

# Bhakti and Sufi Movement in India

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## INTRODUCTION

“Bhakti Movement was a revival of Hinduism, emphasizing devotion and personal relationship with God.”<sup>1</sup>

-A.K. Majundar

Bhakti as a religious concept means devotional surrender to a personally conceived supreme God for attaining salvation. The origin of this doctrine has been traced to both the Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions of ancient India and to various scriptures such as the Gita. But it was for the first time in South India between the 7th and the 10th century that bhakti emerged from a mere religious doctrine into a popular movement based on religious equality and broad-based social participation. The movement which was spearheaded by popular saint-poets reached its apex in the 10th century after which it began to decline. However, it was revamped as a philosophical and ideological movement by a series of ambulatory scholars or acharyas, beginning with Ramanuja in the 11th century. The establishment of the Sultanate of Delhi coincided with many widespread socio-religious movements in various parts of the country drawing upon the concepts of bhakti. These movements have been perceived as revival of the older South Indian bhakti movement. But each one of these later movements had a historical context of its own and its own peculiarities.

### The Bhakti Movement was characterized by:

- ◆ Emphasis on passionate devotion (bhakti) to a personal deity
- ◆ Use of vernacular languages, like Hindi, Punjabi, and Rajasthani, for spiritual expression
- ◆ Rejection of caste distinctions and ritualistic practices
- ◆ Importance of guru-shishya parampara (teacher-disciple tradition)
- ◆ Focus on social justice and the unity of all beings

### Causes of Bhakti Movement

- **Religious factor** – By the first millennium CE, religion grew to become highly ritualistic and superstitious, with many gods and conflicting ideologies. The Bhakti movement promoted a simple religion and a rational interpretation of religion based on love.
- **Social factors** – Indian society was plagued with many evils, such as the caste system, untouchability, atrocities against women, witchcraft and sacrifices. The religion earlier did not allow the untouchables or the women to perform sacrifices. However, the Bhakti religion was open to all. Growing social inequality and exploitation by Brahmins.<sup>2</sup>
- **Political factors** – Before the Turkish conquest, no heterodox belief could grow, as the society was dominated by the **Rajput-Brahman**. However, the advent of Islamic rulers deprived the Brahmins of their temple wealth and state protection. Thus, anti-Brahmanical and anti-caste ideologies could now challenge Brahmanical domination.
- **Economic factors** – With the growth of **feudalism**, oppressive revenue regimes based on regressive taxation and forced labour. The bhakti movement represented the people against feudal oppression. Growth of trade and commerce, leading to urbanization.<sup>3</sup>
- **Influence of Sufism** – Bhakti and Sufism were based on the same ideas and emerged as a dissent against the orthodoxies in their respective religions.
- **Solace in violent times** – Masses suffered greatly under some fanatic rulers. There were instances of looting of temples and sacking of cities not only by the Western invaders but also by rulers within the country. Bhakti provided solace to the despairing hearts in the violent society.

## BACKGROUND: BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN SOUTH INDIA

The Bhakti movement in South India was a powerful spiritual and social revolution that transformed Hinduism and shaped the region's culture, literature, and society. Emerging in the 6th century CE, it emphasized passionate devotion (bhakti) to a

personal deity, often through music, poetry, and dance.<sup>4</sup> Some of these saints hailed from the lower castes and some were women. The saint poets preached bhakti in an intense emotional manner and tried to promote religious egalitarianism. They ignored rituals and traversed the region several times singing, dancing and advocating bhakti. The Alvar and Nayanar saints used the Tamil language and not Sanskrit for preaching and composing devotional songs. Thus the movement could acquire a popular base. The South Indian bhakti saints used to criticize the Jains and Buddhists who enjoyed a privileged status at the courts of South Indian monarchs during that period. They won over many adherents of Buddhism and Jainism both of which by then became rigid and formal religions. These saint-poets simultaneously resisted the domination of the orthodox Brahmins by making bhakti accessible to all without any caste and sex discrimination. But the South Indian bhakti movement also had drawbacks. It never consciously proposed Brahmanism or the varna and caste systems at the social level. It was integrated with the caste system and the lower castes continued to suffer from myriad social disabilities. There was no elimination of Brahmanical rituals such as worship of idols, recitation of the Vedic mantras and pilgrimages to sacred places in spite of the overriding stress on bhakti as the superior mode of worship. The Jains and Buddhists were its principal targets not the Brahmins. This perhaps was also the reason why the Brahman dominated temples played an important role in the growth of South Indian bhakti movement. The ideological and social foundations of caste system were not challenged by the South Indian saint poets. As a result, the bhakti movement of the south in the long run strengthened that hierarchical system rather than weakening it. Ultimately after the movement reached its zenith in the 10th century, it was gradually incorporated by the traditional Brahmanical religion. Despite these constraints, the South Indian bhakti movement in its heyday succeeded in championing the cause of religious equality and consequently, the Brahmins had to accept the right of the low caste to preach, to have access to bhakti as a mode of worship and to have access even to the Vedas. The Bhakti movement in South India also saw the emergence of vernacular languages, such as Tamil and Kannada, as literary and liturgical languages. This democratized access to spiritual expression and created a rich literary heritage.<sup>5</sup>

### **SOUTH INDIAN ACHARYAS**

When the popularity of the bhakti movement in South India was on the wane, the concept of bhakti was defended at the philosophical level by some gifted vaishnava Brahmin scholars (acharyas). Ramanuja (11th century) was the first among them. He gave philosophical justification for bhakti. He tried to establish a careful balance between orthodox Brahmanism and popular bhakti which was open to all. Though he did not support the idea of the lower castes having access to the Vedas, he advocated bhakti as a mode of worship accessible to all including the Sudras and even the outcastes. Nimbarka, a Telegu Brahmin, is believed to have been a younger contemporary of Ramanuja. He spent most of his time in Vrindavan near Mathura in North India. He believed in total devotion to Krishna and Radha. Another South Indian vaishnavite bhakti philosopher was Madhava who belonged to the 13th century. Like Ramanuja he did not dispute orthodox Brahmanical restriction of the Vedic study by the Sudras. He believed that bhakti provided alternate avenue of worship to the Sudras. His philosophical system was based on the Bhagvat Purana. He is also believed to have toured North India. The last two prominent vaishnava acharyas were Ramananda (late 14th and early 15th century) and Vallabha (late 15th and early 16th century).

### **BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN NORTH INDIA**

From 13th to 15th century many popular socio-religious movements flourished in North and East India and Maharashtra. Emphasis on bhakti and religious equality characterized these movements. Almost all the bhakti movements of the Sultanate period have been related to one South Indian vaishnava acharya or the other. For these reasons, many scholars believe that the bhakti movements of the Sultanate period were a continuation or resurgence of the older bhakti movement. They argue that there existed philosophical and ideological links between the two either due to contact or diffusion. Thus, Kabir and other leaders of non-conformist monotheistic movements in North India are believed to have been the disciples of Ramananda who, in turn, is believed to have been connected with Ramanuja's philosophical order. Similar claims have been put forward that Chaitanya belonged to the philosophical school of Madhava. This movement is also believed to have been connected with Nimbarka's school because of its emphasis on Krishna Bhakti. "This movement emphasized passionate devotion (bhakti) to a personal deity, often through music, poetry, and dance."

There are many similarities between the older bhakti tradition of South-India and various bhakti movements that engulfed the Sultanate and Mughal periods (If we exclude the popular monotheistic movements of Kabir, Nanak and other "low" caste saints.). Like the South Indian bhakti movement the vaishnava bhakti movements of North and Eastern India and Maharashtra exhibited egalitarian trends in the religious sphere. But they never denounced the caste system, the authority of Brahmanical scriptures and the Brahmanical privileges as such. Like the South Indian bhakti, most of the vaishnava movements of the later period were ultimately assimilated into the Brahmanical religion, though in the process of interaction, the latter itself sailed through many changes. Bhakti movement was never a single movement except in the broad doctrinal sense of a movement which laid emphasis on bhakti and religious equality. The bhakti movements of

medieval India differed in many significant respects from the older South Indian bhakti tradition. Heterogeneity could be noticed even among the bhakti movements which flourished in medieval India. Each one of them had its own regional identity and socio-historical and cultural contexts. Thus the non-conformist movements based on popular monotheistic bhakti contained features that were essentially different from various bhakti movements. Kabir's notion of bhakti was not the same as that of the medieval saints such as Chaitanya or Mirabai. Within the movement the historical context of Maharashtra bhakti was different from that of the Bengal or North Indian bhakti movement of Ramanand, Vallavha, Surdas and Tulsidas. Later on, when the bhakti movement crystallised into sects, there arose frequent disputes between them which sometimes even turned violent. Among all the bhakti movements of the period between the 14th and the 17th century, the popular monotheistic movements of Kabir, Nanak, Raidas and other lower caste saints stand out fundamentally different. Though there is no single opinion about the origin of the Bhakti movement, there is unanimity of thought over the fact that the Bhakti movement was based on equality and devotional surrender to a personally conceived supreme God. Saguna and Nirguna are the two different ideological streams of the Bhakti movement.

### SAGUNA MOVEMENT

The Saguna Bhakti Movement, emerging in India between the 6th and 17th centuries, emphasized devotion to a personal, anthropomorphic deity with attributes (guna). This movement focused on divine attributes like love, compassion, and beauty, using rituals, symbols, and images in worship.<sup>6</sup> The theologian Ramanuja, who lived in the 12th century, is credited with popularizing the term "Vishishtadvaita" by combining Sankara's Advaitavada with the Pancharatna school of thought. This school of thought maintained that Vishnu existed before anything else. It is because of the effect of Ramanuja's writings and his lengthy stint as priest of the famed Vishnu temple at Srinangam that his beliefs were brought to the attention of the Vaishnavites. As a result, Ramanuja is believed to be the founder of Srivaishnavism. Ramananda, who lived between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, was a person who bridged the gap between the Vaishnava and South Indian schools of devotional worship. He was a devotee of Ram, not Vishnu, and he held Ram in the highest respect. He, like the monotheist bhakti saints, preached in the native tongues and did not believe in caste structures in order to propagate the religion. All of this was done in an effort to spread the faith. A well-known bhakti saint by the name of Vallabacharya was responsible for spreading devotion to Krishna throughout the early 16th century. Surdas and Mira Bai were both follower of Vallabacharya, who was their teacher. Surdas is credited with spreading the cult of Krishna throughout northern India. In addition to being a passionate devotee of Krishna, Mirabai rose to prominence in Rajasthan as a result of her bhajan work. In his work Ramcharitmanas, which is the Hindi translation of the Ramayana, Tulsidas, who was a devotee of Rama, advocated for the caste system and expressed his support for the Brahmins' superiority. In spite of the fact that he was absolutely devoted to the worship of idols, he argued for a religion that emphasized surrender and uncomplicated trust in a single deity.

### NIRGUNA MOVEMENT

The Nirguna Bhakti Movement, emerging in India between the 13th and 17th centuries, emphasized devotion to a formless, attributeless (nirguna) ultimate reality.<sup>7</sup> The bulk of monotheists were members of lower castes and were conscious of the fact that their beliefs were unified despite their differences. In addition, they were aware of the influence and lessons that each other had imparted, and they make oblique references to both one another and their predecessors in poems that give the impression that they came from the same ideological background. A nirguna worldview emerged as a result of their combination of the Vaishnava Bhakti concept, the Nathpanthi movement, and Sufism. This viewpoint was held by each and every one of them without exception. They condemned what they considered to be the worst aspects of the two most prominent religions of the time, which were Hinduism and Islam, and they categorically refused to be linked with either of these religions. Kabir was the first and most significant character in the Nirguna traditions, which are an example of monotheistic movements. A significant portion of his life was spent in Banaras (Kashi), where he was born into a family of weavers who had converted to Islam from Muslim people who were originally from the region. As a result of his support of new principles, which led to his rejection of the varnashrama and all rules that were based on caste distinction, new groups and unorthodox/protestant sects came into being. Poetry written by him was included in the Adi Granth, which is considered to be a sacred text for Sikhs. Kabir had an influence on a great number of individuals, such as the Banaras tanner Raidas, the Punjabi Khatri Guru Nanak, and the Rajasthani Jat peasant Dhanna.

### IN BENGAL

The Bhakti Movement in Bengal, emerging in the 15th century, emphasized devotion to Krishna and Radha, focusing on emotional intensity and love.<sup>8</sup> The bhakti movement was notably different from its equivalents in the south and the north. This was due to the fact that the bhakti legacy of the Bhagavatapurana, as well as the Sahajiya Buddhist and Nathpanthi traditions, had an impact on the movement. Within the context of these traditions, there was a strong focus placed on the

more intangible and subjective aspects of devotion. According to this narrative, Jayadeva was a bhakti saint who lived in the 12th century and had a significant impact. As an example of the mystical aspect of love, he offered the characters of Krishna and Radha. Chaitanya, in addition to being recognized as Krishna's incarnation, was another well-known bhakti saint who originated from this region. However, he did not express any skepticism regarding the claims that the texts and Brahmins made regarding divine revelation. In addition to this, he played a significant role in the propagation of Sankirtan, which is a form of collective devotional singing and dancing. Alongside him, the Bengali bhakti movement began to develop into a reform movement that questioned traditional views about caste divisions. This transformation occurred concurrently with his arrival.

### IN MAHARASHTRA

The Bhagavatapurana and the Siva Nathpanthis were the two texts that served as the movements' primary sources of motivation. The Jnaneswar was one of the first Bhakti saints to come from the state of Maharashtra. His exposition on the Bhagavad Gita, known as Jnanesvari, served as the foundation for the Bhakti ideology that was prevalent in Maharashtra. He believed that Bhakti was the only way to reach God, despite the fact that he was vocal in his opposition to caste systems. This particular sect worshipped Vithoba as their deity, and they would travel to the temple twice a year in order to pay their respects to the deity himself. The Vithoba of Pandarpur was a pivotal figure in the rebellion that took place in Maharashtra.

Namdev, who lived from 1270 to 1350, was another acclaimed bhakti saint with Maharashtrian roots. In contrast to the adoration that he receives in the north Indian monotheistic tradition as a nirguna saint, he is considered to be a member of the Vaishnava devotional tradition in the state of Maharashtra. A number of renowned Bhakti saints, including Choka, Sonara, Tukaram, and Eknath, were also born and raised in the Maharashtra region. While Tukaram's teachings are delivered in the form of the Avangas (dohas), which are the components that make up the Gatha, Eknath's goal was to shift the focus of Marathi literature away from spiritual compositions and toward narrative compositions.

### WOMEN IN THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT

In the Bhakti movement, women were very important. The movement gave women a forum to voice their opinions and ideas, which was not feasible in mediaeval India's male-dominated culture.

During this time, a number of female Bhakti saints rose to prominence, writing devotional poetry and aiding in the movement's growth. The well-known female Bhakti saints are Janabai, Mirabai, Andal, Akka Mahade and Lal Ded. Women have an alternative to the customary role of women in society because to the Bhakti movement. The movement emphasized the superiority of devotion and spiritual experience above gender and contested the idea that women were less valuable than males. Additionally, the Bhakti movement emphasized the concepts of equality and fraternity, which aided in the dismantling of caste and gender barriers. The Bhakti saints spoke out against gender inequality and fought for women's rights. With women taking a large role in these professions, the Bhakti movement also had a huge impact on Indian literature and music. Women also contributed significantly to the creation of new genres of music and dance, including the devotional music known as "bhajan" and the dance form known as "Bharatanatyam," both of which were inspired by the devotional poetry written by female Bhakti saints.

In general, the Bhakti movement gave women a voice and a platform to question conventional gender roles. Women devotees were especially important in the devotion of saints and pilgrimage destinations. Women made up a sizable number of the Bhakti-Sufi saints' devotees, and their devotion was essential in spreading the movement throughout the nation.

Women devotees would sing and dance in the presence of other devotees, fostering a cheerful and celebratory atmosphere, during the performance of devotional music and dance, known as "satsang" or "kirtan." This was a change from how women were typically expected to behave in society, which was to be silent and obedient.

The transmission and preservation of the Bhakti-Sufi saints' teachings were greatly aided by female devotees. They would commit the saints' lessons to memory and transmit them orally to succeeding generations.

### SOME ACHARYAS OF BHAKTI MOVEMENT

#### **Shukracharya [ C. 788-820 CE.]**

One of the mystic Bhakti poet-saint leaders who gave a new orientation to Hinduism. He was born in Kaladi in Kerala. He propounded the Advaita (Monism) philosophy and the idea of Nirgunabrahman (god without attributes). In Advaita, the

reality of the world is denied and Brahman is considered the only reality. It is only Brahman at its base that gives it its reality. His famous quotes include, 'Brahma Satyam Jagat Mithya Jivo Brahmatra Naparaha' meaning, "The Absolute Spirit is the reality, the world of appearance is Maya" and 'Ekameva Adviteeyam Brahma' meaning, "The absolute is one alone, not two". He laid emphasis on knowledge (gyan) as that can alone lead to salvation. Upadesasahasri, Vivekachudamani, Bhaja Govindum Stotra are some of the works authored by Shankaracharya. He also wrote commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita, the Brahma Sutra and the Upanishads. He set up mathas at Dwarka, Puri, Sringeri and Badrinath.

#### **Ramanuja (c. 1017 - 1137 CE)**

In the 12th century, Ramanuja, who was born at Sriperumbudur near modern Chennai, preached Vishista Advaitavada (qualified monism). According to him, God is Saguna Brahman (with attributes) and the creative process including all the objects in creation are real and not illusory as was held by Shankaracharya. Therefore, according to Ramanuja, God, soul, and matter are real. However, God is the inner substance and the rest are his attributes. In Vishista Advaitavada, the universe and Brahman are considered two equally real entities, as in dualism, but here the universe is not separate from Brahman but is formed out of Brahman. The Brahman is considered as a personal god with omniscient qualities who has created the world out of his own self. Thus, the world bears to Brahman the relation of the part to the whole, or the relation of a 'qualified effect' to the base (hence qualified monism). The famous analogy given for this is the sea and wave - Brahman is the sea and the objects of the world, both living and nonliving are the waves upon this sea. According to Ramanuja, Brahman is an entire personal god and is considered to be Vishnu or one of his avatars. He believed that Vishnu has created the world out of his love for humans, and he also controls the world at every step. He also held that Vishnu has all the qualities of a personal god - omniscient, omnipotence, etc. The difference between Dualism and Vishista Advaita is that "mankind enjoys higher status than in pure dualistic worship and is nearer to God". In Vishista Advaita, both the world and Brahman are considered equally real; they are not considered to be two separate entities as in Dualism. Ramanuja advocated prabattimarga or the path of self-surrender to God. He invited downtrodden people to Vaishnavism and advocated salvation by Bhakti. He authored Sribhashya, Vedanta Dipa, Gita Bhasya and Vedantasara.

#### **Madhvacharya [c. 1238- 1317 CE]**

Madhava from Kannada preached Dvaita or the dualism of Jivatma and Paramatma. According to his philosophy, the world is not an illusion but a reality and full of real distinction. God, soul and matter are unique in nature, and are irreducible to each other. He founded the Brahma Sampradaya. He considered Brahman and the universe to be two equally real entities that are not related in any way. The God of dualism is Vishnu who has created the universe, and the universe is separate from God and in an inferior position to God with no link between the two. Vishnu controls all worldly affairs and to worship and pray to God is the duty of all persons.

#### **Nimbarka [13<sup>th</sup> C.E.]**

He was the younger contemporary of Ramanuja who propounded the Dvaita Advaita philosophy and the philosophy of Bheda Abheda (difference/non-difference). The Bheda Abheda philosophy, like Vishista Advaita, also believes that the world and the Brahman are both equally real and that the world is a part of Brahman. The difference is in emphasis only. He was the preacher of Vaishnavite Bhakti in the Telangana region. He also founded the Sanak Sampradaya. He founded Dvaitadvaita or dualistic monism. He wrote Vedanta Parijatasaurabha, a commentary on Brahmasutras. He settled in Mathura.

#### **Kabir [1440-1518]**

One of the most famous disciples of Ramananda who belonged to the 15th century. His iconic verses are found in the Sikh holy scripture, Adi Granth. According to tradition, it is believed that he was born near Benaras to a Brahmin widow who abandoned him after his birth and was brought up in the house of a Muslim weaver. He possessed an inquiring mind and while in Benaras learnt much about Hinduism. He synthesized Hindu- Muslim traditions, emphasizing inner spirituality. He became familiar with Islamic teachings and Ramananda initiated him into the higher knowledge of Hindu denounced idol worship, pilgrimages, rituals, caste system especially the practice of untouchability and laid great stress on the equality of man before God. The mission of Kabir was to preach a religion of love that would unite all castes and creeds. He was quite familiar with yogic practices and regarded devotion to God as an effective means of salvation. He urged his disciples that to attain salvation one must have a pure heart, free from cruelty, hypocrisy, dishonesty and insincerity. He considered neither asceticism nor book knowledge important for true knowledge. He also did not consider it necessary to abandon the life of a householder for the sake of saintly life. Kabir's object was to reconcile Hindus and Muslims and establish harmony between the two sects. He emphasised the essential oneness of all religions by describing Hindus and Muslims "as pots of the same clay". To him, Rama and Allah, temple and mosque were the same. Kabir is regarded as the greatest mystic saint and his followers are called Kabirpanthis. Raidas (a tanner), Guru Nanak (a Khatri merchant) and Dhanna (a Jat peasant) were some of his important disciples. Most of the compositions of Kabir are compiled in Bijak. Kabir's notable works include his poetry collections such as "Adi Granth", "Kabir Granthavali", "Kabir Bijak", "Kabir Sakhi", "Kabir

Shabadavali", and "Kabir Vani". These works showcase his spiritual insights, social commentary, and philosophical thoughts. Some of his most famous poems include "Tinke Teka", "Guru Govind Dou Khade", "Kabira Mera Koi Nahin", "Kabira Khada Bazaar Mein", and "Moko Kahan Dhunde Re Bande". Through his poetry, Kabir conveys his message of love, compassion, and spiritual awakening, inspiring generations of seekers and saints.

#### **Guru Nanak [ C. 1469-1539 CE]**

The first Sikh Guru and the founder of Sikhism, who was also a Nirguna Bhakti saint and social reformer. He was born in a Khatri family in the village of Talwandi (now called Nankana) on the banks of the river Tawi in c. 1469 CE. He had a mystic contemplative bent of mind and preferred the company of saints and sadhus. He preached about the unity of God and strongly denounced idol-worship, pilgrimages and other formal observances of the various faiths. He advocated a middle path in which a spiritual life could be combined with the duties of the householder. "Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world", was one of his famous sayings. He aimed at bridging distinctions between the Hindus and the Muslims in order to create an atmosphere of peace, goodwill and mutual give and take. Guru Nanak's works include the Guru Granth Sahib, a sacred scripture of Sikhism, which comprises over 5,000 shabads (hymns) and 2,000 pauris (couplets). He also composed the Japji Sahib, a daily prayer, and the Asa di Var, a collection of hymns.

#### **Tulsidas [1532-1623CE]**

Tulsidas (1532-1623 CE) was a prominent poet-saint in the Bhakti Movement, particularly in the North Indian tradition. He is renowned for his devotional compositions, primarily in Awadhi and Braj languages, which emphasized love, devotion, and surrender to Lord Rama. His magnum opus, the Ramcharitmanas, is a revered Hindi epic that retold the Ramayana story, emphasizing devotion and moral values. Through his works, Tulsidas promoted the ideology of "Rama-katha" (the story of Rama), which became a central theme in North Indian Bhakti tradition. He also emphasized the importance of devotion (bhakti), love (prema), and surrender (prapatti) to Lord Rama, making his teachings accessible to common people. Tulsidas's legacy extends beyond his literary contributions, as he played a vital role in shaping the spiritual and cultural landscape of North India. His teachings and compositions continue to inspire devotion and spiritual growth in millions of people worldwide. Tulsidas' notable works include the Ramcharitmanas, a revered Hindi epic that retells the story of Lord Rama, emphasizing devotion, morality, and spiritual growth. Other works are Vinaya Patrika, Kavitavali, Gitavali, Krishnagiti, Hanuman Chalisa, Vairagya Sandipani, Dohavali, Sahitya Ratna, and Tulsi Satsai.

#### **Mirabai [ 1498- 1547]**

Mirabai was a renowned poet-saint and devotee of Lord Krishna from Rajasthan, India. Born into a royal family, Mira abandoned her luxurious life to dedicate herself to Krishna, composing over 1,300 poems and songs in Rajasthani and Braj languages. Her works emphasize love, devotion, and the longing for union with Krishna. Mira's poetry is characterized by its simplicity, intensity, and passion, making her one of the most celebrated Bhakti poets. She defied societal norms, embracing a life of spiritual devotion and composing poetry that continues to inspire generations. Mira's legacy extends beyond literature, symbolizing the power of devotion and the pursuit of spiritual growth. Her poetry and life story have been widely studied and revered, cementing her position as one of India's most beloved poet-saints.

Here are some of the most significant works of Mirabai:

- ◆ "Mira Padavali" - a collection of poems and songs dedicated to Lord Krishna
- ◆ "Mira Gitagovinda" - a commentary on Jayadeva's "Gita Govinda"
- ◆ "Mira Sataka" - a collection of 100 poems
- ◆ "Mira Caturdasapadi" - a collection of 140 poems
- ◆ "Mira Slokas" - a collection of poems and sayings
- ◆ "Mira Stuti" - a collection of poems and songs in praise of Lord Krishna
- ◆ "Mira Kaviti" - a collection of poems
- ◆ "Mira Vani" - a collection of poems and sayings

#### **Some of her most famous poems include:**

- ◆ "Payoji Maine Ram Ratan Dhan Payo"
- ◆ "Mere To Giridhar Gopal"
- ◆ "Kabira Mira Maikhana"
- ◆ "Mira Ke Prabhu Giridhar Naagar"
- ◆ "Aeri Aali Ri More Thumke"

### Impact Of Bhakti Tradition

- ◆ The advocates of Bhakti voiced their vehement opposition to a variety of immoral behaviors, including the killing of infants and the practice of sati, as well as their support for the prohibition of alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, and toddy. Both the act of sodomy and the act of adultery were considered to be unacceptable. They had the intention of establishing a social order that was respectable and adhered to strong moral ideals.
- ◆ Another notable benefit was the facilitation of harmony between groups in the Hindu and Muslim communities. An effort was made by the movement to decrease the growing hostility in an effort to heal the divide that had been created. The Sufi saints and the saints of the Bhakti movement both preached the importance of friendship, amity, tolerance, peace, and equality in their own communities.
- ◆ During the course of the movement, there was a change in the manner in which people worshipped God and felt about him. The devotion and affection for God, who is the God of all, the God of both Hindus and Muslims, was thus elevated to a central position as a result of this. The concept of Bhakti, which can be translated as devotion to the Supreme Being, served as the foundation of this movement.
- ◆ As a result of the Bhakti saints' legacy of tolerance, harmony, and mutual respect, which will last for all of eternity, a new form of worship that is shared by Muslims and Hindus has evolved. This group of people is referred to as the Satyapir cult. King Husain Shah of Jaunpur was the one who first proposed the idea, and it was he who created the foundation for the liberalism that Akbar would eventually adopt.
- ◆ During the Middle Ages, there were two significant religious organizations that tried to oppose birth-oriented casteism and social inequality. These movements were known as Sikhism and the Sufis and Saints.
- ◆ In the nineteenth century, reformers such as Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, and Rammohun Roy, as well as in the twentieth century, leaders of oppressed groups such as Jotirao Phule and Dr. Bhim Rao Amdekar, amongst others, continued the reformative and modification-based demands of the Bhakti tradition.

### Negative Impact

- ◆ For the most part, the Bhakti Organization was not successful in accomplishing its objectives, which included promoting religious tolerance and transformation within Hinduism as well as promoting peace between Hindus and Muslims.
- ◆ Both the Muslim population and the Turkish-Afghan government did not accept Rama Sita and Radha-Krishna as legitimate political figures.
- ◆ It is possible that the Bhakti movement had an effect on Akbar; nevertheless, to assert that this was the case would be an instance of bending the truth.
- ◆ For the same reason, the movement caused a rift among the Hindu community.
- ◆ As an example, throughout the course of time, the people who followed Kabir came to be known as Kabir Panthis.
- ◆ Tantra is a new form of superstition that is introduced into Indian civilization as a result of this activity.
- ◆ The tantra school of philosophy originated from the concept of Bhakti.
- ◆ Through the use of mysterious gestures and the recitation of magical words (mantra), it was believed that one might obtain what they desired and enhance their power to an extraordinary degree.

SUFISM

### INTRODUCTION

“Sufism is the path of unity, where the seeker experiences the oneness of existence.”<sup>10</sup>

-Ibn Arabi

The term sufi is an Arabic word generally alluding to a man having drawn to seclusion taking recourse in the path of devotion and dedication to god. The scholars are divided on the root of the term. Some orientalist, being amply influenced by the West are of the view that the term sufi has been derived from a Greek word sophia which means wisdom. Accordingly the divinely wise people were called sufis. Their view is not acceptable for, there exists no term like sufi in the Greek language. The term sufi has several Arabic roots. Some scholars believe that the term is derived from the Arabic words saf which means rank. The people engaged in worship and devotion who enjoyed the first rank in the hierarchy of Islamic Arab society, were called sufis. It is also not correct because the sufis never cared for social status; in fact they always refused such glamour. Some scholars believe that the term sufi comes out of the Arabic word safa which means purity. It is acceptable to some extent. Purity is one of the basic virtues to be inculcated by a novice. Some orientalists believe that the term sufi owes its origin to another Arabic word sof, meaning wool. The aristocrats before and after the advent of Islam wore woolen cloths as a mark of destination. The devotees also imitated them. They were therefore called Sufi's. The derivation is not correct, for the Sufis generally wore torn up cloaks. Most of the scholars have agreed that term

sufi has been derived from the Arabic word suffah meaning the terrace. It has a reference to the devoted companions of the prophet who dwelt on the terrace of the prophets mosque in Madina. They led a life of prayer and penitence in the days of peace and participated in the battles against Islam in the days of war. They had no social and political responsibilities. They were addressed as the dwellers of the terrace (ahl-al suffah). It is believed to be the most reasonable derivation.

### ORIGIN OF SUFISM

Sufi movement is characteristically Islamic in nature. It originated and developed in the Arab peninsula and spread thereafter in the vast Muslim empire which was established by the rulers after conquering many alien lands in Europe, Asia and Africa. Retaining the Islamic Character the movement readily admitted the local influence and adapted to the social conditions, cultural features and spiritual needs of the native peoples. It may be explicitly understood in the case of India where spiritual interactions between the Sufi's and the Yogis resulted into the inception and growth of Bhakti movement. Many Yoga and Muslim saints led and carried forward the healthy tradition of bhakti movement. In other lands also Sufism pursued the same course ensuing similar consequences. Persia, due to its rich cultural heritage and proximity of ideas, influenced the movement most widely and profoundly. Sufism admitted several conceptual elements from the Persian culture and religion, and practiced them in the course of prayer and penitence. Reason being, that it become an Islamic state following the Arab political legacy.

Although we could notice the mystic trends just after the advent of Islam in the life time of the prophet, yet Sufism in the fullest sense came into existence particularly in the days of Umayyad due to at least for some endurable political distress. As the people have different aptitudes, all of them could not live freely in the vitiated political atmosphere. They therefore preferred to draw themselves to isolation and chose to lead a life of devotion. Abul Hamshin Kofi is believed to be the first Muslim mystic. His way of life fascinated many people who joined him in this path and became his disciples. Sufism thus came into origin. This Movement emerged in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, emphasized mystical dimensions of Islam, forcing on love, devotion, and inner spiritual experience.<sup>11</sup>

### SUFISM IN INDIA

Sufism was introduced to India in the 11th century by Islamic mystics and travelers, and it flourished during the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) and Mughal Empire (1526-1857).<sup>12</sup> With the emergence of sectarian controversies, sufi movement spread all over the Muslim world. The Sufi movement commenced with a missionary zeal. Having conquered many lands the Muslims started preaching Islam. As a consequence people of different lands embraced Islam but did not abdicate their ancestral beliefs altogether. The stupendous task of preaching the religion was willingly taken up by the sufis in different parts of the Muslim kingdom. Similar was the case of India Although Indo-Arab Trade could be dated long before the advent of Islam, yet the Muslims, particularly the merchants, started pouring in Indian coastal areas and settled there in pockets with the purpose of the advancement of their trade. The population of the Muslims being two meagre did not attract the sufis to begin their mission. With the invasion of Mohammad bin Qasim throngs of Muslims chose India as their abode. Many of them were left behind in the Indus valley and the adjoining areas. Even after Mohammad bin Qasim was called back, some sufis and scholars came with the army and stayed here with a two- fold purpose in mind that is to guide the Muslims to the write path and to preach Islam to the natives. Although the sufis never in encouraged forceful conversion yet the rulers supported them in their mission. The sufis also did not check or discourage the local cultural elements the converts brought with them by way of inheritance. In India also we notice an amalgam of two cultures. The theologians (Ulama) considered it as an evil of proselytism and attempted to remove all impurities entering into Islam by way of ancestral beliefs. They resolved to preserve Islam in its pristine form. The sufis, however, in the pursuit of their mission interacted with the people in their dialects and persuaded them to accept Islam in their own way.

There are two types of Sufi sects: Ba-Shara and Be-Shara. Ba-shara was in accordance with Islamic law (shara), while be-shara was not in accordance with (shara). Both orders were common in India, the latter being preferred by itinerant saints and Qalandars. The Sufi movement was a socio-religious movement of fourteenth to sixteenth century. The exponents of this movement were unorthodox Muslim saints who had a deep study of vedantic philosophy and Buddhism of India. They had gone through various religious text of India and had come in contact with great sages and seers of India. They could see the Indian religion from very near and realized its inner values. Accordingly they developed Islamic Philosophy which at last gave birth to the Sufi Movement. The Sufi movement therefore was the result of the Hindu influence on Islam. This movement influenced both the Muslims and Hindus and thus, provided a common platform for the two.

Though the Sufis were devout Muslims, yet they differed from the orthodox Muslims. While the former believed in inner purity, the latter believed in external conduct. The union of the human soul with God through love and devotion was the essence of the teachings of the Sufi Saints. The method of their realizing God was the renunciation of the World and

Worldly pleasures. They lived a secluded life. They were called Sufis as they wore garments of Wool (suf) as their budge of poverty. Thus the name 'Sufi' is derived from the word Suf. They consider love to be the only means of reaching God. Historian Tara Chand says, "Sufism indeed was a religion of intense devotion, love was its passion; poetry, song and dance, its worship and passing away in God its ideal". The Sufis did not attach importance to namaz, hajj and celibacy. That is why they were misunderstood by orthodox Muslims.

They regarded Singing and dancing as methods of inducing a state of ecstasy which brought one nearer to realisation of God. Sufi literature and music thrived in India, with Amir Khusrau's poetry and music being particularly renowned. Urdu and Persian Sufi literature also flourished, reflecting the syncretism between Hinduism and Islam.<sup>13</sup> There were some leading Sufi saints like Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti, Fariuddin Ganj-i-Shakar, Nizam-ud-din Auliya etc. Sufism was a liberal reform movement within Islam. It had its origin in Persia and spread into India in the eleventh century. The first Sufi saint Sheikh Ismail of Lahore started preaching his ideas. The most famous of the Sufi saints of India was Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, who settled in Ajmer which became the centre of his activities. He had a number of disciples who are called Sufis of the Chishti order. Another well known Sufi saint was Bahauddin Zakariya who came under the influence of another famous mystic Shihabuddin Suhrawardi. His branch of Sufi saints was known as the Sufis of the Suhrawardi Order. Yet another famous Sufi saint was Nizamuddin Auliya who belonged to the Chishti order and who was a mighty spiritual force. These Sufi saints are revered even today by not only Muslims but by a large number of Hindus. Their tombs have become popular places of pilgrimage for both communities. Sufism stressed the elements of love and devotion as effective means of the realization of God. Love of God meant love of humanity and so the Sufis believed service to humanity was tantamount to service to God. In Sufism, self discipline was considered an essential condition to gain knowledge of God by sense of perception. While orthodox Muslims emphasize external conduct, the Sufis lay stress on inner purity. While the orthodox believe in blind observance of rituals, the Sufis consider love and devotion as the only means of attaining salvation. According to them one must have the guidance of a per or guru, without which spiritual development is impossible. Sufism also inculcated a spirit of tolerance among its followers.

Other ideas emphasized by Sufism are meditation, good actions, repentance for sins, performance of prayers and pilgrimages, fasting, charity and suppression of passions by ascetic practices. These liberal and unorthodox features of Sufism had a profound influence on medieval Bhakti saints. In the later period, Akbar, the Mughal emperor, appreciated Sufi doctrines which shaped his religious outlook and religious policies. When the Sufi movement was becoming popular in India, about the same time the Bhakti cult was gaining strength among the Hindus. The two parallel movements based on the doctrines of love and selfless devotion contributed a great deal to bringing the two communities closer together. However, this trend did not last long.

### MUGHAL IDEAS AND APPROACHES TOWARDS SUFIS

In the middle of the eleventh century, Sufis reached the part of the north west India under Ghaznavid control. The following centuries saw the arrival of many men of God belonging to different brotherhoods or following different 'Ways', There were the Chistis lovers of music and poetry, whose center, Ajmer became very important for the Mughals. There were also the sober Suhra wardiyya, who were initially concentrated in Sind, the Punjab and Bengal. Ali-yi Hamdani led the kusrawiyya into Kashmir. There was an active 46 branch of this group, the Firdausiya, in Bihar and Bengal. Babur visited Hamdanais grave in Khuttalan during his military campaigns. For a time, the Shattariyya played an important role in central India, while the central Ssian Naqshbandiya, who were averse to music and dancing, were increasingly important to the Mughals in the sub-continent. In addition, these were numerous smaller groups, venerators of particular holymen, hybrids with elements from Hindu Bhakti groups and so on. When Babur and his associates came to India there was adazling array of different mystical paths. The theosophy of the Andalusian Ibn Arabi (died 1240) was spreading in India at more or less the same time. Before this theosophy came to be generally accepted these were lengthy disputes between the different masters. Their belief in the 'oneness of being', often designated as either pantheism or monism, coloured the poetry of all the languages of the subcontinent, and inspired mystically inclined scholars to compose numerous commentaries and original works. A text book written by the strait-laced Badauni, Najat arrashid, reveals the surprising fact that he too was a follower of the 'great master'.<sup>14</sup> The most famous of the teachers in India was MuhibbuUah of Allahabad who followed Ibn Arbi, and who was venerated by Prince Dara Shikoh.

Babur's son Humayun was a great venerator of holy men, visited the shrine of the leader of the chistis, Abdul Quddues Gangohi (died 1538), and during his wandering in excile in Iran, he visited all the accessible mausoleums, including the shrine of 'Abdullah-i Ansari (died in 1089) in Gazurgah, near Heart. The sufi with the greatest influence on the emperor was Shah Phul or Bhlul, who claimed to be descended from the great Persian mystical poet Fariddin 'Attar, and who was renowned for his exorcism. Shah Phul was killed by Humayun's brother Hindal, who feased his great influence over Humayun. Shah Phul brother Muhammad Ghaush Gwailiari (died 1562) had an even greater influence on many Muslims,

and the Shattari order which he represented remained active for many years, for example in Burhanpur. The great theologian Wajihuddin Gujarati spoke in his defence.<sup>15</sup> Akbar does not appear to have shown any great interest in these powerful religious figures a somewhat astonishing fact, which is mentioned by both Badauni and Abul Fazl.

Akbar too believed deeply in the dervishes, the representative of mystical Islam. In 1564 he performed the first pilgrimage on foot to Muinuddin Chisti's mausoleum in Ajmer and repeated this act frequently, thus in 1569 to offer thanks for the conquest of Chitor, the Rajput stronghold. It is said that even in this conquest he was supported by a Suhrawardy saint, Miran Muhammad Shah (d. 1604 in Lahore). The conquest was celebrated by Badauni with the verse: "And a happy day was it for the vultures and crows - Glory to Him who multiplied! food for his creatures".<sup>16</sup> The hermit Shaykh Salim Chisti in a hermitage with his tame lion, c. 1700. Till 1579 the emperor visited the Shrine in Ajmer almost every year, "and daily according to his custom held in that sacred shrine by night intercourse with holy, learned, and sincere men, and seances for dancing and Sufism took place, and the musicians and singers, each one of whom was a paragon without rival, striking their nails into the veins of the heart used to rend the soul with their mournful cries, and dirhams and dinars were showered down like raindrops".<sup>17</sup>

### MAJOR SUFI SAINTS AND THEIR THOUGHTS

#### **Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti (1143-1234)**

Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti was a great Sufi Saint of India. The Chisti order was established in India by him. He was born in 1143 A.D. in Seistan in Persia. He came to India around 1192 A.D. shortly before the defeat and death of Prithvi Raj Chauhan and settled on at Ajmer. It is said that some of the Hindu families influenced Prithviraj to drive out Muinuddin Chisti from his state. Accordingly Prithvi Raj sent the chief priest of Ajmer, Rama Deo, with an order to Muinuddin to leave his state. But Rama Deo was so much impressed and fascinated with the personality of Chisti that he became his disciple and remained with him. In this way he attracted everyone who came in contact with him. He had a large number of followers. By leading a very simple ascetic way of life and spreading the message of love and equality, he had tried to wipe out ill- feelings from the minds of the people of two communities i.e. Hindus and Muslims. Of course no authentic record of his activities is available. He did not write any book but his fame rose with the fame of his successors. However living for a long period of more than ninety years and spreading the message of love and universal brotherhood he breathed his last in 1234 A.D. His written works include Khutbat, a collection of sermons and lectures on spirituality and Sufism, and Malfuzat, a compilation of his sayings, teachings, and conversations. Additionally, he authored Risala-i-Wujudiyya, a treatise on the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Being), and Fawa'id al-Fu'ad, a collection of spiritual discourses and teachings.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Farid ul-din Ganj-i-shakar [1188-1265]**

Farid ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar, also known as Baba Farid, was a renowned Sufi saint and poet of the Chishti Order. Born in Kothewal, Punjab, he was initiated into the Chishti Order by Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. His spiritual legacy emphasizes love, compassion, and selfless service. Farid ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar's teachings stressed the importance of inner spiritual growth, renunciation of worldly attachments, and devotion to Allah. He advocated for the recitation of the Quran and the performance of good deeds. His shrine in Pakpattan, Punjab, is a revered pilgrimage site.

His literary contributions are profound, reflecting his spiritual insights and poetic flair. His magnum opus, "Diwan-e-Farid" or "Shayr-e-Faridi", is a collection of poetic verses and couplets emphasizing spiritual growth, love, and devotion. This work showcases his mastery of Persian and Punjabi languages, demonstrating the syncretism of Islamic and Indian cultural traditions. Another significant work is "Fawa'id-ul-Farid", a compilation of his sayings, teachings, and conversations.<sup>19</sup> This text provides valuable insights into Farid ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar's spiritual philosophy, highlighting the importance of inner purification, renunciation, and selfless service.

#### **Nizam-ud-din Auliya (1235-1325)**

Nizam-ud-din Auliya was the most famous of the Chisti Saints. He was the disciple of Baba Farid. He came to Delhi in 1258 and settled in the Village Chiaspur near Delhi. In his life time seven Sultans ruled over Delhi, but he did not go to any of them. When the Sultan Ala-ud-din Khilizi once expressed his desire to meet him, he said, "I have two doors in my home. If the Sultan would enter through one door I would go out through the other." Nizam-ud-din's strong personality and mystic ideology made him most popular. He laid much emphasis on love which leads one to the realization of God. He also said that love of God means love of humanity. Thus he spread the message of universal love and brotherhood. He said that those who love God for the sake of human beings and those who love human beings for the sake of God are favorite to God. This is the best way to love and adore God. However, preaching his teachings for a long period he breathed his last in 1325 A.D. After him, the Chistis did not stay around Delhi; they dispersed and extended their message to the eastern and southern parts of India.

## IMPACT OF SUFISM

The Sufi movement has had a profound impact on Islamic thought, culture, and society. By emphasizing the inner dimensions of faith and promoting spiritual growth, Sufism helped to humanize Islamic practices and foster a deeper understanding of the divine. Sufi mystics and poets, such as Rumi and Hafiz, created a rich literary and cultural heritage that transcended geographical and linguistic boundaries. Their works continue to inspire seekers of truth and love across the globe. Sufism's emphasis on love, compassion, and tolerance helped to bridge gaps between Muslims and non-Muslims, fostering a climate of coexistence and understanding. Sufi shrines and festivals became symbols of interfaith harmony, attracting devotees from diverse backgrounds. The movement's focus on spiritual equality empowered women, allowing them to participate fully in spiritual practices and assume leadership roles.

The Sufi movement also influenced Islamic philosophy and theology, integrating mystical experiences with orthodox teachings. Sufi thinkers like Ibn Arabi and Ghazali developed complex metaphysical systems, exploring the nature of reality and the human condition. Their ideas continue to shape Islamic thought and inspire contemporary scholars.

In India, the Sufi movement played a crucial role in shaping Islamic culture and society. Sufi saints like Mu'inuddin Chishti and Nizamuddin Auliya helped spread Islam through peaceful means, emphasizing love and compassion over conquest. Their legacy continues to inspire Indians of all faiths, promoting unity and understanding.

Today, the Sufi movement remains a powerful force for spiritual growth, interfaith dialogue, and cultural exchange. As a global phenomenon, Sufism continues to adapt and evolve, addressing contemporary challenges while remaining rooted in its timeless principles.

## CONCLUSION

The Bhakti and Sufi movements, emerging in medieval India, shared a common purpose: emphasizing personal devotion, love, and spiritual growth. Both rejected ritualism and formalism, promoting tolerance and acceptance across diverse faiths. Bhakti, rooted in Hinduism, and Sufism, originating from Islam, converged on key principles: emotional devotion, social equality, and inner purification.

Despite theological differences, the movements' legacies are intertwined. They enriched Indian literature and music, fostering interfaith dialogue and social reforms. Bhakti saints like Mirabai, Kabir, and Tukaram, and Sufi mystics like Mu'inuddin Chishti, Nizamuddin Auliya, and Farid ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar, left indelible marks on Indian culture and spirituality.

These movements continue to inspire contemporary society. Their emphasis on love, compassion, and tolerance serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of interfaith harmony. As symbols of India's rich cultural heritage, these movements remind us of the transformative power of devotion and spiritual growth.

Today, the Bhakti and Sufi movements remain relevant, influencing Indian spirituality, literature, and music. They serve as a testament to the enduring power of love and devotion, transcending cultural and religious boundaries. By embracing their shared ideals, we can foster greater understanding, tolerance, and unity.

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