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Echoes of the unuttered: Reading Mirabai and Rabia through the Prism of Silence

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Abstract:

This paper offers a comparative exploration of silence as a central, spiritual and poetic authority in the devotional works of Mirabai and Rabia al-Basri, situating their voices within the Bhakti and Sufi mystical traditions respectively. Moving beyond vocal devotion and lyrical abundance, the study examines silence not as absence, but as a deliberate mode of knowing, resistance, and freedom. In Mirabai's poetry, silence emerges alongside devotional abundance—songs, dance, and longing—yet it simultaneously signifies withdrawal from social norms, patriarchal injunctions, and institutional religion. Her silences articulate a refusal to justify devotion before worldly authority, allowing love itself to become a speech.

Rabia al-Basri, by contrast, employs poetic minimalism where silence performs a more radical function—the annihilation of the self (*fana*) and the erasure of fear, reward, and ritual mediation. Her quiet rejection of paradise and hell destabilizes institutional theology, foregrounding love for God as an unconditioned, interior experience. Across both traditions, silence becomes a critique of religious structures that privilege doctrine over lived devotion, while enabling a spiritual freedom rooted in surrender rather than submission.

By reading silence as spiritual authority, poetic strategy, and ethical stance, this paper argues that Bhakti and Sufi mysticism offer complementary modes of liberation—one expressive and affective, the other austere and contemplative. The study ultimately positions silence as a unifying mystical language that transcends religious boundaries, fostering harmony through inward awakening rather than doctrinal conformity, and reaffirming devotional poetry as a vital component of the Indian Knowledge Tradition.

Keywords:

Silence and Mysticism, Bhakti Literature, Sufi Poetry, Spiritual Authority, Religious Harmony, Self-Annihilation (*Fana*)

Introduction:

Silence has long been occupied as a paradoxical position within spiritual and philosophical discourse—simultaneously perceived as absence and plenitude, negation and revelation. Within the Indian Knowledge Tradition, silence (*mauna*) is not merely the cessation

of speech but a mode of higher knowing, where experiential wisdom (anubhava) surpasses discursive thought. The Upanishadic declaration- “Yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha”- asserts that ultimate truth withdraws from language and intellect, foregrounding silence as a legitimate epistemological ground. Mystical traditions, both within and beyond India, have thus treated silence as an authoritative spiritual language, capable of expressing what words cannot.

Bhakti and Sufi mysticism, though emerging from distinct religious contexts, function as parallel spiritual movements that privilege interior devotion over institutionalized religion. Bhakti saints such as Mirabai articulate devotion through song, longing, and emotional excess, yet beneath this lyrical abundance lies a profound silence- a refusal to negotiate faith with social, patriarchal, or ritual authority. Her repeated withdrawal from worldly affiliations, her acceptance of exile and suffering, and her singular attachment to Lord Krishna suggests a silence that resists explanation and justification. As Kabir famously asserts, “Pothe padh padh jag mua,” knowledge acquired through texts and institutions remains inadequate without inner realization.

Similarly, Sufi mysticism, exemplified by Rabia al-Basri, advances silence as a path toward fana- the annihilation of the self in divine love. Rabia’s austere verses reject both paradise and hell as motivations for worship, embodying a spiritual minimalism where silence replaces doctrinal speech. Her assertion that God must be loved “for Himself alone” destabilizes orthodox theological frameworks, echoing the Sufi emphasis on ma‘rifa (gnosis) over ilm (formal knowledge). As later Sufi poets like Rumi would affirm, “Silence is the language of God; all else is poor translation.”

The present study situates Mirabai and Rabia al-Basri within a comparative mystical framework to examine silence as spiritual authority, poetic strategy, and ethical resistance. It seeks to explore how silence functions as critique of religious institutions, as a means of self-annihilation, and as a pathway to distinct yet convergent modes of freedom in Bhakti and Sufi traditions. Employing close textual analysis and comparative literary methodology, the paper aims to demonstrate that silence emerges not as withdrawal from the world, but as a transformative force fostering spiritual autonomy and interfaith harmony within the broader continuum of the Indian Knowledge Tradition.

Silence as Spiritual Authority in Mystical Traditions:

In mystical traditions across cultures, silence functions as a significant epistemological category that challenges the authority of scripture, doctrine, and institutionalized religion. While religious systems traditionally derive legitimacy from sacred texts and codified interpretations, mysticism consistently foregrounds experiential knowledge over textual mediation. Within the Indian Knowledge Tradition, this epistemic shift is foundational. The Upanishadic assertion that ultimate reality transcends language and cognition - “yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha” - positions silence (mauna) as a legitimate and authoritative mode of knowing. Silence, therefore, is not conceived as the absence of meaning but as a condition through which truth is directly apprehended.

Bhakti and Sufi mysticism articulate this privileging of interior knowledge through parallel conceptual frameworks. Bhakti traditions emphasize anubhava - lived, embodied

realization—as superior to scriptural expertise. Saints such as Kabir openly critique textual absolutism, warning against reliance on books devoid of inner awakening. Mirabai's devotional stance exemplifies this resistance. Although her poetry is rich in emotional and lyrical expression, her silence emerges in moments of refusal - refusal to justify her devotion before familial, royal, or religious authority. This strategic withdrawal from discursive engagement functions as a form of spiritual autonomy, wherein devotion itself becomes the source of legitimacy rather than doctrinal validation.

Sufi mysticism advances a comparable distinction between 'ilm (formal or acquired knowledge) and ma'rifa (gnostic, experiential knowledge). Rabia al-Basri's poetry reflects this epistemic hierarchy through its deliberate theological restraint. Her rejection of paradise and hell as motivations for worship represents a radical departure from normative religious discourse. Rather than articulating an alternative theology, Rabia's minimalistic utterances enact a form of silence that destabilizes reward-based religiosity. This orientation aligns with the Sufi concept of fana, where the annihilation of the ego entails the dissolution of language, desire, and doctrinal attachment. Silence, in this context, becomes both the medium and the outcome of spiritual realization.

Contemporary theoretical frameworks further illuminate the authority of silence. Jacques Derrida's critique of logocentrism challenges the assumption that meaning is fully present in language or texts. His notion of différance—the perpetual deferral of meaning—resonates with mystical claims that ultimate truth resists articulation. Mystical silence may thus be read as an anticipatory critique of linguistic closure, revealing the instability of doctrinal certainty. Similarly, Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse and power enables silence to be interpreted as a strategic refusal—a mode of resistance that operates outside dominant regimes of religious knowledge.

Osho's reflections on mysticism offer an interpretative bridge between classical spiritual traditions and modern philosophical inquiry. He consistently emphasizes that truth is transformative and experiential rather than scriptural, describing sacred texts as indicative rather than constitutive of truth. For Osho, silence is not passivity but heightened awareness—a condition in which knowledge is internalized rather than represented. This perspective aligns closely with both Bhakti surrender and Sufi annihilation, reinforcing silence as an active epistemic state.

Silence also acquires a distinctly gendered significance in mystical traditions. For women mystics such as Mirabai and Rabia al-Basri, silence becomes a means of negotiating spiritual authority within patriarchal religious structures that often exclude women from doctrinal discourse. Their reluctance to engage in theological debate or institutional justification does not signify marginality but constitutes an alternative mode of authority grounded in lived devotion. In this sense, silence functions as both spiritual transcendence and a subtle form of resistance, enabling women mystics to claim legitimacy beyond institutional sanction.

Thus, silence in Bhakti and Sufi mysticism emerges as a critical epistemological and ethical strategy—one that challenges scriptural dominance, privileges inner knowledge, and redefines spiritual authority through experience rather than discourse.

Mirabai: Devotional Abundance and Strategic Silence:

Mirabai's Bhakti poetry occupies a distinctive position within the Indian devotional canon due to its simultaneous articulation of emotional abundance and strategic silence. Her verses are marked by song, dance, longing, and affective intensity, yet they are equally characterized by a sustained withdrawal from social, patriarchal, and institutional authority. This coexistence of expressive devotion and deliberate refusal constitutes Mirabai's distinctive spiritual strategy. Her Bhakti is not merely lyrical effusion but a form of prem-bhakti through which surrender to the divine generates freedom from all competing worldly claims.

At the level of poetic expression, Mirabai's devotion is intensely embodied. Her repeated assertion of longing—"मोहे तो प्रभु मिलन की आस"—foregrounds desire not as a weakness but as a legitimate spiritual force. The imagery of restless eyes that "नैना निशदिन बरस रहे, तेरे दर्शन को तरस रहे" situates longing (viraha) as a continuous, lived state rather than a momentary emotion. Bhakti aesthetics traditionally validate such affective excess, recognizing bhava as a path to realization. Mirabai's devotion thus challenges ascetic hierarchies that privilege restraint and detachment, offering instead a spirituality grounded in emotional truth and embodied practice.

Song and dance further function as modes of devotion through which the body becomes a site of divine presence. In the declaration "पग घुंघरू बांध मीरा नाची रे" dance emerges as a performative assertion of spiritual belonging. The body, often regulated and silenced within patriarchal social orders, is reclaimed as an instrument of worship. This performative devotion disrupts normative expectations of female decorum, allowing Mirabai to articulate faith beyond verbal or textual mediation.

Yet, Mirabai's devotional abundance must be read alongside her equally significant silences. While she speaks incessantly to the divine, she remains notably silent before worldly authority. Her repeated assertion—"मेरे तो गिरधर गोपाल, दूसरो न कोई"—functions not only as a theological claim but as a refusal to recognize any alternative locus of authority. This exclusivity of devotion enables Mirabai to withdraw from dialogue with familial, royal, and religious institutions that seek to regulate her conduct. Silence here operates as a strategic refusal, a conscious disengagement from discursive spaces that demand justification or conformity.

This withdrawal acquires particular significance in relation to religious institutions. Mirabai's poetry consistently prioritizes direct intimacy with Krishna over ritualized religiosity. Her invocation of divine intervention—"हरि तुम हरो जन की पीर"—appeals to a compassionate, accessible deity rather than a mediated, institutionalized form of worship. By bypassing priestly authority and temple ritual, Mirabai aligns herself with the broader Bhakti critique of religious formalism. Her silence toward institutional religion does not signal irreverence but reflects a conviction that authentic devotion requires no external validation.

The gendered dimension of this silence is central to Mirabai's spiritual politics. As a woman operating within a deeply patriarchal social structure, Mirabai's devotion is repeatedly

labelled as transgressive—“लोग कहें मीरा भई बावरी.” Rather than countering these accusations through rational argument or doctrinal defense, Mirabai responds through silence and continued devotion. This refusal to enter male-dominated discursive frameworks transforms silence into a mode of resistance. Feminist readings of Bhakti have emphasized that such withdrawal allows women mystics to claim spiritual authority without seeking legitimacy from institutions that systematically exclude them.

Mirabai’s rejection of patriarchal authority is also evident in her renunciation of marital and royal identity. The assertion “जाके सर मोर मुकुट, मेरो पति सोई” redefines marriage itself, displacing the earthly husband with the divine beloved. This symbolic reconfiguration enables Mirabai to escape the social constraints imposed upon women’s bodies and loyalties. By relocating allegiance exclusively to the divine, she neutralizes patriarchal control without direct confrontation.

Theologically, Mirabai’s devotion exemplifies freedom through surrender. Her repeated pleas—“अब तो थाम लो राम” and “मोहे पार लगाओ सुखधाम”—do not reflect helplessness but trust in divine agency. Prem-bhakti, as articulated in her poetry, dissolves the ego not through ascetic negation but through emotional immersion. This surrender does not diminish subjectivity; rather, it reconstitutes the self around divine intimacy. Freedom here emerges paradoxically through attachment, as devotion becomes the means of liberation from social coercion.

From a philosophical perspective, this mode of freedom resonates with non-dual strands of Bhakti thought, wherein the self is transformed rather than erased. Mirabai’s declaration “मनवा तुम बिन लागत नाही” suggests a self no longer oriented toward worldly attachments. Identity is reorganized around devotion, allowing Mirabai to inhabit a liminal space beyond normative structures of power. Her silence before the world, coupled with speech before the divine, establishes an ethical distinction between love and authority—speech belongs to love, silence to power.

Thus, Mirabai’s poetry demonstrates that song and silence are not oppositional but complementary devotional strategies. While song articulates longing and union, silence protects devotion from institutional appropriation. Through devotional abundance and strategic withdrawal, Mirabai constructs a mysticism that is emotionally expansive yet politically restrained, surrender-based yet liberating. Her Bhakti ultimately reveals silence not as absence but as a deliberate, empowering spiritual stance within the Indian Knowledge Tradition.

Rabia al-Basri: Poetic Minimalism and Annihilation of the Self:

Rabia al-Basri occupies a foundational position in Sufi mysticism not through doctrinal innovation or institutional leadership, but through a radical interiorization of faith articulated in poetic restraint. Unlike devotional traditions marked by lyrical abundance, Rabia’s mysticism is distinguished by poetic minimalism, where silence functions as an ascetic discipline and a spiritual methodology. Her verses are sparse, aphoristic, and uncompromising, reflecting a spirituality that seeks not expression but erasure—of ego, desire, and religious

calculation. In this sense, Rabia's silence is not merely stylistic but ontological, shaping both her poetic form and her mystical ethic.

Silence in Rabia's poetry operates first as an ascetic discipline. Asceticism in Sufism is not limited to bodily renunciation but extends to the renunciation of speech, desire, and conceptual certainty. Rabia's minimal utterances suggest a consciousness disciplined to resist excess—emotional, verbal, or theological. Her poetry avoids elaborate metaphor or narrative, favoring instead declarative clarity that borders on silence. This restraint aligns with early Sufi practices of *zuhd* (renunciation), where speech is carefully measured to prevent the ego from reasserting itself through articulation. Silence, here, becomes a form of spiritual vigilance.

This disciplined restraint underpins Rabia's most radical theological position: love for God beyond fear and reward. In rejecting both paradise and hell as motivations for worship, Rabia dismantles the transactional logic that undergirds orthodox religiosity. Her well-known declaration—

“If I worship You from fear of Hell, burn me in Hell;

If I worship You from hope of Paradise, bar me from its gates”—

redefines devotion as an unconditional act, detached from outcomes. This refusal introduces silence into theological discourse by eliminating negotiation, petition, and expectation. Love, once purified of motive, no longer requires speech. Worship becomes presence rather than performance.

From a theoretical perspective, this position can be read as an ethical absolutism that resists institutional control. Orthodox religious systems often rely on fear and promise as regulatory mechanisms; Rabia's rejection of both constitutes a quiet but profound critique of religious authority. Importantly, this critique is not articulated through polemic but through restraint. Rabia does not argue against doctrine; she simply renders it irrelevant. Silence thus becomes a mode of dissent, operating outside discursive confrontation.

Central to Rabia's mysticism is the Sufi concept of *fana*—the annihilation of the self in divine presence. Her poetry repeatedly gestures toward death not as an endpoint but as an intimacy with the Divine. In the lines, “So beautiful appeared my death—knowing who then I would kiss,” death signifies the final dissolution of ego-consciousness. The self that desires reward, recognition, or certainty must disappear for union to occur. Silence here marks the erasure of subjectivity, where speech—always tied to identity—can no longer persist.

This annihilative silence finds further articulation in Rabia's engagement with prophetic wisdom. Her invocation of the saying, “Die before you die,” reflects a spiritual pedagogy that prioritizes inner death over outward observance. Such an orientation destabilizes orthodox Islam's emphasis on legalism (*shari'a*) by foregrounding inward transformation (*haqiqa*). Rabia's minimal speech enacts this inward turn, where silence becomes the linguistic equivalent of ego-death.

Rabia's critique of religious institutions also emerges in her expansive vision of unity. In verses that assert, “In my soul there is a temple, a shrine, a mosque, a church where I kneel,” Rabia dissolves spatial and doctrinal boundaries. This interiorization of sacred space negates

the authority of institutional religion without overt rejection. By locating worship within the soul, Rabia renders external religious structures secondary. Silence here is spatial as well as verbal—a withdrawal from institutional sites into inward sanctity.

Theoretical insights from contemporary philosophy illuminate this strategy. Michel Foucault's understanding of power suggests that silence can function as a form of resistance when it refuses participation in dominant discourses. Rabia's mysticism exemplifies this refusal. Rather than engaging theological debates or juridical interpretations, she adopts a posture of inward absorption. Jacques Derrida's critique of logocentrism further supports this reading; Rabia's silence exposes the instability of theological language by refusing to anchor meaning in doctrine. Truth, for Rabia, is not spoken but inhabited.

Osho's reflections on Sufi mysticism offer an interpretive bridge between Rabia's ascetic silence and modern spiritual thought. Osho emphasizes that authentic spirituality begins where language ends, asserting that silence is not emptiness but heightened awareness. Rabia's poetry embodies this principle. Her minimalism is not a lack of expression but a saturation of meaning that resists articulation. Silence, in this sense, is not absence but fullness.

The gendered implications of Rabia's silence are particularly significant. As a woman mystic in a male-dominated religious tradition, Rabia's refusal to assume a public theological voice can be read as strategic rather than submissive. Denied institutional authority, she redefines authority itself by grounding it in spiritual realization rather than discourse. Her silence enables her to bypass patriarchal structures without directly confronting them, allowing devotion to function as a form of self-legitimation.

In contrast to Mirabai's devotional abundance, Rabia's mysticism represents a different mode of freedom—one achieved through subtraction rather than expression. Where Mirabai sings, Rabia withdraws; where Mirabai dances, Rabia dissolves. Yet both arrive at liberation by disengaging from institutional mediation. Rabia's poetic minimalism thus exemplifies a mysticism of restraint, where silence operates as ascetic discipline, ethical critique, and ontological transformation.

Ultimately, Rabia al-Basri's poetry demonstrates that silence can function as the highest form of devotion. Through restraint, erasure of ego, and refusal of religious transaction, she articulates a spirituality that transcends doctrine without opposing it, critiques orthodoxy without polemic, and achieves freedom through annihilation rather than assertion. Her mysticism affirms silence not as withdrawal from faith, but as its most uncompromising realization.

Silence as Critique of Religious Institutions:

In Bhakti and Sufi mysticism, silence functions as a sustained and ethically charged critique of religious institutions that prioritize ritual observance, doctrinal conformity, and externally sanctioned modes of devotion. Rather than rejecting religion outright, mystic poets withdraw from its institutional expressions, foregrounding lived spirituality over ritual performance. This withdrawal is not marked by polemical opposition but by silence—a refusal to allow faith to be circumscribed by codified practices or clerical authority.

A fundamental tension in both traditions lies between ritualized religion and experiential devotion. Institutional religion relies on repetitive acts and prescribed forms to authenticate belief, whereas mystical devotion privileges interior transformation. Mirabai's Bhakti repeatedly minimizes ritual mediation by emphasizing direct relationality with the divine. Her assertion that the body's ornaments and worldly markers have been relinquished—"तन का गहना मैं सब कुछ दिन"—signals a conscious detachment from socially sanctioned symbols of religious and marital identity. Here, ritualized femininity and ritualized devotion collapse together, replaced by inward surrender. Silence operates through this renunciation: rather than verbally rejecting ritual norms, Mirabai renders them irrelevant through lived devotion.

Rabia al-Basri advances a similar critique within Sufi mysticism by dismantling the economy of fear and reward that undergirds orthodox religious practice. In a system where ritual observance is often tied to moral accounting, Rabia's declaration that worship motivated by paradise or hell is inadequate introduces a radical ethical shift. Her later insistence—"But if I worship You for Yourself alone, grant me then the beauty of Your Face"—reorients devotion away from institutional incentives toward unconditional love. Silence enters this framework as theological restraint: Rabia does not propose an alternative ritual system; she eliminates the need for one.

This critique extends to the concept of sacred space, a cornerstone of institutional religion. Temples, mosques, and churches function as regulated sites of authority, access, and legitimacy. Mystical poetry, however, internalizes these spaces, thereby dissolving their exclusivity. Rabia's affirmation—"In my soul there is a temple, a shrine, a mosque, a church where I kneel"—reconfigures sacred geography by locating holiness within the self. This inward relocation does not deny the existence of religious spaces but renders them symbolically secondary. Silence operates spatially here, withdrawing sanctity from architectural and institutional boundaries without explicit repudiation.

Bhakti devotion similarly resists spatial regulation by emphasizing omnipresent divinity. Mirabai's repeated appeals to the divine as an immediate rescuer—"हरि तुम हरो जन की पीर"—bypass institutional mediation altogether. The devotee does not approach God through sanctioned spaces or rituals but through intimate invocation. Such immediacy undermines the authority of religious intermediaries, while silence shields devotion from being subsumed into institutional control.

From a theoretical perspective, Michel Foucault's analysis of discourse and power offers a useful lens for understanding this withdrawal. Religious institutions maintain authority by determining legitimate forms of speech, practice, and belief. Mystical silence disrupts this mechanism by refusing participation in authorized discourse. By speaking minimally—or not at all—about doctrine and law, mystics reposition authority within experience rather than institution. Silence thus becomes a strategic displacement of power.

Jacques Derrida's critique of logocentrism further illuminates this phenomenon. Institutional religion often depends on fixed interpretations of sacred texts, presuming stable meaning and absolute truth. Mystical silence exposes the limits of such certainty. When Rabia

asserts, “Prayer should bring us to an altar where no walls or names exist,” she destabilizes the very linguistic and symbolic structures through which religious institutions operate. Meaning here is not anchored in names, categories, or dogma, but in an unarticulated unity beyond language.

Silence also enables a devotional ethics that exceeds dogma. Rather than moral regulation through commandments and prohibitions, Bhakti and Sufi mysticism foreground ethical transformation through love, humility, and surrender. Rabia’s vision of compassion—“Every cry of the heart is attended by light’s own arms”—suggests an ethic rooted in divine responsiveness rather than legal obligation. Similarly, Mirabai’s persistent return to suffering and trust implies an ethical posture shaped by fidelity rather than compliance.

Osho’s critique of organized religion resonates with this mystical orientation. He distinguishes between religion as repetition and spirituality as realization, arguing that truth must be encountered rather than rehearsed. Silence, in this framework, becomes the space where ethical transformation occurs, uncontaminated by institutional expectation. Though modern in articulation, this insight echoes the mystics’ conviction that devotion loses authenticity when reduced to ritual performance.

Thus, silence in Bhakti and Sufi traditions functions as a quiet but profound critique of religious institutions. By privileging lived spirituality over ritual, interior sanctity over sacred architecture, and ethical transformation over doctrinal adherence, mystic poets reimagine religion as an inward journey rather than an institutional affiliation. Silence sustains this reimagining, allowing devotion to remain fluid, inclusive, and resistant to dogmatic enclosure—without abandoning faith itself.

Freedom and Selfhood: Bhakti and Sufi Modes of Liberation:

Bhakti and Sufi mysticism articulate liberation not as social autonomy or rational self-mastery, but as a reconfiguration of selfhood through devotion. Within both traditions, freedom emerges paradoxically through surrender; however, the modalities of this surrender differ significantly. Bhakti mysticism, as exemplified by Mirabai, emphasizes expressive freedom, whereas Sufi mysticism, represented by Rabia al-Basri, privileges contemplative freedom rooted in interior dissolution. These divergent paths converge in their shared aim: union with the divine through the transformation, rather than assertion, of the self.

Expressive freedom in Bhakti is grounded in presence—emotional, bodily, and relational. Devotion manifests through song, movement, and affective intensity, enabling the devotee to inhabit the world fully while remaining inwardly aligned with the divine. This form of freedom does not negate the self but reorients it. Philosophically, this resonates with Martin Buber’s notion of the I–Thou relationship, where authentic existence arises through relational presence rather than objectification. In Bhakti devotion, the self remains intact but is continually reshaped through intimate engagement with the divine beloved. Freedom, here, is experiential and participatory, achieved through nearness rather than negation.

Sufi mysticism, by contrast, articulates freedom as contemplative absence. Rabia al-Basri’s spiritual trajectory culminates in *fana*, the annihilation of ego-consciousness, where the self dissolves into divine presence. This mode of liberation aligns closely with Ibn ‘Arabi’s

metaphysical conception of unity, wherein individual identity is understood as provisional and ultimately illusory. The Sufi seeker attains freedom not by expanding the self, but by emptying it. Silence, restraint, and inwardness become essential disciplines, marking a movement away from expressive presence toward ontological disappearance.

The dialectic of presence and absence is thus central to both traditions. Bhakti affirms presence as a mode of divine intimacy, while Sufism embraces absence as the precondition for union. Yet these are not oppositional but complementary spiritual grammars. Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of transcendence offers a useful lens here: he argues that true encounter involves both proximity and withdrawal, presence tempered by ethical restraint. Similarly, Bhakti's presence is moderated by surrender, while Sufi absence culminates in an intensified form of divine closeness.

Osho's reflections on freedom further illuminate this convergence. He contends that freedom is not the assertion of will but the disappearance of resistance, suggesting that liberation occurs when the self ceases to impose itself upon experience. This insight bridges Bhakti and Sufi mysticism, revealing surrender as their shared foundation despite divergent expressions.

Ultimately, both traditions redefine freedom as liberation from ego-bound identity rather than liberation from external constraint. Whether through expressive devotion or contemplative silence, Bhakti and Sufi mysticism converge in affirming that true selfhood emerges only when the self learns to yield—either through presence saturated with love or absence dissolved in unity.

Comparative Synthesis: Silence as a Bridge of Harmony:

The mystical trajectories of Mirabai and Rabia al-Basri converge in their shared valorization of silence as a medium of spiritual authority, even as they diverge in form and orientation. Bhakti devotion sustains silence alongside lyrical abundance, while Sufi mysticism advances silence through ascetic restraint and contemplative withdrawal. These differences reflect distinct cultural and theological contexts, yet both traditions ultimately resist institutional mediation and affirm inner realization as the ground of faith. Silence thus emerges as a shared epistemic strategy, enabling devotion to transcend doctrinal and sectarian boundaries.

As an interfaith language, silence functions precisely because it suspends theological competition. Ludwig Wittgenstein's assertion that "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" underscores silence as a recognition of the limits of language in matters of transcendence. Similarly, Raimon Panikkar's notion of "intrareligious dialogue" suggests that authentic interfaith engagement occurs not through doctrinal comparison but through contemplative depth. In this light, mystical silence becomes a space of convergence where Bhakti and Sufi traditions meet—not by erasing difference, but by inhabiting a shared humility before the ineffable. Silence, therefore, operates as a bridge of harmony, fostering coexistence through inward listening rather than outward assertion.

Conclusion: Toward a Mysticism of Silence and Harmony:

This study has demonstrated that silence functions not as negation but as a shared mystical grammar through which Bhakti and Sufi traditions articulate spiritual authority, ethical freedom, and interreligious harmony. Through the devotional abundance of Mirabai and the ascetic minimalism of Rabia al-Basri, silence emerges as a means of resisting ritual formalism, patriarchal mediation, and doctrinal absolutism, while privileging lived experience over institutional validation. The paper has argued that silence enables two complementary modes of liberation—expressive presence in Bhakti and contemplative absence in Sufism—both culminating in divine union through the transformation of selfhood.

In a contemporary world marked by religious polarization and discursive excess, mystical silence offers a vital ethical resource. It foregrounds humility, inwardness, and compassion as foundations for coexistence, suggesting that harmony is cultivated not through louder assertions of belief but through deeper attentiveness to the ineffable. As Simone Weil profoundly observes, “Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.” It is within this attentive silence that mysticism continues to offer a timeless path toward spiritual unity and cultural reconciliation.

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