

## Educational Implications of Sufi and Bhakti Philosophical Thoughts

### Sufi

The massive geographic presence of Islam in India can be explained by the tireless activity of Sufi preachers. Sufism had left a prevailing impact on religious, cultural, and social life in South Asia. The mystical form of Islam was introduced by Sufi saints. Sufi scholars traveling from all over continental Asia were instrumental and influential in the social, economic, and philosophic development of India. Besides preaching in major cities and centers of intellectual thought, Sufis reached out to poor and marginalized rural communities and preached in local dialects such as Urdu, Sindhi, Panjabi versus Persian, Turkish, and Arabic. Sufism emerged as a "moral and comprehensive socio-religious force" that even influenced other religious traditions such as Hinduism. Their traditions of devotional practices and modest living attracted all people. Their teachings of humanity, love for God and Prophet continue to be surrounded by mystical tales and folk songs today. Sufis were firm in abstaining from religious and communal conflict and strived to be peaceful elements of civil society. Furthermore, it is the attitude of accommodation, adaptation, piety, and charisma that continues to help Sufism remain as a pillar of mystical Islam in India.

### Bhakti

The Bhakti movement was a devotional transformation of medieval Hindu society, wherein Vedic rituals or alternatively [ascetic](#) monk-like lifestyle for [moksha](#) gave way to individualistic loving relationship with a personally defined god. Salvation which was previously considered attainable only by men of [Brahmin](#), [Kshatriya](#) and [Vaishya](#) castes, became available to everyone. Most scholars state that Bhakti movement provided women and members of the [Shudra](#) and [untouchable](#) communities an inclusive path to spiritual salvation.

Poet-saints grew in popularity, and literature on devotional songs in regional languages became profuse. These poet-saints championed a wide range of philosophical positions within their society, ranging from theistic dualism of [Dvaita](#) to absolute [monism](#) of [Advaita](#) Vedanta. Kabir, a poet-saint for example, wrote in [Upanishadic](#) style, the state of knowing truth.

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 (Gurui and Pirs), 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 located in Punjab, Sind and Bengal, the Chishti in Delhi and the Doab region, and the Firdausi 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. 'Blind faith' here refers to the Brahmins and ulema 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.

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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.