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Bhakti movement and ITS impact on Indian literature

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Abstract

India's religious and cultural traditions would be impossible to imagine without the foundation of bhakti. Bhakti has evolved to define a way of life for a large number of people in India, whereas the philosophical schools of thought are limited to the country's elite. By making God more accessible, the movement had a significant impact on society. The Bhakti movement, a sociocultural mass movement that originated in South India around the eighth and ninth centuries AD and expanded to the North throughout the mediaeval era, was an outgrowth of that region's religious and cultural climate. It sparked a backlash against the established order of dense intellectual musings. To reach out to the overwhelming mass of people who had hitherto been kept outside the strict framework of Sanskrit tradition, it took on the shape of a protest against the dividing walls of caste, creed, colour, and race. With its pan-Indian perspective and welcoming attitude, it inspired a wealth of devotional writing, music, and song that revitalised India's spiritual life.

Keywords: Bhakti, Indian literature, Sanskrit tradition, old scriptures, etc.

1. Introduction

From the ninth century through the sixteenth century, the Bhakti movement profoundly influenced the thinking of millions of people across India. Around the time of the fourteenth century, it absorbed northern India and grew into a pan-Indian movement. Ramanujan, who has traced the resulting break and 'shift' in Hindu fashion, writes, "A major many-sided movement occurred in Hindu culture and sensibility during the sixth and ninth centuries... The term "Bhakti" is often used to describe this transformation (1983: 103). "bringing the high to the low, esoteric contradiction to the man on the street, transmuting old and arcane thoughts into living modern experiences; at the same time, finding commonplace metaphors for the timeless," he says, is the book's most significant achievement (1973: 39). When it comes to worshipping God, Narada says there is no such thing as a "higher" or "lower" devotee based on factors such as their birth, education, attractiveness, social status, material possessions, or religious observances (*nasti tesu tati vidya rupa kula dhana kriyadi bhedah*). According to Sri Chaitanya, everyone, from the smallest blade of grass to the largest tree, from the most revered person to the most lowly, should serve Hari. Adi Shankara acknowledges this, writing in the *Manisha Panchakam*, saying that a *jnani* is a guru to anybody who seeks him out, regardless of caste or status.

The word *bhakti* is derived from the Sanskrit words *bhaj* + *ktin*. The word *bha* means "to serve" or "to give" or "to participate" (Ramachandran 31). Simply said, it's a strong desire to be of service to God and to engage in the heavenly experience. According to K.S. Narayanachar, "Bhakti" is "living for God and living in God, in thought, emotion, and action." This definition comes from the greatest traditions of intellectual and religious thinking in India. Sage Yajnavalkya defines God-Union, or *Sayujya* as it is known in the Vedic tradition, as "a full experience of union between the lover and the beloved, that knows nothing of any external or exterior features and of nothing greater or superior in taste." (1989: 17).

The concept of bhakti has its roots in the hymns of the *Rigveda*, and it started to take shape in Hinduism's Epic and Puranic eras. Bhakti Yoga, also known as the Path of Devotion, is explicitly discussed as a path of salvation in the *Mahabharata's Narayaneeya* portion of *Santiparvan*, as well as in the *Vishnu Purana*, the *Bhagavata Purana*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is widely considered that the *Bhagavad Gita* has presented the most thorough articulation of *Bhakti* in all its dimensions, as stated by Laxmana Murthy. Following the *Bhagavad Gita* came the *Bhakti* sutras of Narada and Shandilya (1989: 11). Avadesh Kumar Singh, in his history of the Bhakti movement in India, notes that the bhakti described in the *Gita* is *jnana bhakti*, or *bhakti* via knowledge (intellectual devotion). He claims that the *Narada Bhakti Sutra* provides a formulaic interpretation of the *Gita's jnana-bhakti* while still taking into account the text's nuanced meanings.

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In the ninth century, the *Srimad Bhagavata* established it in an illustrated style. (2012: 301–302). He notes that the *Narada-Bhakti-Sutra* describes *bhakti* in eleven different ways: (1) loving the blessed qualities of God, (2) loving God's beautiful form, (3) loving worshipping God, (4) loving remembering God, (5) loving serving God, (6) loving God as a friend, (7) loving God as a son, (8) loving God as a husband, (9) loving in submission to God, (10) loving being completely absorbed or drowned in God, and (11) (2012: 304). "Differences like caste, learning, beauty, family, fortune, and profession among others that have plagued Hindu society for long are eradicated... in one fell swoop..." (2012: 300).

In the *Bhagavata*, *bhakti* is broken down into nine different categories: '*Sravanam kirtanam visnoh/Smaranam padasevanam/Archanam vandanam dasyam/Sakhyamatma nivedanam*. Listening to stories of Lord Vishnu's great actions, praising them, meditating on Him, seeking shelter at His feet, worshipping Him, saluting Him like an attendant, serving Him like an attendant, making friends with Him, and dedicating oneself to Him are all aspects of *bhakti*. It is often held that *jnana*, when fully developed, becomes *bhakti*, and vice versa, even though both Shankara and Ramanuja promoted *jnana marga*. Sri Ramanuja defines *bhakti* as "love that is persistent and fearless" (*snehanupurvam anudhyanam bhaktih*). According to Ramanuja, *bhakti* is a kind of knowledge that eventually develops into love (*Bhaktischa Jnanavishesha eva Shemushi Bhakti rupa*). According to (Narayanachar 18). An aesthetic form known as *bhakti* () is considered the tenth *rasa* and the fifth *Purushartha*.

The South Indian *Bhakti* movement has been enriched by the works of 63 Nayanars (Shaivite devotees), 12 Alvars (Vaishnavite devotees), Saranas, Dasas, Vachana sahitya of Veerashaiva poets such as Basavanna, Pada kavitha of Annamacharya, Kshetrappa, and other great masters of Carnatic music such as Among the later *bhakti* poets, we may also cite figures like Sri Aurobindo and Tagore for their contributions because of how influential they were. The 75 adherents of *bhakti* who lived in southern India during the reigns of the Pallava and Pandya dynasties in the second to seventh centuries AD were essential in the development of the *Bhakti* movement.

It is noteworthy to note that Karaikkal Ammaiyar, who lived about the fifth century and was one of the first Shaivite saints, is supposed to have been a contemporary of the Vaishnavite saints Bhuttalwar and Peialwar. This is something that happened around the same time. They went on to have an impact on the philosophical systems developed by Ramanuja and Madhava. There are 4,000 hymns that make up the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, often known as the Tamil Veda. These hymns were authored by the 12 Alvars. The 1,102 poems attributed to Nammalvar are often regarded as the most important of them. The Sri *Vaishnava* temples do this as part of their daily rituals on a consistent basis. They provide the substance of the Upanishads, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Puranas* in the form of poem written in Tamil. "The Alvars played a significant part in making the Hindu religion a live experience for the ordinary people in the south," claims the scholar S. Abid Husain. *The Vishnu Purana*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and other other works of holy Hindu literature were the primary sources from which they drew their inspiration. Their intense devotion to Vishnu and literary brilliance gave

Vishnu *Bhakti* the status of an independent religion that had a far wider appeal to the general populace than any of its competitors...' (61).

It is said that reciting Andal's *Thiruppavai*, a sacred text that is meant to be read during the Dhanurmasa, is the simplest way to connect with God. The fact that the Alvars come from a range of socioeconomic strata that included sudras as well as a woman demonstrates how lenient the *bhakti* cult had been towards caste, class, and gender. These are the divides that were preserved by the greater, pan-Indian tradition until that time. "The Alvars emphasised the supremacy of *bhakti*, which was characterised by the recital of *nama* (*nama smaranam*), and complete submission to God... In the vernacular of the people, their fresh and streamlined interpretation of *bhakti* opened the door to all men and women, regardless of their economic status or social standing (Singh 308).

Among *Vaishnava sampradayas*, we find four main lineages – the *Vishishtadvaita* (qualified non-dualism) of Sri Ramanujacharya, the *Dvaita* or *Brahma sampradaya* of Sri Madhvacharya and *Achintya Bheda Abheda* (literally 'inconceivable difference and non-difference') of *Gaudiya Vaishnavism* espoused by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, *Shuddhadvaita* ('pure non-dualism') of *Rudra sampradaya* espoused by Vishnuswami and Vallabhacharya and *Dvaitadvaita* of *Kumara sampradaya* espoused by Nimbarka (Klostermaier 1998). Abid Husain avers that it was 'Ramanuja who raised the cult of *Bhakti* to the level of an independent religion and helped it to conquer the minds of the people throughout India from south to the north' (62).

An enlightened movement that began in the twelfth and thirteenth century, the *Virashaiva* religion was first established by Basavanna. It originated in the ancient practise of Shaivism. It considers God to be an abstract concept. By using the Agamas, it places a focus on the sarva *shruti samanvayam*, which may be translated as "the aggregate and symphonized vision of all the *shrutis*." It was a reformist movement within *bhakti* that had the goal of doing away with the caste system as well as gender inequality. Both *Shaivites* and *Vaishnavites* attempted to give the concept of *bhakti* a philosophical underpinning in their own schools of thought.

During the time when the *Vijayanagara* Empire was in control of Karnataka, the *Haridasa* and *Virashaiva* religious sects were more popular. The Kannada Haridasas were inspired by the philosophical viewpoint of *Madhvacharya*. It is said that *Purandaradasa* and *Kanakadasa* were two of Sripadaraya's followers who made significant contributions to the development of Carnatic music. *Yakshagana* is another branch that may be traced back to this movement in Karnataka.

In Northern India, during the time between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, there was a large *Bhakti* movement that was founded by Meera Bai, Kabir, Sur Das, Tulsi Das, Tukaram, and other mystics known as "Sants." This movement spread across Northern India. Their school of thought is known as Sant Mat, which literally translates to "point of view of the Sants." They gave up the weight of rituals and the complexities of ideologies in favour of expressing their tremendous love for God in everyday language. This allowed them more freedom. "an equality opposed to the qualitative disparities of the Hindu caste system and to those between Hindus and Muslims" is a defining characteristic of their beliefs (Woodhead 71–72).

There are two groups of Sant people: those living in the north and those living in the south. Sants from the north, like Kabir and Raidas, wrote in the local language of Hindi, while Sants from the south, like Ramananda and Namdev, wrote in the local language of Marathi. Despite the fact that they are a diverse group, they can be identified by certain distinguishing characteristics. These characteristics include a non-sectarian attitude, vernacular verse, faith in divinity, the rejection of religious rituals, concepts of caste and liturgy, close affinity to the marginalised sections including women and the untouchables, and surrender to the God "who dwells in the heart." It would seem that Ramananda, a Vaishnava saint, was the one who initiated Kabir, Raidas, and maybe even other Sants. The Sant Mat also includes other spiritual leaders from the Sikh religion, such as Guru Nanak. Their followers formed the sects after their names, such as Kabir Panth, Dadu Panth, Dariya Panth, Advait Mat, and Radhasoami, despite the fact that the Sants themselves did not adhere to any one sect. Sufi poets from the Middle Ages, such as Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, and Sindhi poets, on the other hand, seem to have had an affinity with the teachings of poet-saints from Sant Mat (Alsani 637–638).

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a renowned proponent of the Vaishnava school of Bhakti Yoga, which was mainly centred on Lord Krishna and Radha. He was born in West Bengal in 1486 and passed away in 1533. Chanting the Hare Krishna mantra became more common as a result of his efforts. Gaudiya Vaishnavas are the name given to those who follow in his footsteps. Chaitanya chose six holy men to help him systematise and spread his bhakti philosophy. These six saints were Rupa Goswami, Sanatana Goswami, Gopala Bhatta Goswami, Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, and Jiva Goswami. Together, they are known as the Six Goswamis. Chaitanya's cultural influence is profound in Bengal. Ma Kali was the subject of the seventeenth century collection of songs written by Ramprasad Sen and referred to as Shyama Sangeet, also called Songs of the Dark Mother.

The literature of Bhakti was characterised by a note of ecstasy, and as a result, it gave birth to a vast corpus of poetry that sprang from the heart. This new literary form "was supplemented by the Nayanmars, the Alvars, the Virasaivas, and the bhasha poets from all castes, regions, faiths, and genders," according to one historical account. (Singh 315). The author Avadesh Kumar Singh discusses the connection between bhakti poetry and mysticism in the following way: "This element of ecstasy expressed in different literary and metrical forms was unique because at a certain level it was related to mysticism as well... Bhakti was an unfathomable ocean of love fed by an inexhaustible springs of mystical experiences" (315–316).

Between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Virashaiva writers such as Dasimayya, Basavanna, Allama, and Mahadeviyakka contributed to the flourishing of the vachana poetry style for almost two hundred years. It is the most passionate poetry written in a plain, colloquial language and it is written in the native tongue, which is Kannada. It does not use Sanskrit, which is the traditional language of pundits. According to Ramanujan, a vachana is "a religious song written in free verse in the Kannada language" (1973). The word vachana may be translated as "saying" or "thing spoken." The Vachana poets disapprove of the traditional as well as the folk practises. For instance,

Basavanna makes fun of the meaningless recitations of Vedic hymns that are performed in front of God, and in the same vachana, he criticises the practise of sacrificing animals at traditional celebrations. The fact that he considers his whole body to be a temple demonstrates the fervent devotion that drives him. Devara Dasimayya believes that the distinctions between the sexes are only cosmetic. These poets are monotheists who disapprove of the worship of several deities. Poetry known as vachana is a kind of protest poetry that challenges the prevailing tradition, as well as the preaching and practises associated with it.

Annamacharya and Kshetranya are two names that come to mind when thinking about poets who belong to the Pada tradition. Annamacharya (1408–1503), also known as Padakavitapitamaha (Father of the Pada tradition of poetry), made a significant contribution to the bhakti literature with his 32,000 kirtanas and padams on Lord Sri Venkateshwara, of which only 12,000 are available now. Annamacharya lived from 1408–1503 and was known as Padakavitapitamaha (Father of the Pada tradition of poetry). He considers all of Vishnu's reincarnations to be different manifestations of Lord Venkateshwara, who is the Supreme Reality. The importance of bhakti and virakti is emphasised throughout his Adhyatma sankirtanas. He argues that all people should be treated in the same manner and that mental equilibrium is essential. While still emitting an erotic tone, His Srngara Keerthanas reach the heights of spiritual pleasure by attributing it to Lord Venkateshwara and his spouse in the last charanam.

The madhura bhakti that Kshetranya, who lived in the seventeenth century A.D., articulated in his padams is what made him famous. He used the srngara as a theme to represent his connection to the divine, most notably in the name Muvva Gopala. It has a deep and meaningful connection to the devadasis who serve in the temples in South India. As a result of its use as an accompaniment to dance, Kshetranya's padams have evolved into an essential component of South Indian culture's long-standing musical and dance traditions.

Conclusion

An effort is made in the current anthology of critical essays to analyse and evaluate the precept and practise of bhakti as well as the rich contribution of bhakti poets right from the time of the Alvars to the present day. This endeavour was done in order to better understand and appreciate bhakti. Its reformatory zeal has had an influence on the society both in the past and in the present, and here is where its relevance can be observed. The Bhakti literature in India is so extensive and diverse that it is difficult to make any kind of systematic analysis of it. However, its contribution could be evaluated in light of the new orientation and thrust it provided to a tradition that is a thousand years old. In the process, it replaced a lot of different customs and traditions, rituals and practises.

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