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 and compiled by disciples or devotees after the death of the poet saint.

Historians also draw on biographies or hagiographies 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

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 their and other social categories.
Brahmanical ideas:

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

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

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 equalized 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 mundane 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 traditions 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 Parvati, all often conceptualised in anthropomorphic form.

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

2.1 The Alvars and Nayamars of Tamil Nadu

- **Alvars** → those who were immersed in devotion to Vishnu (c. sixth century)
- **Nayamars** → leaders who were devotees of Shiva

They travel from one place to another singing hymns in Tamil in
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<th>Tantric practices</th>
<th>Puranic Traditions</th>
<th>Vedic Traditions</th>
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<td>Those engaged in Tantric practices frequently ignored the authority of the Vedas.</td>
<td>Also, devotees often tended to project their chosen deity, either Vishnu or Shiva, as supreme.</td>
<td>In Vedic traditions, the principal deities are Agni, Indra, and Soma.</td>
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<td>It is widespread on several parts of the subcontinent. They were often homogeneous. Women and practitioners often ignored differences of caste and class within the ritual context.</td>
<td>The singing and chanting of devotional compositions were often a part of such modes of worship.</td>
<td>Those who valued the Vedic tradition often condemned other practices.</td>
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<td>They followed sacrifices or precisely chanted mantras.</td>
<td>Allocces and peoples were part of this tradition.</td>
<td>Vedic practices were for only men and Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas. They practiced Vedic tradition by chanting long Vedic hymns and elaborate sacrifices.</td>
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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 on at least attempt to reform the system.
- This is corroborated by the fact that Brahmin's 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 *Malayalam Divya Prabhavantham*, was frequently described as the Tamil Vedas. It was significant as the house vedas in Sanskrit that were cherished by the Brahmanas.

### 3.3 Women Devotees

- Presence of women.
- The composition of Andal, a woman Alvar, was widely sung.
- Andal saw herself as the beloved of Vishnu.
Kavaikkal Ammaiyar: a devotee of Shiva.

- Adopted path of extreme asceticism
- Compositions were preserved within the Nayanara tradition.

2.4 Relations with the State (feudal)

(i) Cholas, Cheras Pallavas and Pandyas ruled South India. Buddhism and Jainism had prevailed in this region for several centuries.

(ii) Always 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 Brahmanas and Shaakty traditions, making land grants and constructing temples for Vishnu and Shiva.

Chola Rulers

Temples

Chidambaram Thanjavur Gangaikodcholpuram

- Both Nayanars and Alwars 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 Nathas, Yogis and Siddhas.

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)

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

In 711 an Arab general named Muhammad Qasim conquered Sind, which became part of the Caliph's domain.
world. Therefore they do not practice funerary rites such as cremation. Instead, they ceremonially bury the dead.

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

5. They also questioned the theory of siltirth.

6. The Lingayats also encouraged certain practices disapproved in the Dharmaashtras, such as post-puberty marriage and the remarriage of widows.

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
- Maharashtrians (13th century)

Sanскrit tradition:
- Puranas (incorporated)

4. Religious Ferment in North India:

During this period, in north India, deities such as Vishnu and Shiva were worshipped in temples.
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 sculptures to recreate the visions of these popular saints who sang in the language of the people.

These kings 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).

2. The Virshaiva Tradition in Karnataka

Twelfth century → emergence of movement
- Karnataka (led by) Brahman named Pasavanna (minister in court of Kalachuri ruler)
- Pasavanna's follower → Virashaiva (Hindus of shiva) or Lingayats (worship of linga)

Characteristics of Virashaiva:
1. They worship shiva in his manifestation as a linga.
2. Men usually wear a small linga in a silken case on a loop strung over the left shoulder.
3. Lingayats believe that on death the pound 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 mimbar (pulpit).
- However, a mosque in Kerala is built with Shikhasa, a mosque is built in Kashmiri with wood, and a mosque is built in Bangladesh with bricks.

| Kerala → Shikhasa  |
| Kashmiri → 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 musalmān or Muslim was virtually never used.
- People were identified in terms of the region from which they came.
- (i) Turkish ruler → Tunsheka
  (ii) Tajikistan → Tajika
  (iii) Persian ruler → Parashi ka
  (iv) Turks and Afghans → Shakas and Yavans.

A more general term used for these migrant communities was melghat, indicating that they did not observe the norms of caste society and spoke languages that were not derived from Sanskrit.
Later, the Turks and Afghans 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 Jizya tax from the non-Muslims called zamani.

Several rulers gave land endowments and granted tax exemptions to Hindu, Jain, Zoroastrian, Christian and Jewish religious institutions and also expressed respect to the saints.

→ These grants were made by several Mughal rulers including Akbar and Aurangzeb.
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 is 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 Khojans, a branch of the Shi'a sect composed of devotional poems in Punjabi, Sindhi, Kachchhi, Hindi and Gujarati, sing them in special stages during daily prayer meetings.

Local Muslims traders who settled along the Malabar coast (Kerala) adopted the local language Malayalam. They also adopted local customs such as matriliney and matrilocal residence.
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

Khanqahs and SiliSals

Khanqah : (Institution)

Institutionally, the sufis began to organise communities around the hospice of Khanqah (Persian) controlled by a teaching master known as shaikh, pir or muhshid (مُشْهِد).

SiliSals : The word, siliSala literally mean a chain, signifying a continuous link between master and disciple, stretching as 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 daragah. If became the center of devotion for his followers. This encouraged the practice of pilgrimage on ziyyatatto.
Life in the Chisht Khangah

1. The Khangah 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

4. The shaikh lived in a small room on the roof of hall where he met visitors in the morning and evening.

5. There was an open kitchen (langar) run on the jeta (unasked for charity).

6. From morning till night people - include soldiers, slaves, singers, merchants, poets, travellers, rich and poor, Hindus, yogis and gourmets came seeking discipleship, amulets for healing.

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 Chisti devotionalism: ziyarat and qawwals

- Ziyarat
  (a) Pilgrimage called ziyarat, to the shrines 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 Mian Muinuddin, properly known as "Ghausub Nauz" (Comforter of the Poorer).

- Muhammad Roin Chughtai was the first dhu'll 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.

- Qawwals Qawwals

- Part of ziyarat is the use of music and dance, including mystical chants performed by specially trained musicians, or qawwals, to evoke divine ecstasy.
6.2 Outside the Khangah

Many ignored rituals and observances and took extreme forms of asceticism. They are known by different names—Qualanderas, Madaris, Malangs, Haidaris.

Be-Sharia and Ba-Sharia Sufis:

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<td>Sufis who left the Khangah and took to mendicancy and obscurity and extreme forms were called Be-Sharia.</td>
<td>The sufis who lived in Khangahs by following normal Sufi practices were called Ba-Sharia Sufis.</td>
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<td>They were known by Qualanderas, Madars, Malangs, Haidaris</td>
<td>They did not have other names.</td>
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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 adapted several features of Indian devotional traditions.
The sufis remember God either by reciting the gūlāb (the divine names) or evoking his presence through sama, or performance of mystical music.

### Languages and Communication

In Delhi, those associated with the chitt silsilā conversed in Hindavi.

Baha Tahir composed verses in the local language, incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Yet others composed long poems or masnavis to enshrine ideals of divine love using human love as an analogy.

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 jārīnāma or lullabies and ḍhadānāma 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 culahari, 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 biographies.

Verses compiled in three distinct traditions:

- Kabir Bijak
- Kabir Granthavali
- Adi Granth (Dadupanth)
- Sahib

→ Kabir poems survived in several languages:
- Sant Bhasha
- Ular bani

Messages:
(i) Kabir drew on to describe the ultimate reality. These include Islam; he described the ultimate reality as Allah, Khuda, Hayat, and Pr.

(ii) He also used terms drawn from Vedantic traditions, alakhu (the unseen), nirakar (formless), Brahma, 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 Sultan 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 them freely on immediate requirements such as food, cloth, 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 legitimisation from them.

7. It was believed that the auliya 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 Shaikh was addressed with high sounding titles. The disciples of Nizamuddin Auliya addressed him as Sultan-ul-Mashaikhs (Sultan amongst Sheikhs).
(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 Khangah of Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia which was being run on futil.

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 to 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 whatsoever. 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 generations depend on women, when his women die, man seeks another woman and is bound to her.
(iii) 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 Mewar, Rajasthan.

(iv) She recognised Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu, as her lover. Her relatives tried to poison her, but she escaped.

(vi) According to some traditions, her preceptor was Ravidas, a leather worker.

(vii) 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.

(viii) Biographies have been reconstructed primarily from the bhajans attributed to her.

(ix) Her songs continue to be sung by women and men, especially women who are poor and considered "low caste" in Gujarat and Rajasthan.
Discuss the major beliefs and practices that characterised Sufism.

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 hadith and sunna given by the 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 mysticacy and dhibacy. They ignored rituals and observed forms of asceticism.
(vi) According to Sufis, God is one and is all powerful. Everyone is his creation. That is why all are equal.
(a) The message of Baba Guru Nanak is spelled out in his hymns and teachings. These suggest that he advocated a form of *Vishnu Bhakti*.

(b) He rejected sacrifices, ritual baths, image worship, austerities, and the scriptures of both Hindus and Muslims.

(c) For Baba Guru Nanak, the Absolute or "Iqbal" had no gender or form.

(d) He proposed a simple way to connect to the Divine Name, expressing his ideas through hymns called "Shabad".

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