

BHAKTI-SUFI TRADITIONS (8th-18th century)

→ Sources to understand Bhakti and Sufi tradition

- Textual sources available from this period include compositions attributed to poet saints most of whom expressed themselves orally in religious language used by ordinary people.
- These compositions were often set to music were compiled by disciples or devotees, after the death of the poet saint.
- Historians also draw on hagiographies or biographies of saints written by their disciples or devotees. These may not be literally accurate, but allow a glimpse into the ways in which devotees perceived the lives of these path breaking women and men.

1. A mosaic of Religious Beliefs and Practice

1.1 The Integration of cults.

There were at least two processes at work to integrate different cults.

disseminating
brahmanical
ideas

brahmanas accepting
and reworking the
beliefs and practices of
these and other social
categories.

Brahmanical ideas:

It is exemplified by the composition, compilation and preservation of Puranic text in simple Sanskrit verse.

- Many beliefs and practices were shaped through a continuous dialogue between "great tradition" and "little tradition".

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e.g.: Principal deity was identified as Jagannatha in Puri, Odisha.

- Worship of the goddess, often simply in the form of a stone coloured with red and yellow mud.
- They were identified as wives of the principal male deities - sometimes they were equated with Laxmi, wife of Vishnu in other instances, with Parvati, the wife of Shiva and Saraswati wife of Brahma.

Bhakti movement → Hindu saints and reformers started religious reform movements that adopted methods of devotion to achieve the salvation.

- Their methods of expression of devotion ranged from the routine worship of deities within temples, singing and chanting of devotional compositions.

2. Poems of Prayer

Early Tradition of Bhakti

At a different level, historians of religion often classify Bhakti tradition into two broad categories

↙
Nirguna
(without attributes)

↘
Saguna
(with attributes).

Saguna bhakti :

included traditions that focused on the worship of specific deities such as Shiva, Vishnu and his avatars and forms of the goddess or Devi, all often conceptualised in anthropomorphic form.
(मानवस्पी)

Nirguna bhakti :

Nirguna Bhakti on the other hand was worship of an abstract form of god.

2.1 The Alvars and Nayanars of Tamil Nadu

- Alvars → those who are immersed in devotion to "Vishnu"
(c. sixth century)
- Nayanars → leaders who were devotees of "Shiva"
- * They travel from one place to another singing hymns in Tamil

1.2 Difference and conflict between various cults or traditions of Hinduism

Tantric practices	Puranic traditions	Vedic traditions
Those engaged in Tantric practices frequently ignored the authority of the <u>vedas</u> .	Also, devotees often tended to protect their chosen deity, either Vishnu or Shiva, as supreme.	In Vedic traditions the principal deities are Agni, Indra and Soma.
It is widespread in several parts of the subcontinent. They were open to men and women, and practitioners often ignored differences of caste and class within the ritual context.	The singing and chanting of devotional composition were often a part of such modes of worship.	Those who valued the Vedic tradition often condemned other practices.
They followed sacrifices or precisely chanted mantras.	Shivas and Nayanaras were part of this tradition.	Vedic practices were for only men and Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. They practiced Vedic tradition by chanting long Vedic hymns and elaborate sacrifices.

praise of their gods.

* During their travels the Alvars and Nayanars identified certain shrines as abodes of their chosen deities and large temples were built at these sacred places. These developed as centres of pilgrimage.

3.2 Attitudes towards caste

- Alvars and Nayanars initiated a movement of protest against the caste system and the dominance of Brahmanas or at least attempt to reform the system.

- This is corroborated by the fact that bhaktas hailed from diverse social backgrounds ranging from Brahmanas to artisans and cultivators and even from castes considered untouchable.

- One of the major anthologies of compositions by the Alvars, the Nalayira Divya Prabandham, was frequently described as the Tamil Veda → it was significant as the four vedas in Sanskrit that were cherished by the Brahmanas.

3.3 Women devotees

- * Presence of women.

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① the composition of Andal, a woman Alvar, were widely sung.

- * Andal saw herself as the beloved of Vishnu.

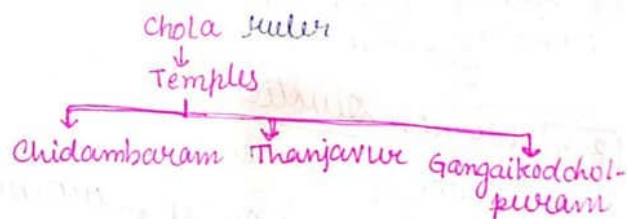
(2) Karikaikal Ammayal, a devotee of Shiva.

↓
adopted path of extreme asceticism

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compositions were preserved within the Nayanar tradition.

[2.4] Relations with the state (rulers)

- (i) Cholas, Cheras, Pallavas and Pandyas ruled South India. Buddhism and Jainism had prevailed in this region for several centuries.
- (ii) Alvars and Nayanars opposed Buddhism and Jainism through their hymns. This hostility was due to competition between religious traditions for royal patronage.
- (iii) Chola rulers supported Brahmanical and Bhakti traditions, making land grants and constructing temples for Vishnu and Shiva.



* Both Nayanars and Alvars were revered by the Vellala peasants.

- This was the period when several Rajput states emerged in North India.

- In most of these states Brahmanas occupied position of importance, performing a range of secular and ritual functions.

- There seems little attempt to challenge Brahmanical position directly. These include the Naths, Yogis and Siddhas.

↓
came from artisanal groups.

- Many of these new religious leaders questioned the authority of the Vedas, and expressed themselves in language spoken by ordinary people.

- A new element in this situation was the coming of the Turks which culminated in the establishment of Delhi Sultanate.

- This was accompanied by marked changes in the realm of culture and religion.

5. NEW STRANDS IN THE FABRIC ISLAMIC TRADITIONS (Arrival of Islam into India)

- Arabs merchants frequented ports in the first millennium CE, they settled in the Malabar coast.

- In 711 an Arab general named Muhammad Qasim conquered Sindh, which became part of the Caliph's domain.

world. Therefore they do not practice funerary rites such as cremation. Instead, they ceremonically bury the dead.

(4) They challenged the idea of caste and the "pollution".

(5) They also questioned the theory of rebirth.

(6) The Lingayats also encouraged certain practices disapproved in the Dharmashastras, such as post puberty marriage and the remarriage of widow.

Source to know Virshaiva :

* Vachanas, composed in Kannada by women and men who joined the movement.

New Religious Development

This period witnessed two major developments.

↓
Tamil Bhaktas

↓
Sanskrit tradition,
Puranas (incorporated)

↓
Mahayashtra
(13th century)

4. RELIGIOUS FERMENT IN NORTH INDIA :

↓
(tradition)

• During this period, in north India deities such as Vishnu and Shiva were worshipped in temples.

rulers tried to win their support as well.
* The chola king attempted to claim divine support and proclaim their own power and status by building splendid temples that were adorned with stone and metal sculpture to recreate the visions of these popular saints who sang in the language of the people.

* These king also introduced the singing of Tamil Shaiva hymns in the temples under royal patronage taking the initiative to collect and organise them into a text (tevaram)

3. THE VIRSHAIVA TRADITION IN KARNATAKA

* Twelfth century → emergence of movement
→ Karnataka → (led by) Brahman
named Basavanna (minister in court of
Kalachuri ruler)

* Basavanna's followers → Virashaiva
(hymns of Shiva)
or Lingayats (wearers of linga)

characteristics of Virshaiva:

- ① They worship Shiva in his manifestation as a linga.
- ② Men usually wear a small linga in a silver case on a loop strung over the left shoulder.
- ③ Lingayats believe that on death the devotee will be united with Shiva and will not return to this

- Some architectural features of mosques are universal such as their orientation towards Mecca, evident in the placement of the Mihrab (prayer niche) and the minbar (pulpit).
- However a mosque in Kerala is built with Shikhara, a mosque is built in Kashmir with wood and a mosque is built in Bangladesh with bricks.

Kerala	→ Shikhara
Kashmir	→ Wood
Bangladesh	→ Bricks

5.3 Names for communities

- Historians who have studied Sanskrit texts and inscriptions dating between the eighth and fourteenth centuries point out that the term Musalman or Muslim was virtually never used.
- People were identified in terms of the region from which they came.
- (i) Turkish ruler → Turushka
- (ii) Tajikistan → Tajika
- (iii) Persian ruler → Parashika
- (iv) Turks and Afghans → Shakas and Yavanas

A more general term used for these migrant communities was mlechchha indicating that they did not observe the norms of caste society and spoke languages that were not derived from Sanskrit.

- Later the Turks and Afgans established the Delhi Sultanate. This continued with the establishment of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century.
- Theoretically, Muslim rulers were to be guided by Ulama, who were expected to ensure that they ruled according to shari'a.

Ulama → scholars of Islamic studies
(religious head)

Shari'a → law governing muslim community

- Muslim ruled and protected people of all the religions but collected ~~tax~~ Jizya tax from the Non-Muslims called zimmi.
 - Several rulers gave land endowment and granted tax exemptions to Hindu, Jain, Zoroastrian, Christian and Jews religious institution and also expressed respect to the saints.
- These grants were made by several Mughal rulers include Akbar and Aurangzeb.

5.2 The popular practices of Islam in India.

- The developments that followed the coming of Islam permeated far and wide through the subcontinent amongst different social strata - peasants, artisans, warriors, merchants, to name a few.

- All those who adopted Islam accepted, in principle, the five "pillars" of the faith.

There is one god, Allah, and Prophet Muhammad as his messenger; offering prayers five times a day; giving alms; fasting during the month of Ramadan; and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca.

- However, these universal features were often overlaid with diversities in practice derived from local customary practices of converts from different social milieus.

- For example, the Khojaks, a branch of the Shi'a sect composed devotional poems in Punjabi, Multani, Sindhi, Kachchi, Hindi and Gujarati, sing them in special ragas during daily prayer meetings.

- A whole muslim traders who settled along the Malabar coast (Kerala) adopted the local language Malayalam. They also adopted local customs such as matrilineal and matrilineal residence.

6. The Growth of Sufism

- Sufis → a group of religious minded people.

↓
turned to asceticism and mysticism.

They emphasized on seeking salvation through intense devotion and love for god by following his commands.

e.g: Prophet Muhammad

6.1 Khangahs and silsilas

→ Khangahs: (Institution)
Institutionally, the sufis began to organise communities around the hospice or khangah (Persian) controlled by a teaching master known as shaykh, pir or murshid (सूफी संत)

→ Silsilas: The word silsila literally mean a chain, signifying a continuous link between master and disciple, stretching an unbroken spiritual genealogy from Allah > the Prophet Muhammad > sufis > devotees.

→ Ziyarat: When the sheikh died, he was buried in a tomb shrine and his tomb shrine is called dargah. It became the center of devotion for his followers. This encouraged the practice of pilgrimage or ziyarat.

1.1 Life in the Chisti Khanga

- ① The Khanga was the centre of social life.
- ② It comprised several small rooms and a big hall (jama'at khana) where the inmates and visitors lived and prayed. The inmates included family members of the Shaikh, his attendants and disciples.
- ③ The inmates included:
 - ③ The Shaikh lived in a small room on the roof of hall where he met visitors in the morning and evening.
 - ④ There was an open kitchen (langar), run on futuh (unasked for charity).
 - ⑤ From morning till night → people - include scholars, slaves, singers, merchants, poets, travellers, rich and poor, Hindu yogis and qalandars - came seeking discipleship, amulets for healing. (Astit)

Practices adopted :

- (i) Shaving the head of inmates
- (ii) Yogic exercises
- (iii) bowing before the Shaikh.
- (iv) offering water to visitors
- (v) attempts to assimilate local tradition

7.2 Chishti devotionalism: ziyarat and qawwali ..

• Ziyarat

(a) Pilgrimage, called ziyarat, to ~~tombs~~ of sufi saints is prevalent all over the Muslim world.

• For more than seven centuries people of various creeds, classes and social backgrounds have expressed their devotion at the dargahs of the five great Chisti saints.

• Most revered shrine is that of Khwaja Muinuddin, properly known as "Ghasib Nawaz" (Comforter of the poorer)

• Muhammad Bin Tughlaq was the first Sultan to visit the shrine, but the earliest construction to house the tomb was funded in the late fifteenth century by Sultan Ghiyasuddin Khalji of Malwa.

Sawal Qawwali

• Part of ziyarat is the use of music and dance including mystical chants performed by specialty inclined musicians or qawwals to evoke divine

ecstasy

16.2 Outside the Khanqah

- Many ignored rituals and observed extreme forms of asceticism. They are known by different names —
Qalandars, Madaris, Malangis, Haidaris.

Be-Sharia and Ba-sharia Sufis:

BE-SHARIA	BA-SHARIA
Sufis, who left the Khanqah and took to mendicancy and observed celibacy and extreme forms of asceticism were called <u>Be-Sharia</u> .	The Sufis who lived in Khanqahs by following normal Sharia practices were called <u>Ba-Sharia</u> Sufis.
They were known by different names — Qalandars, Madaris, Malangis, Haidaris	They did not have other names.

7. The CHISTIS In The Subcontinent

Chistis → Groups of Sufis who migrated to India in the late 12th century.

- They adapted successfully to the local environment and adopted several features of Indian devotional traditions.

- The sufis remember God either by reciting the zikr (the divine names) or evoking his presence through sama or performance of mystical music.

7.3 Languages and Communication

- In Delhi, those associated with the chisti silsila conversed in Hindustani

- Bala Farid composed verses in the local language, incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib.

- Yet others composed long poems or masnavis to express ideas of divine love using human love as an allegory.
e.g.: Padmavat composed by malik Muhammad Jayasi

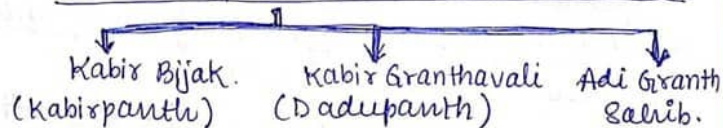
- A different genre of sufi poetry was composed in and around the town of Bijapur, Karnataka.

- The poems were probably sung by women while performing household chores like grinding grain and spinning.
- Other compositions were in the form of lullabies and shadinama or wedding songs.

New Devotional Paths

→ Kabir

- * Kabir was born a Hindu but was raised by a poor Muslim family belonging to the community of Julahas, who were relatively recent converts to Islam.
- * He was initiated into Bhakti by a guru, perhaps Ramananda.
- * Kabir is perhaps one of the most outstanding examples of a poet-saint who emerged.
- * Historians have tried to reconstruct his life and times through a study of compositions attributed to him as well as later hagiographies.
- * Verses compiled in three distinct traditions



- * Kabir poems survived in several languages
- Sant Bhasha

Urat Bansi

Messages :

- (i) Kabir drew on to describe the Ultimate Reality. These include Islam : he described the Ultimate Reality as Allah, Khuda, Hazrat and Pir.
- (ii) He also used terms drawn from vedantic traditions, alakh (the unseen), nirakari (formless), Brahman, Atman, etc.

Sufis and the State

- ① A major feature of the chisti tradition was austerity, including maintaining a distance from worldly power.
- ② This was by no means a situation of absolute isolation from political power. The sufis accepted unsolicited grants and donations from the political elites.
- ③ The Sultans in turn set up charitable trusts (augaf) as endowments for hospices and granted tax free land.
- ④ The chistis accepted donations in cash and kind rather than accumulate donations, they preferred to use these fully on immediate requirements such as food, clothes, etc.
- ⑤ Their miraculous powers made sufis popular among the masses, whose support kings wished to secure.
- ⑥ Kings did not simply need to demonstrate their association with sufis; they also required legitimization from them.
- ⑦ It was believed that the awliya could intercede with God in order to improve the material and spiritual conditions of ordinary human beings. That is why, kings often wanted their tombs to be in the vicinity of sufi shrines and hospices.
- ⑧ Occasionally the sufi shaiikh was addressed with high sounding titles. The disciples of Nizamuddin Auliya addressed him as sultan-ul-mashaikh (sultan amongst shaiikhs).

(vii) A major feature of Sufism was austerity including maintaining a distance from worldly power.

(viii) According to Sufism service of mankind and needy people is as equal to the devotion of God. That's why a common kitchen (langar) was being run in Khanqah of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya which was being run on futeh.

Teachings Of Guru Nanak

① Ego is a deterrent of spiritual progress. Ego is a highly dangerous phenomenon in humans. Engage in worship of the ultimate reality. The word of God can cleanse you and move you in spiritual advancement.

② All humans are equal: Equality of humans is the crux of Guru Nanak's teachings. There are no caste, creed or religious differences whatever. Never discriminate people on the basis of race, status and caste.

③ The greatness of womanhood. Men and women are equal. In fact, women are even more respectable since man is born to a woman; his future generation depend on women; when his women dies, man seeks another woman and is bound to her.

(iii) Other terms with mystical connotations such as Shabda (sound) or Shunya (emptiness) were drawn from yogic traditions.

(iv) Some poems draw on Islamic ideas and use monotheism and iconoclasm to attack Hindu polytheism and idol worship.

(v) He use Sufi concept of zikr and ishq to express the Hindu practice of naam-simaran (remembrance of god name).

- MIRABAI -

(i) Mirabai (the best known women poet) within the Bhakti tradition) was a Rajput princess from Merta in Marwar who was married against her wishes to a prince of the Sisodia clan of Mwar, Rajasthan.

(ii) She recognised Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu, as her lover. Her in-laws tried to poison her, but she escaped.

(iii) According to some traditions, her preceptor was Raidas, a leather worker.

(iv) After rejecting the comforts of her husband's palace, she is supposed to have donned the white robes of a widow or the saffron robe of the renouncer.

(v) Biographies have been reconstructed primarily from the Bhajans attributed to her.

(vi) Her songs continue to be sung by women and men, especially those who are poor and considered "low caste" in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Q. Discuss the major beliefs and practices that characterised Sufism.

Ans → Major beliefs and practices of Sufism:

• In the early centuries of Islam, a group of religious minded people called Sufis.

• They turned to asceticism and mysticism in order to protest against the growing materialism of the Caliphate as a religious and political institution.

Major beliefs and practices of Sufism are:

- (i) They criticised the dogmatic definitions and scholastic methods of interpreting Quran and Sunna given by theologians. Sufis thus interpreted the Quran on the basis of their personal experience.
- (ii) They gave emphasis on seeking salvation through great devotion and bhakti of God.
- (iii) They regarded prophet Muhammad as a perfect human being and preached to follow the prophet Muhammad.
- (iv) They were in favour of zikr, sama, singing, dance and training of mind, through different methods under the guidance of any Auliya or Pir.
- (v) They gave stress on mendicancy and alibacy. They ignored rituals and observed forms of asceticism.
- (vi) According to Sufis God is one and is all powerful. Every one is his creation. That's why all are equal.

④ The message of Baba Guru Nanak is spelt out in his hymns and teachings. These suggest that he advocated a form of Virguna Bhakti.

⑤ He rejected sacrifices, ritual baths, image worship, austerities and the scriptures of both hindus and muslims.

⑥ For Baba Guru Nanak, the Absolute or "Nab" had no gender or form.

⑦ He proposed a simple way to connect to the Divine Name, expressing his ideas through hymns called "shabad".

⑧ Guru Gobind Singh also laid foundation of the Khalsa Penth (army of the pure) and defined its five symbols: uncut hair, a dagger, a pair of shorts, a comb and a steel bangle.