

## Theme 6: Bhakti - Sufi Traditions

### Most striking feature of this phase-

- \*Increasing **visibility of a wide range** of gods and goddesses in sculpture as well as in texts
- \*continued and even **extended worship** of the major deities - Vishnu, Shiva and the goddess
- \* Each of whom was visualised in a **variety of forms**.

### Reasons -The integration of cults

1) Process of disseminating Brahmanical ideas i.e. composition, compilation and preservation of Puranic

Texts in **simple Sanskrit verse**, explicitly meant to

be **accessible to women and Shudras**, who were generally excluded from Vedic learning.

2) The **Brahmanas accepting and reworking** the beliefs and practices **of these and other social categories**.

**Example-** Worship of the goddess, often simply in the form of a stone smeared with ochre.

### A Mosaic of Religious Beliefs and Practices

### Difference and conflict

- \***Tantric practices** were **widespread** in several parts of the subcontinent
- \*Many of these **ideas influenced** Shaivism as well as Buddhism
- \*The principal deities of the Vedic pantheon, Agni, Indra and Soma, become **marginal figures**, rarely visible in textual or visual representations.
- \*There were sometimes **conflicts**, between - those who valued the Vedic tradition and On the other hand those engaged in Tantric practices

**The traditions of devotion or bhakti needs to be located within this context.**

- \* **Poet-saints** emerged as **leaders**
- \* They developed a **community of devotees**.
- \* **Brahmanas** remained important **intermediaries** between gods and devotees
- \* These traditions also **accommodated** and acknowledged **women** and the “**lower castes**”,

### **Bhakti traditions into two broad categories:**

- \* **Saguna** (with attributes) included traditions that focused on the **worship of specific deities** such as Shiva, Vishnu and his avatars (incarnations) and forms of the goddess or Devi, all often and
- \* **Nirguna** (without attributes). Worship of an **abstract form of god**.

### **Early Traditions of Bhakti**

### **The Alvars and Nayanars of Tamil Nadu - bhakti movements (c. sixth century)**

- \* The **Alvars** (literally, those who are “immersed” in devotion to **Vishnu**)
- \* **Nayanars** (literally, leaders who were devotees of **Shiva**). They travelled from place to place singing hymns in Tamil in praise of their gods.

- \* They identified certain **shrines** as abodes of their chosen deities.
- \* **Large temples** were later built at these sacred places--developed as **centres of pilgrimage**.
- \* **Singing compositions** of these poet-saints became part of temple rituals in these shrines, as did **worship of the saints’ images**.

\* Several important **chiefdoms** in the **Tamil region** in the early first millennium CE.

From the second half of the first millennium there **is evidence for states**, including those of the **Pallavas and Pandyas** (c. sixth to ninth centuries CE).

### **Cholas Rulers**

\* **Chola** rulers (9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century) supported **Brahmanical** and bhakti traditions.

\* **Making land grants** and constructing **temples** for Vishnu and Shiva.

## **Bhakti Saints--Relations with the state**

### **Cholas Rulers and other measures:**

\* Claimed divine support and proclaim their own power and status by building **splendid temples**

\* These temples were adorned with stone and metal sculpture **to recreate** the **visions** of these popular Saints who sang in the **language of the people**.

\* Singing of Tamil **Shaiva hymns** in the temples

\* Collect and organise these hymns into a **text** (Tevaram).

\* Metal images were carried **in processions** during the festivals of these saints.

### **Cholas and Temples:**

\* Shiva **temples**, constructed- at Chidambaram, Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram.

\* The most spectacular representations of Shiva in **bronze sculpture** were also produced

## Origin:

- \*The twelfth century - in **Karnataka**,
- \* Led by a Brahmana named **Basavanna**
- \*He was initially a **Jaina**
- \* And **minister** in the court of a Chalukya king.
- \*His **followers** were known as **Virashaivas**  
(Heroes of Shiva) or Lingayats (wearers of the linga)

## The Virashaiva Tradition - Karnataka

## Resources :

Virashaiva tradition is derived from vachanas (literally, sayings) composed in Kannada by women and men who joined the movement.

## Teachings:

- \*They **worship** Shiva in his manifestation as a **linga**.
  - \***Men** usually **wear** a **small linga** in a silver case on a loop strung **over the left shoulder**.
  - \*Those who **are revered** include **the jangama** or wandering monks.
  - \* Lingayats believe that **on death** the **devotee** will be **united** with **Shiva**
  - \*And will not return to this world.
  - \* They **do not practise funerary rites** such as cremation, prescribed in the Dharmashastras.
  - \* Instead, they **ceremonially bury their dead**.
- They challenged the idea of caste and
- They also questioned the theory of rebirth.
- The Lingayats also encouraged certain practices disapproved in the Dharmashastras, such as post-puberty marriage and the remarriage of widows.

## Religious Ferment-North India

In **north India** deities such as Vishnu and Shiva were worshipped in temples,

**Brahmanas** occupied positions of importance, performing a range of secular and ritual functions.

Other religious leaders, such as the **Naths, Jogis and Siddhas**, were becoming popular among the artisanal groups

### New elements in this situation:

- \*Coming of Turks
- \*Followed by Islam
- \*And the Sufis

- \*These religious **leaders questioned** the authority of the Vedas,
- \*Expressed themselves in **languages** spoken by **ordinary people**,
- \*However, they were **not in a position to win** the support of the ruling elites.

## Teachings:

The principle -**the five “pillars”** of the faith:

- \* There is one God, **Allah**, and Prophet
- \* **Muhammad** is his **messenger** (shahada);
- \* offering **prayers five times** a day (namaz/sala);
- \* giving **alms** (zakat);
- \* **fasting** during the month of Ramzan (sawm);
- \* performing **the pilgrimage** to Mecca (hajj).

## Diversities in practice :

Because of:

- \***sectarian** affiliations (Sunni, Shi'a),
- \*the influence of **local customary** practices of converts

## Examples:

The Khojahs  
Arab merchants

**Practice of-Islam**

## Reasons for growth:

A group of religious-minded people called sufis -

\* Turned to **asceticism** and **mysticism** in protest against the growing materialism of the Caliphate as a religious and political institution.

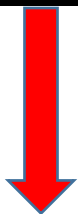
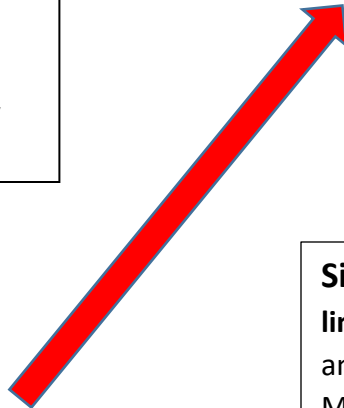
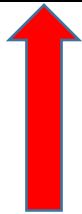
\* They were **critical of the dogmatic** definitions and scholastic methods of interpreting the Qur'an and sunna (Traditions of the Prophet) adopted by theologians

## Sufis laid emphasis on:

\* Seeking salvation **through intense devotion and love** for God by following His commands, and

\* By following the example of the **Prophet Muhammad** whom they regarded as a **perfect human being**.

\* The sufis thus sought **an interpretation of the Qur'an** on the basis of **their personal experience**



## The Growth of Sufism

**Silsila: means a chain**, signifying a continuous **link between master and disciple**, stretching as an unbroken spiritual genealogy to the Prophet Muhammad.

**Special Channels** that spiritual power and blessings were **transmitted** to devotees.

**Special rituals** of initiation-oath of allegiance, wore a patched garment, and shaved their hair.

## By the eleventh century-Sufism

\* Evolved into a **well-developed movement** with a body of literature on Quranic studies and sufi practices.

\* Institutionally, the sufis began to organise communities around the hospice or **khanqah** (Persian)



## Features of a Khanqah

\* It was **controlled** by a teaching **master** known as shaikh (in Arabic), pir or murshid (in Persian).

\* He **enrolled disciples** (murids) and appointed a successor (khalifa).

\* He established **rules** for spiritual conduct

## The cult of the shaikh :

\* When the **shaikh died**, his **tomb-shrine** (dargah) became the **centre of devotion** for his followers. This encouraged the **practice pilgrimage** or ziyarat to his grave.

\* People believed **that in death saints were united with God**, and were thus closer to Him than when living.

\* People sought their **blessings** to attain material and spiritual benefits.

### Most influential:

As they **adapted** successfully to the **local environment** and adopted several features of Indian devotional traditions.

### Shaikh Nizamuddin's hospice :

- \*Location : the banks of the river **Yamuna** in Ghyaspur,
- \*Comprised **several small rooms** and a **big hall** where the inmates and visitors lived and prayed.
- \*The Shaikh lived in a **small room** on the roof of the hall.
- \* A **veranda** surrounded the courtyard, and a boundary wall ran around the complex.
- \*There was an **open kitchen**

## Chishti Silsila

### Chisti devotionalism:

- \*Pilgrimage, called **ziyarat**, to tombs of sufi saints- for seeking the sufi's spiritual grace
- \*The **use of music and dance** including mystical chants performed by specially trained musicians or **qawwals** to evoke divine ecstasy.
- \*The sufis remember God either by **reciting** the zikr (the Divine Names) or evoking His Presence through **sama'** (literally, "audition") or performance of mystical music.
- \*Sama' **was integral** to the Chishtis, and exemplified interaction with indigenous devotional traditions.

### Languages and communication

- \*Adopted **local languages**.
- \***Composed verses** in the local language
- \*Composed **long poems** or masnavis to express ideas of divine love using human love as an allegory.
- \*Wrote **short poems in Dakhani**
- \*Other compositions were lurinama or **lullabies** and shadinama or **wedding songs**.



### A major feature :

Of the Chishti tradition was **austerity**, including maintaining a distance from worldly power.

### No absolute isolation from political power :

- \* The sufis accepted unsolicited **grants and donations** from the political elites.
- \*The Sultans in turn set up charitable **trusts** (auqaf ) as endowments for hospices and granted tax-free land (inam).
- \*The Chishtis accepted **donations in cash and kind**.

## Sufis and the state

### The Kings and the Sufis:

- \*Kings also required **legitimation** from the saints
  - \* Since the Sufi saints derived their authority directly from God - and **did not depend on jurists** to interpret the shari'a.
- The auliya could **intercede** with God in order to improve the material and spiritual conditions of ordinary human beings

### Instances of conflict between the Sultans and the sufis.

- \*To assert their authority, both expected that **certain rituals** be performed such as prostration and kissing of the feet.
- \*Occasionally the sufi shaikh was **addressed with high-sounding titles**. For example, the disciples of Nizamuddin Auliya addressed him as sultan-ul-mashaikh (literally, Sultan amongst shaikhs).

## Kabir

\*Verses Compiled in **three distinct** but overlapping traditions -The **Kabir Bijak** , **Kabir Granthavali** and many of his compositions are found in the **Adi Granth Sahib**

### \* Languages and dialects:

Some are composed in the special language of nirguna poets, the **sant bhasha**

Ulatbansi (upside-down sayings), are written in a form in which everyday meanings are inverted .

\*He described the **Ultimate Reality** as Allah, Khuda, Hazrat and Pir.

## Gurunank:

\*Advocated a form of **nirguna** bhakti.

\* He **rejected** sacrifices, ritual baths, image worship, austerities and the scriptures of both Hindus and Muslims .

\*The **Absolute** or “rab” **had no gender or form**

\*Simple way to connect to the Divine by

\*Remembering and **repeating the Divine Name**,

\*Expressing his ideas through hymns called “**shabad**”

\*Organised his followers into a **community**.

\* He set **up rules** for congregational worship (sangat ) involving collective recitation.

## Bhakti Saints-Northern India

## Mirabai :

\*Woman poet within the bhakti tradition.

\*Biographies have been reconstructed

primarily from the bhajans attributed to her, which were transmitted orally for centuries

\*Recognized Krishna, the avatar of Vishnu, as her lover.

\*Did not favour the norms of caste society .