5. The Teachings of Bhakti and Sufi saints: A Comparative Study

India in the medieval ages saw a silent revolution brought about by a vibrant and radical group of socio-religious reformers, and from the period of 10th century onwards, religion took a turn with a burst of spirituality via these reformers. These reformers had a deep devotion to God, and belonged to two very different faiths: Islam and Hinduism. Sufi mystics were born out of Islam, and the Bhakti mystics born out of Hinduism. Although these mystics plunged into contemplation and meditation, they had a strong influence and rapport with the common man. Though the two religions were far apart in terms of their doctrine, they had much in common. They were not a part of their respective orthodox groups. Both the orthodox Brahmins of the Hindu faith and the orthodox ulema of the Islamic tenets, although they learnt each word of the scriptures - the Vedas, Upanishads and the Quran - it seemed they lacked the appreciation of the core essence of its message. However the mystics of both these religions touched the hearts and souls of the common man, emphasizing the importance of 'Knowledge', which was imparted by their messengers (Gurus and Pirs),

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1 See footnote 10 of Chapter I, "A Brief Historical Account of Sufism".
2 The term "Guru" means one who brings light into the darkness. If we split the word 'guru' (gu +ru) where 'gu' means darkness and 'ru' means light.
and as such, the Bhakti and Sufi saints have contributed to the making of a particularly charismatic religious history.

The teachings of the Bhakti and Sufi saints had much in common which can be traced back from different ages in various regions, and though both movements were not of the same period, they were for some time contemporary. Introduction of Sufism in India began around the eleventh century, though it had been active outside India from the tenth century. Sufi saints such as Muinuddin Chishti were responsible for bringing Sufism to India around the same period as the Muslim conquest. The Bhakti movement, which was highly influenced by Buddhism, was a combination of Hinduism and Buddhism, and the birth of Bhakti can be attributed to Sankaracharya melding the best of both faiths in the eighth century in south India, spreading to north India during the twelfth century after the decline of Buddhism in this area.

The regions where they preached were different. Sufism was concentrated in north India, their Suhrawardy silsila located in Punjab, Sind and Bengal, the Chishti silsila in Delhi and the Doab region, and the Firdausi silsila centralized in Bihar. Although the Bhakti movement started in south India, it spread all over the north to different regions by different saints.
Therefore they spoke different languages, their methods of teaching were
different, but their ideas were synonymous.

Most of the Bhakti and Sufi saints had one ultimate goal, realisation
of God for the individual. Bhakti gurus and Sufi pirs had a strong dislike of
'blind faith' in sacred scriptures, and did not believe in the discriminatory
restrictions of caste and creed. For both, rituals and ceremonies were not
important, rather the individual's relationship with the True Master (gurus
and pirs) who could give them the right Knowledge to realize God through
their personal devotion to Him. Condemning polytheism, both movements
were monotheistic, believing in one God who was the Supreme Being and
the Creator.

The concept of Bhakti (devotion) is as old as Hinduism itself. It is one
of the three approaches that the Bhagvat Gita recommends, the other two
being Knowledge and action. It became a powerful theory to combat the
cold logical theories of the Jains and Buddhists.

3 'Blind faith' here refers to the Brahmins and ulama who read and learnt every line of the scriptures, yet
failed to understand the meaning of a single word. If they would have done so, they would not have placed
so much emphasis on rites and rituals, and at the same time discriminating amongst common people who
looked up to them for guidance and as role models. Nanak said "The Vedas tell you of the different between
good and evil. Sin is the seed of hell; chastity the seed of paradise. Knowledge and the teachings of Vedas
compliment each other; they are to one another as merchandise to merchant", Adi Granth, p467.
4 The Bhagvat Gita is a Hindu text in which describes the "Knowledge" which is imparted by Lord Krishna
to Arjuna in the Kurukshetra. In this text, Lord Krishna calls the Knowledge as Raj Vidyā and explained
the Bhakti marga, which means devotion to God through love, which one experiences after realizing the
God within.
The main principle of Bhakti faith was ‘selfless love’ or ‘devotion’. Rather than supplicating to God for materialistic needs or desire, the saints of this movement stressed that the only means of salvation was selfless love or devotion. This was uninterrupted, single-minded, extreme devotion to God without any material motive. This love for God is best described as similar to the unconditional love a mother has for her child. God’s love was the source of bliss, thus He was at times worshipped by a devotee as his Supreme Beloved. The Bhakti saints, like the Sufis, believed that one need not go to places of worship to realise God, that He resided within the heart of each individual. Each human should thus be respected as a temple of God. There was no pilgrimage better than the heart, as it was the place where the Supreme Being Himself resided.5

The Sufi saints believed in oneness with God, and that union with God was the highest stage of Enlightenment, which could be achieved through love of God. To attain such a state, one was required to go through certain stages Muqama6 and the changing psychological conditions, or states

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5 Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Delhi quoted Shaikh Ahmad Jami, "Dil bedast aarad keh haj i-akbar ast, ze hazaar kabele yek dil behtar ast", which formed part of a long sermon which concluded in saying the above verse meaning that bringing solace to a heart which is in great predicament is better than going to Kaba a thousand times. This could only be realized within each individual, and the Guru was the instrument who could guide the way.

6 It is a classical work on Arabic literature compiled by Abu Muhammad al-Qasim al-Hariri (1054-1122). Nizamuddin Auliya learned the Maqamat of Hariri from Maulana Shamsuddin and committed its forty sections to memory.
Sufi saints asserted that for an individual to attain a closeness with God, which paves the way to salvation, one should do so through service to humanity. Nizamuddin Auliya discussed this theme in one of his discourses, and retold the story of the Prophet Abraham, who would only eat in the company of guests, till one day he found himself in the presence of a single polytheist. Abraham, when he saw that he was alone with a polytheist, did not give him anything to eat. The command then came fourth from God, "O Abraham, how is it that we can confer life on him [the polytheist] yet you cannot give him bread." This shows that Nizamuddin emphasized the presence of the Absolute Being within each human being, as every individual is the son and daughter of God, then all are equal.

As with Bhakti gurus, Sufis believed that closeness with God was made more possible when one had a spiritual master who could channel the 'Knowledge' and guide the individual towards the path of self surrender to God. Hence importance was given to the acquisition of a pir or the guru. From here came the pir-mureed and the guru-shishya parampara (Guru-Chela tradition of Bhakti). It was considered that the Sufi or Bhakti path required the strict guidance of a spiritual master, who had himself clearly understood the Knowledge and had reached the stage where he had direct

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communion with God. In the *pir-mureed* relation, the *mureed* or the disciple had to progress on the path of practicing self-modification (*mujaheda*)\(^8\), reciting and recollecting God's name, either through knowledge (*jnana*)\(^9\), or by concentrating on God's name (*zikr*), contemplation and meditation. In the *guru shishya-parampara*, the *syshya* had to first make himself ready to accept Knowledge. They had to be committed to be on the path of Bhakti for the rest of their life. *Guru's* word for them is the word of God. And in order to thank the *guru* for Knowledge, the shishya is ready to do *seva* (service), *satsang* (be in company of holy men) and *bhajan* (to meditate and recite the True Name regularly).

Since these saints wanted to reach the masses who were not accepted by the *ulema* and Brahmins, the Sufis and the Bhakti saints both used local dialects as a means of communication, preached in the form of couplets rather than traditional prose.

The mystics of the two movements were not appreciated by the orthodox *ulema* or Brahmins, as they defied them. Most of the Sufi and Bhakti saints criticized the *ulema* and Brahmin, who kept people in

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\(^8\) The *Practice of mujaheda* (practice of mystic exercise) is the first important and indispensable act on the path of spiritual ascendancy and not mere theological knowledge as imported by the theologians.

\(^9\) *Jnana* is the Knowledge which is described in the Vedas and Upanishads. This is the same Knowledge which Lord Krishna said "Raj Vidya" meaning the 'king of all Knowledge'. He said that if a human being takes this Knowledge and practices it, even it is the only thing he learns in life, his main purpose is fulfilled.
darkness, and misinterpreted the religious scriptures. Both movements discarded idol worship, blind faith in scriptures, performing namaz without understanding the relevance of it, and discriminations of individuals in the name of gender, caste and creed. As rituals were not considered important, service to human beings had much higher spiritual significance than mere formal adherence to rituals and practices. Nizamuddin Auliya said that “Devotion to God is of two kinds: lazmi (obligatory) and mutaaddi (supererogatory).” In lazmi, the benefit goes to the devotee alone. This type of devotion includes prayers, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca, recitation of religious formulae, and turning over the beads of the rosary. The mutaaddi, by contrast, centred around other’s needs, and is performed by spending money on others, showing affection to people, and generally being considerate. The reward mutaaddi is incalculable. They tried to bridge the gap between the two religions (Hinduism and Islam) by teaching that God was one and the same, even if he was called by different names. Respect of fellow human beings and service to humanity was held in high esteem by both, as Sufism and Bhakti considered individuals as a temple of God.

Music was central to both movements. It was considered to imbibe a mystical state of ecstasy, when one could feel the presence of God. This

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11 Ibid.
music was the inner music which is constantly there till the human is ‘alive’. No one plays any instrument but the music is on and when one meditates, he just needs to concentrate on it in order to reach the state of union with God. Sufi and Bhakti saints organised musical recitals (sama or kirtan) and this was a manifestation of Knowledge.

Sufis were organised into different silsilas or orders, based on their views and practices. There were many silsilas, such as Suhrawardi, Chishti, Qadariya, and Firdausi. Those saints who were leading figures lent a name to the silsila. It consisted of people who had become disciples of certain Sufis and would follow the path shown by him. A few famous Sufis of the Chishti silsila were Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, Khwaja Qutubuddin Baktiyar Kaki, Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagori, Khwaja Fariduddin Masud, Shaikh Nazimuddin Auliya, Shaikh Nasiruddin Mahmood, Shaikh Burhanuddin Gharib. The Chishti were prevalent in the Ganga-Yamuna doab region. The Suhrawardi, famous in Punjab, Sind and Bengal, was lead by saints such as Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya, Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi. The Firdausi order was an off-shoot of Suhrawardi, famous in Bihar. Shaikh Sharfuddin Yahya Maneri was the most important Sufi belonging to

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12 Couplets of Dharamdas (a disciple of Kabirdas) where he has explained this music. He says “... Bina bajaaye Nish din Baage, Ghanta Shankh Nagani re, Behra sunsun Mast, hot hai, Baat Batave Saari re...”
13 For detail please see the first chapter of this thesis entitled “A brief Historical Account of Sufism”
this *silsla*. The Qalandari order covered most of the wandering dervishes

The *Rishi* order in Kashmir was established by Shaikh Nuruddin Wali.

Similarly, the Bhakti movement of this period can be divided into two phases. The first phase was eighth century onwards, started by Sankaracharya in South India. It was revived by Ramanuja in the twelfth century and spread all over north India during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The most prominent Bhakti saints during this period were Namdev, Gyandev, Ramanandev, Vallabhacharya, Ektnath, Chaitanya, Kabir, Ravidas, Raidas and Nanak. These holy men belonged to the *nirguna* school. The other Bhakti school of note was the *saguna* school, of which Mirabai, Sahjobai, Tulsidas among others were influential during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Unlike the saints of the *nirguna* school, they worshipped idols in the form of Lord Rama, Krishna and others. The leaders of Bhakti movements who were to make a deep impact on social and religious ideas were those who were influenced by Islamic ideology, particularly Sufism\(^4\), and related them to ideas from the Vedas and Upanishads.

\(^{14}\) Kabir and Nanak found similarity in Islam to their ideas and related it to the formless God of Hinduism (in the Upanishads, Yogashastra). They emphasized the formless God (*nirankar*) and did not believe in idol worship. Their disciples were from both Muslim and Hindu communities. In their teachings they criticized both *ulema* and Brahmins who kept people in darkness and made them perform useless rites and rituals.
As the key figureheads of the first and most influential Sufi movement have been reviewed in the first chapter, it is important to examine their Bhakti counterparts understand the context of their beliefs and teachings.

The first known Bhakti saint, Sankaracharya (eighth century) was from South India and as a Hindu revivalist, he gave a new orientation to Hindustan. He was largely instrumental in extinguishing the last flicker of Buddhism, though he was heavily influenced by the teachings of Buddhism, as Buddha placed a strong importance on the individual. Sankaracharya was the first religious leader who gave a special place to women in his sangha. He was also one of the first religious leaders who valued manual work. People in the fields of business, traders, and craftsmen were all welcomed in his sangha. He had a radical approach to the changing society and attracted a large number of followers. A visionary scholar who had a wide knowledge of all contemporary religious movements, Sankaracharya saw all these things in Buddhism which was devoid in Brahmanical doctrine. He adapted the teachings of Buddha and tried to incorporate them in Brahmanical doctrine. He discarded those things from his teachings which were not practical and laid emphasis on one Lord, the Creator, and Union with God (parmatma) with the soul (atma). He endeavoured to change the Brahmanical pattern of worship by preaching a doctrine of pure monotheism.
But this was beyond the intelligence of the common man, and even though Sankaracharya was in principle the first Bhakti saint, his successor, Ramanuja, brought his philosophy to the level of the common man, and hence started the practice of the Bhakti movement. It should be noted that though he became an ascetic and travelled all over India to impart his teachings, when his mother died, he set a new ascetic tradition when he came back to pay last rites to her.

It was therefore left to Ramanuja to revive Hinduism (*vashnavism*) after the decline of Buddha by preaching Bhakti or “love of God” as a means of ‘salvation’. Ramanuja lived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. He was from a Brahmin family. His philosophy was monotheism (*vishitadvaita veda*), which reconciled devotion to a personal god. This was similar to the philosophy of *Vedanta*\(^{16}\) or yogic philosophy. He expounded that the individual soul, though of the same substance of God, was also emanating from Him (the Supreme Being) and one could obtain eternal bliss not through absorption in God, but by existence near to God. Thus, he preached

\(^{15}\) *Advaitvada* philosophy of Sankaracharya was one of pure monotheism. It was also called as *kevaladvaita*. He preached that Brahma or God is real, the world is unreal, the individual self is the only supreme self, no other. His monotheism did not have any room for idols, nor for the caste system, nor for many of the practices of the Brahmins. He believed in the one indefinable, omnipresent God. If interested to explore this further, see Hymns of Guru Nanak, p 22.

\(^{16}\) In the *Vedanta* or the Upanishads, the importance of *jnana* is given. Here for Union with God, which provides external happiness, one has to take Knowledge (*jnana*) and perform meditation regularly. It is realization of God within, through certain yoga techniques to go inside oneself.
the doctrine of personal devotion to God (saguna ishvara). He spread his doctrine to sudras, and traveling extensively in India to propagate his ideas. Many subsequent Bhakti leaders derived inspiration from him, and thus he can be rightly called the founder of the Bhakti movement.

Among the famous saints of thirteenth century, Namdev from Maharashtra can be remembered as someone having similar doctrine to that of Ramanuja. He was the first saint to preach in Marathi language and wrote a chande (a form of poetry) called ‘Abhanga’. He can be placed first among the saints of India who wrote Abhanga in different languages. To Namdev, guru was the most important being, who was the key to changing the life of an individual. His guru was Vithal. He believed that guru was the one who understood the importance of the union of the soul with God and for this, jnana was important. After jnana the soul had to follow the path of Bhakti (Bhakti-marga). His teachings were similar to Kabir and Sufi, Baba Farid, as we find their couplets in the Adi-Granth17, along with those of Guru Nanak. He not only propagated his teachings in Mahasrashtra, but ventured up as far as Punjab via Gujarat. He can be considered the first saint who promoted such teachings in north west India. He was known for his

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17 The religious book of Sikhs, which has the compilation of hymns of Guru Nanak, along with Baba Farid, Kabir, Namdev and a few other monotheistic saints. There is much similarity within their writings. This is the best example of just how much Bhakti and Sufi doctrines had in common. They both talked and wrote about one God, union with God, and a rejection of materialistic obsession.
criticism of those Brahmins who read but did not comprehend the scriptures, and if asked something on what they had just recited, they were not able to explain. The Brahmins were opposed to saints preaching in local languages and winning the hearts of people.¹⁸

The later Bhakti saints whose ideas were similar with those of Sufis were Ramananda, Vallabhacharya, Chaitanya, Kabir, and Nanak. Ramananda founded a new school of *vaishnavism* based on the gospel of love and devotion. Although he himself was a Brahmin, he did not find any difference between a person of high caste and low caste and among his disciples were people from all sectors. He considered all human beings as children of God and as such, the body as a temple where God resided. He had twelve chief disciples, including Ravidas, Kabir, Sena, and Sadhana from different lower castes. He popularized the cult of Ram and Sita instead of Krishna and Radha.

**Vallabhacharya** (1479 – 1531) was born to Telgu parents near Benares. His doctrine was *suddha-advaita*, or pure non-duality. He preached renunciation of the world and complete identity of *atma*, and *prakriti* with

¹⁸ However Namdev said, “Tatva Poochne Gaya Vedaggyon Ko, To Vahan bhare mile Vidhi Nishedha, Us se Samadhan Kiwi Samaya Nahin Mila Ahankar Bali Bana Vahan. Isliye to nam Pakra Sab Bhava se, To mile Vahan Par Bhedabheda. Ek Ek ke mat se milne Par Bhant Garvashali Mein Bhoole sada”. Namdev by Madhava Gopal Deshmukh, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1981. p60
Parmatma\(^{19}\), and was the one who believed that Bhakti was the only means of salvation provided by God. He lay emphasis on guru who was considered to be divine on earth, showed the path of grace or pushtimarg which lead people closer to God. He identified Brahma with Krishna, who is one, omnipotent and omniscient, and the cause of all that is there in the Universe, that is, He is the creator, and He is characterised by Satya (truth), Cit (consciousness) and Ananda (bliss). When the conscious being’s soul is introduced to the truth of his/her life, and when they follow the path of meditation, he/she experiences bliss. But this is only possible when the individual’s soul understands the maya (illusion), and is ready to surrender to God by accepting the guru, that he experiences bliss. This is possible because the soul is part of God, and if the soul realizes this, then his suffering would be reduced and he would enjoy reunion with god. The only means of salvation is sneh (deep rooted and all surpassing love) of God. And this is attained when the Lord is ready to shower his blessings on the individual. This is when he is happy with the devotion of the individual and allows the person’s atma to be a part of Him. Though his philosophy was

\(^{19}\) Atma is the soul, prakiti is the world, Parmatma is God. Union of atma with Parmatma is the ultimate goal of being a human being, as it is not possible to experience this enlightenment after death. This is by the grace of the Guru who guides a person and gives Knowledge and shows him the path of salvation.
very good, it was radical thinking for the period, and the masses found it difficult to adopt the concept of guru as path to God.

**Chaitanya** (1486 – 1533) was from Bengal, and believed Krishna to be God, who was infinite, full of love and bliss, full of infinite power and consciousness. The love of Radha for Krishna was eternal, and knowledge, meditation, charity, virtue can be subordinated to this love.\(^\text{20}\) To express the relationship between God and the individual soul, he developed a theory called *achintyabhedabheda* (incomprehensible dualistic monoism). This was the kind of love which only the two (God and soul) could understand. Some of his powers were *cit, maya, avidya, anand*, and *sat*. He believed that God was the creator, preserver and destroyer, that God is Lord of *maya*, and *jiva* is the subject. The *lila* is played by Him where the *jiva* has to act as He wishes. For Chaitanya, Bhakti, or devotion, was the only means of salvation. His favourite form of devotion as a *bhakta* was *kirtan* and *samakirtan* - this was singing and chanting God’s name, accompanied by dance, during the course of which one could reach the state of ecstasy, and feel the presence of God near him. This was similar to *sama* and *qawwali* of the Chishti saints. In spite of being a Brahmin, he was opposed to the caste system and people

\(^{20}\) S.A A.Rizvi, “History of Sufism in India”, p357.
from all castes came to him. Among his Muslim disciplines were Rup, Haridas, and Santam.

One of the important nirguna saints, and a disciple of Ramananda, was Kabir (1440 – 1500). He was the son of a Brahmin widow and was brought up by a Muslim weaver, so could be considered the first important living bridge between Islam and Hinduism. He was a householder and a mystic, and never promoted renunciation of home and family. As he did not adhere to ascetism or book learning for the ‘True Knowledge’, and he believed that God was in the heart and this was the most important realisation. Kabir emphasized the unity of God, whom he calls by several names such as Ram, Rahin, Allah, Govind, Hari, Saaien, Sahib. It led Kabir to conclude that all religions were different roads to the same goal, hence he considered the difference between Hindus and Muslims meaningless. He strongly opposed the rites, rituals and ceremonies performed by both Hindus and Muslims, as did Nizamuddin Auliya who said that rituals like prayer, fasting, pilgrimage “are like spices in a stew”.

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21 Kabir believed that the grihastha ashram is the best ashram. Anyone who wants to enjoy the bliss should be a householder and then try to obtain Knowledge and follow the path of Bhakti. By doing this, he would not forget God and would attain salvation. But an ascetic who cannot discard worldly things would not get salvation. He preached that a person should stay in the world as an householder as a lotus is there in the pond. He criticized ascetics and said: “Man na rangaye, rangaye jogi kapara, Dadhi Badha Ke, Hoga gaye Bakra”.

22 Note that even Nizamuddin Auliya and other Chishti saints had a similar faith.

23 He equated it with that of different names of water (aab, nir, toya, ambu) but that all meant the same thing.
the real thing being the meat not the spices. Kabir denounced idol worship, pilgrimages, bathing in rivers, or taking part in formal worship, such as namaz. He was sharp and harsh towards the orthodox Brahmins and ulema, as he believed they misused the innocence of the people for their own benefit and that they tried to misguide the common people by interpreting the scriptures according to their own conveniences.

Kabir believed that God was Supreme and was not far away in some 'heaven', but residing within oneself. Kabir emphasized the need of a real master or guru, who could give the intuitive Knowledge and show the Divine Being which would illuminate the heart of human beings. While citing the importance of guru, he actually placed him above God as he felt

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24 Kabir strongly condemned idol worship as he felt that it was not the true form of worship. He felt that if by worshipping the price of stone, a person could be in union with God, then he would worship the mountain. He also felt that people were making fun of themselves by worshipping an idol and not God Himself. And they were therefore ignorant about the God within themselves. He equated this with the cleanliness of Masjid and condemned the meaningless namaz. He says in one of his couplets: "Mandir mein buti rakha Hai, Masjid Mein Safam Safai Hei; Dile dargah mein dokho to Jhalkat - noore Illahi Hai".

25 Kabir felt all the pilgrimages were in the hearts of human, and since it was the place where the Absolute Being resided, it was the biggest pilgrimage on earth.

26 Kabir said in one of his couplets that if a person gets heaven by bathing in the river Ganga, then all fish would go to heaven.

27 Kabir has said that Muslims do not understand that real namaz is to be good to people. Just paying the rites by reciting namaz five times a day without meaning is useless.

28 Kabir says to people that the Creator is in the heart. He is to be understood with the help of the guru and Knowledge, he calls the Divine Being as Ram and explains Him as follows: "Ek Ram Dasratha Ka Beta, Ek Ram Ghat Mein Bettha, Ek Ram ke Jaghat Pasara, Ek Ram Jagat se Nyara". He asks people to understand who is the real Ram he wants to worship. And he emphasizes the Ram who is in the heart of each being and is beyond this world.

29 Kabir says more importance to guru and therefore he has written many couplets where he praises the guru and his goodness to provide Knowledge of God who has hidden Himself in the heart. And humans get illusioned in this world and don’t look to Him where He resides. For this he says, "Guru Govind dono Khare, Kako lagoon Pauyne, Balnhari Guru Aapne, Govine Diyo Lakhaye".
that to find the right guru is very difficult. He felt that through guru’s instruction (True Knowledge) a man was taught to remember God’s name in heart and was released from transmigration. On meeting the guru, the person would be comforted and bask in peace of mind. Kabir believed that if God was estranged then a person would need to seek refuge in a guru, but if guru was emanated, then there was no shelter. Kabir regarded death as the ultimate truth of life. Everyone who was born had to die. He described the human form like an earthen pot full of water which inevitably would burst. Death could come suddenly and unexpectedly, and therefore when a person is alive they should take Knowledge and repeat God’s name through meditation. He should not ignore it.

He believed in transmigration and therefore asked for a good end. A saint’s life, says Kabir, was a triumph over continual rebirth for it resulted in supreme bliss. “If while living thou be dead, while dead return to life by means of Divine Knowledge and thus become absorbed in God; if thou abide pure amid impurity, thou shall not again fall into the terrible ocean of

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30 Kabir says to realize God is very easy if the true guru is there and he gives me right knowledge and illuminates the heart. He says, “Hari to Milte Pal Bhar Mein, Gurudev Ka Milna Mushkil Hai”.

31 He gets moksha which is salvation and it is very easy in kaliyug. As he has said that “kaliyug kewal naam Adhara, Sumara Sumara Nar Utaro Paara”.

32 Kabir, “Granthavali” pages 1 - 4

33 “Ramnam Ki Loot Hai, Loot Sake to Loot, Phir Paachehe Pachchayega Jab Praan Jayenge Chchoo”.

34 Kabir says that a person should do good in his life, take knowledge and use his time on earth economically. He should definitely save time and meditate because that is the only wealth he can carry with him after death. For this he says, “Bhule man samajh ke Laad Ladaniya, Thoda Laad, Bahut mat Laade, Toot Jaye Teri Gardaniya”.
the world”. Kabir believed in the power of reciting and repeating God’s name. He described heaven with the use of negatives, as if heaven or hell was made with human being himself, and he himself considered that heaven was craved only in absorption with God. 

Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539) was the son of a village accountant. He was one of the most important nirguna saints who preached in a similar manner to Kabir. He was married and had three children, but left them to join the Sufis, and he visited many places including Mecca. Finally he rejoined his family and settled. Like Kabir, he believed in the formless God and that God could be seen within the self, and lay emphasis on the repeated recitation of God’s name, which was called as nam or shabd by him. He believed that taking Knowledge could only be attained through a living guru as guru was the only one who would help in attaining Union with God. He was opposed to all discrimination of caste, as well as religious rivalries. He declared “there is no Hindu, there is no Musselman”. Gospel he believed

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35 Macauliffe, p 163, see also Rizvi’s “A Wonder That Was India.” Vol. Two.
36 “Everybody saith he is going hither (to heaven), I know now where heaven is, they who know not secrets of their own hearts, glibly talk of heaven. As long as a man desires the heaven, he shall not dwell at God’s feet. I know not where heaven’s gate is, nor it’s mote, nor it’s platered fortress, saidth Kabir what more can I now say, than that society of saints is heaven?” Kabir as quoted in Macauliffe, p 265-266
37 He has described that the shabdi was the name of God and it was since the beginning when this universe was formed and it was the name of Absolute Being. “Shabd hi dharti, Shabd hi aakash; Shabd hi Shabd Bhayo Prakaash; Shagle Shristi Shabd ke paachehe; Nanak Shabd Ghata Ghati aachche”. He also felt that God’s name was the only Truth, and it was there before time began, and He was the only Truth. He said, “Before time itself, there was Truth. When time began to run its course, He was the truth. Even now, He is the Truth, and evermore shall truth prevail.” Hymns of Guru Nanak, p26.
was based on universal tolerance, based on all that was good in Islam and Hinduism.

Nanak founded a new religious movement (*Sikhism*) by blending the concept of unity with God which was closely related both to Islamic concepts and to the Hindu doctrine of rebirth. He also believed in unity of Being or *wahdatul-wujud*, which was represented by *dvaitadvaita-vilokshanavada* by the Gorakhnath Sages[^38], its similarity with *om* for which Nanak said *ek-onkar* (the one invisible Absolute Being[^39]). Like the God of Ibn Al-Arabi, Nanak’s God not only creates but he is also there in all living beings in all finite forms. The Divine essence is the knower, the known, and the knowing; *‘and filling all, upholdeth all, and is yet detached; oh he is the one who is both manifest and unmanifest all over’.*[^40] Nanak’s god is eternally unchanging and formless (*nirankar*), inscrutable (*agam*) boundless (*apar*) and beyond time (*akal*). He is one ‘husband’[^41]. His manifestation is beyond comprehension. His light is there in the soul and he should not be sought outside it, as it pervades and illuminates all hearts. Nanak gave

[^38]: Gorakhnath was the Lord of *nath panthis* who shared very similar realization with Sufis and were welcomed at Chishti saints Khanqahs as well as their techniques of *yoga* which were liked by most of the Sufis e.g Nasiruddin Chirag-e-Delhi performed yoga. See also in *History of Sufism in India* pp366-68.

[^39]: This was similar to what Sufis said about the Absolute Being. Guru Nanak said that whichever way one turns his eyes, he will see God. Similar verse is in the Quran, "whichever way ye turn there is the face of Allah". He says God is unique and was *Ek-onker, “Ekam Ekonkar nirata, Aman ajooni jat na jata”*, p26 *Granth Sahib*.


[^41]: He is the *Pranpati*, who is loved as beloved by his *premi* (lover).
highest importance to True Name (nam).\textsuperscript{42} That is why Nanak's audience selected the names like Guru Sabad or Guru's word, which was inexplicable and undefinable.

Nanak's teachings were for people from all castes and he preached a practical approach to problems of life. His views were closely related to those of Kabir and the Chishti saints. He rejected asceticism and advocated living a normal life accompanied by right faith and belief. He says: "He alone, o Nanak, knoweth the way, who earneth with the sweat of his brow, and then shareth it with the others."\textsuperscript{43} He depreciated the mulla, pirs, and yogis who lived on charity. He said: "They who eat the fruit of their labour and bestow something, o Nanak, recognise the right way".\textsuperscript{44} Like Sufis, he believed that the essence of goodness was humility and service to others. He criticised the rituals and ceremonies which were performed by Hindus and Muslims.

\textsuperscript{42} Nanak emphasized on nam japo, i.e worship the Name of the Lord. But this means not just a parrot. Like repetition Rama, Rama. But it implies understanding of the words of the prayer and making them the rule of life. The path of nam - nimanga requires three things: realization of the Truth within the heart hriday gyan; its expression in prayer mukhkhah and detachment from worldly things vrtan vairag. He says nam is worth more than all pilgrimages to 'holy' rivers because in the worship of nam, the person delves into one's heart, which is the shrine of God and sanctuary of Divine Knowledge, he says: "Teerath nevan jao, teerath nam hai, Teerath shabad beechar, antergyan hai" Hymns of Guru Nanak, p37. See also Adi Granth p68. The name which cannot be pronounced by this tongue and can only be repeated inside. It is the ajapajaap which is constantly done inside and a human who has the knowledge can just concentrate on it.

\textsuperscript{43} "Sri Guru Granth Sahib" 4, p1191

\textsuperscript{44} Macauliffe, vol 1, p39
The teachings of the Sufi saints during the Sultanate period can be traced back to the theory of *Wahdat u'l-Wajud* (unity of being) of Ibn al-Arabi. This concept was founded on the primordial belief in the ultimate nature of unity which reduced to nothing, the ideas of the existence of entities other than God. Ibn al-Arabi believed that the Absolute Being was inseparable from the Absolute Existent and was the ultimate source of Existence, that the Absolute Being had manifested Himself in every form of existence and in the highest degree in the form of Perfect Man. According to Ibn al-Arabi, the One and the many are the two aspects of one. Medieval writer, Afifi, interprets his concept and says: "The one reveals himself in many ... as an object is revealed in different mirrors, each mirror reflecting an image determined by its nature and its capacity as a recipient. Or it is like a source of light from which an infinite number of lights is derived. Or a substance which penetrates and permeates the forms of existing objects: thus, giving them their meaning and being. Or it is like a mighty sea on the surface of which we observe countless waves forever appearing and disappearing. The external drama of existence is nothing but this ever renewed creation (al-Khalq, al-Jadid) which is in reality a perpetual process

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46 Similar to monotheism which explains that all humans have some part of God in them due to which they are alive. Ibn al Arabi explains that this God is the one who is in all living beings and thus is many.
of self revelation”. Ibn al-Arabi identified the Absolute with zat (or essence) and interpreted it as the Absolute Being (Wujud al-Mutlaq) calling it a source and cause of all existence.

The symbol of mirrors was used to remind the person who was the recipient of divine self-manifestation that he was seeing God directly, rather than the reflection of the Divine Light. Al-Arabi emphasized that “He who knows himself, knows the Lord”. It was only the self-revealing aspect of the Absolute that human beings could understand. To al-Arabi tanzih referred to the aspect of completeness in the Absolute that was similar to union with God and tashbih which stood for his limitedness (taqayyud). True knowledge of the Absolute was required for the fusion of the two.

According to Ibn al-Arabi, the Divine Being is the creator as He wishes to know himself in the beings who know Him. Thus, “the creation is essentially the revelation of the divine being, first to Himself, luminescence incurring within Him; it is a pure theophony (tajalli-ilahi)”. Ibn al-Arabi attached importance to the cosmic significance of man. He believed that in the universe was ‘Perfect Man’ created by God, and each individual was a small universe, the first ‘epiphany’ of God. His arguments were based on the

47 M.M. Sharif (ed) A History of Muslim Philosophy, vol 1, p413. See also History of Sufism in India, p106.
Jewish tradition that God created Adam in his own image, but Ibn al-Arabi made full use of the Sufi theories of *hagiqaal* and *Muhammadiya* and *Nural-Muhammadiya* which were similar to the creation of Manu and Shatrupa, in the beginning of the universe. Ibn al-Arabi discredited man for being wielded by his own ‘ego’ and this separated him from the Absolute, closer to inferior beings like animals, plants and minerals. Human beings when they remove the veil of illusion (*maya*) and try to see within themselves, they are illuminated by the light of the Absolute. This notion is seen in the Bhakti movement, and is described that with Knowledge one is illuminated.

Contrary to Bhakti belief, Ibn al-Arabi did not believe in being one with God, rather it was the realization of the union with God which existed in Him. One had to understand that this union was ever-present during a lifetime, and would only break when the individual died. Like the Sufis, he believed that this realization would not come with *ilm* (knowledge) which was intellect, but through *marifat* (intuitive Knowledge) of the soul. For this realization he advised the Sufis to remove the veil of sin and ignorance which separated the soul from God, thus enabling the soul to be

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48 This was similar to *jnana* of Upanishads as well as the *nam* of Kabir and *shabdh* of Nanak, and many other *nirguna* saints of the Bhakti movement. This is the Knowledge which brings the individual close to God.

49 Kabir has written a beautiful couplet on veil ‘Ghoongat Ke Pat Khol Re Tohe Piya Milenge’. This *ghoonghat* is the veil which all of us have. This is due to ignorance and we are lost in *maya* (illusion). This is to be removed to enable the person to have union with God, which is possible through Knowledge.
illuminated by Divine Light. This illumination in a person makes him tolerant, compassionate and a fellow being. Al-Arabi abdicated that the Divine Being existed and was worshipped by all religions, and God was worshipped and loved in his highest manifestations. He declared, "My heart has become the receptacle of every 'form', it is a pasture for gazelles (objects of love) and a convent for Christian monks, a temple for idols and the pilgrim's kirtin, the tablets of torah (Jewish law) and the book of Quran. I follow the religion of love; whichever way its camels go, for this is my religion and my faith". 50

Like Ibn al-Arabi, Sufi mystics had a deep devotion to God, and they disliked the vulgar display of wealth, degeneration of morals, and general inequality among society. The Sufi concept of *fana* 51, or spiritual merger of the devoted with God, was central to their teachings. They emphasized *wahdad ul-wajud*, that is, Unity of Being. They believed that God is everywhere, but he is to be realized. He is in different forms of life, in all human beings and animals.

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51 R.A Nicholson asserted that controversy surrounds the concept of *fana* and *baqa* as expressed by Bayazid Bastami, comparing *fana* with *nirvana*. Nicholson says "both terms imply the passing away of individuality, but while nirvana is purely negative, *fana* is accompanied by *baqa*, everlasting life in God. The rapture of the Sufi who has lost himself in ascetic contemplation of Divine being is entirely opposed to the passionless serenity of the *arahat*". For details see Nicholson's "The Mystics of Islam", p16.
*Tasawwuf*, or mysticism, strove to achieve the inner realization of Divine unity by arousing the intuitive and spiritual faculties. Sufis plunged into contemplation and meditation, and adherence to a life of temperance which was an essential attribute for attaining a strong union with God.

In the Hindu scriptures - the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, or the religious texts like Bhagvata Gita - the universality of the Supreme Being is discussed. They describe the Absolute Being as the creator, nourisher and the destroyer. The texts explain the *jnana* (intuitive Knowledge) which can be taken by the individual who can then bring himself to the level of God by reciting the name of God provided by *jnana*. This required a lot of practice (*sadhana*), which was made possible through *yoga*. Yoga means union, union with the Ultimate, and this has been idealized and practiced from the beginning. It describes those who propose different beliefs about the Ultimate and those who advocate different methods of achieving the Union. The view called ‘*advaith*’ (non-dualistic), *Vedanta* (culmination of the Vedas) best exemplifies the ideal of perfect *yoga*, which it explains.52

*Yoga* can be performed in different ways. *Karma yoga* is one form which presupposes the ‘law of Karma’. An individual performing a good or

52 “*Yoga – Union with the Ultimate*”, Archie J. Bahn, Fredric Ungar Publishing Company, 1978
evil task reaps the same result. *Gnana yoga* is a second way to progress towards the Union with Ultimate reality and emphasizes the attainment of understanding. This ‘path of Knowledge’ includes a quest for Knowledge of both self and objects as ordinarily experienced, and of self and objects as they ultimately are. A study of scriptures, especially with the guidance of sagacious teachers (i.e. *guru*), aids the process of understanding the yogic practices. This is summarized in the symbol ‘*Am*’ or ‘*Om*’.\(^{53}\) The goal of Knowledge is to realize the illusory nature of all perceptive and discursive knowledge. Ultimate reality can be intuited, but not “known”. The path of Knowledge leads beyond knowledge to a yogic intuition in which awareness and being are identical, or completely united. “Knowledge” involves a distinction between knower and known, but in yogic intuition knower and known are one, not two.\(^{54}\) *Bhakti yoga* places importance on devotion. What one loves, that he serves. The more fully he loves it, the more completely he devotes himself to it. The greater the value of that which one loves, the more he seeks to unite himself with it, and thereby finding his own value realized in the Beloved. Such Union is complete when between lover and Beloved,
and there is no difference other than identity.\textsuperscript{55} Amir Khusrau, a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya says:

\textit{“Man to shudam, tu man shudee I become you and you into me}
\textit{Man tan shudam tu jan shudee I become a body and you a soul}
\textit{Ta kas na bayad baad az een So that no one can say}
\textit{Man degaram tu digaree” I am one and you are other.}

This is the love between God and the individual soul.

\textit{Raja yoga} focuses the attention and efforts towards the body and mind for the purpose of controlling and illuminating every physical and mental element which prevents the soul from enjoying the perfect Union. \textit{Tantric yoga} is a form of \textit{Bhakti yoga} in which orgasm constitutes the concrete symbol of cosmic self-realisation. The goal of \textit{Tantric yoga} is a kind of eternal orgasm.\textsuperscript{56}

Similarly in Buddhism and Jainism, Buddha and Mahavira explained the importance of self-realisation. They preached a middle-path which was good for humans staying in \textit{Grihastya Ashram}. They also emphasized the knowledge which could be attained from the real Guru. Guru who was of

\textsuperscript{55} ibid. p20
\textsuperscript{56} ibid. p21. This is a state of ecstasy which is attained after long term meditation. And this lifts the person from material desires and pleasures, as it is considered that all the pleasure of worldlyness is below this pleasure, which is long lasting as is such that whenever the individual who has experienced it, remembers it he re-lives this happiness. This is explained in the discourses of Maharaji in November 1998.
that time and was living. That *guru* is called *Satguru* (the true living *Guru* of the period). Bhakti saints and disciples have much praise for these *gurus*. As Kabir said that is all this earth was paper, the water in the ocean were the ink, all the trees in the forests are to be used as pen and one would write the description of *Guru* on it, still he would not describe the *guru* wholly.57

Bhakti saints were monotheists who argued that salvation was granted by the grace of God if Knowledge was imparted to the individual through a *living Guru*. Most of them linked the Bhakti *marga* with that of traditions of the Vedas. They used the scriptures to explain the theoretical aspects of Knowledge. All Bhakti saints placed emphasis on *Ek Brahma*58 who was the Creator and resided within the heart of each human being. For Nanak, God was one and He was the truth, the Creator, without fear and without hate, he was beyond time, immortal, and it was His spirit which pervades the universe, He is never born, He never dies, He is self-existent.59 For Nanak, God was formless and idols made for God were just to remember and respect the form which was read in scriptures. The formless God was

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57 Kabir says, “*Sab Dharti Kagad Karoon, Lekhani Sab Vanrai, Sab nadi Syahi Karoon, Guru Gun likha naa jaaye*”.

58 Nanak called *Ek Onkar* or *Ik Aumkar*, there is one God. Even in the *Chandogya Upanishad* it is written, “*So a!! speech is held by Aum*”. Nanak describes the *Aumkar* as the “*emancipation and essence of the three worlds*”. Hymns of Guru Nanak, p28.

59 Hymns of Guru Nanak, Khushwant Singh (translator), p25. Nanak describes God, “*There is one God, His name is Truth, He is without fear and without hate. He is beyond time immortal, his Spirit pervades the Universe. He is not born, Nor doe He die to be born again, He is self-existent. By the Guru's grace shall thou worship Him*".
worshipped since the time when humanity had threats from nature. But it is understood that the need for the Union with that power was always felt by humanity. Though at times they did not understand it and tried to fulfill their hearts with worldly things, which only served to worsen their condition.

There is a common theme that runs through the Quran, Adi Granth and the Hindu scriptures. Nanak called God as Sat Kartar, who was the True Creator or Satnam, whose name was the True Name. Nanak also called God as Nirankar and therefore he is beyond description. He says that therefore one should admit that he is beyond his imagination, and he defies description or definition, and can not be realized from this eye or mind.

Sufi Muinuddin Chishti says:

*Ek Mandir men das darwazah* There is a temple with ten doors
*Jamen basen kartaar* that is where the god resides,
*Apne-apne niyam dharma se* With their own way

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60 Ibid, p26. This concept of Nanak's is similar to that of Kabir and other monotheist saints. It is also similar to that of the Christian Bible, "In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God." Genesis, book 1 or it can be said that since the time which humans felt the need for God. It is just the expression is different throughout the ages but the essence remains the same. The goal is the same, the methods different. The Sikh religion, pp260-270.

61 The names of the Hindu Gods—Vasudeva, Hari, Govinda and Rama were all combined in the word *Wah Guru* and He was said as *Hail Guru! *Exactly similar to Muslims' Subhan Allah—Allah be praised! Both the *Adi Granth* and the *Quran* begin with similarly praising God—in the *Adi Granth* "ik Aumkar Satguruprasha" (The One God, By the grace of *Guru*, worship), and in the Quran “Bismillah—I-Rahman—I-Rahim” (in the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful), *Guru* Nanak’s Hymns, p28.

62 Thou hast a million eyes, yet no eye hast Thou.
Thou hast a million forms, yet no form hast Thou
Thou art without odour, yet millions of odours emanate from Thee
With such charms, O Lord, hast Thou bewitched me.
Puje shakal sansar! The universe worships him!63

Even Kabir says the pilgrimage was in the heart of the human where God resides.64

There is an interesting event with Nanak that when he was resting in a mosque with his feet towards Kabah, a mullah came to say his prayer and shook Nanak rudely and said:

“O servant of God, thou has thy feet towards Kabah, the house of god; why hast thou done such a thing?”

Nanak replied;

“Then turn my feet towards some direction where there is no God, no Kabah.”65

To realize such a God, nam or True Knowledge is important. This nam leads to union with God as we discussed earlier from jnana yoga in the ancient period yogis used to realize the union with God. The monotheist saints, particularly Kabir and Nanak, emphasized satguru. Even the Sufis stressed the importance of pir-o-murshid to realize the Absolute Being. Here we see that these Bhakti saints might have been influenced by Sufi traditions. One of the important agendas of both the Bhakti Guru and Sufi

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63 Chishti, Muinuddin, “Namaaz Kee Hagheeqat,” p. 64.
64 Kabir says ‘Nama mandir mein naa Masjid me naa kabah Kailash mein, Khoji hovey to mein mil jaoun pal bhar ki talash mein.’
65 Hymns of Guru Nanak, p. 17.
pir-o-murshid was to illuminate people regarding the limitations and restrictions of the ulema and Brahmin philosophies. Nanak and Kabir wrote many couplets to make people understand the importance of Guru. Nanak said that Guru is the vessel who could save the individual soul from the ocean of the world, and provide release from the cycle of life and death. Kabir said that those individuals who believe in Knowledge and Truth within themselves are to be respected as they have acknowledged the satguru and have chosen to walk down the path shown by Him.

Guru has been revered by all the saints as Guru Arjun says that when guru is there, the superstitious mind of human is illuminated and he cuts the chains and frees the soul. But it can be ascertained that under the Guru’s instruction; by meeting the True One, happiness is obtained. If the satguru be met, true love shall not sunder and the wealth of Divine Knowledge of the three words shall be obtained. If anyone acquires virtue, he will not forget

66 “How shall I scale the fortress without a ladder? By meditating on God through the Guru I shall behold him. The Guru giving me God’s name is my ladder, my boat, my raft; The Guru is the lake, the see and the boat; the Guru is the sacred stream” The Sikh Religion, Its Gurus, Sacred Writing and Authors, Max Arthur Macauliffe, p 267.


68 The Sikh Religion, Its Gurus, Sacred Writing and Authors, Max Arthur Macauliffe. It has been described that Knowledge illuminates one’s life and the child who receives it obtains primal love (the love of God which disposes Him to protect the child in love). And he says that Guru who is served by this child showers his blessings which protects the child from problems. Nanak says, “He who serveth the True Guru obtaineth the real ______, and is delivered by repeating the world, Truth is contained in pure vessels; few there are whose acts are pure. By seeking Thy protection, the soul blends with the Supreme Soul”.
the Pure Name. The birds which peck one, sea and land have played and gone away.  

The importance of Guru is so much that Kabir says that if God and Guru both come and stand in front of one who has knowledge, that disciple should bow at Guru first because he is the one who made him see God who was residing within but he was ignorant of Him.

Bhakti and Sufi saints gave importance to salvation and for this Kabir emphasized the Bhakti marga which was based on contemplation and meditation. He stressed that at least some time in a day should be spent by the disciple reciting the name of God which is provided by Guru through True Knowledge. Even Nanak said this marga as nam marga and laid emphasis on nam japo as explained earlier.

All Bhakti and Sufi saints laid emphasis on Guru-shishya parampara (pir-mureed traditions). The disciples were urged to follow the sayings of the Guru if they desired the eternal love of God. For this they had to shed their ego as the presence of ego obstructed the realization of Knowledge and love of God. He had to surrender himself fully to his Guru and should be

69 ibid, p 272.
70 "Guru Gobind dono khare, kako lagoon payan, balihari Guru aapne Govind diyo lakahai, Govind diyo lakhai, gyana ka hai bhandara sat marga par paon apan Guru hi ne dara govind liyo bithaye hiye khud guru ke charanan matha dinha tek kiyo kul jiwan arpan.
71 ibid, page 138 "panch pahar dhande gaya, teen pahar gaya soi, ek pahar hari nam bin mukti kaise hoi, mukti kaise hoi tohi se samjhat hai, moorakh gaflat chor, yahi mein tera hit hai, thora samaya nikar ram se neh laga le, kabira hai bin dam amar phal yako kha le"
ready to devote anything and everything in his life at the feet of Guru. It is considered that if someone is in love with the other person, he or she does something for the loved one. Similarly, in order to show love towards Guru, the disciple should be ready to do something which would please his master. Satsang and Simran were important for the disciple to fully understand Knowledge. Satsang is a society of holy men where description from heart is given and whatever is said by the holy man or master is not intellectualized or based on scriptures. It is purely on the basis of personal experience that holy men talk about the Absolute Being in all human beings. Very few people are lucky to be party to such society and discourse. Satsang is said to be a kind of ‘soap’ which keeps on washing the dirt and dust of maya (illusion) covering the human conscience even after receiving True Knowledge. It is important to listen to satsang for a disciple to reach the ultimate goal. For him, seva, satsang and bhajan (nam jap) are the only roads which can bring him in union with God. Kabir emphasized that life seems pointless if one is on this earth but does not take Knowledge and perform the task of a true disciple. Otherwise he is similar to an animal and cannot reform himself and release from cycle of life and death. He said that

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72 If one turns the pages of malfuzaat, he/she can realize the master-disciple relationship. The saints have crushed their ego so much that they even avoided to be taken for special treatment. In all the collection of malfuzaat, the first sentence begins like this: 1. I had the benefit of kissing his feet. 2. I had good fortune of kissing his feet. 3. I obtain the benefit of kissing his feet. (Writes Amir Hasan Sijzi in Fawaid-ul-Fuad)
the human body is the gate to salvation, and one should develop all dimensions of their being, which includes not only their minds but their souls. After taking Knowledge, salvation can be attained but one should be involved in seva, satsang and bhajan in spite of staying in grihastya ashram. If this is not done, then that human will be crushed in the grindstone, as wheat is done and flour is made out of it. It is said that the three pillars, seva, satsang and bhajan act like the mast in the grindstone where if any wheat grain is left near the mast, then until the end, it will remain the same.

*Bhajan, satsang and seva* are, as explained earlier, the three pillars of a successful life of a saint, which results in being in Union with God. Fourth and the most important pillar being the ‘*guru*’ whose importance has been explained earlier. Sufi saints define it as *fana* whereas Bhakti saints call it yoga or *parmatma se Milan*. Then what is *bhajan* for Sufis? One need no explanation about *qawwali* and its importance in the Sufi parlance. *Sama* is the very important in Sufi gatherings of which *qawwali* is crucial. *Bhajan* and *sama* are so similar in approach that at times it is hard to distinguish

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73 For such forgetting souls, Kabir explains in one of his couplets, “Chalti chakki dekh ke, diya kabira roya, Do paton ke beech mein, sabot bacha na koya”.
74 Kabir, Nanak and other saints have given importance to such society of holy men; Maharaji’s discourse 2nd November, 1999, Nepal.
75 Maharaji said in his discourse, November 1998, “Chakki chakki sab kahe, killi kahe na koi, Jo killi ke Sang mein, Bal na Banka hoi”. 
between them. One is compelled to do a comparative study when a difference is found between the two.

Take the example of *satsang*. These are different names for the same concept. Otherwise we would not have one of the most important apolitical sources for the study of socio-cultural history of the Sultanate period. Through the pages of *malfuzaat* one can have the feeling of *satsang*. It is a compound word made of *sat* (truth) and *sang* (gathering), i.e. the gathering of the Truth, conversing with Truth. That is what exactly happened in the Sufi’s *Khanqahs*. Nizamuddin Auliya stressed the importance of *satsang*. In fact his visionary personality took him a step further. It has been already discussed in the second chapter about his zeal to spread the message of the love and the truth. The gathering at the *Khanqahs* of these saints was in fact *satsang* in the true sense and spirit of the word.

*Seva*, the service of God through serving humanity is the focus point of the Sufi movement. Answering to a question of his disciple, Muinuddin Chishti said that the most superior kind of worship is to assist the helpless and to feed the hungry. Nizamuddin compare ‘rituals’ with spices and
‘service’ as meat is the main ingredient of the soup. For Sufis service of humankind is the raison de’tre of religion.\textsuperscript{76}

Bhakti and Sufi saints emphasized that worldly life is \textit{maya}, and its glamour is perishable as is the human body, and it will again go back to dust.\textsuperscript{77} It is said that the life of a living being is like a dream, maybe of 60 years, 70 years or more, and the day the human dies, the dream breaks, and he realizes that he has lost the time in running behind \textit{maya} and did not perform the task for which he was given this beautiful human body. Bhakti doctrine explains that the human body is the most elusive form given when the Lord showers His love to get \textit{moksha} (salvation).\textsuperscript{78} Sufis and Bhakti saints said that human body had 10 gates. The body has nine natural gates or orifices, it is therefore through the tenth gate that the Divine light enters the body.\textsuperscript{79}

Bhakti and Sufi saints all upheld the notion that God resided within each individual and not in temples or mosques. Merely practicing a religion, reading sacred texts and performing rites and rituals, does not necessarily

\textsuperscript{76} Lawrence, B Bruce, “Nizamuddin Auliya: Morals of the Heart”, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{77} “Manus Janam Anmol Re, Maati mein na ro re, Ab jo mila hai, phir na milega, Kabhi nahin, Kabhi nahn, Kabhi nahn re.” Kabir Vaani.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Nanak says that the body has nine natural gates like the eyes, ears, mouth, nose, etc. The tenth gate is called the \textit{Dasam Dur}. Hymns of Guru Nanak, Khushwant Singh (trans), Sangam Books, Bombay, p167-168
lead to union with God. In fact, often these external elements alienate the individual from looking within to find Knowledge and Truth. True religion is not to show off what you wear and how you keep yourself. As Nanak writes:

Religion lieth not in visiting tombs
Nor in visiting places where they burn the dead
Not in sitting entranced in contemplation
Nor in wandering in the countryside or foreign lands
Nor in bathing at places of pilgrimage.
If thou must the path of true religion see,
Among the world’s impurities, be of impurities free.
When a man meets the true guru
His doubts are dispelled
And his mind ceases its wanderings;
Drops of nectar pour down on him like rain.
His ears catch strains of sahaja’s celestial music
And his mind is lit up with knowledge divine.
If thou must the path of true religion see,
Among the world’s impurities, be of impurities free.
Sayeth Nanak, if thou must be a real yogi ...

From eleventh century onwards in India, the contact and philosophical conflicts between the Sufis and Yogis became more frequent when Sufis

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80 Ibid. Even Kabir said for such exhibitors that ‘Man Na rangaye, rangaye jogi Kapara, Dadhi Badha ke ho gaye Bakara’.
came to India. The Yogis variously regarded as *Siddhas*, had close links with all the eminent Chishti saints as can be attested from their frequent visits to Nizamuddin Auliya\(^81\) and their heated discussions with Baba Farid and *Jamaat khana*. This practice of uninhibited interaction owes its genesis to the historical tradition preceding the establishment of Chishti *silsila* in the sub-continent throughout Turkey, Syria and Egypt. These Yogis were disciples of Goraknath, who were known as Nath Panthis.\(^82\) Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Delhi was even influenced by the yogic practices of these people, and emphasized to his followers the importance of yoga as a way to help attain salvation. He stressed the importance of each breath.\(^83\) The yogis also had involved discussions with Nanak where he argued with them about the importance of *nam marg* and *nam simran*. Nanak emphasized *sahaja avastha* as the state of equipoise from which the God who is purest of pure can be obtained and not by practicing asceticism. This state of equipoise is

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\(^81\) The Yogis called Nizamuddin “Sidha” which means one who has achieved the ultimate union with God according to their point of view. See *Fawaid-ul-Fuad*, introduction.

\(^82\) Nath Panthis were those who followed the teachings of Goraknath who believed that because the path to salvation was difficult it was important for humans to challenge worldly desires, through the practice known as asceticism. Contrary to Sufi and Bhakti principles of salvation via service to humanity and brotherhood, the Nath Panthis asserted that salvation could only be attained through withdrawing from society. Yet it is fascinating to note that Sufis entertained these ascetics at their *khanqahs* and were in fact admired by them.

\(^83\) A true Sufi, according to Nasiruddin, was one who regulated his breath, and a class of yogis too he said believed in regulating the breath. *Khair-ul-Majalis*, pp59-60.
known to Sufis as *fana-ma-al-baqā*, also the *turiya avastha* of the Hindu scriptures. At this position, the Sufi and Bhakti saints opposed their respective orthodox counterparts who tightly controlled scriptures which were meant to be disseminated to every one. Brahmins did not allow low caste people to learn Sanskrit as it was considered to be the language of *devas*. They made these texts so complex and difficult that they were unaccessible to the common people and their positions of power could be maintained. Though the *ulema* did not put restrictions on the study of religious texts like the Quran and Hadith, we know from historical texts that those Indians who were of low-caste and who were attracted to the Islamic philosophy of egalitarianism, became the victims of the *ulema*’s most unegalitarian practice. As discussed in chapter three, Nizamuddin Auliya describes the importance of equality among men and women, a subject which was stressed

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84 "... By the gentle path of sahaja, Attain God, Purest of the Pure. A disciple who serves his *guru* and no other Will succeed, says Nanak, that is sure ...". Hymns of *Guru Nanak*, p180.
85 *Deva* means "Angel", and thus only the upper caste considered themselves entitled to learn Sanskrit. Those who were of lower caste were considered so inferior that if they learnt Sanskrit and read the scriptures the Brahmins believed the scriptures would become contaminated.
86 Political historian of the sultanate period, Ziauddin Barani (an "aalmi") condemned any Indian conversions to Islam. He advised the Sultans of the period to put a stop to the admission of the children of low-born converts to *mardarsahs* (schools) because the education would qualify them for Government jobs. He suggested that only the children of noble families had been chosen by God to rule mankind. This clearly shows how unreliable Barani’s writings are in giving us a comprehensive picture of society during the period under review. See for detail “*Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*” by Barani.
in both religious movements. Nanak also said that one should not denigrate women as they are conceived and born as men are conceived and born.\textsuperscript{87}

In contrast to the orthodox sections of both religions, the Bhakti and Sufi saints practiced and preached humanitarian principles of both religions, and as discussed in chapter two, it is because of this fact that they adopted the languages of the masses, hence the evolution of several local dialects. It is in the same period that Amir Khusrau started composing poems in two languages. He would write the first line in Persian and second in Hindawi. Similarly in the western part of India, Bhakti saints such as Eknath and Namdev were questioning the use of the “Holy” language of Sanskrit. They said “if Sanskrit was made by God, then who made Prakrit?”\textsuperscript{88}

During the thirteenth century the mystics laid importance on the indigenous dialects. The Sufis used Hindawi as the vehicle for communicating their discourses. Hindu mystical songs were recited at the \textit{sama} gatherings. Syed Gisu Daraz admitted that each indigenous language had its own characteristics and importance, and through Hindawi the esoteric ideas of Sufism could easily be expressed.

\textsuperscript{87} "We befriend, wed and go unto them. We slander the sex which gives birth to Kings? All who live are born to women; only God (who is Truth and Reality) owes not His existence to any woman." Hymns of Guru Nanak, p140.

\textsuperscript{88} Eknath, a Maharashtrian saint, emphasized preaching and practice using the local dialect in order to reach the masses and make them understand about God and self.
These gatherings were common among the Sufis and Bhakti saints. In *sama* and *kirtan* the mystical songs were recited which brought the spiritual followers to a state of ecstasy, whereby through the music they would be in union with the Divine Being. Hindu mystical songs were also recited in the *sama* gatherings. Many talented musicians participating in the *sama* gatherings were newly converted Muslims. Shaikh Ahmed from Naharwala in Gujarat, who gave the expert renditions on Hindawi *ragas*, lived during the thirteenth century. He undoubtedly attended the most significant *sama* performance, which is clear from his presence when a Persian verse produced such powerful ecstasy in Shaikh Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, that he died a few days later. Ahmed was said to have been a disciple of Faqir Madhu, the Imam of the Zami Mosque in Ajmer, who retained his Hindu name even after conversion.\(^9\) In *sama*, a *qawwal*\(^9\) sings Sufi poetry on musical tunes. This is also to invoke the audience to go into a trance to experience what is called the ‘meeting with the Beloved’. They talk about *ishq-e-haqeeqi*\(^9\), which has been explained by Bhakti saints like Kabir and Nanak, their couplets regarding this can be read in the Adi Granth.\(^9\) One

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\(^8\) *Fawaid-ul-Fuad*, pp186-7.

\(^9\) A *qawwal* is a vocal musician who sings Sufi poetry in musical tones.

\(^9\) *Ishq-e-haqeeqi* is a Sufi concept which means love between a human and God.

\(^9\) The two couplets by Kabir and Nanak are respectively: “When I saw within my heart, I saw my love within me. And lo, when I saw what I saw, I was rid of all my sorrows”, and “O fool, saith thou toucheth
should enjoy the worldly love which Sufis called *ishqe-i-majazazi*.\(^93\) This meant that when a person loved his Beloved intensely, at some point of time, a stage was attained which helped in sublimation to the spiritual love of *ishqe-i-haqqi*.

Similarly, Chaitanya, who introduced *kirtan*, a musical gathering in which people from a particular area assembled with all kinds of local instruments to invoke spiritual ecstasy. Musical tunes were accompanied by vocals. One member would utter sayings, which would be repeated by others in a typical style. The whole ceremony would go on throughout the night in which they were intoxicated by the ambience or chorus of the music. This invokes them to realize God within. It is possible that *kirtan* was inspired by *sama*. Kabir composed a large number of "love" songs regarding spiritual love.\(^94\) Chaitanya similarly described the love of Radha for Krishna and this he symbolized as meaning everyone can be the beloved of the Supreme Being. Most of the saints, like Kabir, have shown the soul as the female part in this love as it was considered that the love of female is more intense than the male. Kabir says the attraction between *jivathama* and *paramathma* (a

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not another's creeper, thou art a devoted gardener? But is not the whole world in bloom like a garden of flowers? (Why then love only the part and not the whole?), p1048, Book 9, Adi Granth.

\(^{93}\) *Ishqe-i-majazazi* is a worldly love that is conditional, based on mutual exchange.

\(^{94}\) "My eyes are heavy with sleep my Love, come let us go to bed. Lovelorn my body, quivers and quakes", Love Songs of Kabir, G.N.Das (ed), Abhinava Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p11.
masculine element, from *Param Purusha*) towards each other is for the ultimate union. In contrast, the Sufi’s *jivathama* (human soul) which should be a prime mover in this game of love between the two, is to be taken as a masculine element as they hold the view that the love of man for the woman is always stronger and more eloquent than that of woman for man.

Even today in sama gatherings, though not as common as they were during the sultanate period, *qawwali* is still famous for bringing followers to the state of ecstasy. Shankar and Shambhu were the official *qawwals* at the *dargah* of Khwaja Gharib Nawaz of Ajmer. It is worth noting that even though Muslim, Bismillah Khan, plays *shahnai* at the Vishvanath temple at Varanasi, entry is still restricted and common Hindus are discouraged by the priest. This is not sheer coincidence, but is possibly a result of the interplay between the Bhakti and Sufi movements back in the sultanate period.

The *khanqah* of Nizamudin was always visited by Bhakti saints, and common Hindu people, and even today, Hindus are welcome at Sufi *dargahs* all over the country. Needless to say these Hindu visitors have inherent Bhakti traits, and orthodox believers do not patronize these *dargahs*. 
Bhakti saints like Kabir and Nanak can be seen in synchronization with the two spiritual movements. The Hindu saints adopted some Islamic traditions and understandings to preach their doctrines. It is evident that both the Bhakti and Sufi saints preached the same message, based on similar principles. They did not find any difference in the Absolute Being, who was the Creator, and that each individual should try to be in Union with Him. There was no clear distinction between a “Hindu” and a “Muslim” God.

The origin of the Bhakti movement can be traced back to the ancient scriptures like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Buddhist texts and was living in parallel with the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religions. History gives importance to Hinduism as one of the oldest world religions, because of these written records, and it is from these records that we understand the importance of ‘Union with God’ came from such a time when humanity was born. This can be seen through one of the early religious texts, the Bhagvat Gita, which talks about Knowledge, Action and Bhakti. This is the basis of the Bhakti movement, nam, or Knowledge, which has been present since time immemorial, and is still present and will remain so whilst humanity resides in this world.\(^{95}\) As referred to in the first chapter of this research, the

\(^{95}\) In *Bhagvat Gita* where Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna about Knowledge, he says that this Knowledge is there since humanity was created, and will remain while humans walk the earth. Also, Maharaji says in
core of the Sufi believe system is astoundingly similar to Bhakti. It lies in the acknowledgement of the establishment of the primordial covenant between God and the souls of men and women in a time before creation of the cosmos. The union between God and the souls of every human is known in Sufi literature as the “Day of Alast”. The goal of every Muslim mystic (Sufi) thus came to recapture this experience of loving and ecstatic intimacy with the Lord of the world.

In spite of such sincere religious movements which worked to bind both communities, today people in India and the world are fighting in the name of religion. Perhaps it is because we fail to understand the importance of each human being and each breath we take. We should use the wisdom of the Bhakti and Sufi teachings and apply them to our contemporary problems.

his discourse (November 2000, Delhi), that since Sanatan Kal (ancient period), this Knowledge is prevalent and will remain as such.