

## BHAKTI TRADITION: LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION

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### **Abstract**

*Human consciousness is expressed through the act of knowing (cognition), willing (conation), feeling (affection) or doing (action). Human personality is determined by the preponderance of cognitive, conative and affective tendencies. When the cognitive ability is preponderant one becomes prone to pursue the path of knowledge. Those in whom the conative aspect is predominant turn out to be men of action. Similarly, when the affective faculty is preponderant one tends to follow the dictate of the heart rather than the mind. One becomes empathetic, sensible and loving. When the prompting of hearts is directed unto the divine it takes the form of bhakti. Bhakti doesn't demand suppression of the natural impulses but sublimation of them. A man of knowledge (jnani) or a man of action (karmi) might court the downfall of the overpowering influence of Maya. But a devotee (bhakta) remains immune to it. A devotee is prepared to stake everything i.e. prosperity, social esteem, gain or glory in life, for the cause of his love for the Lord. Gopis courted social obloquy for their unconditional love for Krsna. True love knows no reason. Reason has its native limitations. Devotion does not negate reason but points to its futility in respect of knowledge of the Supreme. The devotional path calls for willing suppression of reason. In this paper an attempt will be made to explore the literary and philosophical perspectives of the Bhakti tradition with reference to the Bhagavat Gita and Nabadha Bhakti.*

### **Keywords**

*Bhakti, Jnana, Karma, the Bhagavat Gita, Bhakti movement, Nabadha Bhakti*

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## Introduction

In Indian Philosophy, *Bhakti* refers to the concept of the devoted love and attachment to a personal God. It is often expressed through intense emotional connection and considered a path of spiritual liberation within Hinduism. *Bhakti* can be expressed through various practices like singing hymns, chanting, praying, and performing rituals dedicated to the deity. A story regarding selfless love is depicted here. Once *Lord Vishnu* marked a sense of ego within sage *Narada*, as the greatest devotee of Him, as he always used to recite His name without fail. The Lord wanted to eradicate this *ahankara* from *Narada's* mind. So, he made a plan. The next time when *Narada* came to Him, He behaved as if suffering from something. *Narada* asked him about his suffering. The Lord said that I have a disease which can only be cured by getting the dust of the feet of my devotee. Will you do this favour for me? *Narada* baffled. How could he do this to his Lord? As a result of this sin, he had to go to the Hell. Therefore, he politely refused to do that. Then the Lord proposed to him to go to the *Gopapur* and to ask the *Gopis* for the same. *Narada* went there and told the *Gopis* about this. To his surprise, he found each one of them was quickly ready to do that for their loving *Kanha*. *Narada* returned to the Lord after collecting some dust from the feet of the *Gopis*. He said to the Lord that I am just surprised to see the behaviour of the *Gopis*. The *Gopis* totally forgot about their separate existence and became one with me. Therefore, they had no second thought. They didn't even think about their future pain in hell. This is called selfless love and complete surrender. In this article, we shall discuss the gospel of *bhakti* in relation to *jnana* and *karma* and the contribution of the *bhakti* movement bringing out the renaissance in the psyche of the Indian populace. Further, we shall discuss how *bhakti* is primal to *jnana* and *karma* leading to self-transformation through the great saints of mediaeval period.

## II

### The Bhagavat Gita Perspective

The *Bhagavat Gita* gives emphasis on *bhakti* as *shradha* or faith in one's own self leading to self-upliftment and self-transformation. The fifth verse of the chapter six of the *Bhagavat Gita* says, "Let a man lift himself by his own Self alone, and let him not lower himself; for, this Self alone is the friend of oneself, and this Self is the enemy of oneself". The *Bhagavat Gita* ensures the result of faith and resolution by declaring that as one thinks so he becomes. The *Bhagavat Gita* gives importance to all the three paths – *karma*, *jnana* and *bhakti*. Without *bhakti*, human effort by itself will not succeed and without *jnana*, *bhakti* will not be effective. *Bhakti* and *jnana* are the means that help us perform the right action. According to *Narada*, devotion is finer than action, knowledge. The fifty-fourth verse of the chapter

eleven of the *Bhagavat Gita* says, “But, by single-minded devotion, can I, of this Form, be known and seen in reality, and also entered into, *O Parantapa*”. Identification is the truest measure of love. The devotee, forgetting his own individual existence and, in his love, identifying to become one with his beloved Lord, is the culmination of Divine Love. Only those who are thus capable of identifying themselves with the One unifying Truth that holds together, in its web-of-love, the plurality and can experience the cosmic form of the Divine. The man of faith is a man of *Yoga*. The second verse of the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavat Gita* says that “Those who, fixing their mind on Me, worship Me, ever steadfast and endowed with supreme faith, those, in my opinion, are the best in *Yoga*”. Similarly, the 6<sup>th</sup> verse of the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavat Gita* says that “Those who worship Me, renouncing all actions in Me, regarding Me as the Supreme Goal, meditating on Me with single-minded devotion, O Partha, I swiftly deliver them from the ocean of birth and death, for their consciousness is united with Me”. In order to ascend to the Higher summits of cultural perfection, it is necessary that we direct all our contacts and experiences in our life, towards the achievement of perfection and self-transformation. As his inner disposition, so will be his personality. The 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of the seventeenth chapter of the *Bhagavat Gita* says, “The faith of each is in accordance with his nature, O Bharat, Man consists of his faith; as a man is, so is he”. Man’s potentiality determines his faith to a given end, and this faith then reacts upon his potentiality, determining his future course, and moulds the being in man. Man is constituted of and exists in his *shraddha*. Each devotee ultimately reaches the seat of his devotion, if he consistently, and with sufficient intensity, devotes himself to its attainment (BG. VII-20-22). The noblest of all the verses in the *Bhagavat Gita* is the 66<sup>th</sup> verse of the eighteenth chapter which states that “abandoning all *dharmas* (of the body, mind and intellect) take refuge in me alone, I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not”. This verse pin-pointedly focuses on the utmost faith of the *Yogi* in the Divine grace. Here *Arjuna* is advised to abandon all *dharmas*. That really means to renounce the ego and ego-centric identification with the outer envelopments of matter around us and finally have faith and come to the Lord for shelter. When both these conditions are accomplished by utmost faith, the devotee reaches a state of growing tranquillity in meditation. Without faith neither the devotee can surrender completely nor make himself free from the karmic bondage.

### III

#### **The Bhakti Movement:**

*Bhakti* or devotion cuts across the confines of community, race, sect and religion. This is amply evident in the life of the great *bhaktas* (devotees) and *bhakti*

movement across time and clime. Apart from the canonical scriptures like the *Bhagavat Gita*, *Bhagavatam*, *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, *Bhaktisutra* of *Shandilya* one gets comprehensive understanding of *bhakti* from the writings and compositions of the *Alvar* saints, *Nayanar* saints, *Sufi* saints, *Nanak*, *Kabir*, *Surdas*, *Meera*, *Tulsidas*, *Samkara Dev*, *Sri Chaitanya*, *Achyutananda* and host of mystics and saints who preferred to live unsung and unnoticed. The tempo of *bhakti* movement revived in the seventh century by the *Alvar*, *Nayanar* and *Adyar* saint-poets reached its low ebb with the ascendance of Vedic orthodoxy and social-spiritual hegemony with its stress on caste hierarchy, rituals and abstentious ceremonies. This witnessed the rise of the *Siddha* tradition which was essentially a radicalistic movement. *Siddhas* were supposed to have scaled the height of spiritual attainment, far ahead of others in terms of their psycho-spiritual powers (*siddhis*). They were vocal against idolatry, the priesthood and temple culture. Since God is within, He is to be realised through self-effort. But for that one need not run away from the world of action. There is no need to go on pilgrimage or take a holy dip in the rivers. One has only to overcome one's ego, the self-centric motivations and cultivate humility and detachment, while being in the world.

The tangible expressions of *bhakti* in the form of devotional songs and social activism, urging people to rise above social and religious barriers in the form of the *bhakti* movement spanned over a millennium, from the seventh century to the seventeenth century. Through the *bhakti* movement gathered momentum with great devotees and saints such as, *Jnanadev*, *Namdev*, *Eknath* and *Tukaram* in the South-West India, *Nanak* in North-West India, *Ramanand*, *Kabir*, *Surdas*, *Meerabai*, *Ravidas*, *Tulsidas* in the North, *Sanak Dev* in the North-East, *Sri Chaitanya* and *Pancha Sakhas* in the Eastern India, a long line of saint poets of India and Sufi saints were responsible for creating a conducive psycho-social climate in the Indian psyche. The songs of *Alvar* saints in the form of spontaneous recollection of intense feelings for the divine received philosophic support from *Ramanujacharya*, *Madhvacharya* and *Ballabhacharya* and *Nimbakacharya*. Devotional writings of the Sufi saints and teachers like *Rumi*, *Rabiya*, *Bastami*, *Arabi*, *Mansur*, *Jaydev*, and *Namdev*, prepared the background for the maturation of the devotional psyche of the Indian populace.

#### **Main Features of the *Bhakti* Movement**

- 1- Intense love and devotion are a path of Salvation
- 2- Unity of God, Universalism, and repeating the one true name again and again.
- 3- Rejection of rituals and ceremonies.

- 4- No caste discrimination
- 5- Open-mindedness in religious and gender issues.
- 6- They allowed all to take food from the Common kitchen.
- 7- They used vernacular language for a better understanding of the common people and to spread their messages.
- 8- They stressed on the idea of a personal God.
- 9- They proposed equality and universal brotherhood.
- 10- They give importance to the idea of a true Guru or Teacher for spiritual realisation.
- 11- Instead of a priest who thought of a middleman they focus on a personal connection with God.

#### IV

##### ***Nabadha Bhakti***

*“Naham tisthami Vaikunte yoginam hrudaye na ca,  
Mad bhakta yatra gayanti tatra tisthami Narada.”.*

I do never reside in Vaikuntha, nor in the heart my seekers,

I reside in the heart of my devotees who glorify my name.

In *Srimad Bhagavata* and *Vishnu Puran*, the nine forms of *Bhakti* (*nabadha bhakti*) is beautifully elaborated.

**1. Shravana:** - Hearing of God’s Lilas and glories. Thus, the devotee’s mind merges in the thought of Divinity. The mind loses its interest in worldly affairs. *Satsanga* - According to *Shri Shankaracharya*, “The company of the wise, even for a moment, becomes the boat to cross across the ocean of Samsara.”. *Satsanga* illumines the devotee and purifies his mind. In *Bhagavata*, Sri Krishna says to *Udhava* that *Satsanga* can make one free from worldly attachments and thus subtle truths can be well grasped by the devotee.

**2. Kirtana:** - Recitation of the names of God is an expression of divine feelings. The devotee is lost the love of God being thrilled with divine feelings. But such practices should be genuine and the outcome of pure hearts. Otherwise, these things will become mere fierce. As God knows the inner secrets of all, no one can cheat Him.

**3. Smarana:** - The mind has to meditate on the glories of the Lord. It is the continuous remembrance of the Lord, without fail. It is swimming against the forceful current of *Maya*.

**4. Padaseva:** - It is serving or concentrating on the Lord’s feet, through idol worship or a mental image of God. A better version of it is to take the whole of humanity as God and serve the needy or poor.

**5. Archana:** - Worshipping God can be initiated by both introverted and extroverted people. The introvert worship is more intense by which only the man of pure heart can do.

**6. Vandana:** - It is the prayer of God. *Bhagavata* says that every part of nature and all beings are pervaded by the divine existence. So, the devotee should treat the whole nature with absolute devotion as the parts of God. Thus, the ego vanishes, and the Divine grace descends upon the devotee.

**7. Dasya:** - *Dasya bhakti* is the love of God in the sense of service. Service of the idols, images, the saints, or devotees or the needy, is also included in this *Bhakti*. The purpose of this is to remain ever connected with the Divinity and to win Divine grace.

**8. Sakhya:** - *Sakhya bhava* is the expression of deep companionship with the divine presence. The *Gopis*, *Arjuna* and even *Draupadi* had developed this *bhava*. Here the physical love is turned into spiritual love.

**9. Atma-Nibedana:** - Complete self-surrender before the Lord. The devotee loses his separate existence. He becomes a part and parcel of God. No ego or *ahankara* persists there. God takes care of him and the devotee enjoys eternal bliss. The highest form of *Bhakti* is called *Prapatti*, according to *Ramanuja*. Here the devotee totally merges in Divinity. *Sadhana*, *Satsanga*, *Sadachara* and *Seva* are the four pillars of *Bhakti*.

## V

### Conclusion

Love for the finite is passion (*ashakti*) and love for the infinite is devotion (*bhakti*). *Bhakti* is a spontaneous human response to the perennial call of the Divine. The transition and transformation of the human psyche from passion (*ashakti*) to devotion (*bhakti*) has been more practical and viable in human life through the *bhakti* movement. *The Bhakti Movement* has eradicated many social evils. They have allowed women's participation in religious activities and allow widow marriage. The *Bhakti* movement was not just a religious movement. It tried its best to bring a social and cultural harmony in Indian society. It contributed a lot to bring social and cultural reformation by removing many social evils such as, Class and Caste discrimination, gender discrimination, Pré -dominance and exploitation by the so-called higher castes, that was prevalent at that time in Indian society. It has raised a strong voice against the inequalities that have divided the Indian society and invited the invaders to rule over us. It was an attempt to bridge the differences between the various religious thoughts and to establish an egalitarian society. It had spread the mantra of love among Indian people to open their hearts and minds for mutual tolerance and universal brotherhood.

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