



Amir Khusrau and Sufism

For Prelims: [Amir Khusrau](#), [Sufism](#), [Khayal](#), [Hindustani music](#), [Bhakti Movement](#), [Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti](#).

For Mains: Contributions of Amir Khusrau. Spread of Sufism and its impacts in India.

Source: [IE](#)

Why in News?

The **Prime Minister** praised [Amir Khusrau](#) and [Sufism](#), highlighting it as India's **pluralistic heritage**.

Who is Amir Khusrau?

- **About:** He was a **13th century Sufi poet and musician** who was bestowed with the title of ***Tuti-yi-Hind***, the 'Parrot of India'.
 - His real name was **Abu'l Hasan Yamin ud-Din Khusrau** and was born in **Patiali, Etah** district of **Uttar Pradesh**.

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- **Contributions:** He made lasting contributions to Indian **classical music, Sufi qawwali, and Persian literature.**
 - **Language:** He is credited for developing **Hindavi**, a precursor to modern Hindi and Urdu.
 - His literary works blended **Persian, Arabic, and Indian traditions**, enriching **Indian linguistic heritage.**
 - His literary works include **Divans (poetry collections), Mathnawis (narrative poetry),** and **treatises.**
 - **Music:** He is credited with creating **new ragas** and developing musical forms like **Khayal** (a form of classical **Hindustani music**), and **Tarana** (a rhythmic, fast-paced vocal composition),
 - It is said that Amir Khusrau was one of the **first expounders** of the art of making **Ghazal and Qawwali** (devotional Sufi music traditions).
 - He is believed to have invented musical instruments such as the **sitar and tabla.**
- **Role in the Delhi Sultanate:** He served at least **five Sultans** i.e., **Muiz ud din Qaiqabad, Jalaluddin Khalji, Alauddin Khalji, Qutbuddin Mubarak Shah, and Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq,** and many other powerful patrons **over five decades.**
 - Sultan **Jalaluddin Khalji** honored him with the title of **Amir** in recognition of his literary excellence.
- **Sufi Influence:** Amir Khusrau was the beloved disciple of **Nizamuddin Auliya** and drew spiritual inspiration from him, shaping his **poetry and music.**

What is Sufism?

- **About:** **Sufism** is the **mystical and spiritual dimension of Islam**, focusing on **inner purification, love,** and direct connection with God (**Allah**).
 - It emerged in the **7th and 10th centuries CE** against the **rigidity of institutionalised**

religion and emphasizes **devotion, self-discipline, and renunciation of materialism** to attain spiritual enlightenment.

- It ran **parallel** to the **spiritual [Bhakti movement](#) in Hindu tradition** emphasizing **devotion (*bhakti*), love, and inner realization** over ritualistic practices.
- **Core Practices:** Sufis organized themselves into communities centered around **khanqahs (hospices)**, led by a **master (*shaikh* or *pir*)**.
 - Sufis established ***silsilas* (Orders of Sufi)** linking disciples to the **God**, and **Sufi tombs (*dargahs*)** became pilgrimage sites for spiritual blessings.
 - Sufis practice **self-mortification, *zikr* (remembrance of God), *sama* (musical recitals), and *Fana-o-Baqā* (dissolution of self for union with God)** to induce mystical states of ecstasy.
- **Sufism in India: Al-Hujwiri** was the earliest prominent Sufi in India, settled in **Lahore**, and authored ***Kashf-ul Mahjub***.
 - The **13th and 14th centuries** marked the growth of Sufism, spreading messages of compassion and love for all, known as ***sulh e-kul***.
- **Sufi Orders in India:** By the 12th century, the Sufis were organised in **12 orders or Silsilas**. Major Sufi Orders are:
 - **Chishti Order:** It is the **most influential** Sufi order in India and was founded by **[Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti](#)** in Ajmer.
 - Key persons associated with it were **Akbar** (follower of Salim Chishti), Qutbuddin Bhaktiyar Kaki, **Baba Farid, Nizamuddin Auliya, and Amir Khusrau**.
 - **Suhrawardi Order:** It was founded by **Bahauddin Zakaria** in Multan and embraced **luxury and state support**.
 - It combined **religious knowledge with mysticism**, stressing personal experience and inner purification for **divine knowledge**.
 - **Naqshbandi Order:** It emphasised the **primacy of *Shariat*** and opposed innovations (***biddat***) and **rejected** Sufi traditions like **musical assemblies (*sama*) and pilgrimages to saints' tombs**.
 - Mughal emperor **Aurangzeb** followed the Naqshbandi Order.
 - **Rishi Order (Kashmir):** It was established by **Shaikh Nuruddin Wali** and flourished in Kashmir during the **15th and 16th centuries..**
 - It draws inspiration from the popular **[Shaivite bhakti tradition](#)** and being rooted in the **socio-cultural milieu of the region**.
- **Impact:**
 - **Religious:** Emphasized **personal devotion, *tawhid*** (oneness of God), and equality, fostering **Hindu-Muslim coexistence**.
 - The Chishti order welcomed **all faiths**.
 - **Social:** Attracted marginalized groups, **weakened caste hierarchies**, and established ***khanqahs* and *madrasas*** as learning centers.
 - **Cultural:** Influenced Indian music, notably ***qawwali***, and enriched **vernacular literature** through poets like **Bulleh Shah** and **Sultan Bahu**.
 - **Political:** Inspired ***Sulh-i-Kul***, shaping Akbar's **religious tolerance policies**. Rulers patronized Sufis to reinforce authority and manage religious diversity

Similarities Between Bhakti and Sufi Movements

Aspect	Bhakti Movement	Sufi Movement
Core Belief	Devotion to a personal God (Saguna/Nirguna Bhakti)	Love for God (Ishq-e-Haqiqi) and inner purification
Rejection of Rituals	Opposed caste-based discrimination and idol worship	Provided alternative to orthodox Islamic legalism.
Emphasis on Love and Devotion	Bhakti as a path to liberation (Moksha)	Love as a way to unite with God (<i>Fana</i> - merging with God)
Simple Language for Masses	Used vernacular languages (Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, etc.)	Composed poetry in Hindavi, Persian, and Urdu

Conclusion

Amir Khusrau's contributions to **literature, music, and Sufism** reflect **India's pluralistic and syncretic traditions**. His works bridged Persian and Indian cultures, while Sufism, alongside the Bhakti movement, fostered **social harmony**. These traditions played a crucial role in shaping India's **composite cultural and religious ethos**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the contributions of sufism in shaping India's cultural and social heritage.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2019)

1. Saint Nimbarka was a contemporary of Akbar.
2. Saint Kabir was greatly influenced by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (d)

Q. With reference to the religious history of medieval India, the Sufi mystics were known to pursue which of the following practices? (2012)

1. Meditation and control of breath.
2. Severe ascetic exercises in a lonely place.
3. Recitation of holy songs to arouse a state of ecstasy in their audience

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Evaluate the nature of the Bhakti Literature and its contribution to Indian culture. (2021)

Q. Sufis and medieval mystic saints failed to modify either the religious ideas and practices or the outward structure of Hindu / Muslim societies to any appreciable extent. Comment. (2014)

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