



**Jindal School of International Affairs**  
India's First Global Policy School



# Sufi-Bhakti Poetry for a Fractured World

Fall 2026

MA(DLB) 0860

## Course Information

**Course Type:** Cross-elective

**Credit Hours:** 60 Hours

**Credits:** 4

**Location:** T3-T72

**Course Duration:** 15 Weeks

**Prerequisites:** None

## Instructor Information

**Raghav Dua** is Lecturer at the Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA) and Programmes Lead at the Jindal India Institute (JII) of O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU). He studies the intersection of politics and literature with a focus on the poetry of Bhakti and Sufi mystic poets as lenses into the human condition. As a founding member of JII, he has led the development and implementation of a range of initiatives at the Institute, most notably the Master of Arts (M.A.) in India Studies, for which he currently serves as Faculty Co-coordinator. He also developed and co-leads *We Are Meant to Sing as One: Bhakti-Sufi Poetry for a Fractured World*, a project that engages the poetry of Bhakti and Sufi mystic poets such as Kabir, Baba Farid, Amir Khusrau, Guru Nanak, Mirabai, Bulleh Shah, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and Waris Shah among others, as mediums for fostering peace, unity and coexistence in an increasingly divided and polarised world. Apart from this, he also serves as Editor-at-Large at E-International Relations, the world's leading open-access website and publisher in the field of International Relations (IR), with an annual readership of over 3 million.

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## 1. Course Description

Our world is organised around categories like religion, caste, gender, class, nation, etc., through which we come to understand ourselves and others. Identity, in this sense, is both necessary and unavoidable. At the same time, these very categories carry within them the potential for producing unequal power relations and rigid boundaries. They can become sites of conflict. Essentially, the same structures that enable belonging can also produce division. This course begins with that complexity. From there we ask: What do we do when the categories through which we organise and make sense of our world also become sites of conflict and division?

We turn to an important response from the Indian subcontinent. With the arrival (7th-8th century CE) and gradual spread of Islam over several centuries in a predominantly non-Islamic landscape, new forms of interactions and identities emerged. The result was a layered history of conflict and coexistence between Hinduism and Islam shaped by power politics as well as everyday life. However, more fundamentalist and exclusionary tendencies on both sides over the centuries have more often than not foregrounded division between the two religions.

It is within this context that *Sufi* (Islamic Mysticism) and *Bhakti* (Hindu Devotionalism) traditions came in close proximity, often drawing from each other. From this shared space emerged what we may today call a Sufi–Bhakti family of mystic poets: Kabir, Baba Farid, Amir Khusrau, Guru Nanak, Mirabai, Bulleh Shah, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and Waris Shah, among others. They offered sustained critiques of religious, caste and gender hierarchies. Some did so more directly than others, but across their work one finds a consistent effort to imagine alternative ways of being centered on love and a shared sense of the sacred. Their poetry and songs carry a set of convictions common to the spiritual core of both Sufism and Bhakti: that the divine is One and it transcends all names and forms; that love is the highest form of worship; and that liberation is lived in the here and now, cultivated through everyday acts that unsettle and break exploitative boundaries.

Over time, their voices travelled through singers and poets and became part of the shared cultural fabric of the subcontinent. You have likely encountered them, often without realising it: in Qawwalis like *Dama Dam Mast Kalandar*, *Chaap Tilak*, *Mera Piya Ghar Aya*, *Sanson ki Mala* or *Kanhiya Yaad Hai Kuch Bhi Hamari* or in the music of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Farid Ayaz, the Sabri Brothers, Abida Parveen, the Wadali Brothers, etc., or Coke Studio productions like *Par Chanaa De*, *Pasoori*, *Afreen Afreen*, *Tajdar-e-Haram* and others. What is regarded as popular music today carries within it long traditions of spiritual and socio-political critique.

This course turns to the ideas of these mystic poets as a way of responding to conflicts and divisions of our own times and makes a conscious attempt to go beyond elite histories and engage with the so-called “low” politics of the everyday. Through workshops and curated sessions, this course will offer students an immersive engagement with Sufi–Bhakti poetry as a lived practice of coexistence. Participants will listen to songs and poems and engage in interesting exercises, in addition to interactive lectures and group discussions. The aim is not just to learn *about* these traditions but to experience how they work on the *Self* and unsettle rigid identities, opening up new ways of relating to others.

In doing so, the course treats poetry and music as forms of everyday socio-political action. Together, we will contemplate what it means to hold on to love and unity in times of division and whether these seemingly simple engagements might, in fact, carry the power to reimagine the political itself.

## 2. Course Intended Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Explain the nature of divisions in contemporary societies and why the question of coexistence remains both difficult and urgent;
- Understand how ideas such as love, humility, compassion, courage and shared humanity can challenge rigid identities and open up possibilities for peaceful coexistence;
- Employ Sufi–Bhakti poetry as a lived practice of coexistence;
- Trace the lives and ideas of mystic poets such as Kabir, Baba Farid, Amir Khusrau, Guru Nanak, Mirabai, Bulleh Shah, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and Waris Shah among others and draw out key themes in their poetry;
- Reflect critically on their own assumptions about identity, difference and belonging and how these shape their relationships with others;
- Apply these insights to think through and navigate differences in their own social and cultural contexts.

## 3. Course Structure and Materials

### Course Structure

This course is organised around a series of interconnected themes that will provide students a deep and wide immersion into Sufi–Bhakti poetry as a lived practice of coexistence. While the course is still under development, it will be broadly structured around 4–5 thematic clusters that will enable a focused yet flexible exploration of ideas and experiences. Indicative themes include:

#### *Had Anhad*<sup>1</sup>

This cluster explores how the world is organised around categories like religion, caste, gender, class, nation, etc., and how these come to shape identity and conflict. Turning to the poetry of mystics such as Kabir, Guru Nanak, Bulleh Shah and Mirabai, it foregrounds the call to move beyond divisions and towards an experience of the boundless (*anhad*). Together we will explore what it means to go beyond boundaries and to live with an openness that resists enclosure and affirms a deeper and shared ground of existence.

#### *Love as Rebellion*

This cluster will draw on stories from Delhi, as well as the shared cultural worlds of Punjab and Sindh. We will explore narratives (*qissa*) such as Heer-Ranjha, Sohni-Mahiwal, Sassi-Punnun and Mirza-Sahiban, along with others like Khusrau-Nizam (including the story of Sufi Basant) and Laila-Majnun, in addition to the trove of Hindavi-Sufi romances (*premakhyans*), where love becomes a way of pushing back against the social order and a metaphor for longing and the search for Truth.

***\*\*Complete set of themes will be shared with students during the first session of the course.***

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<sup>1</sup> This title is drawn from the 2009 film *Had-Anhad: Journeys with Ram and Kabir* by Shabnam Virmani.

Each theme will be approached through a combination of activities designed to move beyond conventional classroom formats. These include:

- Poetry writing workshops
- Listening sessions (Sufi music, Qawwali, Bhakti compositions, etc.)
- Film screenings and guided discussions
- Interesting exercises and games
- Select readings and interactive lectures

### | Course Materials |

**(a) Poems and Songs:** A curated handout of all poems and songs to be engaged with in each session will be shared with students in advance. These selections will draw from a range of Sufi and Bhakti compositions and will be accompanied by appropriate English translations to ensure accessibility.

**(b) The Kabir Project Films:** A series of films by Shabnam Virmani exploring the poetry and living traditions of Kabir and other mystic poets across South Asia. These films beautifully capture how Sufi-Bhakti poetry challenges boundaries and divisions today. They will constitute a major component of the course.

- (1) *Meera, Who Is Krishna To You After All?* (2022)
- (2) *My Sorrow Cracked the Mountain: The Legend of Sasui* (2022)
- (3) *How Can I Forget? The Legend of Marui* (2022)
- (4) *Don't Fall In Love With Those Who Wander In Boats* (2021)
- (5) *Chalo Hamara Des (Come to My Country): Journeys with Kabir and Friends* (2009)
- (6) *Had-Anhad (Bounded-Boundless): Journeys with Ram and Kabir* (2009)
- (7) *Koi Sunta Hai (Someone Listens): Journeys with Kumar and Kabir* (2009)
- (8) *Kabira Khada Bazar Mein (In the Market Stands Kabir): Journeys with Sacred and Secular Kabir* (2009)

### (c) Recommended Readings

- Rikhi, Vipul. 2023. *Drunk on Love: The Life, Vision and Songs of Kabir*. New Delhi: HarperCollins India.
- Rikhi, Vipul, with Shabnam Virmani. 2019. *One Palace, a Thousand Doorways: Songlines Through Bhakti, Sufi and Baul Oral Traditions*. New Delhi: Speaking Tiger.
- Virmani, Shabnam. 2024. *Burn Down Your House: Provocations from Kabir*. New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Books.
- Virmani, Shabnam, and Vipul Rikhi. 2019. *I Saw Myself: Journeys with Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai*. New Delhi: Penguin India.
- Hess, Linda. 2015. *Bodies of Song: Kabir Oral Traditions and Performative Worlds in North India*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Khusrau, Amir. 2011. *In the Bazaar of Love: The Selected Poetry of Amir Khusrau*. Translated by Paul Losensky and Sunil Sharma. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Hameed, Syeda Saiyidain, and Reyaz Ahmad. 2024. *His Miracle, Not His Sin: The Rubaiyat of Sarmad*. New Delhi: Speaking Tiger.
- Chaturvedi, Manjari, ed. 2025. *Qawwali: The Call of Hearts in Love*. New Delhi: Om Books International.
- Dua, Raghav, and Michal Erlich, eds. 2026. *Singing Oneness: Poems for a Fractured World*. Delhi NCR: Jindal India Institute.

#### 4. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

**(a) Do I need prior knowledge of Sufism or Bhakti to take this course?**

No. The course is designed to be accessible to all students, regardless of their prior background. We will build our understanding step by step through poetry, music, interesting activities and in-class discussions.

**(b) Do I need to be a poet or a singer to participate?**

No. You are most welcome if you are, but it is not required. All assignments and in-class activities will be designed in a way that allows everyone to participate meaningfully, regardless of their background.

**(c) What if I do not understand Hindi, Punjabi or Urdu?**

That is not a problem. The course will be conducted entirely in English. All poems and songs will be presented with English translations and no prior knowledge of any other language is required.

**(d) What kind of material will we engage with in the course?**

The course will combine poems, songs, films, games and select readings. A handout of poems and songs will be provided in advance of each class, along with their English translations.

**(e) Will the course involve listening to music or watching films?**

Yes. Listening to Sufi and Bhakti music and engaging with films (especially from The Kabir Project) is central to the course. These are not supplementary but integral to how we approach the topic.

**(f) How is this course relevant today?**

The course speaks directly to a world marked by division and conflict. It explores how older traditions of coexistence can offer ways of thinking and living differently in the present.

**(g) Will attendance and participation be important?**

Yes. Since the course relies heavily on in-class engagement, regular attendance and active participation are essential.

#### 5. Assessment Structure and Grading

This course will follow a **continuous assessment model** in which the **internal component (70 marks)** will take the form of an **individual portfolio** developed progressively over the semester through regular feedback. This process will include the completion of two reflective pieces and one group project. **A detailed assessment brief** including due dates, specific guidelines, prompts, expectations, etc., will be shared during the first session of the course.

There will also be an **end-term exam** carrying **30 marks** which will build upon your portfolio submission.

## Grade Definition

Letter Grade	Percentage of Marks	Grade Points	Comments
O	80 and above	8	<b>Outstanding:</b> Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability.
A+	75-79	7.5	<b>Excellent:</b> Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and critical and analytical ability.
A	70-74	7	<b>Very Good:</b> Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organizational capacity, ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles, critically analyse existing material and originality in thinking and presentation.
A-	65-69	6	<b>Good:</b> Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills.
B+	60-64	5	<b>Fair:</b> Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B	55-59	4	<b>Acceptable:</b> Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of the study and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B-	50-54	3	<b>Marginal:</b> Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials, and poor critical and analytical skills.
P1	45-49	2	<b>Pass 1:</b> Pass with Basic understanding of the subject matter.
P2	40-44	1	<b>Pass 2:</b> Pass with Rudimentary understanding of the subject matter.
F	Below 40	0	<b>Fail:</b> Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials. Will require repeating the course.

**Note:** The standard JSIA attendance policy will apply for the purposes of this cross-elective.

## 6. Course and Project Integration



# We Are Meant to Sing as One

# Bhakti-Sufi Poetry

for a Fractured World

This course is part of a larger academic-creative initiative called *We Are Meant to Sing as One: Bhakti-Sufi Poetry for a Fractured World*, led by Prof. (Dr.) Michal Erlich and Prof. Raghav Dua at the Jindal India Institute (JII). The project engages the poetry of Bhakti and Sufi mystic poets such as Kabir, Baba Farid, Amir Khusrau, Guru Nanak, Mirabai, Bulleh Shah, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and Waris Shah among others, as mediums for fostering peace, unity and coexistence in an increasingly divided and polarised world. It employs practices such as contemplation, deep listening, singing, recitation, poetry writing, translation, performance and other creative responses to engage with questions of coexistence. Launched in August 2025, it emerged as a participant project and the *Winner* of the Fall 2025 *Allies of Coexistence* programme under the *Manara Youth Coexistence Initiative* by the Manara Centre for Coexistence and Dialogue, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

As participants in this course, students will also have the opportunity to engage with the project directly. Those who perform well will be invited to be part of select project activities and events organised by the Institute. To learn more about the project and its ongoing work, please visit our Instagram page: [@singing.oneness](https://www.instagram.com/singing.oneness).