Chapter 2

SUFI AND BHAKTI MOVEMENTS

In the medieval period, religion provided the frame work of society at the community and state levels. The state allowed intellectual activity to grow, to begin with, but later curtailed it for reasons of state policy, even though confined to discrete groups and made subject of philosophical reasoning and logical disputation. As a result, religions failed to play the role of bringing about a harmonious process of living people therefore, had to develop their own beliefs and practices. Sufi and Bhakti represented people’s revolt against the ossified practices, in search of, and as an endeavor to bring harmony in life. Sufism played the most important role in working out the great synthesis.

Sufi Movement

The origin of Sufism lay in mysticism (Tassawuf) and one could discern from the very beginning two trends - natural mysticism and the esoteric.

An interesting feature of introduction of Sufism in India, as Nizami pointed out, was that it was introduced at the very beginning of the establishment of Muslim role and the latter’s rise and spread all over India. In other words, it developed in a period when free thought and scientific research and development had been suppressed in west and central Asia in the early tenth century as was pointed out by Professor Mohammad Habib in the introduction to Nizami’s book.¹

The Sufi stream came to India when Sufi thought was delinked from natural mysticism or was not playing an active role in bringing about any social transformation as the Qarmatrians or Shah Inayat tried to do. It was
institutionalized into different silisilahs and each confined itself to a vilayat (i.e. domain). The major silisilahs in India were the Chisti, Qadri, Naqshbandi and Suhrwardy Abul Fazl in Ain-i-Akbari gave a list of all that existed during his time, with some details leading Sufis.\(^2\)

The role of Sufis must be understood in proper social context in order to better understand and appreciate their valuable contribution. Analysing the social role of the Sufis K. Damodaran says:

*Sufism* was spiritual reflection of the growing social conflicts. The Sufis disliked the vices and luxurious living of the upper classes, which violated the Quranic precepts of simplicity and the brotherhood of man. They saw that Islam was becoming more and more subordinate to the state, and that the Ulema, the Qazis and the mullahs representing religious orthodoxy were exploiting the Quranic doctrines to uphold and justify a social system based on oppression. But, at the same time, they found themselves in a helpless position, unable to mobilize the people and fight for justice and the purity of Islam.\(^3\)

The Sufis adopted many local practices and made them an integral part of their cult. Some of these Sufi saints were half sadhus. They spoke local dialects and to a great extent Indianised Islam. In this contest to quote Khwaja Hasan Nizami:

"According to the custom of Sufis, it was necessary to celebrate the death anniversary of Hazrat Khwaza Ajmeri. The elderly disciples (mashaikh) wanted new Muslims to take part in it and their participation should also impress non-Muslim. And, by contemplating over the nature and habits of Hindus, they had understood that they were very fond of rituals of their taste. The consolidation of Islam among them was possible only by
suitably adopting those rituals which were prevalent among them (i.e. neo-muslims) during the days of idol worship so that they do not consider Islam to be alien to their taste and way of life”.

Hasan Nizami, records many devices used to convert the Hindu masses to the faith of Islam. He discovered a rest called *Parnami Panth* in Gujrat whose followers are Half-Hindu and Half-Muslim. Their holy scripture is called *Qulzum Sarup*. Its language is a mixture of Arabic, Sindhi, Hindi, Gujarati etc. They consider idol worship as infidels.

It was much easier for the people of India, who, far ages had belief in the theory of transmigration, to accept Islam couched in that idiom. Some peripheral and heterodox sects of Islam in Gujrat like the Bohra and Khoja (both Shia Ismaili sects) successfully employed such concepts to attract more and more people thoroughly immersed in native traditions towards them. Another interesting example of synergetic thought is that of the Bohra saint – poet Syedi Sadiq Ali wrote didactic poetry in Gujarati and employed local idiom and many Sanskrit words like Sad Guru etc. He also employed the concept of transmigration of in this respect.

The *Nizaris* (a sub-sect of the Ismaili Shias popularly known in India as the Khwaja Muslims) also adopted purely Indian idiom and religious concepts for preaching their faith in India. Pir Imamuddin, one of the Nizari missionaries of Gujrat founded *Imamshai Sat Panth* (i.e The True Path). The *Nizari Dais* in the guise of popular Hindu saints ambulated around singing *bhajans* and giving people the good tidings of two new *awtar* of *Kal-Yugi* Hazrat Muhammad and Hazrat Ali. The conversion of the local people to the new faith used to be kept secret and the proselytized were called *Guptis* (i.e.
hidden). These Guptis wore required to perform all the Hindus rituals and only secretly practiced their new faith. In some of the sacred books of the Khoja Om is “Ali and Ali is Om.” It is interesting to note that there is close resemblance between the way ‘Ali’ is written in Arabic script and om is written in Sanskrit and the Nizaris write ‘Ali, with little modification in their sacred books so as to look like om.

The Mahdawiya sect associated with the name of Wahid Mahmud, appeared in the early 13th century. He claimed himself to be a Mahdi who could lend the people to the right path. He asserted that the religion of Mahmud being obsolete and abrogated must be replaced by a new dispensation. The followers of Wahid are called Mahdawiya. They regard him as their Prophet, venerate the sun and called it their Qiblah; they have their prayer, which they chant with their face turned towards the sun.

The Raushaniya, or “the enlightened,” was a Sufi sect founded by an Afghan, Mian Bayazid Ansari, who was styled as Pir-i-Raushan, or the Enlightened Pir. The Akhund Darweza, a venerated Afghan saint, dubbed him in derision Pir-i-Tariq, the Darkened Pir, and the adherents of the sect were nick named Tariqis. Bayazid Ansari was born in the Punjab and flourished in the middle of the sixteenth century. At first a devout Muslim he afterwards abandoned the exterior practices of Islam and devoted himself to mediation. His Saying, several of which are quoted in the Dabistan, express sound reason, pure morality and fervent piety. In the spirit of his nation and time, and for self defence he took up arms against the Mughals. His history and that of his sons is carried to the middle of the seventeenth century. It is
interesting to note that Mian Bayazid composed a great number of works in four languages, viz., Arabic, Persian, Pashto and Hindi (i.e. Sanskrit) and the gospel of this sect, Khairul-Biyan, is to be found in all four languages.12

The regions of Sind and Gujrat saw the emergence of another very interesting sect – Satpanthis. This sect was founded as a branch of Ismalism. But with the passage of time the sect moved further away from its Islamic foundations. Satpanthi preachers said that Hinduism and Islam were similar way of obtaining God, but Islam was a higher stage, while the Quran was the fifth and the last of the Vedas. They had a negative attitude towards idol worship, but adopted the Hindu postulate of rebirth. They considered that the main aim of human life was to free itself from Khuda or Brahma. Among the rich library texts of this sect there is a work called Jannatpuri which describes one of their spiritual leaders, Imam Shah, visiting hell and then, heaven in the company of one Vir Chandan. While in hell all sorts of sinners are detained, his heaven is populated not only by Muslim righteous men, but by the noble heroes of the Mahabharata.13

Mughals ideas and approaches towards Sufis of India

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

Babur’s family had a long standing connection with the Naqshbandis, going back to Bahauddin Naqshband, who died in Bukhara in 1389. His most important successor, Khwaja Ahrar (died 1490), was one of the most powerful men in Central Asia at the time, and Babur’s father was a follower of his. Members of his family came with him to India and some of them married into the Mughal family.
Babur’s son Humayun was a great venerator of holy men, visited the shrine of the leader of the chistis, Abdul Quddues Gangohi (died 1538), and during his wandering in excile in Iran, he visited all the accessible mausoleums, including the shrine of ‘Abdullah-i Ansari (died in 1089) in Gazurgah, near Heart. The sufi with the greatest influence on the emperor was Shah Phul or Bhlul, who claimed to be descended from the great Persian mystical poet Faridddin ‘Attar, and who was renowned for his exorcism. Shah Phul was killed by Humayun’s brother Hindal, who feased his great influence over Humayun. Shah Phul brother Muhammad Ghaush Gwailiari (died 1562) had an even greater influence on many Muslims, and the Shattari order which he represented remained active for many years, for example in Burhanpur. The great theologian Wajihuddin Gujarati spoke in his defence. Akbar does not appear to have shown any great interest in these powerful religious figures a somewhat astonishing fact, which is mentioned by both Badauni and Abul Fazl.

Akbar too believed deeply in the dervishes, the representative of mystical Islam. In 1564 he performed the first pilgrimage on foot to Muinuddin Chisti’s mausoleum in Ajmer and repeated this act frequently, thus in 1569 to offer thanks for the conquest of chitor, the Rajput stronghold. It is said that even in this conquest he was supported by a Suhrwardy saint, Miran Muhammad Shah (d. 1604 in Lahore). The conquest was celebrated by Badauni with the verse:

“And a happy day was it for the vultures and crows –
Glory to Him who multiplieth food for his cratures”.
Till 1579 the emperor visited the Shrine in Ajmer almost every year,

"and daily according to his custom held in that sacred shrine by night intercourse with holy, learned, and sinceremen, and séances for dancing and Sufism took place, and the musicians and singers, each one of whom was a paragon without rival, striking their nails into the veins of the heart used to rend the soul with their mournful cries, and dirhams and dinars were showered down like raindrops".¹⁸

Akbar's first surviving son Salim was born from a Rajput princess on 31 August 1569, as a result of the prayers and blessings of Salim Chisti (d. 1571)¹⁹, one of Farid Ganj – Shakar's descendents, the chronogram of whose death is Shaikh-I-hukama, Shaikh of Sages' or Shaikh hukkam 'Shaikh of rulers'. Out of gratitude, Akbar erected a sanctuary for the saint, around which the city of Fatehpur Sikri was built, a city of red sandstone which seems to reflect the high soaring mystical feelings of the emperor. The enormous gateway is visible for miles and leads the visitor to Salim Chisti's delicate white

Fig. 1. The hermit Shaykh Salim Chisti in a hermitage with his tame lion, c. 1700.
Fig. 2 Nar Singh, ‘Akbar presiding over a religious debate in the ibadatkhana with the Jesuit Fathers Rudolph Aquaviva and Francis Henriquez in the city of Fatehpur Sikri in 1578, c 1578-9
marble tombs and finally to the *Ibadat Khana*, the ‘house of worship’, where the emperor held his meetings with the representatives of different religions – Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and Zoroastrians. Strange people, too came to Agra and Fatehpur Sikri in those years; the influx of Shia poets and preachers from Iran and Iraq continued and even increased. Among them was Mulla Muhammad of Yazd who ‘got the name of Yazidi and tried hard to make the emperor a Shia.’ It was *Ibadat Khana*, as Abul Fazal records, that ‘bigoted ulama and the routine lawyers were shamed.’

In 1578 an ecstatic experience contributed to the ruler’s shifting towards an all-embracing religion instead of pure, orthodox Islam. Finally in 1579 Akbar issued the famous *mahzr* called by Vincent Smith his ‘infallibility decree’, which gave recognition to the emperor’s power of *ijtihad*; that means he gained the right to exercise his own judgement and to issue orders on matters of religion as well as politics, based on the principles of equality and justice. The just ruler, Sultan-i-adil, was placed in this document above the mujtahid.

The document was drawn up by Shaikh Mubarak, and the *Sadrus sadur* ‘Abdunnabi as well as other learned men were forced to sign it. But both ‘Abdunnabi and *Makhdum ul mulk* (who disliked each other) were ordered to go for pilgrimage in this very year. The incredibly wealthy *Makhdum ul Mulk* died or was assassinated in Ahmadabad on his return, while Abdunnabi was imprisoned slightly later (he had a Brahman executed against Akbar wish) and murdered in prison. Two years after the proclamation of the *mahzr* the *Din-i-Ilahi* was created, which may be called an order rather than a religion. Among its nineteenth select members, only one was a Hindu. In the regulation of this
eclectic movement the noblest ideas of various religious traditions were combined, for instance the prohibition of sensual lust, deceit, slander and oppression, ideas that suggest influences of Jain ahimsa and catholic ideals of celibacy. A central facet of the Din-i-Ilahi is the veneration of the light, whether the sun or a perpetual fire, which may have its roots in Zoroastrian practices. Abul Fazl revived the Iranian idea of the Farr-i-Izadi, the Khwarena or glory, which is the divine sign of true royalty, and recognizing this splendour in Akbar, therefore depicts ‘His Majesty as the spiritual guide of the people’.  

Abul Fazl was also responsible for the formulation of the ‘four degrees’ of absolute adherence to Akbar’s person: one had to place at his disposal property, life, honour and faith. Badauni whose former admiration for Akbar turns into aversion after the promulgation of the Din-i-Ilahi, as his former friendship with Faizi changes suddenly into hatred, reviles with poisonous pen one of the ‘possessors of the four degree in faith, the reprobate apostate, Sharif of Amul who ‘chewed the cud of a host of foolish stories and is now one of the apostles of this Majesty’s religion in Bengal.  

The Din-i-Ilahi was condemned by some authors, following Badauni, as apostasy from Islam; others regard it rather as a heresy within Islam. In any case, Akbar himself denied any claims to prophethood or divinity, even though the religious formula Allahu akbar might have confused people since it could be interpreted as ‘Akbar is God’, thus pointing to the emperor’s divine nature. The Din-i-Ilahi has also been called ‘a heterodox personality cult in which Akbar assumed the role of the Insane-i-kamil, the perfect Man of whom the theoreticians of Sufism had long dreamt. Thus, Shaikh Tajauddin, a mystic of
the Ibn ‘Arabi school, who ‘introduced arguments concerning the unity of existence as idle Sufis discuss, and which eventually lead to licences and open heresy, claimed that the expression Insane-i-Kamil referred to the caliph of the age25 - and that was Akbar. Again, the Din-i-ilahi was considered as ‘solar monotheism’; or one may find in its tenents traces of the Ishraqi school of Suhrwardi Muqtul (d. 1191), who had paid with his life for his tendency to unite in his philosophical system mystico-gnostic trends of Iran, Greek and Islamic origin, and whose mysticism of illumination – the hikmat al ishraq – was not unknown to the Muslim intellectuals of India.

Akbar’s ideal of Sulh-i Kull, peace with every one’, manifested itself in various ways. To be sure, he too continued to annex neighbouring territories; but in home politics he tried to give the Hindus a large share in the administration.

It was natural for Akbar to try to gain the support of the majority of his subjects, the Hindus; for the reason he attempted to understand their culture and religion better than any of the preceding kings of Delhi.

Akbar was said to have to very keen on having letters from the Bihari Sufi Sharafuddin Maneri (died 1380) read to him, as they taught a sensible, wise form of piety. Akbar however, was most strongly drawn to the Chistis. The rulers of the dynasties preceding the Mughals had also venerated the Chisti holy man Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi (died 1325).

Akbar once visited the mausoleum of Nizamuddin master, Farid Ganj-i-Shakar in Pak pattan in the Punjab, And for many years he visited the shrine to Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer.26 Akbar is depicted in a miniature in the golden
yellow robes of the chistis, which is evidence of his close connection to this order, which became even closer after the birth of Jahangir. The most prominent of Akbar critics was Ahmad Sirhindi (mujaddid-i-alf-i-thani), who also frequently appears, during Jahangirs time. He was a naqshbandi, and like many members of this ‘strait-laced’ order, he began his theological career by uniting on anti-Shia tract. Akbars tolerance and his syncreticism were completely at odds with Ahmad’s narrow conception of the true Islam. Sirhindi evolved his own theories to counter those of the increasingly influential Ibn Arbi. Whereas this Great master’s followers proclaimed that hama ust, Everything is He Ahmad Sirhindi’s were to say of him that hama az ust, Everything is from Him’, instead of wahdat-al-wajud, the ‘unity of Being’, he substituted wahdat-ash-shuhud, unicity of contemplation’. His claims were unacceptably large, and Jahangir, upon learning of Ahmad’s criticism of his father’s religious policies, had him brought before him. He was therefore put in the cave of Anira I Singh Daln and incarcerated in the fortress of Gwalior. However, while locked up in Gwalior, Shayakh Ahmad had experience of the mighty majesty of God. He was released after only a year, and treated quite well by Jahangir, who gave him two thousand rupees, after which he continued to unite and preach until his death in 1624. It is not certain whether Aurangzeb was a disciple of Pir Muhammad Masum, Sirhindi son, but it is a possibility.

The role of the Naqshbandi in India increased in importance. Muhammad Nasir Andalib’s son, Mir Durd became the first great mystical poet in Urdu. There were others Naqshbandiya who were also active at that time in Delhi, the most prominent being Shah Walliullah, the son of lawyer who had been involved in compiling the Fatawa-i-Alamgiri. He was born in
1703, and had spend several years in Mecca. After his return to Delhi, he attempted to bring about a survival of Islam. Shah Walliulah’s great Arabic work, *Hujjat Allah al-baligha*, attempted to account for the plight of Muslims in India, pointing to the mismanaged economy, financial problems and neglecting of the agricultural regions.

The mughal government did not communicate all that much with the great intellectuals, but they did expect their advice. However, the influence of the *Naqshbandi* reformer continued in India even after the collapse of the Mughal empire, and a branch of this *naqshbandis* still survives in Delhi.

The *Chistiyya* also continued to play a role. Along side these some what mutually antagonistic brotherhoods, another community was gaining in importance, namely the *Qadriyya*, the oldest Sufi way. In India they gained their followers in the South (Tanjore is still an important center). Later on in the Mughal era, in the fifteenth century, Qadiris settled in Sind and in the southern Punjab. The *Tariqias* rose in significant in Jahangirs era; Mian Mir, who came from Sind, had settled in Lahore in Akbars time. Jahangir was very impressed by the holy man, who then came to contact with the young Dara Shikoh. Mian Mir died in 1635. Dara Shikoh and his sister Jahanara became disciples of Mian Mirs successor, Mullah Shah Badakhshi. Tawakkul Beg, who was another faithful disciple of Mullah Shah, acted as a messenger between his master and Shahjahan in Kashmir.

There were many mystical groups and currents during the Mughal time, but only one others merits a brief mention: the Rishis in Kashmir. Any one who visited Srinagar will have come across the grave of Baba Rishi in Gulmarg, in a fragrant pine forest near the sources of the Jhelum River. Baba
Rishi was one of the Muslim Rishis who were even in contact with A’Ibar. Nuruddin is regarded as the founder of the Rishis, introducing the new spiritual path in 1589. They lived ascetic lives, practiced breath control, planted fruit trees, and cared for their fellow creatures in tranquility and humility. The love of women is paramount in a few Sufi scriptures from the Mughal period; however, it is not clear whether these contain traces of Kashmiri Tantrism\textsuperscript{34}.

![Fig 3 Dara Shikoh visiting a sufi faqr, c. 1640-50](image-url)
What is certain is that Sufism permeated Indian Islam to great extent, and right up to the end of the Mughal period the holy festival of urs of Moinuddin Chisti as well as Abdeul Qadir Jilani, was celebrated in Delhi in the Lal Qila (Red Fort).

Bhakti Movement

The most powerful characteristic of the medieval age in India was the Bhakti movement. The movement began in the sixth-seventh century in south India with the rise of Hindu devotional cults, gradually spread throughout the country, and lasted till the sixteenth – seventeenth century. Most of these cults were heterodox and reflective of an inner social ferment.

Dr. Tara Chand felt that one of the possible influences might have been the advent of Islam. Muslims came to the western coast of south India in the eighth century and to the eastern coast by the tenth century, and by this time they had come to acquire considerable social and political influence.

It may therefore, be premised without overstraining facts that if, in the development of Hindu religion in the south, any foreign elements are found which make their appearance after the seventh century, which cannot be accounted for by the national development of Hinduism itself, they may with much probability be ascribed to the influence of Islam.

The Bhakti movement in India, by and large, was marked by (i) the rejection of the then existing ritual hierarchy and Brahmanical superiority

(ii) The use of vernacular in preference to Sanskrit (the language of the elite); and (iii) the emergence of the low-caste non-literate persons like Rameja Dasar, Pillai Uranga, Villi Dasar and Kanak Dasar in the south and Kabir,
Raidas, and Dadu in the north as great spiritual leaders. There was large scale participation of peasantry, artisans, and other lower classes as well as of ritually inferior but economically powerful groups like merchants and craftsmen in these devotional movements.

Just as a Sufism embraced a variety of ideas, with the name sufi given to men of different social, ethical and even doctrinal ideas, Bhakti too was open to many interpretations. The very principal of all people being equally dear to God was used both for denouncing the caste system and for glorifying it. Thus Bhakti was, it seems, not a movement, but a complex of movements, school of ideas and trends. The same view is expressed by Savitri Chandra and Krishna Kumar Sharma. The ideology of social protest, with which some Soviet and Indian scholars associate Bhakti, was significant, but not the only direction Bhakti took, for the heterogeneity and contradiction of ideas within Bhakti were many.

The notion of Bhakti as a movement is untenable because of other reasons too. Even for its most radical thinkers, who combined Bhakti with social protest, the main aim was to save an individual soul, not improve society and one has to agree with Savitri Chandra that ‘it’s objective was individual salvation and mystical union with God, rather than change in the living conditions of the masses.’

The religious reformist and school of thought in medieval India have been the subject of study of many scholars in India and elsewhere. According to Russian scholar Autonova ‘Bhakti’ was an anti-feudal movement which in the form of religious reformist ideas reflected the struggle of the toiling
masses, which was guided at the beginning by the city and money lending elite of Hindu society. In Ashrafan’s view, ‘Medieval Bhakti was an ideology of the townsfolk protest against the social and caste privileges of religious and non-religious feudal, a movement that grew with the feudal society and was an inevitable result of its development. As far as Sufism is concerned, the scholars approach is less unified, and trends of different socio-cultural meaning can be distinguished with it.\(^{39}\)

To determine what Bhakti was, we should start with two general divisions of it into the sagun and nirgun traditions. Sagun means ‘having qualities’ and possessing a concretized form. Following the general idea of a unified Deity, Sagun Bhakti supposed that God should be worshiped in same anthropomorphous form of either Rama or Krishna. Among the followers of this traditions were such humanities of medieval Indian culture as Vallabhb Charya, the founder of the celebrated ‘Pushti Marg’ community in Braj. Members of this community consisted of the poets of the ‘Ashtachap’, among whom Surdas was especially famous, and other great poets like Vidyapati, Jais and Rashkhan, Tulsidas, Mirabai, Narsi Maheta, the galaxy of Marathi Varkari saints and the Bengali luminary Chaitnya.

No less a popularity was enjoyed by the communities and saints of nirgun Bhakti (nirgun means devoid of qualities). Among its most celebrated representatives were Kabir, Ravidas (Raidas), Garibdas, Malukdas, Akho Bhagat, Charandas, Dadu Dayal and others. Early Sikhism of Nanak had many features similar to nirgun Bhakti. The adherents of this tradition followed strict monotheism and believed that Rama, Krishna and Allah were the names of the
same God, which was understood by them as an Absolute, devoid of any visible form or life story, and hence no temples, rituals and priests were needed to worship him. The whole of the nirgun Bhakti literature objects to ‘Pathar Puja’ or stone worship.\textsuperscript{40}

Both traditions of Bhakti were a challenge to the orthodox religion because many moral, social and ethical categories were critically reviewed by the saints. For instance, the traditional idea of the mundane world being maya (illusion) and God being the ‘Reality’, was re-considered by the Bhaktas God, was according to them, dissolved in the mundane being, hence to know God there was no need to renounce the world in the way the ascetics did.

According to some scholars, medieval Bhakti emerged as a response to the invasion of Islam. According to K.M. Panikkar, ‘Bhakti.... provided calm to the bleeding soul of Hinduism in Northern India during the period of Muslim Occupation’. Similar views on Bhakti were held by Joshi, Krishna Rao and others.\textsuperscript{41} Such an estimate does not agree with the facts of history, for if Bhakti was a response to the challenge of Islam, then we cannot account for the development of Bhakti in many regions of India especially in the south, much before the Muslim invasion.

Bhakti indeed was an answer to a challenge, but not to the challenge of Islam. It owed its development to many important changes in Indian society and culture. These changes occurred very gradually, sometimes in different directions, and none of them can be defined as the only important one.

The advent of Islam made the situation even more complicated. Living within a well defined caste structure, the Muslims got involved in an intricate
system of social divisions and ethnic groups. The dogma of Islamic practices, cultural traditions and values influenced the Hindu society in various ways and vice versa. All this led to the necessity of some change in the traditional outlook of both communities.

The development of Bhakti was closely connected with the development of medieval culture, especially the urban culture. In the streets and Bazaars of the thickly populated cities, people of all castes and religions rubbed shoulders with each other in every day business, sorrow and joys. Vidyapati (the maithli poet of Madhubani district of Northern Bihar) says that in the city throngs ‘ones’ caste mark was transferred on the others for head; Brahman’s Janev (kind of ritual thread) found itself on an untouchables neck. It became more and more difficult to maintain ones caste purity, though the basic idea survived.

The influence of Bhakti communities was very strong. They played a great role in the development of not only social thought and religion, but also music, literature and fine arts. Many Bhakti preachers as well as Sufis traveled through out India and spread their ideas in different regions. On the one hand, as Ashrafyan has rightly observed, the spread of the Bhakti ideas to different parts and ethnic groups of India testifies to their similar social development. One the other hand, the spread of Bhakti became a part of India’s cultural integrity and unity.

The influence of Bhakti extended not only to Sufism, but even to a religion that seemed to be insensitive to reformist ideas, Jainism.
In this chapter we harbour no ambitious to discuss all the aspects of Bhakti and Sufism. We shall only chalk out some important features problems, and analyse the attitudes of Bhaktas and Sufis. Till the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century the only way to understand Bhakti ideas was through the numerous sects, communities, and fraternities, which evolved around a spiritual leader.

Thus approximately up to the first half of the seventeenth century the main key to the understanding of Bhakti ideas was through the sects and fraternities, peaceful gatherings of submissive followers of nirguna Bhakti or Sagun Bhakti. Feudal authorities both Hindu and Muslim, who were sympathetic to these sects, some times granted them lands and money.44

These sects and communities coasted for many centuries and some of them flourish even today. But by about the mind-seventeenth century the religious reformist school of thought moved into a new stage. From the traditional practices of peaceful discussions and preaching the ideology of Bhakti became transformed into the ideology of anti-Mughal struggle. This process coincided with the crisis and disintegration of the Mughal empire. The growth of apposition to Aurangzeb’s policies as well as ethnic consolidation of same people of India led to freedom movements which were in need of some doctrinal, religious and ethical basis. Such a basis was provided by Bhakti ideas, which were transferred to meet the new requirements.

Historically the growth of the Bhakti movement can be divided into two phases: the first, from its early development in South India to the 13th century; the second, from the thirteenth century to the seventeenth, when in north India it came in contact with Islam, was inspired by its monotheism and stimulated
by its challenge, and developed against it a system of self defence and self-preservation for Hindu spirituality by borrowing Islam’s monotheistic egalitarianism.

The School, Centre and their Leaders of Bhakti Movement

The Varkari panth was an important center of Bhakti in Maharashtra. This school of Bhakti worshipped the local deity Vithosa who was supposed to be an incarnation of Krishna. The main center of Varkari tradition was the city of Pandharpur, to which the devotees still make annual pilgrimages. This school of Bhakti gave birth to a galaxy of poets like Namder, Nashari, Bahinabai, Chokha, Mela, and of course Eknath and Tukaram.45

In Maharashtra during the 17th century the most influential of Maratha saints was Tuka Ram (b. 1608) whose conception of God was very much like that of Kabir and who occasionally used Sufi terms in his hymns. Sukaram, who is generally believed to have inspired Shivaji as his spiritual guide, does not seem to have shared his dislike of Islam or of the Muslims. Some of his verses could have been written only by one who believed not only in one God but also in the mission of the prophet.46

In Maharashtra during the 17th century the most influential of Maratha saints was Tuka Ram (b. 1608) whose conception of God was very much like that of Kabir and who occasionally used Sufi terms in his hymns. Sukaram, who is generally believed to have inspired Shivaji as his spiritual guide, does not seem to have shared his dislike of Islam or of the Muslims. Some of his verses could have been written only by one who believed not only in one God but also in the mission of the prophet.47
As observed by the Russian Reisner and some other Indian scholars, Maharashtrian Bhakti had the biggest support in the villages, since urban life in Maharashtra was not so developed as composed to other parts of India. Because of this reason, as Reisner says, Bhakti there was closer to the ideas of Tulsidas, than to those of Kabir (mainly in social aspects).48

In the doctrine of Ramdas the central place was occupied by the idea of ‘Maharashtra dharma’. This was the idea of liberation from the Mughals and consolidation of all the Marathas. But here, there was a contradiction Ramdas appealed to Shivaji and his heirs with words that became the main slogan for the anti Mughal struggle in Maharashtra: to unite all the Marathas and to promote ‘Maharashtra dharma’. On the other hand, this patriotic idea of the ‘Maharashtra dharma’ meant in practice nothing but the restoration of the traditional, centuries old values of the pre Muslim state. So it was not by mere chance that the Marathi literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries idolized Shivaji as in carnation of the hero King Vikramaditiya or even as God Shiva himself, who was born as Maratha leader to restore dharma and the authority of the Vedas.49

Maharashtra was not so developed economically as, far instance, Gujarat or Bengal, but it was here that the process of ethnic consolidation began quite early as the twelfth century the Marathi language had pushed Sanskrit out of the administrative and literary sphere.

It has been accurately observed by some scholars like Reisner and P.V. Ranade that one of the most important social process spearheaded the Maratha movement, was the feudalization of the rural elite watandars who began to
press for a dominant role in Maharashtra and thus inevitably clashed with the Mughals. According to Ranade ‘the dominant group of the maratha watandars to consolidate its position among its own people and experts its power over India.’

The development of the anti-Mughal struggle in the Punjab and the ideology of this (Sikh) movement was very different from the liberation war. The reason for this were social, cultural and ethnic.

The Bhakti many, both in the south and in the north could not be considered as a single unified movement; it had many facets and its sources were diverse. Bhakti literature is an important part of Tamil literature. It is non-vedic and its traces are found in Buddhist and Jain literature as well

Different social, cultural and political factors seems to have played a role in the origin and promotion of Bhakti in different parts of India. The power of Brahman and Kashtriya castes in different regions and the emergence of new technologies and professions seem to have also played some role. In addition, a major factors could have been the emergence of Islam and Sufism in India, with their concept of equality and absence of castes. The interval about 500 years between the beginnings of Bhakti in the south and north might have been due to different political and social conditions, but this might also have been due to early arrival and impact of Islam in the south as compared to the north.

Dadu Dayal (1544-1603)

Dadu was a spiritual descendent of Kabir. He was a contemporary of Akbar. Among Bhakti poets of the eclectic group Dadu Dayal (1544-1603)
came nearest to Sufism. Like Kabir he rejected the authority of Hindu and Muslim scriptures, denounced the priest craft and believed passionately in the worship of God as Ram.

Throughout identified with the tradition of Kabir, Gorakhnath and others, he enter the court under the insignia of Kabir – uttering the names of Ram, Rahim and Allah – further aligning Akbar with that same tradition.

Akbar, hearing of Dadu and impressed by Dadu’s pupil, repeatedly asks him to come to the court. Since Dadu was a preacher who covered a large area in northern India, the language of his verses must have varied according to the audience he was addressing Dadu’s verses have been preserved in the traditions – the oral (maghazia) and the written (Kaghazia). The verses communicated orally have not yet been compiled.

One of the most significant concepts which emerge from Dadu’s Granthawali is the concept of the Guru. “Without the Guru even a hundred thousands moons and millions of suns cannot enlighten man’s dark corners.” This concept of the Guru – on the one hand holding absolute power over his disciples and on the other being benevolent towards them – corresponds remarkably closely to say, Abul Fazls concept of the sovereign.

Dadu fully accepts the social function of all classes and groups in the society of his day. In fact he used the smile of God for almost every one of them in different verses thus elevating their position in society. The Dadupanthi sect was synergetic in the beginning one of its early exponents being Rajjabdas, a re-convert to Hinduism. Gradually it transformed itself from an esoteric to a militant orientation under the influence of the vairagis
and the Sikhs. Towards the end of the eighteenth century it led a predatory existence in the area around Jaipur. But of the aims and spirit of the early movement scarcely a vestige remained.

Bir Bhan (b. 1543)

A contemporary of Dadu founded the Satnami sect which denounced caste system. The followers of the Satnami sect married within their own sect and believed in monotheists. In Sundardas the eclectic school of Bhakti returned to orthodoxy; though he enjoyed the patronage of Muslim nobles he was essentially a scholar of Sanskrit. His Sundar Vitasa draws purely from Sanskrit sources.

The difference between the eclectic and the orthodox Ramaite Bhakti school is that whereas the former worshiped God as Ram, the latter worshiped Rama, the son of Dasratha king of Ayodha as God.

Tulsidas (1532-1623)

The great representative of the orthodox Ramaite school (Saguna) was Tulsidas (1532-1623) who is said to have enjoyed the patronage of Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, but wrote exclusively for the Hindus without any attempt at eclecticism. His great contribution was Ram Carita Manas, the religious epic of the life of Rama, and in its spiritual significance a work as great in its way as Valmikis Ramayan, and more popular. He regarded all eclecticism including that of Kabir and Akbar as hypocritical. ‘Kal yog (evil time) has swallowed the Dharma (religion), scriptures are lost; hypocrites have established religious sects at will.... Brahmns sels the Vedas; the rulers have no sense of morality. Neither the farmers has land nor the beggar alms,
merchants have no income, menids no jobs; every one is hungry and distressed..... This is due to Ravana of poverty. 'O' Ram kill this demon of poverty as you killed Ravan.60

Chaitanya (1485-1533)

In Bengal Chaitanya (1485-1533) started a Bhakti movement in the form of Krishna work ship. He believed firmly in devotion to God, Krishna in his case, and rejected the ritual and caste system of Hinduism. The main purpose of religious life was the attainment of an ecstatic feeling in the love of God, which was helped by music, this feeling could be any men whatever his creed or caste, provided he devoted himself to the love of God.61

It has recently been pointed out that after becoming a sanyasin, Chaitanya spend twenty years of his life in the Hindu Kingdom of Orissa away from Muslim Bengal.62

Chaitaniya is also reported to have converted a Muslim theologian Bijli Khan to Vaishnavism63 and according to another tradition a group of Pathans.64 But Kartabhajas, a group among chaitaniya’s followers were monotheists and synergetic and had contact with Muslim faqirs, they recruited Muslims and Christian into their fold and celebrated their Sabbath on Friday.65

A very charming figure in the Krishna cult of North India is that of the princess Mira Bai, who worshiped Krishna in the name of Girdhar-Gopal or Hari and though she denounced Hindu ritual, her devotion was intensely subjective and more and less untouched by the polemical atmosphere that was simultaneously borrowing from Islam and rejecting it.
Prannath (1618-94)

The ideas put forward by Dara Shikoh were further developed by the Hindu saint and Scholar Prannath. This men life was very eventful. Born in a poor feudal family in Kathiwar, he left his house in his early youth and went wandering with some ascetics Prannath was well versed in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi, and even seemed to know the Hebrew. One of his books, Qulzum-e-Sharif was written in several languages.\(^6\)

Prannath was a sworn enemy of religious strife and said that ‘those whom you call infidel possess all virtues, that whatever the Quran says, the Vedas also say.

Unity was one of the main ideas preached by Prannath. He preached not only Hindu-Muslim Unity, but the integrity of India, which was not usually mentioned in the literature of this important historical juncture:

Every one loves best the tongue of his skin
There are thousands of languages in the world people speak differently and have different customs, It is impossible to count all the languages, But all of them, taken together, I’ll call Indian.\(^7\)

Prannath founded a community that exists even today, mostly in Gujrat. It members, both Hindus and Muslims pray and eat together.\(^8\)

Jain Monki

Among the Jains an important or mist was Banarsi Das of Jaunpur. He wrote the biographical poem *Ardhakanthanaka*. This poem is interesting as a description of the commercial and family life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and also as a history of the author’s spiritual search. Banarsidas assimilated many features of *Bhakti* to his own ideas. From his youth he had an
enquiring mind and was sometimes sceptical about Jain and Hindu rituals. At the beginning of the eighteenth century a Jain monk Meghavijaya called him a man who proclaimed his independent views (svamata) and noted that his ideas were popular.
Notes and References


8. It is written thus.


11. Raverty, *Notes on Afghanistan*, p. 46 note, Akbar who was very fond of word play was delighted with the antithetical retort and his historians were only too ready to repeat and ring the change upon it.

12. For details see *Akbarnama*, Beveridge, III, 670, 709 and passim; *Tabqat-i-Akbari*, trans., II, 608, 609, 6129, 637, 638, 649; Badauni, Lowe, II, 357, 360, 361, 362, 366, 368, 393, 401; A monograph on the Raushaniya sect by Dr. Leyeden in the XI Vol. Asiatic Researches; An article by Dr. I.H. Qureshi in the *PIHC*, 1941, p. 364.


15. Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia*, p. 239.
16. Babur Nama, pp. 653, 807; he met Ghauth Gwaliori in 1529.
17. Badauni, Muntakhab II, tr. 107 text 104.
18. Ibid., II tr. 188 text 185.
19. According to Badauni, Muntakhab III, tr. 18, note 1, Jahangir was never called Salim by his father but only ‘Shaikhu Baba’.
20. Badauni, Ibid., tr. 214, text 212.
22. About his wealth see Badauni, II, tr. 321, text 311.
25. Ibid., tr. 266, text 258-9.
27. Brown, Indian painting under the Mughals, XX
28. Friedmann, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi; Fazlur Rahman, Selected letters of S.A. Sirhindi
30. Marshall, Mughals in India, no. 1203 mention 260 letters by Pir Masum.
32. Eaton, Sufis of Bijapur, Lawrence, ‘Seventeenth century of Qadriyya in Northern India.
33. Mian Mir is frequently portrayed, e.g. in the Los Angeles Conity Museum of Art, 1, 69, 24.287; a typical drawing is in Schimmel, Islam in India and Pakistan, no. xxva.
34. Murata, The Mysteries of Marriage.

37. Agreed here with the position of Dr. Savitri Chandra Shobha (*Social Life and Concepts*, p. 1) and Dr. Krishna Sharma (*Bhakti and Bhakti Movement*, p. 1).


42. Vidyapati Thakur, *Kirtilata*, p. 86.

43. Ashraffyan, C.Z., *Medieval City*, p. 140


45. Rich literature exists on the marathi saints and Bhakti poets. Their life stories, based on the eighteenth century works by Mahipati were tr. And pub by Justine E. Abbott (The poet Saints of Maharashtra Series).

46. E.g. First among the great names is *Allah*, ever forget to repeat it, Allah is verile one, the prophet is verile unique. Thou art one, O, Friend, Thou art one, Thou art one, I do not exist but in Thee (*Tukaram, Abharga*, pp. 1-194.

47. E.g. First among the great names is *Allah*, ever forget to repeat it, Allah is verile one, the prophet is verile unique. Thou art one, O, Friend, Thou art one, Thou art one, I do not exist but in Thee (*Tukaram, Abharga*, pp. 1-194.


55. *Granthavali*, p. 7/58.
60. Tulsidas, *Ram Charita Manas*, Allahabad, 1949, 542
63. R.C. Majumdar; *The Delhi Sultanate*, Bombay, 1960, p. xxxii.
64. D.C. Sen, *Chaitaniya and his Age*, 228-9.
66. Tara Chand, 221