

- Bhakti-Sufi Traditions Changes in Religious Beliefs and Devotional Texts (c. Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries)
- Integration of Religious Developments and the Growth of Early Bhakti Movements
- The Popular Practice of Islam and the Growth of Sufism
- New Devotional Paths: Dialogue and Dissent in Northern India
- Solved Examples
- Practice Set
- Answer Key
- Quick Reference
- Glossary

Bhakti-Sufi Traditions Changes in Religious Beliefs and Devotional Texts (c. Eighth to Eighteenth Century)

The period from the eighth to the eighteenth century in India witnessed significant transformations in religious beliefs and devotional practices. This era saw the rise of Bhakti and Sufi movements, which emphasized devotion, social equality, and spiritual experience beyond orthodox rituals. These movements used vernacular languages to reach common people, thereby gaining legitimacy and societal cohesion through royal patronage.



Origins with Basavanna: Propagated devotion to Shiva through the Lingayat sect.

Rejection of Rituals: Opposed Brahmanical practices like caste and idol worship.

Community Values: Emphasised equality and encouraged women's participation. Example: Akka Mahadevi's poetry.

Practical Philosophy: Advocated ethical living and condemned social evils like child marriage.



The Virashaiva Tradition

Alvars and Nayanars: Tamil poet-saints like Andal and Appar composed devotional hymns.

Personalised Devotion: Emphasised love for a personal deity. Example: Vishnu for the Alvars and Shiva for the Nayanars.

Equality in Devotion: Rejected caste-based discrimination in spiritual practices.

Temple Culture: Bhakti hymns promoted temple worship in Tamil Nadu.

Andal and Karaikkal Ammalyar's devotional works showed deep faith while challenging prevailing patriarchal norms in society and religion.

By the 10th century, Alvar and Nayanar hymns were compiled into the Nalayira Divyaprabandham and Tevaram, respectively.

Chola rulers supported Alvar and Nayanar traditions by building temples, sponsoring hymns, and promoting devotional practices and saints.

Chola kings like Parantaka I honored saints with metal images, festivals, and processions, boosting their religious and cultural influence.



Early Traditions of Bhakti

Bhakti-Sufi Traditions (c. Eighth to Eighteenth Century)

The Bhakti-Sufi traditions represent a synthesis of diverse religious ideas and practices, integrating local deities and folk customs with major community values that transcended caste and class barriers.

Exam Question

Q: How did the Bhakti and Sufi traditions contribute to social equality in medieval India?

A: The Bhakti and Sufi traditions promoted devotion accessible to all, rejected caste discrimination, and encouraged participation of women

Integration of Religious Developments and the Growth of Early Bhakti Movements

From the eighth to the eighteenth century, religious traditions in India evolved with the rise of Bhakti and Sufi movements. Poet-saints composed the increasing visibility of various gods and goddesses in sculpture and texts, and the integration of cults through Puranic texts in simple

Brahmanas began accepting beliefs and practices of women and Shudras, who were traditionally excluded from Vedic learning. Tantric work blurred distinctions.

Bhakti traditions are classified into Saguna Bhakti, worshipping deities with attributes like Shiva and Vishnu, and Nirguna Bhakti, focusing on formless (Vishnu) and Nayanars (devotees of Shiva), who composed hymns in Tamil and traveled to sacred shrines that later became pilgrimage centers.

These saints often opposed caste hierarchies, coming from diverse social backgrounds. Women played a significant role, with figures like Anantadevi. Rulers supported these traditions, as seen in inscriptions consecrating images of poet-saints.

The Virashaiva or Lingayat movement emerged in Karnataka in the twelfth century under Basavanna, promoting devotion to Shiva, rejecting caste distinctions, and questioned rebirth theories.

Exam Question

Q: What are the main features of the Virashaiva or Lingayat movement?

A: The Virashaiva movement emphasized devotion to Shiva, rejected caste discrimination and orthodox funeral rites, practiced burial, and promoted social equality.

The Popular Practice of Islam and the Growth of Sufism

Islam spread in India with the arrival of Muslim rulers and Arab traders, who settled along the Malabar coast and adopted local customs. Muslims in India did not rigidly classify people as Hindu or Muslim but by birthplace.

Sufism, a mystical form of Islam, arose as a protest against materialism in the Caliphate, emphasizing love, devotion, and personal experience. Prophet Muhammad. Initiation rituals included oaths, distinctive garments, and head shaving.

After a Sufi Shaikh's death, his tomb (dargah) became a pilgrimage site (ziyarat) where devotees sought blessings. Various ascetic groups in India, from the late twelfth century, adapted to local traditions, establishing Khanqahs as centers of social and spiritual life.

Chishti dargahs attracted pilgrims of all backgrounds, with music and dance (sama) used in devotion. The dargah of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti spread to the Deccan, with saints composing poetry in Dakhani, a local Urdu variant.

Chishti saints maintained austerity, accepted donations without accumulating wealth, and generally had cordial relations with rulers, who supported them.

Exam Question

Q: How did the Chishti Sufi order influence religious and social life in medieval India?

A: The Chishti order promoted inclusivity, used music and vernacular languages in devotion, established Khanqahs as community centers, a

New Devotional Paths: Dialogue and Dissent in Northern India

In northern India, new devotional movements emerged that engaged in dialogue and dissent with existing religious and social norms. Kabir, emphasizing nirguna bhakti and critiquing caste and religious divisions. His legacy is claimed by both Hindu and Muslim communities.

Baba Guru Nanak (1469–1539), founder of Sikhism, was born into a Hindu family but preached a form of nirguna bhakti rejecting rituals, sacrifice called shabad in Punjabi.

Mirabai, a fifteenth–sixteenth century woman poet, is renowned for her devotional bhajans dedicated to Krishna, challenging societal norms

Historians reconstruct these religious traditions through diverse sources including sculpture, architecture, hagiographies, and devotional literature

Exam Question

Q: What contributions did Kabir and Guru Nanak make to devotional traditions in northern India?

A: Kabir promoted nirguna bhakti and challenged caste and religious divisions, while Guru Nanak founded Sikhism, emphasizing devotion to

Solved Examples

Example 1: Explain the significance of the use of vernacular languages by Bhakti and Sufi saints.

Answer: The use of vernacular languages like Tamil by Alvars and Hindavi by Chishtis made religious teachings accessible to common people and popularized devotional practices.

Example 2: Describe the role of women in the Bhakti tradition.

Answer: Women like Mirabai and Andal composed devotional songs and challenged social norms by expressing personal devotion, thus playing a significant role in the Bhakti movement.

Practice Set

Easy

- Who were the Alvars and Nayanars?
- What is a dargah?

Moderate

- Explain the difference between Saguna and Nirguna Bhakti.
- What was the significance of the Chishti Sufi order in India?

Challenging

- Discuss how Bhakti and Sufi traditions contributed to social cohesion during the medieval period.
- Analyze the role of Kabir in promoting religious dialogue and dissent.

Answer Key

- Alvars and Nayanars were poet-saints from South India devoted to Vishnu and Shiva respectively.
- A dargah is a tomb shrine of a Sufi saint.
- Saguna Bhakti worships God with attributes; Nirguna Bhakti worships a formless, attribute-less God.
- The Chishti order promoted inclusivity, music in devotion, and established social centers called Khanqahs.
- Bhakti and Sufi traditions fostered social equality, challenged caste, and promoted unity through shared devotional practices.
- Kabir used poetry to critique religious orthodoxy and promote harmony between Hindu and Muslim communities.

Quick Reference

- **Bhakti Movement:** Devotional movement emphasizing personal love for God, rejecting caste and ritualism.
- **Sufism:** Mystical Islamic tradition focusing on love, devotion, and personal experience of God.
- **Alvars and Nayanars:** South Indian poet-saints devoted to Vishnu and Shiva.
- **Virashaivas/Lingayats:** Shaiva devotional movement rejecting caste and orthodox rituals.
- **Chishti Order:** Influential Sufi order in India known for inclusivity and music in worship.
- **Kabir:** Poet-saint promoting nirguna bhakti and religious harmony.
- **Guru Nanak:** Founder of Sikhism advocating devotion to a formless God.

Glossary

Alvars

Devotees of Vishnu who composed Tamil devotional hymns.

Nayanars

Devotees of Shiva who composed Tamil devotional hymns.

Dargah

Tomb shrine of a Sufi saint, a place of pilgrimage.

Ziyarat

Pilgrimage to the tomb of a Sufi saint.

Wali

A Sufi saint believed to be close to God and capable of miracles.

Zikr

Remembrance of God through recitation of divine names.

Qawwals

Musicians who perform devotional songs in Sufi traditions.

Hagiography

Biography of a saint written by followers.

Virashaivas/Lingayats

A Shaiva devotional community rejecting caste and orthodox rituals.

Saguna Bhakti

Devotion to God with attributes and forms.

Nirguna Bhakti

Devotion to a formless, attribute-less God.