by the local chiefs, merchants, and the members of the royal family. These lands were cleared of forests, irrigation tanks were built on them and cultivation was initiated. Several tribes who inhabited these forests were converted to peasants and incorporated into the lower rung of the rural society. The temple served as the 'social and political integrator'. It employed the peasants, artisans and pastoralist on the temple lands and for various temple activities and incorporated these different

communities of the rural society within a single framework of religion. From the fourteenth century onwards, the various *bhakti* and *Sufis* cults in the Deccan due to their popular social base and a broad religious outlook represented in their interaction with the society a process of 'acculturation' that involved interaction and diffusion of cultural values and traditions between the various social groups, resulting in the development of new cultural characteristics.

Similarly, political changes in the peninsular region led to changing social situations. A period of transition can be seen during the gradual decline of the Cholas in the twelfth- thirteenth centuries, the invasions of the Delhi Sultanate in the fourteenth century and the rise of the Vijayanagar Empire in the fourteenth century. Especially, the Hoysala occupation of the Tamil region and the establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire by AD 1336, led to the integration of the three cultural zones of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. As a result, a network of relations developed between wetland agricultural settlements and dry upland zones with a narrow resource base. This brought into focus the Telugu warriors as well as the dominant agricultural community of the Velamas from the arid northern zones of the Deccan plateau and a new warrior class, subsequently known as the *nayakas*. Consequently, unsettled forested areas and hilly tracts situated on the peripheries of agricultural settlements gradually evolved into major political and economic centres. The population of these inhospitable tracts comprised of hunting tribes whose martial tradition became the basis of their recruitment in the Vijayanagar and *nayaka* armies. Subsequently, military recruitment began to attract a socially diverse group of troopers from beyond the boundaries of South India. A large number of North Indian, Deccani and Rajput warriors migrated southwards to join these armies. According to Susan Bayly, a 'large number of Islamic motifs' filtered through to South India during the Vijayanagar period (AD1336-1576) through this avenue of migration. (Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900*, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 31-68).

Simultaneous with the changing political conditions was the expansion and growth of trade, trading networks and urbanization. The merchant and the artisan class were much more mobile, territorial barriers being of little significance to them. For instance, Kanmala and Komatti traders and Pattanulkar (silk weavers) from Saurashtra finally settled in the Tamil region during the Vijayanagar period. Particularly, the Pattanulkars migrated from Saurashtra, briefly settled in the city of Vijayanagara in northern Karnataka, from where they again moved out, and finally settled in the pilgrimage centers of Kancipuram, Madurai and Ramesvaram. The emergent mercantile communities were the followers of different religious traditions – Saiva, Vaisnava and Islam and their complex network of economic interaction influenced the society in the medieval period.

21.1 POLITICAL ELITES

The new warrior class, subsequently known as the *nayakas*, emerged as the patron of temples and *mathas* that promoted various religious systems during the medieval period. The *nayakas* were also involved in the management of the temples. Although the *nayakas* are primarily associated with the Vijayanagar Empire, the beginning of this social group as significant political elite is first noted in the Kakatiya kingdom of eastern Deccan. In the Kakatiya kingdom various landed elements especially the powerful chieftains of the Andhra rural society were incorporated into the political network. They were of non-noble ranks and their incorporation was at the expense of the older, established princes and chiefs of noble lineage. These chiefs already possessed hereditary rights over their own plots of land and had a fixed share in the agricultural produce of the village. In lieu of their services to the Kakatiya state, they were granted additional land that was assessed at *concessional* rates. They had the

power to remit taxes within their localities and held military titles like *angaraksha*, *lenka* and *nayakas*. (Cynthia Talbot, 2001. *Pre-colonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.pp.48-84) Such tenure was called *vritti*. Further, in order to incorporate the chiefs and warriors in to the political framework, the Kakatiya state created a new type of teneurial right over territories called *nayankaramu*.

Changing political boundaries, ever mounting military requirements of the kingdoms, especially of the Vijayanagar Empire and the expansion of the agricultural frontier contributed to the increasing migration of the Telugu warrior class to the river valleys and peripheral areas of potential development. Referred to as the *nayakas*, they impinged upon the pre-existing local power groups and their respective spheres of control and emerged as the major benefactors of the temples and *mathas*. These *nayakas* were also called *amaranayaka*. According to Fernao Nuniz and Domingo Paes, the two Portuguese travellers who visited the Vijayanagar Empire during the sixteenth century in the reign of Krishnadevaraya refer to the *nayakas* as the agents of the Vijayanagar rulers, the *rayas*. The *nayakas* collected taxes from the territories on the *raya's* behalf and rendered military service. They had a certain number of troops under their control and possessed revenue rights over land and territory called *amaram*. They also had the obligations of giving gifts to the temples, repairing and building tanks and reclaiming land for agriculture. Later on these *nayakas* became powerful and established independent states during the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

According to Noboru Karashima, the *nayakas* were large military commanders who were granted land by the king in the fifteenth century and functioned somewhat 'like the feudal lords of medieval Europe and Japan.' He says that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the legitimacy of the *nayaka's* territorial rule was initially derived from the authority given by the king. The *nayakas* during this period were important officials like governors, *mahamandaleshvara*, generals, *dandanayakas*, revenue officers, *adhikari* and administrators. It is only in the sixteenth century according to Karashima that, they displayed more feudal characteristics. They had clear cut territories called *nayakkattanam*. "This feudal relationship was seen not only between the kings and the *nayakas*, but also amongst the *nayakas* themselves, between superiors and inferiors, which is also well reflected in the references to the merit given by the under lord for the benefit of the lord. At the bottom level, this feudal hierarchy embraced the big landholders in the village." (Noboru Karashima, 1994. *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagar Rule*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.pp.35-38). Therefore there was a hierarchical network of lord-vassal relations which reached down the landlords and the occupant cultivators of the village.

Several historians like D.C.Sircar do not agree with the view that the *nayakas* and the *nayankara* system represented a feudal structure, for 'fealty', 'homage' and 'subinfeudation' associated with feudalism seems to find little evidence here.

An analysis of the *nayaka* rule shows that under them, there was political and economic stability and there was an expansion of manufacture and trade. They encouraged artisans and merchants and gave them protection as shown by the tax remission given to the *kanmalas*, and *tarikkam* collected from the weekly fair.

The political elites in the Deccan comprised of various sections of nobility and the *iqtdars*. In the Bahamani court, one of the influential factions within the nobility was the Afaqis. The term means universal that is those who do not have any roots. The Afaqis were therefore foreigners. The Afaqis migrated from Iran, Transoxiana and Iraq and became influential in the Bahamani court from the fifteenth century onwards. This created resentment amongst the older nobility called the Dakhanis. The Sultans

of the Bahamani kingdoms and the subsequent Deccan Sultanates often tried to support one group of nobility against another, so that neither group became strong enough to overwhelm the Sultan. These recurring factional fights imparted an unstable character to the polity and often led to the decline of that particular state.

After establishing his sovereignty in the Deccan, Hasan Bahaman Shah appointed all his allies who had helped him to drive out the Tughlaqs and establish the Bahamani kingdom with administrative posts. They were given revenue assignments known as the *iqtas*. The institution of *iqta* resembled the *iqadari* system of the Delhi Sultanate. The *iqta* holders had to maintain the troops and equipments and these were to be proportionate to the size of the *iqtas*. The *iqtas* given to various power groups by the Bahamani and the Deccani Sultanates were transferable assignments.

Though not so initially, the *iqadars* in the Deccan subsequently emerged as absentee landlords based in the cities. The *iqtas* in the Deccan were centred around the towns and forts and attracted trade and commerce as they provided security for the movement of the traders, cash and goods. There are evidences to show that the Bahamani *iqadars* often gave *iqtas* from their own assignments to the local *zamindars* that represented the powerful indigenous class of hereditary landholders. This has been seen as a process of sub-infeudation since it was not the central government that granted *iqtas* to the local *zamindars*, but one of its own *iqadars*. Therefore, the *iqtas* became a mechanism by which the Bahamani state controlled the villages by absorbing the rural elites as a part of the political frame work.

21.2 LANDED ELITES

In this Section we will primarily focus on landed elites who happen to possess urban base as well.

21.2.1 *Watandars*

In the Deccan region, one of the powerful agrarian classes was that of the *watandars*. The holder of a *watan* was called the *watandar*. *Watan* meant a patrimony which was not only hereditary but also saleable and transferable. *Watandars* of *pargana*, like the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* were superior to the *watandars* of the village, the *patils* and *kulkaranis*. The *watan* was valued, for it was not only a lucrative source of income, but a symbol of social prestige. Despite acquiring political power and position in the state hierarchy, the Marathas were always keen to retain their original village *watan* which compared to the political power was permanent in nature. Several holders of temporary land tenures like *saranjam*, *jagir*, *mokasa* were always anxious to get these tenures converted to *watan* or *inam* that could remain with their family in perpetuity. Village officers, viz., the *deshmukhs*, *deshpandes*, *patils*, *kulkarani* and one of the *balutedars*, that is the village servants the *Mahar* communities held large landed holdings and were entitled to certain rights and privileges called *haklavajma*. All these privileges along with their respective administrative positions were called the *watan*. The position of the *watandars* in the agrarian hierarchy and their rights and privileges has already been discussed in detail in the unit on the rural society.

21.2.2 Landed Elites in the Tamil Region

In the Tamil region there were agrarian elites of diverse social background whose status in the agrarian hierarchy as well as in the political structure of the various states kept on changing. The river valleys from the sixth century onwards, witnessed a proliferation of the *brahmadeyas* and the temples at the royal initiative that recognized the potential of these two institutions for restructuring and integrating the economy and society. Therefore, a class of brahmana landed elites emerged. Since they were the repositories of better irrigation technology and farming methods, the land granted

to them became a mechanism for the extension of agriculture into unsettled areas and extraction of the surplus from various peasant groups. The significance of the brahmanas in the *brahmadeyas* stemmed from their Vedic-Puranic-Sastraic discourse that provided the social rationale for integrating diverse peasant and tribal groups through the institution of caste. Therefore linking peasants, local chiefs and other groups to the royalty, both the brahmana and the *brahmadeya* also utilized as the institutional channels of transmission and dissemination of the royal ideology. The proliferation of *brahmadeyas* in the river valleys was also instrumental in extending agriculture. The brahmana landed class implemented the royal irrigation projects and this gave them the crucial right to organize and manage the production and water resources, often with the *vellala* community, i.e. the powerful non-brahmana landowners. Therefore, the brahmana landed elites often by their presence, in the non-brahmana villages promoted the royal strategy for ensuring the loyalty of the various social groups there and provided the much-needed manpower for the vast irrigation projects.

Political and economic changes further influenced the caste equations within the rural society, when the brahmana landed elites in the *brahmadeyas* were replaced by several non-brahmana groups as the powerful landed elites. For instance, in a village called Ukkal situated in the lower Kaveri valley of the Tamil region, the brahmanas were prosperous landholders controlling the agricultural production till twelfth century. However, by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they were selling their lands. The immediate cause was the heavy taxation imposed by the Vijayanagar rulers. The non-brahmanas bought the land in Ukkal, thereby emerging as new landed magnates of the village towards the end of Chola rule.

During the Chola period, there was an influential non-brahmana landed group called the *nattavars* or *nattars* meaning the people of the territory of the *nadus*. But inscriptions refer to only the influential representatives of the *nadus* implying that the *nattavars* were the landed elites and the representatives of the big landholders. They collected dues, imposed forced labour and have been portrayed as an exploitative class. (Noboru Karashima, *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagar Rule*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp.42-61). They were actual controllers of local production, having under them small landholders, cultivators and perhaps artisans and merchants. *Nattavars* controlled funds for worship in the temples and conducting repair works. Their power was rooted deeply in the locality. The Chola period *nattavars* were mainly the *Vellalas* tied to each other by kinship network. Some of the locally entrenched *Vellala* landed communities emerged as big landowners with titles like *nadudaiyan* or *nadalvan*. Some of them also had titles like *arayan*, used by the big landholders in the later Chola period. The *nattavars* included the Pillais, Mudalis, Reddis, and Vanniyas.

In the Vijayanagar period their status underwent transformation due to changes in the land holding system and influx of the migrants. One of the *nattavar* groups, the Vanniyas from fourteenth century onwards joined the Vijayanagar army. They had appropriated the *kaniyatchi* rights or proprietary rights of several villages and became the local leaders. While the *nattavars* in the Chola period were mostly *Vellalas*, those in the Vijayanagar Empire, belonged to several different communities, like, artisans, merchants and so on. The exploitative attitude of the *nattavars* is ascertained by the inscriptional evidence when the *Valangai-Idangai* groups, that is the left-hand and right-hand castes (to be discussed in the following section) comprising of producers and merchants revolted in 1429 against the landholders and the Vanniyas. (Noboru Karashima, 1994, p.57) Thereafter, the power of the *nattavars* were substantially reduced and with the consolidation of the *nayaka* regime by sixteenth century the *nattavars* were marginalized, though some of them continued to function as the local link between the state and the villagers.

Nattavars often collaborated with the *nayakas* in making grants to the temples. However, their status had declined for the taxes which they collected like *nattu-viniyogam*, *nattu-kanikkai*, *nattayam* were no longer seen in the epigraphs of the sixteenth century illustrating a decline in their status. Besides, during the Vijayanagar period, the importance of *nadu* as a territorial unit for local production had decreased. Probably, this was because of a new trade centre *pettai* or the reorganization of the local production system after the establishments of the *nayakkattams*. The term *nattavars* was used but the actual unit of local administration shifted from the *nadus* to the area called *parru*. Consequently in many localities the *nattavars*' original character as the corporate unit of landholders in a locality must have been lost.

Thus, a multi community composition of the agricultural elite emerged who related the local society to the political authorities. These diverse agricultural communities contributed to the building of sub regional agrarian domains around important towns in developing agricultural zones. The medieval configurations of the *nadus* vanished, replaced by a set of sub regions defined as hinterlands of towns along routes of transport and communication.

21.2.3 Palaiyakkarars

Amongst the rural landed elites were also the warrior peasant communities during the sixteenth century. In the dry upland zones, the agriculturists came into conflict with the hunters and pastoralists that often led to the incorporation of the latter into the agricultural community. These changes provided the context for the emergence of a warrior peasant class, both economically and politically powerful and primarily non-brahmana and Telugu in composition. These warrior peasant groups later developed into *palaiyakarars* or poligars. They are called so because in the sixteenth century they were made incharge of military camps called the *palaiyams*. Later these camps evolved into 'small kingdoms' ranging from three villages to almost 2,000 square miles. They were probably the descendants of the local chieftains, *araiyars*. Nicholas Dirks refers to them as the 'little kings'. The *palaiyakarars* comprised mainly of the Telugus, Kannadigas, Kaladi, Kallars, Vokkaligas, Maravas, Vadugas and so on. The warrior chiefs reclaimed vast stretches of land and developed them into towns. They used to impose heavy taxes on the peasants, artisans and merchants that often led to rural tensions. The rise of these poligars displaced the older Tamil peasants and landholders; especially the *brahmanas* already settled there and created a new class of landed magnates.

With the decline of the Vijayanagar Empire in the seventeenth century and the *nayakas* in the early eighteenth centuries, these *palaiyakarars* with their small political systems gained importance. Caste and territorial loyalties were important for them as on the basis of kinship networks they consolidated their respective status. The *nayakas* especially of Madurai attempted to bring the poligars into the fold of the ruling elite.

21.3 VALANGAI-IDANGAI (RIGHT HAND AND LEFT HAND CASTES)

The expansion of agriculture led to an increase in landed transactions, private and temple holdings, particularly in the non-brahmana villages. This created a hierarchical structure of the landed rights with the increasing prominence of the Vellalas as the dominant agricultural community *vis-à-vis* the lower agricultural groups. The agrarian hierarchy escalated the tensions within the agrarian community. Simultaneously, the growth of urban centers and intensification of mercantile activities led to the rising importance of the *nagarams*, merchants, craftsmen and weavers, especially the *kaikkolas*. Hence, the rising social importance of the various non-brahmana groups led to a movement towards a higher caste status, especially the claims of the artisans

to a twice-born caste status with a respectable ritual space in the temples. This bid for social mobility in the twelfth century culminated into a “societal crisis”. The conflicts that escalated this social crisis were usually between the artisans and agriculturists, sub-castes of the artisans like the *kaikkolas* and *saliyas*, hill and forest people and the different merchant groups. The existing social structure weakened and led to the crystallization of the non-brahmana communities into a dual vertical division of the *Valangai* (Right hand castes) and *Idangai* (Left hand castes), within the traditional structure of the caste society. However, the Vellalas and the brahmanas remained outside this dual division. Further social tension manifested in 1429, when the *Valangai* and *Idangai* groups revolted against the brahmanas and the Vellalas.

21.4 TRADERS AND ARTISANS

One of the direct consequences of the agrarian expansion was the escalation of commercial activities in the ninth century that led to the growth of market centers, *nagarams* and a network between them that linked towns and villages, to the *managaram*, usually a royal centre and a port. Due to commercial activities of overland and inland trade, new trade routes and urban centres came up linking the remote and newly conquered regions with the nuclear areas and the coast. The spread of guild activities and trading associations, namely the Ayyayole 5000, Tamil Tisai Ayirattu Ainnurruvar, foreign merchant organization, Anjuvannam brought forth the mercantile community with its diverse groups of traders, merchants, artisans, craftsmen, and itinerant traders. One such prominent trading community that became prominent in the ninth century was the *nagarattar*, whose members applied the *chetti* suffix. Often the mercantile communities invested in agriculture, gifted to the temples, further strengthening the ties of integration, and inter dependence. One such weaver community, the *kaikkolas* had significant links with the temples and became an important social group that the religious traditions attempted to incorporate in order to project a liberal outlook. In several places, the *kaikkolas* formed their own-armed bands and emerged as the ‘merchant-warriors’.

By ninth century, clusters of *brahmadeyas* and temples had developed into centers of urban growth, thus connecting villages, urban centers and royal capital, diverse population and religion within the same complex. The multi -temple complex of Kancipuram and Tanjavur emerged as important politico-urban centers. The economic outreach of the temple at Tanjavur covered the whole of Cola kingdom and even northern part of Sri Lanka. The emergence of different mercantile classes and weavers due to migration has been discussed at the beginning of this unit.

From the eighth and ninth century onwards, due to trading interaction with the Arab merchants, numerous towns along the Coromandel coast developed. Pulicat, Karaikal, Nagore, Nagapattinam were some of the well known trading settlements along the coast. Since most of these port towns had trading relations with the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean, they came ‘to be identified as centres of formal Islam in South India. By thirteenth century a significant number of Tamil speaking Muslims could be recognized. Muslim traders were involved in the trade of gem stones, pearls, cotton goods and most important horses that were supplied to the Pandyas, Cholas and the Vijayanagar states. These traders had well developed international links in south-east and West Asia. The maritime trading towns came to be dominated by the Sunni trading families known as the *maraikayars*. They were primarily ship owners. Another group of Sunni Muslims who were based in these towns were the Labbais. They were pearl divers, fishermen, weavers and artisans by profession. Migration in the seventeenth century to the Tamil trading towns brought a group of Dakhani speaking Muslims, the Navaiyats. The Navaiyats were elite Shafai Muslims who were in Mughal service in the Deccan during seventeenth century. The Mughal occupation of Deccan resulted in the migration of the Pathan warriors, Pathan merchants and

artisans to South India, many of whom settled in the maritime towns of the Coromandel coast. (Susan Bayly, 1992. *Saints Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 71-103).

21.5 RELIGIOUS GROUPS

There were several religious groups during the medieval period who were attached to the temples, *mathas*, *khanqahs* and *dargahs*. A large number of them had a popular social base and some of them were exclusive in their following. Amongst the religious groups two were significant, the *Sufis* and the *matha* and sectarian leaders attached to the temples. A discussion on the rise of *Sufis* as a social class and their increasing power is provided in the next section.

In the Deccan, the complex network between the court and the different *Sufi silsilahs*, *Sufis* and the *ulemas* and *Sufis* and the larger society, broadened the sphere for the *Sufis* from mere pious saints engaged in religious contemplation. Some *Sufis* emerged as orthodox groups whose aim was to purify Islam of its folk elements. There were some *Sufis*, who were important writers. They wrote numerous mystic and popular literatures, which became an important vehicle of integrating the non-elites, especially the non-Muslims. Another kind of *Sufis* were those who accepted land grants from the state and emerged as the landed elites or *inamdars*. These landed *Sufis* were called the *pirzadas*, literally meaning born to a saint. For these *Sufis*, the court politics, royal attitudes and patronage were important. Such conservatism and preference for court patronage produced a reaction from some of the *Sufis*. These *Sufis* were known as *dervishes* and ranged from spiritual heretics to non-conformists. They were hostile to the *pirzada inamdars* as they found them to be too compromising. The *dervishes* rejected Islamic orthodoxy and its urban materialistic orientation and withdrew partially or totally from the 'structural relations' of the world. At no point of time were the *Sufis* involved in conversion. *Sufis* were not Muslim 'missionaries' as they made no conscious attempt to gain non-Muslim followers. Most of the devotees who regularly visited the *dargahs* and their shrines came usually from a marginalized social background and gradually came under the influence of Islam.

Along with the temples, the institution of the *mathas* assumed further importance in this period. As a powerful institution within the larger structure of the temple, the *mathas* were either a competitive unit *vis-à-vis* the temple authorities or participated along with them in various transactions. The religious leaders or the *acharyas* and the *mathadhipatis* were the vital link between the local population and the new class of rulers, thereby enabling the establishment of political authority over the newly conquered areas. The gifts were made to the deities and the sectarian leaders or the *acharyas* and the head of the *mathas* were the instruments through which the gift was made. In return, they were the recipients of privileges from the ruling class and also gained greater control over temple organization and administration. Thus, these sectarian leaders established religious, political and economic control over the society and legitimized themselves as central figures of the community. A *guru* commanded a large group of followers, thereby linking the different groups in the society into the mainstream of the community. The *guru* initiated the disciple into the community and was instrumental in the dissemination of the theology. The *acharyapurushas* as well as the *mathas* had their respective retinue of servants, system of recruitment and organization comparable to any political system. The influence of the *jiyars* and *acharyas* was so pervasive that they were even deified and worshipped.

21.6 SUFISM IN DECCAN

Sufism refers to various mystical tendencies within Islam. The main idea of *Sufism* is to develop religious experience in direct communion with god, based on the spirit of *Quranic* piety. The *Sufis* while accepting the *Shariat* did not confine their religious practise to formal adherence. In order to have religious experience with god; the *Sufis* advocated the importance of traversing the *Sufi* path, *tariqa*, under the guidance of a spiritual person known as *shaikh*, *pir* or *murshid*. The *shaikh* himself should have successfully traversed the *Sufi* path and established direct relationship with god. The disciple was called *murid* who had to pass through series of stages, *maqamat* and changing psychological conditions, *hal* to attain concentration, *zikr* and consequently attain communion with god.

There developed a number of orders within *Sufism* called *silsilahs*, in and outside India with their distinct characteristics. The centre of the *Sufi* activities was the *khanqahs* or hospices, where the *pir* imparted spiritual training to his *murids*. The popularity of the *khanqahs* depended upon the reputation of its *pir*. Some of the well known *silsilahs* in the medieval period were the Suhrawardi, Chishti, Qadri, and Shattaris. Out of these, except Suhrawardi *silsilahs*, the rest flourished in north Indian as well as the Deccan region. The *Sufis* organized impassioned musical recital, *sama* to induce a mystical state of ecstasy. However, there were differences of opinion amongst the *Sufi* orders over the forms of *sama*.

With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the beginning of the thirteenth century, various *Sufi* orders migrated from Central Asia, where they were originally based. The attack of the Mongols in Baghdad that subsequently ruined the city and the execution of the Abbasid caliphate by the Mongols in 1258 AD, created a situation of insecurity and persecution. Under these circumstances, the *Sufis* along with other refugees migrated to India. They established several *khanqahs* in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in various parts of India, including Deccan. Although an offshoot of Iranian and Central Asian philosophy and practice *Sufism*, as it developed in India, was influenced by environment of the sub-continent. The various *silsilahs* were located in different socio-economic and political context and responded to that context in their own way. Hence, each *silsilah* had its individual phases of growth, stagnation and revival.

Three Stages of *Sufis* Order

Scholars (J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufis Orders in Islam*, Oxford, 1971) have identified three stages in the *Sufi* institutional orders:

- 1) **The *khanqah* Stage:** This stage was a period of *Sufi* mysticism, from ninth to the twelfth century, when contemplation and introspection on matters of religion produced prolific mystical literature. The *Sufis* led a simple and often an austere life. The *Sufi* orders were undifferentiated, where the relation between the master and disciple was not formal and neither did the master in any way claim to be the mediator between god and the student.
- 2) **The *Tariqa* Stage:** From the thirteenth century onwards, the *Sufi* orders underwent significant transformations. The mystical techniques that were the means to achieve communion with god were systematized through specific spiritual exercises. There were spiritual lineages or *silsilahs* which were a distinct school of thought and had respective founders. A person had to take a vow of spiritual allegiance, *baiat* from the *pir*, who usually represented a particular spiritual lineage and was the head of the *khanqah*. The spiritual lineages went right up to Prophet himself. This vow of allegiance (*baiat*) carried with it several rituals, like bestowing the *khilafat-nama* (a written certificate), *khirqa* (a patched frock) and other objects of spiritual succession. Thus, initiation involved the consecration of the initiate in a formal ceremony.

A hierarchy emerged with the formalization of the teacher-disciple relationship. Veneration and worship of *pir* became important. *Pir* was now the mediator between god and man and became a saint, or *wali*, literally meaning a friend of god. Thus, the *Sufi* orders gradually transformed from spiritual school to saint-centered cults in which the spiritual power or *barkat* of the individual *pir* was significant. As the system got consolidated the succession was based on family ties, where the descendants of the *pir*'s family became the successor. In India, they were called *pirzadas*, i.e. born of a *pir*.

- 3) **The Taifa Stage:** This stage can be discerned from fifteenth century onwards. *Barakat* or spiritual power that qualified a saint was transmitted to his grave, which now structurally became a tomb. This tomb, known as the *dargah*, emerged as the centre of pilgrimage attraction. Therefore, *Sufism* now emerged as a devotional movement, the object of devotion being the saint. It no longer remained a mystical movement. The cult of saint had greater attraction for a common man who would find it difficult to grasp the abstract ideas of mysticism and spirituality.

However, this classification has certain limitations. It does not help to understand the relations of the *Sufis* with the *ulemas*, court and the non-Muslim population. Some *Sufis* belonged to more than one order; others belonged to the same order but interacted in a contradictory way with the society. (Richard Eaton, 1978, *Sufis of Bijapur.1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*. Princeton)

21.6.1 The Historical Background and the Development of *Sufism* in the Deccan (Fourteenth to Seventeenth Century AD)

In 1327 AD, the Tughluq ruler of Delhi Sultanate, Sultan Mohammad bin Tughlaq, ordered the transfer of capital from Delhi to Daultabad which was situated in the Deccan. This transfer also involved the shifting of bases of the residents of Delhi. One such group who were ordered to migrate was the *Sufis*. Shaikh Burhanuddin Gharib (d.1340), of the Chishti *silsilah* was one such well known *Sufi* who migrated to Daultabad and subsequently made it his centre of activities and introduced the Chishti order there. Another well known saint who migrated was Gesudaraz. Gesudaraz at that time was a child. However, after sometime he returned to Delhi only to leave it after several years for Deccan, when Delhi was invaded by Timur in 1398. Both the saints belonged to the Chishti *silsilah*.

Of all the *silsilahs* the Chishti *silsilah* was most popular in the north as well as in the Deccan, especially during the period of the Bahamini Sultanate (1347-1489AD). The Chishti *silsilah* originated in Herat and was introduced in India by Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti who migrated to India and finally settled in Ajmer in 1206. He had a large number of Muslim and non-Muslim followers. His successor was Bakhtiyar Kaki in Delhi, Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri in Nagaur in Rajasthan. Bakhtiyar Kaki had several well known descendants. His immediate descendant was Khwaja Fariduddin Masud, also known as Ganjshakar or Baba Farid. He ultimately settled in Ajodhan in Punjab. Baba Farid's disciple was Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya (1236-1325) who made Delhi the most famous centre of the Chishti order. Later his successors spread the Chishti order to various parts of the country including Deccan. Shaikh Burhanuddin Gharib was Nizanuddin Auliya's successor. Some Chishti saints like Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Delhi, were also popular in Delhi during Mohammad bin Tughlaq's period. However, since he never appointed a successor, the Chishti *silsilah* after his death did not have any commanding figure. Gesudaraz was one of his disciples.

With the decline of Delhi Sultanate, the *Sufis* dispersed to stable provincial kingdoms and established their *khanqahs* there. One such area which attracted the *Sufis* was the region of the Deccan plateau. The migration of the *Sufis* to the region of Deccan, particularly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries should be seen against the

background of the establishment of the Bahamani kingdom and the subsequent five Sultanates in the Deccan, viz., the Adil Shahis (AD 1490-1686) of Bijapur, Nizam Shahis of Ahmadnagar (1496), Barid Shahis of Bidar (1504), Imad Shahis of Berar (1510) and the Qutub Shahis of Golkanda (1543). Hasan Bahman Shah who was the founder of the Bahamani kingdom was one of the governors of the Tughlaq provinces in the Deccan. He asserted his independence against the Tughluqs, drove them out and established a new political state. The various Telugu chieftains of eastern and southern Deccan who had fought against the Tughlaqs, some of them successfully, assisted Hasan Bahman Shah in founding the Bahmani state in Western Deccan. Since Bahman Shah was in service of the Tughlaqs, this gave him political authority and legitimacy to generate support amongst the Telugu chieftains, and therefore, the Bahamani could be considered as the Tughlaq successor state in Deccan.

During the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the plateau had emerged as a stable political, social and cultural centre. The development of the Dakhani culture imparted a distinct identity to the region. The cities like Gulbarga, Bidar and Bijapur were the centre of political and cultural activities. This attracted a large number of *Sufis*, who primarily had an urban orientation. For instance, as already stated, Gesudaraz, the Chishti saint migrated from Delhi to Gulbarga. A number of Qadri *Sufis* migrated from Arabia to Bidar. Several *Sufis* came from Safawi Iran. However, the Adil Shahi dynasty, despite being well established by sixteenth century failed to attract any *Sufis*, for it was dominated by Shias, who were antagonistic to *Sufis*. (Richard Eaton, 1978, p.286). The Qadri *Sufis* were affiliated to the Sunni sect and the Shattari *Sufis* were antagonistic to the Shias. It is only in the reign of Sultan Ibrahim II (1580-1627) that *Sufis* entered Bijapur. The reasons were mainly two. First, the disturbances in Gujarat and Bidar in late sixteenth century drove some *Sufis* towards Bijapur. Second, there was a significant transformation in the state religion from *isna-ashari* Shi'ism to Sunnism. This meant that the political power shifted from foreign Iranis to native Deccanis. Besides, the Sultan himself adopted a broad outlook, encouraging both Muslim and non-Muslim traditions. Hence numerous *Sufis*, especially of the Qadri and the Shattari *silsilahs* were attracted to Bijapur. Most of these *Sufis* were first generation immigrants from places outside Deccan, mainly from the Arab world.

Therefore, the court politics, royal attitudes and patronage were important for the *Sufis*. Several tombs were built during the Adil Shahi period indicating a transition from *tariqa* to *taifa Sufism* in Bijapur.

In connection with this, the attitude of the Chishtis is important as there was a shift from earlier indifference towards politics to interest in it and finally distancing from the state and its mundane affairs. During the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries in the period of the Bahamanis, the Chishtis developed close relations with the Sultan, accepted court patronage and were important in politics. This was a departure from their earlier attitude in Delhi where they often declined court patronage. The Bahmani kings realizing the spiritual potential of these *Sufis* and their close network with the society and popular social base gave them land grants and built magnificent *Sufi* shrines. The most prominent of these Chishtis was Muhammad Banda Nawaz Gesudaraz (1321-1422). Sultan Feroz Shah Bahamani (1397-1422) granted him four villages. After his death, his descendants continued to receive land grants from the Bahamani Sultans and they eventually became the landed elites in Deccan. His tomb later developed in to a popular pilgrimage site. The *urs* at the *dargahs* especially of Gesudaraz had become a major festival by the seventeenth century attended by the ruling and non-ruling classes. Gesudaraz brought about changes in the Chishti philosophy especially those aspects that were not in favour with the *ulemas*. He was an orthodox *Sufi* and declared the supremacy of the *shariat* over all *Sufi* stages.

The changing trends in politics and shifting royal patronage finally led to the decline of the Chishti order in the Bahamani kingdom. The change of Bahamani capital from

Gulbarga to Bidar in 1422 and the pro-foreigner and anti-Deccan attitudes of the Bahamanis at Bidar encouraged the immigration of the foreign *Sufis*, who were now being patronized at the expense of the Chishtis as the latter were considered to be too 'Indian.' Thereafter, from the end of the fifteenth century, the Chishtis again thrived in Deccan till seventeenth century. They distanced themselves from the court politics of the Adil Shahi kingdom as can be seen in the location of their new centre, the Shahpur Hillock, which was outside Bijapur, the capital of the Adil Shahis. The Chishtis reverted to their original attitude. They maintained distance from the court and the *ulemas* and drew inspiration from the local influences, hence resembling the earliest Chishti saints of Delhi. It is for this reason that the Chishti *silsilah* unlike the other *Sufis silsilahs* were not affected by the sectarian conflict between the Shias and Sunnis in the Adil Shahi politics because they no longer depended upon the court patronage and were not interested in political affairs. The Shahpur Hillock had a single *khanqah* where several *Sufis* congregated, unlike the Shattari and Qadri *Sufis*, who had several hospices in the city patronized by the state.

By eighteenth century, with the decline of the Adil Shahis, natural calamities and epidemics and the Maratha invasions in Bijapur reduced the city to ruins and the urban culture almost disappeared. This was a setback for the *Sufis* and *Sufism*, which primarily had an urban orientation, as has been mentioned earlier. Hardly any *khanqah* remained in Bijapur as functioning unit. The landed elites amongst the *Sufis* known as the *pirzadas* were forced to migrate to Hyderabad and Arcot for state patronage, without which they could not survive. However, the Chishtis continued to be in the Shahpur Hillock outside Bijapur and emerged as a significant and popular *Sufi* order.

21.6.2 The Political Role of the *Sufis*

It was widely recognized in the medieval politics that because of their special spiritual powers, *barakat*, their direct communication with god, and their popular social base, the *Sufis* had the authority to grant moral legitimacy to a state and make them a legitimate part of the Indo-Islamic world. This political role of the *Sufis* in granting legitimacy to the state was based upon the following developments:

- 1) For the Sunni Muslims, the spiritual leadership formally rested with the Caliph and informally with the *Sufis*. However, with the downfall of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad in 1298 AD due to the Mongol invasions, the *Sufis* were now considered virtually the spiritual leaders, who had the capability to authenticate the political leadership of the Sultan and his sovereignty, i.e. *hukumat* over his domains.
- 2) The *wilayat* or the spiritual territory of a *Sufi shaikh* theoretically had no territorial limitations. Hence, it followed that the *Sufis* could bestow moral legitimacy to any state anywhere in the world.
- 3) If a *Sufi shaikh* authenticated a state, then the character of that state transformed from *Dar-al-Harb*, i.e. the Abode of War to *Dar-al-Islam*, i.e. the Abode of Peace, implying that the state could no longer be attacked by any Islamic polity and the rebellion, which often became the basis of the foundation of the state could now be justified.

The importance of the above mentioned aspects were particularly crucial for a newly established state like the Bahamani, whose founder, Hasan Bahman Shah rebelled against the Tughluqs and acquired power in 1347 AD. Further this legitimacy provided an ideological support to Bahman Shah for expanding and consolidating his political and social network. In association with this, the prophecy of the *Sufi shaikh* in predicting the political future of an individual especially the Sultan was taken virtually to be an appointment. It was understood that the *shaikh* was conveying the divine will, since he was already in direct communion with god to 'lease out the political

sovereignty.' This is illustrated in the recorded sayings, i.e. *tazkira* of Nizam-al- Din Auliya, the Chishti saint in fourteenth century Delhi. Having just met with Sultan Mohammad bin Tughluq at his *khanqah*, and while Hasan Shah Bahamani, then in the service of the Tughlaqs was waiting outside, Nizam al-Din Auliya is supposed to have remarked, 'One Sultan has just left my door; another is waiting there.' (Richard Eaton, 2000, *Essays on Islam in Indian History*, Oxford, p.168. The evidence is from Saiyid Ali Tabataba's *Burhan-i-Maathir* and Muhammad Qasim Firishta, *Tarikh-i- Firishta*).

When Hasan Bahman Shah revolted in 1347 and became the ruler, Nizam al-Din's prophecy was used as an ideological mechanism for declaring the rebellion and the foundation of the state a legitimate one that could be accepted by the larger society. Hasan Bahman Shah recognised this and patronized various Chishtis in the Bahamani kingdom and made lavish endowments to the shrine of Burhan al-Din Gharib, the disciple of Nizam al- Din who had migrated to Deccan. The shrine was located in Khuldabad in north Deccan. Such gifts to the shrine implied that Sultan was also acknowledging Burhan al-Din Gharib's as his own *pir* or master, Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi, especially when Delhi was still under the control of the Tughlaqs. Such an acknowledgement was to highlight Nizamuddin Auliya's prediction about Hasan Shah becoming a Sultan that became the basis of the ruler's authority.

Hence the Chishti *shaikhs* played crucial role in the state formations in Deccan. There were several reasons for the importance of the Chishtis in polity and society in medieval India, especially the medieval Deccan. Unlike the other *Sufi* saints whose tombs were located outside India, in Central and West Asia, those of the Chishti saints were located within the sub-continent. This was important for the *khanqahs*, tombs and shrines were the focus of pilgrimage and *Sufi* activities. This gave the Chishtis the double advantage of having an Indian as well as Islamic character. Such a broad based outlook of the Chishti *silsilah* was useful for the Deccani states to establish their legitimacy *vis-a-vis* the political partners and the local population of the Deccani society, amongst whom the Chishtis were already popular.

Another factor that affirmed the spiritual power of the *Sufis* in the political sphere was their tendency to be highly mobile. Wherever the Delhi Sultanate extended itself, and appointed imperial governors in the far flung areas, the *Sufi* shaikhs, especially the Chishtis accompanied them and established their *khanqahs* in these areas. These imperial governors were the future rulers as it happened in the case of Hasan Bahman Shah. Under these circumstances, Chishti *shaikhs* who had already developed a wide social base, "indigenized and legitimized new, satellite Indo-Muslim polities."

Apart from the state, the society also recognized the *Sufis*'s political potential. The popular perception was reflected in Abd al-Malik Isami's *Futuh-i-Salatin*. According to Isami the well being of the sultan and the prosperity of his domain was dependant on the blessings and auspicious presence of the *Sufi shaikhs*. He illustrated this by giving the example of Nizam al-Din Auliya, on whose death in 1325, Delhi was reduced to a city of chaos. Further, Daultabad in the Deccan plateau prospered when Burhan al Din Gharib migrated there. His successor was Shaikh Zain al-Din Shirazi, who was the contemporary of Hasan Shah Bahmani.

However, despite the relations of mutual dependence between the Sultan and the *Sufis* saints, there conflicts and contradictions too, often made this relationship tense. The very spiritual authority on the basis of which the predictions were made and legitimacy was bestowed became a source of conflict between *shaikhs* and the Sultans. For instance, Feroz Shah Bahamani (1397-1422) and Gesudaraz had numerous differences. The most important issue that soured the relation between the two was that of succession. The Sultan wanted his son Hasan Khan to be anointed as the successor by the *shaikh* and the *shaikh* clearly favoured the Sultan's younger

brother, Ahmad. Thereupon the Sultan shifted his patronage to the tomb and shrine of a Muslim holy man locally known as Khalifat al Rahman. The Sultan also favoured Baba Kamal Mujarrad, whose tomb faced the sultan's tomb in Gulbarga. Consequently, Gesudaraz was marginalized.

21.6.3 Social Role of the *Sufis*

- a) ***Sufis* as Disseminators:** The *Sufis* disseminated their teachings to the poor illiterate non-Muslim and Muslim population, like the cotton carders, barbers, smith, potter and so on through a range of literature. This literature comprised of folk songs which contained analogies from everyday life of the people. Written mainly in the seventeenth and eighteenth century by Bijapuri *Sufis* belonging to the Chishti order, these songs have been preserved in the oral tradition of Dakhani speaking villagers throughout the Deccan plateau and represent the characteristics of folk Islam. These songs were not composed in Persian, but in Dakhani, the local language or the vernacular of medieval Deccan. Through these songs, attempt was to disseminate not the complex mysticism, but simple tenets of Islam and *Sufism*, devotion to god, Prophet Muhammad, respect for one's *pir* or spiritual guide. The songs were particularly aimed at the womenfolk, who would sing these songs while occupied in various household chores.

There were different categories of folk songs related to different types of household work and different aspects of woman's life. For example, *chakki-nama*, associated with grinding food grains at the grindstone, *charkha nama*, associated with the spinning of thread at the wheel or *charkha*, *lun-nama*, associated with lullaby, *shadi nama* or wedding songs, *suhagan nama* or married woman's songs and *suhaila* or eulogistic songs. (Richard Eaton, 2000, pp.189-202). These songs were meant to appeal to the women and had relevance to their lives, for example marriage, pining for the lover, mother and child relationship and so on. It was expected that while women would perform their household chores, they would sing these songs and practise *zikr* or the *Sufi* spiritual exercise of concentration and contemplation.

The *Sufis* who composed these songs were the immediate spiritual descendants of the great mystical *Sufis* of Bijapur who mostly wrote in Persian and articulated the mystic teachings of their master in a simple manner in these songs. Several themes from the pre-existing folk songs preserved in the oral traditions in Marathi and Kannada were also adapted. The Marathi village songs of this type had also a devotional purpose, focus being the deity of Vithoba in Pandharpur. Therefore, this literature bridged the gap between the mystical aspects of Islam with popular religion.

The trend of *pir* worship and devotionism at *pir's* tomb that developed during this period linked the 'inner circle' of *pir's* disciples with the non-elite devotees who visited the shrines and were a part of the 'outer circle.' In this connection, the *Sufi* folk songs that expounded the tenets of Islam, the miraculous power, i.e. *karamat* of the *Sufis* and their role as the mediator between god and people played a significant role. Due to their popular circulation, different social groups, particularly rural women were drawn to these shrines. In this context women played a significant role in dissemination of the ideas in these songs and literature and subsequently became an important medium of spreading Islam. The women it appears were the most frequent visitors to the shrines or *dargahs* primarily because one of the *barakat* of the saint was associated with fertility. They also participated in various functions and festivals there. The *malfuza*t literatures in the seventeenth century points out that the women entered even the inner circles of *Sufi* followers and along with the men were instructed in the religious mysticism and exercises to achieve the goal of direct communion with god. Although a large number of women came from non-Muslim background, "they perceived no great theological or social wall existing between Islam and Hinduism. For them the village *dargah* formed only one more facet of an already diffuse and eclectic religious life." (Richard Eaton, 2000, p.198). Consequently, these women would

convey the teachings to their children. In this way, *Sufi* ideas through the folk literature and the cult of saints represented in the *dargahs* entered the household space through the woman, binding the members of the family to the *dargah* and that particular *Sufi silsilah* and subsequently Islam. In this manner Islam spread to the non elite, rural folks.

However, this should not be misunderstood as the attempt on the part of the *Sufis* to convert people to Islam. *Sufis* were not Muslim ‘missionaries’ as they made no conscious attempt to gain non-Muslim followers who for the reasons cited above were attracted to their shrines. Most of the devotees who regularly visited the *dargahs* came from a marginalized social background and gradually came under the influence of Islam. Hence, a following was created focused on the *pir*, and “the diffusion of the Islamic precepts was a by-product of this effort.” Besides, these *Sufis* were also trying to create a place for themselves as the mediator between god and people and win over the spiritual allegiance of the people. Therefore, there was never a sudden conversion to Islam at any point of time. The *Sufis* who entered Deccan in the thirteenth and fourteenth century have been portrayed in the later legends as militant champions of Islam. There is little historical evidence to show this. Those claiming that their ancestors were converted by some *Sufi* saint or the other are till day undergoing ‘a gradual process of Islamic acculturation’ which is also uneven in terms of food, dress and speech. Besides, such a claim was motivated by their desire to establish a long association with the *dargah* of the *Sufi* and their long standing in Islam. In fact the *dargahs* represented a process of Islamic acculturation, which represented a process of interaction and diffusion of cultural values and traditions between the two societies, resulting in acquisition of new cultural characteristics.

Sufis were not merely pious mystics preaching Islam. They were a heterogeneous group reacting to the social environment they were situated in. Richard Eaton in his study on the *Sufis* of Bijapur identifies *Sufis* as a class with their distinct affiliations. (Richard Eaton, 1978, *Sufis of Bijapur.1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*. Princeton). As a social class there were four types of *Sufis*. They were:

- 1) Reformist *Sufis*: These *Sufis* mainly belonging to the Qadri and Shattari orders flourished during the reign of the Adil Shahi sultan, Ibrahim II (1580-1627). Though the Sultan patronized them, but his broad religious outlook was not received favourably by these *Sufis*. They shunned the use of Dakhni language and were exclusive in their social interaction. This orthodox reaction intensified particularly during the times of Ibrahim’s successors.

The *Sufis* of the Qadri and Shattari order took upon themselves to reform Islam in Bijapur and influence the sultan. They were city based and had close ties with Arabic traditions. They often collaborated with the *ulemas*. They developed their *khanqahs*, had respective *murids* and received *khiilafat* from some *pirs*. Their hospices were centres of *Sufi* activities and discourses. Their *khanqahs* were popular and after death, their tombs became important pilgrimage centres, reflecting popular devotional attitude while in their lifetime they were antagonistic towards it.

- 2) Literary *Sufis*: Some *Sufis* were important writers who wrote numerous mystic and popular literatures. They were mostly Chishtis who lived in isolated place on the Shahpur Hillock outside Bijapur and were not significantly affected by the changing fortunes of the Bijapur court. Their mystical writings gave a respectable status to Dakhani Urdu, which was finally marginalized with the Mughal conquest of Deccan in the seventeenth century. Their role in developing the *Sufi* folk literature which became an important vehicle of integrating the non-elites, especially the non-Muslims has already been discussed. Their popularity also coincided with the *Sufi* faith which now heavily centered on the *dargahs*.

- 3) Another kind of *Sufis* were those who accepted land grants from the state and emerged as the landed elites or *inamdars* in Bijapur. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, Bijapur state was undergoing social and political turmoil. At this juncture, the Sultan's political strategy was to placate the *ulemas* and win over the *Sufis* of non-Chishti origin whose ancestors had a popular social base. Therefore numerous land grants were made to them and the state patronage was extended so that these *Sufis* could communicate the royal ideology and legitimize it within the larger society. These landed *Sufis* were called the *pirzadas*, literally meaning born to a saint. Consequently, certain changes took place within the *Sufi* institutions. The *khanqahs* were ignored in favour of *dargahs*, which now started attracting numerous devotees and their management became a lucrative source of income. Besides, the state patronized those orders that had popular *dargahs* for it gave them an access to the larger society which they wished to control. Since the continuation of land grants was dependant on the state's will, therefore the state intervened and controlled the internal affairs of the *dargah*, especially in appointing, confirming or rejecting a successor. The *Sufis* now themselves gave less importance to the *khanqahs* and focused on the *dargahs*. The 'cult of personality' replaced the 'cult of order'. The concept of *pir* worship became popular and the intellectual mystical aspect of the *Sufi* philosophy receded into the background. The leadership of the *khanqahs* and *dargahs* was now based on family heredity that capitalized on the personality cult and became prosperous. With these land grants, the declining Adil Shahi state ensured the political loyalty of the *Sufis*, whereby the ruler expected this class to generate allegiance for the regime, pacify recalcitrant tendencies and legitimize the state policies. Such a strategy became crucial for the stability of the Adil Shahis in the seventeenth century as Bijapur became a disturbed province due to perennial revolts of the local forces against the state. There are cases of well known *shaikhs* being summoned to the court and made to pray for the well being of the Sultan in the face of Maratha invasions in the Deccan.

However, the *Sufis* protected their landed interests and ignored the popular following. In fact, with the decline of the Adil Shahi state in 1686, the fortunes of these landed *Sufis* did not suffer. Aurangzeb renewed the *inam* grants and granted the new ones. In fact, the landed *pirzaidas* were the first ones to accept the Mughal regime for in the existence of a state they saw their survival and prosperity.

- 4) *Dervishes*: Such conservatism and preference for court patronage over taking care of the religious needs of the devotees produced a reaction from some of the *Sufis*. These *Sufis* were known as *dervishes* and ranged from spiritual heretics to non-conformists. They were hostile to the *pirzadas* and *inamdars* as they found them to be too compromising. The *dervishes* rejected Islamic orthodoxy and its urban materialistic orientation. They adopted spiritual exercises to attain direct experience of god. They withdrew partially or totally from the 'structural relations' of the world. In fact stressing on religion's original purity and simplicity, the Bijapur *majzubs* resembled the early *Sufis* in Iraq and Khorasan. The *majzubs* completely repudiated the contemporary society going back to the original principles of *Sufism*. The contemporary *Sufi* literature calls them *majzubs*. In fact, the polarization between the *pirzadas* and the *dervishes* sharpened further with the decline of the Bijapuri state. One of the popular *dervishes* was a Chishti named Amin al Din Alah whose popularity and influence was feared by the *pirzadas*, especially of the Qadri *silsilah*.

21.7 SUMMARY

This Unit is a survey of various social groups that emerged in medieval period in South India. The historical context of social change and consequently changes in the social structure are located in the shifting political boundaries, development of trade

and commerce, expansion of agricultural activities, socio-religious movements based on *bhakti* and *Sufi* and finally, the growth of international trade and profits from it. The social groups discussed here are the political elites, landed elites, religious leaders, traders and merchants, artisans and *Valangai-Idangai* caste. A discussion on these groups has already taken place in the previous Units. Here an outline has been provided in order to understand the factors of social change, social mobility and social transformation.

21.8 EXERCISES

- 1) Examine the power and position of the landed elites in peninsular India.
- 2) Discuss different groups of political elites in peninsular India.
- 3) Analyse the changing social structure of peninsular India in the medieval period.
- 4) Discuss the different classes of *Sufis* in the Deccan region during the seventeenth century.
- 5) What was the socio-political role of the *Sufis* in the Deccan?



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