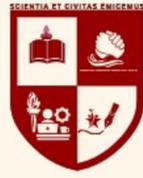


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Ports see 60,000 tonne basmati rice stuck on war, exporters call for help

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UPSC Spotlight - focus page for prelims 2026

The Pala Civil Times special feature



Iran launches fresh attacks against Israel, U.S.

The ongoing Iran–Israel War has intensified, with fighting spreading across several parts of West Asia and affecting multiple countries. Iran launched missile and drone attacks targeting Israel, U.S. bases, and other regional locations. A missile reportedly struck a state-run oil refinery in Bahrain, while a drone was shot down near the Al Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi, which hosts U.S. forces. Missiles were also reported near Doha, prompting evacuations near the U.S. Embassy, and Saudi Arabia intercepted a drone near its border with Jordan. Azerbaijan accused Iran of a drone attack near Nakhchivan airport, though Tehran denied involvement. Meanwhile, United States and Israel continued nationwide strikes on Iran's military infrastructure and nuclear programme, while Israel also issued evacuation warnings in southern Beirut amid clashes with Hezbollah in Lebanon. The conflict has already caused significant casualties across the region, highlighting the risk of a wider regional escalation.

Sri Lanka evacuates the crew of second Iranian ship near its territorial waters

The Iran–Israel War has begun affecting the Indian Ocean region after a naval incident near Sri Lanka. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake announced that 208 crew members from the stranded Iranian naval ship IRINS Bushehr would be evacuated by the Sri Lanka Navy and brought to Colombo Port, while the vessel would be diverted to Trincomalee Harbour after reporting an engine fault. Sri Lanka clarified that the operation was conducted on humanitarian grounds. The incident occurred a day after the United States reportedly torpedoed the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena near Sri Lanka's southern waters, killing at least 84 sailors, indicating that the conflict involving Iran, the United States, and Israel is extending beyond West Asia. Sri Lanka reiterated that it will maintain a neutral foreign policy and has called for restraint and de-escalation. The issue also drew attention in Parliament when opposition leader Sajith Premadasa warned about another Iranian vessel near Colombo Port. However, government spokesperson Nalinda Jayatissa clarified that the ship was located in Sri Lanka's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and not within its territorial waters. Authorities stated that the government and security agencies are closely monitoring the situation to prevent loss of life and safeguard regional stability.

U.K. museum returns 16th-century bronze statue to Indian government

A 16th-century bronze statue of Thirumangai Alvar has been returned to India by the Ashmolean Museum after research confirmed that the idol originally belonged to the Sundararaja Perumal Temple. The museum had acquired the statue in 1967 from a private collector, but provenance research later linked it to a 1957 photograph of the temple idol preserved in archives in Pondicherry. After a police complaint in 2020 revealed that the original bronze had been replaced by a replica in the temple, the Government of India formally sought its return. The handover was completed in London at the Indian High Commission.

The return is significant because it restores a sacred idol to its original place of worship, helping preserve India's cultural and religious heritage. It also highlights growing international cooperation in addressing the issue of stolen or illegally exported antiquities. Such repatriation efforts strengthen cultural diplomacy and demonstrate increasing global recognition of ethical museum practices and respect for the cultural property of other nations.



Indian HPV vaccine under test for single-dose roll-out



Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a campaign in Ajmer, Rajasthan, to vaccinate 1.15 crore 14-year-old girls against the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) using Gardasil-4, a vaccine developed by Merck and available in India since 2009. It is one of the most widely tested HPV vaccines and is part of immunisation programmes in several countries. The vaccination initiative is linked to India's Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP), which aims to expand protection against HPV.

Indigenous Vaccine and Policy Delay

India has also developed an indigenous quadrivalent HPV vaccine called **Cervavac**, launched in September 2022 and highlighted as a successful collaboration between government and private sector to create an affordable domestic vaccine. Phase-2 trials showed that Cervavac was "non-inferior" to Gardasil, and it was expected to be included in the UIP.

However, its inclusion has been delayed due to an ongoing study led by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) examining whether a single dose of Cervavac provides adequate immune protection compared with Gardasil. **The results are expected only by 2027.**

This delay is also linked to a 2022 recommendation by the World Health Organization (WHO) advisory group that countries may adopt either a two-dose or single-dose schedule to improve global HPV vaccine coverage.

Maldives, Sri Lanka alarmed at conflict in Indian Ocean

The sinking of the Iranian warship IRIS Dena by the United States in the Indian Ocean, close to Sri Lanka, has raised security concerns among smaller Indian Ocean states. Leaders from Sri Lanka and the Maldives, attending the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi, warned that the ongoing Iran–Israel War risks spilling into the Indian Ocean region. The Iranian ship had recently participated in multilateral naval exercises with the Indian Navy in Visakhapatnam, making the incident particularly sensitive for India and regional partners. Sri Lankan forces rescued about 30 Iranian sailors, though more than 80 deaths were reported in the explosion.

Expectations from India as a Net Security Provider

Regional leaders emphasised India's role as a stabilising power in the Indian Ocean. Former Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed stated that smaller countries expect India to act as a “net security provider” and ensure that the conflict does not spread to regional waters. Sri Lankan legislator Harsha de Silva noted that countries like Sri Lanka, still recovering from economic crises, lack the capacity to withstand prolonged external shocks and therefore depend on close maritime cooperation with India.

India's Maritime Security Architecture

India has expanded its regional security role through several initiatives. Its SAGAR vision has evolved into MAHASAGAR, reflecting a broader maritime security approach. India also hosts the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region, convenes the Colombo Security Conclave, and plays a leading role in the Indian Ocean Rim Association. Recently, India hosted naval engagements such as International Fleet Review 2026, Exercise MILAN 2026, and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium Conclave of Chiefs, which included participation from Iran and many other countries.

India and Finland elevate bilateral ties to strategic partnership



India and Finland elevated their ties to a “Strategic Partnership in Digitalization and Sustainability” after talks between Narendra Modi and Finnish President Alexander Stubb in New Delhi. The partnership aims to deepen cooperation in technology, trade, and sustainability.

Agreements and Institutional Mechanisms

Both countries signed three pacts on mobility, environment, and statistics. They also agreed to double bilateral trade by 2030. To strengthen cooperation, they will establish a Joint Working Group on Digitalisation, a Joint Task Force on 6G telecommunications, improve startup ecosystem connectivity, co-host the World Circular Economy Forum in India, and start a consular dialogue.

Key Areas of Cooperation

The partnership will focus on AI, 6G telecommunications, clean energy, quantum computing, defence, space, semiconductors, and critical minerals. These sectors are expected to enhance technological collaboration and strengthen resilient global supply chains.

Past Cooperation examples

Past cooperation includes Nokia mobile phones and telecom networks that connected millions in India. Finnish expertise also contributed to building the Chenab Rail Bridge, the world's highest railway bridge, and the bamboo-to-bioethanol refinery at Numaligarh in Assam.

Ports see 60,000 tonne basmati rice stuck on war

India's basmati rice exports are currently facing a major disruption due to the ongoing conflict in West Asia, which has affected shipping routes and logistics. Nearly 3,000 containers carrying about 60,000 metric tonnes of basmati rice are reportedly stranded at Indian ports as ships are not sailing to several eastern ports of Arab countries. Exporters note that exports to West Asia are about 30% lower than the same period last year, while freight costs have surged sharply—bulk transport rates rising by about 20% and container freight by nearly 40%. In response, the Indian Rice Exporters Federation (IREF) has urged the government to issue an advisory declaring the situation a “force majeure”-type exceptional circumstance, which would help exporters renegotiate contracts and avoid penalties or forced price reductions. The disruption is significant because West Asia and Africa together account for about 50% of India's rice exports, and around 90% of exports to West Asia (worth nearly ₹25,000 crore annually) consist of basmati rice. Over the past two decades, basmati exports have expanded sharply from 0.6–0.7 million tonnes worth \$400–450 million in the early 2000s to about 5–6 million tonnes worth nearly \$5.8–5.9 billion annually, highlighting its growing role in India's agricultural trade. The present crisis therefore has implications for export earnings, trade relations with key markets, and logistics costs, even though exporters expect the disruption to be temporary given the staple demand for basmati in the region.

India's Rice Exports (April-March fiscal years)

	Basmati		Non-Basmati	
	Quantity (in lakh tonnes)	Value (in \$ million)	Quantity (in lakh tonnes)	Value (in \$ million)
020-21	46.30	4018.41	131.49	4810.80
021-22	39.44	3537.49	172.89	6133.63
022-23	45.61	4787.65	177.92	6356.71
023-24	52.42	5843.30	111.17	4573.41
024-25	60.65	5944.49	141.30	6527.98
pr-Dec 24	42.42	4322.70	93.33	4405.26
pr-Dec 25	46.99	4097.45	105.21	4208.25

Source: Department of Commerce • Quantity is in lakh tonnes and Value is in \$ million.

India in talks with US on risk insurance to energy cargoes



The Strait of Hormuz, a critical route for global energy trade, has seen vessel traffic come to a halt amid the ongoing conflict in West Asia. Shipping companies and insurers are avoiding the route after Iran warned of possible attacks on ships. In response, India is in discussions with the United States regarding political risk insurance and guarantees for merchant vessels carrying energy cargo through the strait.

Importance of the Strait for India

The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. It is a vital route for India's energy imports. About 2.5–2.7 million barrels per day of India's crude oil imports—around half of the country's total—normally pass through this waterway, mainly from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. India imports over 88% of its crude oil, and around half of its LNG imports and over 80% of LPG imports also move through this route. Globally, nearly one-fifth of petroleum and LNG trade passes through the strait.

India's Energy Situation and Response

Indian authorities say the country currently has crude oil and fuel stocks for about six to eight weeks, so there is no immediate shortage or need to ration petrol, diesel, or LPG. However, the LNG sector faces greater pressure because storing LNG is more difficult. Major importer Petronet LNG has issued force majeure notices to QatarEnergy due to supply disruptions.

India, China top Asia-Pacific region in metabolic diseases burden: study



A review of data from the Global Burden of Disease Study (1990–2023) shows that India and China have the highest absolute metabolic disease burden in the Asia-Pacific region. The analysis, published in the journal *Metabolism*, also includes projections for the region up to 2030, highlighting the growing public-health challenge.

Diseases and Risk Factors Analysed

The study examined disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) and mortality associated with five major metabolic diseases and risk factors: Type 2 diabetes, high systolic blood pressure, high body mass index (BMI), high LDL cholesterol, and Metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD). These conditions occur when the body's normal process of breaking down, storing, or using energy from food becomes disrupted.

India's Current Burden

In 2023, India recorded around 21 million DALYs and 5.8 lakh deaths from Type 2 diabetes. High systolic blood pressure caused about 3.8 crore DALYs and nearly 15.7 lakh deaths. Rising trends are also seen in high BMI, LDL cholesterol, and MASLD. Notably, in terms of DALYs, India replaced China as the country with the highest burden in the region in 2023, although China still leads in the other parameters.

Prevention of diabetes before birth offers hope for healthy future

India faces a major public health challenge with about 101 million people living with diabetes and another 136 million classified as prediabetic. This places the country among those with the highest metabolic disease burdens in the world, making early prevention strategies extremely important.

Gestational Diabetes and Foetal Programming

One key risk factor is Gestational Diabetes Mellitus (GDM), which refers to glucose intolerance first detected during pregnancy and affects nearly one in five pregnancies globally. Although it may appear temporary, GDM increases the mother's risk of developing Type 2 diabetes later in life. More importantly, high blood sugar during pregnancy can influence the baby's metabolism through a process called foetal programming, where the foetus produces extra insulin in response to high maternal glucose. This can predispose the child to obesity, insulin resistance, and diabetes in adulthood.

Early Detection and Prevention Strategy

Research shows that foetal pancreatic beta cells begin insulin secretion around the 11th week of pregnancy. If maternal blood sugar levels are high before this stage, long-term metabolic effects may already begin. Therefore, experts suggest that screening should happen in the first trimester, ideally around the 8th week, rather than the second trimester as commonly practiced.

A two-hour postprandial blood glucose (PPBG) test at eight weeks of pregnancy can help detect Early Gestational Glucose Intolerance (EGGI) if levels exceed 110 mg/dL. Early identification allows timely intervention through medical nutrition therapy, lifestyle changes, and supervised medication, helping normalise glucose levels before the 10th week. Experts propose three key measures: preconception counselling, mandatory antenatal registration by eight weeks, and universal early pregnancy glucose testing.

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI ACT)

Objective : Modernizes India's nuclear legal framework and integrates multiple aspects of nuclear development into a single regulatory structure to support safe and sustainable nuclear energy expansion.

Key Provisions

Private Sector Participation – Allows private companies and joint ventures to undertake nuclear plant operations, power generation, equipment manufacturing, and nuclear fuel fabrication, subject to government licence and safety approval.

Central Government Control of Strategic Activities – Sensitive fuel-cycle activities such as uranium enrichment, isotopic separation, spent fuel reprocessing, high-level waste management, and heavy water production remain exclusively under the Central Government.

Licensing and Safety Regulation – Introduces a structured system for granting, suspending, or cancelling licences, along with mandatory safety authorisation for nuclear activities.

Graded Liability Framework – Replaces the earlier single liability cap with variable operator liability depending on the type and risk level of nuclear installations.

Regulation of Peaceful Applications – Establishes oversight for nuclear and radiation technologies used in healthcare, agriculture, industry, and research.

Strengthened Regulatory Authority – Grants statutory status to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, enhancing independence and regulatory oversight.

Safety, Waste Management and Decommissioning – Operators must maintain strict safety standards, ensure safe radioactive waste disposal, provide financial security for compensation, and handle plant decommissioning.

Dispute Resolution and Appeals – Creates an Atomic Energy Redressal Advisory Council, while appeals lie with the tribunal under the Electricity Act, 2003.

Evolution of Nuclear Laws in India

• Atomic Energy Act, 1962

Foundation of India's nuclear programme; gives the Central Government control over atomic energy research, development and use for peaceful purposes.

Amendments (1986, 1987, 2015)

Gradually allowed government companies and joint ventures to participate in nuclear power generation while maintaining strategic control.

• Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010

Introduced no-fault liability and ensured compensation in case of nuclear accidents.

Prelims model questions

1. Consider the following statements regarding the SHANTI Act, 2025:

1. It allows private companies to participate in certain areas of India's nuclear energy sector under licensing and regulatory supervision.
2. All activities related to nuclear fuel cycle are opened to private sector participation.
3. The Act provides statutory recognition to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b)

Sensitive nuclear fuel cycle activities remain under exclusive Central Government control.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) The Vital-Vidhwansak, the first monthly journal to have the untouchable people as its target audience, was published by: (2020)

- (a) Gopal Baba Walangkar
- (b) Jyotiba Phule
- (c) Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
- (d) Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

2) With reference to Madanapalle of Andhra Pradesh, which one of the following statements is correct? (2021)

- (a) Pingali Venkayya designed the tricolour Indian National Flag here.
- (b) Pattabhi Sitaramaiah led the Quit India Movement of the Andhra region from here.
- (c) Rabindranath Tagore translated the National Anthem from Bengali to English here.
- (d) Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott set up headquarters of Theosophical Society first here.

“

“All things are ready, if our mind be so.”

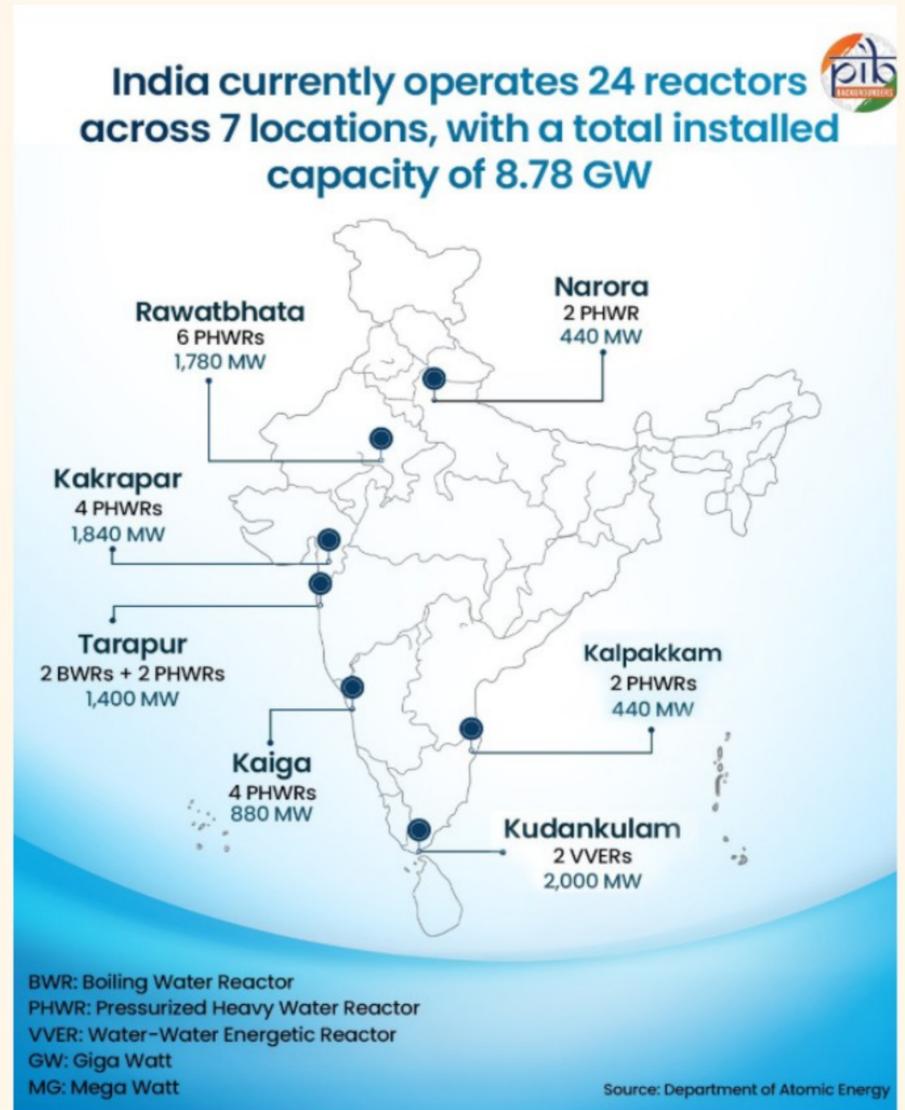
— William Shakespeare, Henry V

Prelims 2026 countdown

79 days to go

Power & Policy

Nuclear Energy: A Potential Turning Point for India's Energy Future



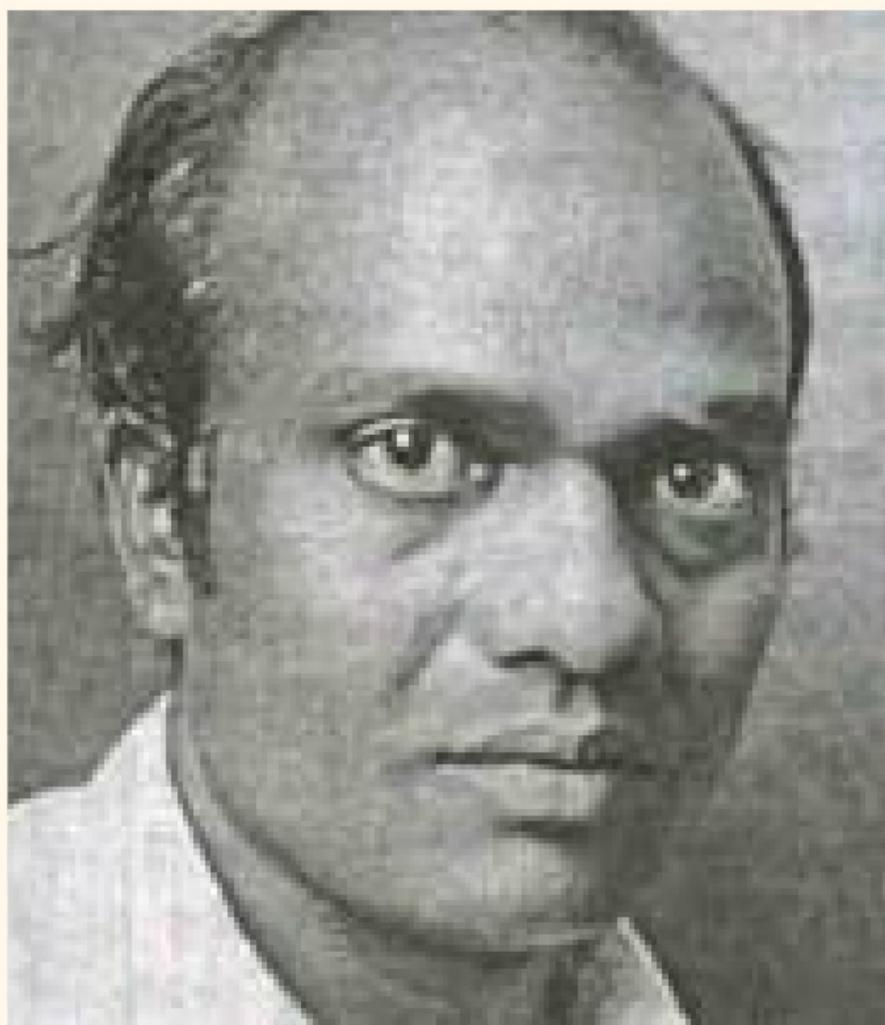
Nuclear energy can become a major turning point for India as the country faces rising electricity demand, rapid industrial growth, and the need to reduce carbon emissions. Unlike fossil fuels, nuclear power produces large amounts of electricity with very low greenhouse gas emissions, making it an important option for achieving India's clean energy goals. It also provides reliable base-load power, meaning electricity can be generated continuously regardless of weather conditions, unlike solar or wind energy. As India works toward long-term energy security and climate commitments, expanding nuclear capacity can help diversify the energy mix and reduce dependence on coal and imported fuels. If implemented effectively, nuclear energy could play a crucial role in ensuring reliable electricity supply, supporting economic development, and helping India move toward a cleaner and more secure energy future.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option A

The **Vital-Vidhwansak** (meaning "Destroyer of Brahmanical or Caste-Based Social Order") was the first monthly journal specifically aimed at addressing the issues and rights of the untouchable community. It was published in 1888 by Gopal Baba Walangkar, a pioneering social reformer and activist for the rights of Dalits in colonial India. Walangkar, a retired soldier, was one of the earliest advocates for the upliftment of the untouchable classes and sought to challenge the caste system through his writings.

Gopal Baba Walangkar (1840–1900) is regarded as an early pioneer in the emergence of Dalit periodicals in India. Influenced by Jyotirao Phule, he adopted and extended the then-popular Aryan invasion theory, arguing that untouchables were the indigenous inhabitants of India while Brahmins descended from Aryan invaders. He also contributed articles to Marathi newspapers such as *Sudharak* and *Deenbandhu*.



2) Answer is option d

Statement 1 Saint Nimbarka was a contemporary of Akbar.: Incorrect. Saint Nimbarka was the founder of the Nimbarka sect (a branch of Vaishnavism), and he lived in the 14th century. Akbar, on the other hand, ruled from 1556 to 1605. Nimbarka's time was well before Akbar's reign. Therefore, Nimbarka was not a contemporary of Akbar.

Statement 2: Saint Kabir was greatly influenced by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi.: Incorrect. Saint Kabir was a 15th-century mystic poet and saint who is known for his Bhakti and Sufi influences. He is famous for his poetry criticizing both the Hindu and Muslim rituals, advocating for a personal connection with God. Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, on the other hand, was a 17th-century Islamic scholar and a key figure in the Naqshbandi Sufi order. He lived after Kabir's time and was not an influence on Kabir. In fact, Kabir's ideas were more in line with Sufism, but he was not directly influenced by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi.



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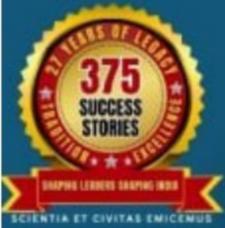
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repeated day in and day out.”

Robert Collier



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