



ISSN 2455-7544  
www.daathvoyagejournal.com

# **Daath Voyage : An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English**

**A Refereed Open Access Journal  
Vol. 8 No.4 December 2023**

**Editor: Dr. Saikat Banerjee**

Editor: Dr. Saikat Banerjee  
Assistant Professor, Department of English  
St Xavier's College, Ranchi, Jharkhand



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023

## **From Temples to Texts: An Evolutionary Journey of Bhakti Movement in Indian Literatures**

**Arijit Mondal**

Assistant Professor

Amity School of Languages

Amity University Chhattisgarh

Email: [amondal@rpr.amity.edu](mailto:amondal@rpr.amity.edu)

&

**Mohaiminul Islam**

Assistant Professor

Amity School of Languages

Amity University Chhattisgarh

Email: [mislam@rpr.amity.edu](mailto:mislam@rpr.amity.edu)

*Received 5 December 2023 Revised 11 December 2023 Published 29 December 2023*

**Abstract:** The Bhakti movement, a transformative socio-religious phenomenon that emerged in medieval India, revolutionised the landscape of Indian literature by facilitating a transition from traditional temple-centric practices to the creation of profound textual expressions. The movement publicised the idea that all people, regardless of their social background or caste, could directly experience divine grace and salvation through devotion. At the same time, it also sparked the formation of an immense reservoir of devotional poetry and literature in languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Bengali, and others. This paper delves into the evolutionary journey of the Bhakti movement within Indian literature, tracing its impact on the shift of focus from ritualistic practices to the composition of devotional texts. The movement's journey from temple rituals to sacred texts thus serves as a testament to its profound impact on Indian literature, reshaping not only literary practices but also cultural norms and societal structures. The objective of the paper is to examine the shift from Sanskrit to regional languages, enabling a broader audience to engage with themes of devotion, spirituality, and equality. By examining the movement's influence on regional languages and the emergence of vernacular literature, the paper highlights how the Bhakti movement catalysed the democratisation of spirituality and religious discourse. It underscores how the movement's emphasis on a direct and personal connection with the divine challenged prevailing social norms and nurtured inclusivity. Drawing upon historical sources, literary works, and critical scholarship, this paper explores the ways in which the Bhakti movement's emotional resonance and social reformist ideals



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023

continue to resonate within the fabric of Indian literature, leaving an enduring legacy that bridges the spiritual and the literary realms.

**Keywords:** Bhakti Movement, Indian Literature, Spiritual, Language, Sanskrit

### **Introduction**

The Bhakti movement, a transformative spiritual and cultural phenomenon, unfolds a captivating narrative within the archives of Indian history. It chronicles a remarkable shift, transcending the hallowed confines of temples and materialising eloquently within the pages of texts. This movement, anchored in unwavering devotion (*bhakti*) to personal deities, dared to defy the constraints of caste, class, and gender. Spanning centuries, this captivating journey unveils the mesmerising tale of how staunch devotion, expressed through the intricate artistry of poetry and prose, served as the catalyst for an awe-inspiring spiritual revolution. As time unfurled its tapestry, the luminous essence of this dedication transcended eras, igniting hearts, and fostering a profound metamorphosis that reverberated through the very fabric of existence. The Bhakti movement, characterised by its profound influence on the multifaceted religious and literary realms of India, functioned as a powerful impetus for transformation, radiantly enlightening the intellects and spirits of an immeasurable multitude of people spanning the nation's diverse cultural and societal spectrum. Its evolutionary journey stands as a testament to the enduring power of love, faith, and the written word, leaving an indelible mark on India's cultural heritage. In the rich tapestry of India's cultural and spiritual history, the movement emerges as a vibrant thread, weaving together the realms of devotion, literature, and religious transformation. Originating around the 7th century CE, this profound movement heralded a spiritual revolution, one that transcended the confines of temples and found its eloquent expression within the pages of literary masterpieces. The movement defied societal divisions, uniting people of diverse backgrounds under the banner of love for the divine. This movement primarily began in the Tamil South between the sixth and ninth centuries CE with the poet-saints such as the *Saiva Nayanars* and *Vaisnava Alvars* who "produced a transformatory avalanche in terms of devotion and social reform that is now known as the Bhakti Movement" (Nandakumar 794).

Over the centuries, the Bhakti Movement progressively gained influence, imprinting an enduring legacy on the cultural and spiritual fabric of the nation, nurturing a profound transformation in religious



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023

practices, social dynamics, and philosophical outlooks through its emphasis on devotion, inclusivity, and personal connection with the divine. According to Patton Burchett, “The concept of a single, coherent and socially progressive ‘bhakti movement’ grew in large part out of the context of early twentieth-century Indian nationalist agendas which sought to create a sense of national identity by propagating the notion of a shared pan-Indian bhakti religious heritage” (115). The movement exerted a profound and far-reaching impact on the entirety of the Indian literary tradition, profoundly shaping its thematic content, stylistic expressions, and cultural ethos. Emerging between the 7th and 17th centuries, the movement emphasised devotion to a personal god and sought to break down barriers of caste, class, and religious dogma. The Bhakti movement left an enduring and profound imprint on the Indian literary tradition by not only significantly shaping the thematic elements, linguistic nuances, and stylistic diversity of literary works, but also by instilling a spiritual essence that vibrated deeply within the cultural fabric, thereby endorsing a rich tapestry of devotional expression across languages and regions throughout Indian history.

### **Language and Vernacular Literature**

The core ethos of the Bhakti movement resided in its fervent advocacy for profound individual dedication to a specifically chosen deity, striving ardently to establish an intimate, heartfelt communion directly with the divine, emphasising a deeply emotional and personal connection as the quintessence of spiritual fulfilment. The pervasive impact of the movement was distinctly conspicuous within the literary landscape of its era, manifesting prominently in the works crafted during this time, wherein themes of impassioned devotion, introspection, divine love, and the exploration of individual spiritual journeys became prevalent motifs, significantly shaping and characterising the essence of the literature produced within this period. According to Rekha Pande, “The Bhakti movement is treated chiefly as a literary movement or at best an ideological phenomenon which had religion at the basis of its inspiration” (214). The Bhakti movement, advocating for an inclusive approach to spirituality, played a pivotal role in endorsing the utilisation of vernacular or regional languages as mediums for religious expression, thereby democratising access to devotion, empowering local communities, and cultivating a profound sense of cultural identity and resonance through the embrace of native tongues in articulating religious sentiments and doctrines. Prior to the advent and widespread influence of the Bhakti movement, the realm of literary



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023

and religious discourse in India was predominantly dominated by classical Sanskrit, serving as the esteemed language of scholarly and religious expression, setting a high standard for cultural and intellectual pursuits within the elite echelons of society. The movement led to the creation of a vast body of devotional poetry and literature in languages like Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Bengali, and others. One of the defining features of the Bhakti movement was its emphasis on vernacular languages rather than classical Sanskrit. The proponents and adherents of the movement, cognizant of the imperative to connect with the masses, conscientiously crafted their devotional poetry and songs in local languages, thereby consciously breaking away from the traditional stronghold of classical Sanskrit. Thus, it helped to facilitate a significant shift towards linguistic accessibility, consequently propelling the proliferation of regional languages and their corresponding rich literary traditions, marking a pivotal juncture in the diversification and flourishing of indigenous cultural expressions across the Indian subcontinent. In the southern part of India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, the Bhakti movement produced a remarkable body of devotional literature. Prominent Tamil Bhakti saints like *Alvars* and *Nayanars* composed hymns and songs praising their chosen deities. These compositions are collectively known as the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* (for Alvars) and *Thevaram* (for Nayanars). In Karnataka, the Bhakti movement found expression in the works of saints like Basava, Akka Mahadevi, and Allama Prabhu. Their compositions, known as *Vachanas* in Kannada, convey devotion to Lord Shiva while critiquing social inequalities. In Maharashtra, saints like Sant Eknath, Sant Tukaram, and Sant Namdev composed devotional poetry in Marathi. Their *Abhanga* and *Bhajans* are still popular and widely sung in various areas of Maharashtra. The movement also left its mark in Bengal with the writings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who propagated the worship of Lord Krishna. His followers, like Jayadeva, composed devotional songs in Bengali, contributing to the Bhakti tradition. Saints like Narsinh Mehta and Mirabai in Gujarat composed devotional poetry in Gujarati and Rajasthani respectively. Mirabai, renowned for her intense devotion, stands as an eminent figure celebrated throughout history for her profound and unyielding adoration towards Lord Krishna, embodying the essence of divine love and spiritual dedication through her evocative poetry and fervent devotional songs that echo across time and culture, epitomising the essence of Bhakti and leaving an indelible mark on the spiritual landscape of India. In regions where Islam and Hinduism coexisted, there was a syncretic



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

[www.daathvoyagejournal.com](http://www.daathvoyagejournal.com)

Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023

development of literature, often referred to as Sufi-Bhakti literature. Saints like Kabir and Guru Nanak combined elements of both traditions in their writings, emphasising the unity of God and the importance of devotion.

The Bhakti movement wielded an indelible and all-encompassing influence over the entirety of Indian literature, permeating its diverse linguistic, cultural, and regional landscapes, profoundly shaping the thematic, stylistic, and emotional dimensions of literary works, while also incubating a unifying thread of devotion, spiritual exploration, and humanistic expression that transcended boundaries and echoed across generations. Its profound impact extended to the enrichment and progression of regional languages in India, catalysing the vibrant development of modern Indian languages by infusing them with spiritual depth, cultural nuances, and a diverse array of literary expressions that not only preserved indigenous linguistic traditions but also facilitated their growth, refinement, and eventual emergence as vibrant mediums of communication and cultural identity. The movement played a pivotal role in nourishing the proliferation and evolution of devotional poetry, songs, and narratives, perpetuating an enduring legacy that remains an intrinsic and cherished component of Indian culture, wherein these expressive forms continue to thrive as profound means of spiritual connection, cultural preservation, and emotional resonance, transcending temporal boundaries and resonating deeply with diverse audiences across the country. It held a pivotal and instrumental role in propelling the evolution and enrichment of vernacular literature across the diverse cultural landscape of India, igniting a transformative era where regional languages flourished as vehicles for profound spiritual, social, and cultural expression, thereby ratifying a literary renaissance that empowered local tongues and facilitated their ascension to prominence within the broader spectrum of Indian literary traditions. It encouraged the use of local languages to convey spiritual messages and developed a diverse range of literary expressions that continue to be celebrated today. This devotional movement was characterised by intense love and devotion (*bhakti*) to a personal deity, often in opposition to the rigid caste system and religious orthodoxy of the time. The Bhakti movement had a profound impact on language and vernacular literature in India, as it emphasised the use of local languages to convey spiritual messages and connect with the masses.



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

[www.daathvoyagejournal.com](http://www.daathvoyagejournal.com)

*Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023*

### **Pronouncing Humanism, Social Relevance and Equality**

V. Raghavan describes bhakti as the “democratic doctrine which consolidates all people without distinction of caste, community, nationality, or sex” (32). The Bhakti movement in India, which spanned several centuries, placed a strong emphasis on humanism, social relevance, and equality. This devotional movement was marked by the belief in a personal and loving relationship with the divine, and its teachings had a profound impact on society by challenging traditional hierarchies and promoting more inclusive and egalitarian values. Bhakti poets and saints emphasised the idea that devotion to a personal deity was accessible to all people, regardless of their caste, social status, or background. This humanistic approach encouraged people to seek a direct and personal connection with the divine, emphasising the intrinsic worth of each person’s spiritual journey. Bhakti teachings rejected the caste-based hierarchy and emphasised that all souls were equal in the eyes of the divine. Gokhale-Turner states that, “For the bhakti tradition no social solution to Untouchability is possible; indeed, the very question is irrelevant. As Untouchability has suprahuman origins and justifications, it is pointless to call for social action to remedy it” (32). This message acted as a potent challenge to the prevailing social divisions and entrenched hierarchies of the era, notably combating the widespread prevalence of caste-based discrimination, as it advocated for a unifying spiritual connection that transcended societal barriers, inspiring a collective re-evaluation and forming a sense of egalitarianism, thereby subverting the rigid caste structures and initiating a call for social harmony and inclusivity. The Bhakti movement embodies “an element of social protest against the hierarchical structure of the Hindu socio-religious order” (Lorenzen 295). Numerous Bhakti saints and poets utilised their influential platforms to courageously confront and address pertinent contemporary social issues, employing their profound spiritual insights and devotional fervour to advocate for societal reform, challenge prevailing norms, and vehemently critique social injustices, thereby leveraging their spiritual authority to catalyse meaningful change and inspire collective introspection towards creating a more equitable and compassionate society. These saints and poets fearlessly critiqued oppressive societal norms, rituals, and practices that perpetuated discrimination and injustice, vehemently challenging the entrenched systems that propagated inequality, advocating for a reformation of customs, traditions, and social structures to advance an environment of inclusivity, compassion, and social justice



grounded in their spiritual convictions and devotion to a more humane and equitable society. By advocating for a more compassionate and egalitarian society, they made their teachings highly relevant to the common people. The Bhakti saints, as embodiments of their convictions, frequently spearheaded a transformative societal movement by setting compelling examples, fearlessly challenging entrenched caste hierarchies and societal conventions, as they advocated and lived out principles of equality, inclusivity, and universal love, thereby effecting significant shifts in the prevailing social norms and developing a more egalitarian and compassionate society. For instance, Kabir, a prominent Bhakti saint, was known for his unorthodox upbringing and his open rejection of caste distinctions. His poetry called for unity and tolerance among people of different faiths and backgrounds.

The Bhakti movement, characterised by its inclusive ethos, embraced a wide spectrum of people from diverse religious backgrounds, creating an environment of acceptance and unity by transcending religious boundaries and welcoming followers irrespective of their faiths, thereby furthering a spirit of harmony, mutual respect, and universal spiritual connection among people of varied religious beliefs. Numerous Bhakti poets, through their profound verses and teachings, championed the principle of religious tolerance, advocating the notion that diverse paths of devotion and spirituality could ultimately converge towards a singular divine truth. Thus, they emphasised the universality of spiritual experiences and cultivated an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding, and harmony among various religious traditions and followers, transcending the boundaries of sectarian differences and celebrating the inherent unity underlying all paths towards the divine. The emphasis placed by the Bhakti movement on tolerance, inclusivity, and pluralism exerted a unifying influence on a society marked by diversity and fragmentation, encouraging a sense of cohesion and shared understanding among disparate communities, transcending divisions based on caste, creed, or religious affiliations, thereby weaving a societal fabric enriched by mutual respect, empathy, and a collective appreciation for the richness of diverse beliefs and practices. Indeed, certain Bhakti saints, including the revered figure Meera Bai, emerged as staunch advocates for gender equality, challenging societal norms and advocating for the empowerment of women by exemplifying independence, spiritual devotion, and fearless pursuit of personal freedom. Therefore, she inspired a paradigm shift in perceptions of gender roles and raised a movement towards greater inclusivity,





: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023

dignity, and recognition of women's inherent spiritual potential within religious and social spheres. Meera, through her devotional poetry, challenged gender norms and societal expectations, asserting her right to devotion and spiritual fulfilment. Her enduring literary and spiritual legacy remains a perennial source of inspiration, resonating profoundly across generations and cultures, serving as an everlasting catalyst for women's empowerment by embodying themes of resilience, untiring devotion, and the assertion of individual agency, thereby continuing to ignite a spirit of empowerment, self-expression, and the pursuit of personal freedom among women, transcending temporal boundaries and serving as a guiding light for those seeking empowerment and emancipation in diverse societal contexts. The Bhakti movement, with its emphasis on inclusivity, equality, and spiritual connectivity, served as a pivotal precursor for subsequent social reform movements in India, planting the seeds of social consciousness by challenging entrenched societal norms, advocating for egalitarian principles, and upholding a collective conscience that catalysed future movements striving for social justice, caste equality, women's rights, and broader societal reforms aimed at creating a more equitable society. The teachings of Bhakti saints and their advocacy for equality and justice contributed to the broader social and cultural changes that occurred in India over time. Therefore, it can be stated that "The Bhakti movement was a product of a transitional society when a number of changes were taking place in the society on the political, economic and social front" (Pande 214-215). Rohini Mokashi-Punekar defines *bhakti* as a "deeply spiritual and democratising movement" which is typically "revolutionary in spirit" and grounded on "a questioning of the orthodox and repressive Brahminical understanding of Hinduism, [which] as such made it possible for the lower castes and women to give a form to their religious aspirations, emphasizing devotion and love, not knowledge, as a means of salvation" (123-124).

The Bhakti movement endorsed the idea that all people, regardless of their social background or caste, could directly experience divine grace and salvation through devotion. John S Hawley states, "The bhakti tradition by nature runs in families—this is a piety of shared experience, of singing and enthusiastic communication—and each clan, to be inclusive, needs to have at least one representative from the Untouchable castes" (13). Even in contemporary times, the prevailing perception endures that the concept of *bhakti*, characterised by devotion and spiritual practice, retains its inherent nature of developing social



progress and advancement, as Gail Omvedt describes the “radical bhakti (devotional) movement that had swept over northern and western India, bringing together women and men of low caste to proclaim equality and reject Brahmanic ritualism and caste hierarchy” (277). This emphasis on equality and rejection of social hierarchies influenced the themes of Indian literature, highlighting the worth and dignity of every individual. The Bhakti poets, renowned for their eloquent and impassioned expressions, frequently engaged in poignant critiques of prevailing societal norms and customs, using their poetry as a powerful medium to advocate for social reform and espouse essential moral values. They challenged oppressive practices such as caste discrimination, societal inequalities, and moral corruption while exhorting people to uphold virtues of compassion, empathy, equality, and ethical conduct, thus becoming instrumental in initiating a moral and social awakening among the masses. The verses composed by Bhakti poets were poignant reflections that courageously addressed pressing societal issues like entrenched caste discrimination, pervasive gender inequalities, and the often superficial or oppressive aspects of ritualistic practices, fervently advocating for societal transformation by challenging these systemic injustices. They took a big role in encouraging the equitable treatment of all people irrespective of their caste or gender, and emphasising the essence of genuine, heartfelt devotion over rigid adherence to ritualism, thereby creating a more compassionate and inclusive society. These themes of social consciousness and reform were later incorporated into various literary works, contributing to broader awareness and discussions on social issues. The Bhakti movement was not merely a religious or spiritual movement; it was also a social and cultural phenomenon that boosted humanism, social relevance, and equality. By emphasising the worth of every individual, challenging social hierarchies, advocating for social reform, and stimulating tolerance and pluralism, the movement left a lasting legacy that continues to influence Indian society and its values today—

The Bhakti Movement recognises the absurdities of social systems. It not only portrays the anti-human ideologies of feudalism in their various aspects and forms, but also expresses a feeling of rebellion against them. This spirit of rebellion against feudalism and the resultant creative potential of mass culture had not been expressed in any other form of Indian poetry before the Bhakti period. (Pandey and Tyagi 129-130)



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023

## **Devotional Poetry and Integration of Folk Elements**

The Bhakti poets crafted profoundly emotive and intimately personal verses that fervently articulated their boundless love and unwavering devotion to the divine, encapsulating an intense spiritual ardour and a deeply resonant connection, transcending conventional boundaries to evoke profound emotional resonance among both the poets themselves and their audiences. These poems often used metaphors of human relationships, such as lover and beloved, to describe the devotee's relationship with God. Bhakti poetry often challenged orthodox rituals and hierarchical religious structures, focusing instead on the individual's direct connection with the divine. Bhakti poets, often referred to as 'saint-poets' or 'Bhaktas,' composed verses and hymns that expressed their deep love, devotion, and personal connection to the divine. The devotional poetry of the Bhakti movement was ingeniously composed in an array of regional languages, thereby transcending linguistic barriers and ensuring accessibility to a vast and diverse audience, igniting a deep sense of inclusivity and resonance among people from different cultural backgrounds, social strata, and geographic regions across the Indian subcontinent. The primary theme of devotional poetry during the movement was intense love and devotion (*bhakti*) to a personal deity, often Lord Krishna, Lord Rama, Lord Shiva, or the formless, universal divine. Through their verses, these poets eloquently conveyed their profound spiritual encounters and an intense yearning for unity with the divine, articulating a soulful exploration of their spiritual journey and an impassioned quest for a profound connection that resounded deeply within their hearts and echoed through their compositions, inviting others to partake in their spiritual odyssey. Bhakti poets deliberately chose to compose their poetry in regional vernacular languages rather than Sanskrit, which was the language of the elite and the religious establishment. This decision was a significant departure from traditional religious literature and allowed the common people, who were often not well-versed in Sanskrit, to connect with the spiritual teachings.

Bhakti poetry took on various forms, including devotional songs (*bhajans*), hymns, couplets (*dohas*), and narrative poems. The diverse and multifaceted nature of these poetic forms rendered them remarkably adaptable, allowing for seamless integration into varied cultural and linguistic contexts, encouraging an organic resonance and flexibility that facilitated their assimilation and appreciation across a spectrum of cultural landscapes, thereby enabling the poetry to transcend boundaries and ring profoundly



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

[www.daathvoyagejournal.com](http://www.daathvoyagejournal.com)

*Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023*

within different societal frameworks and linguistic realms. Many Bhakti poets used their verses to challenge prevailing social norms, religious orthodoxy, and caste-based discrimination. They passionately championed the ideals of equality, tolerance, and the pursuit of a direct, intimate connection with the divine, fervently advocating for a society founded on principles of egalitarianism, where people of diverse backgrounds are treated with respect and fairness, advancing an atmosphere of inclusivity, mutual understanding, and embracing the idea that each individual, irrespective of societal hierarchies or religious affiliations, could promote a profound and personal relationship with the divine, transcending barriers and nurturing a more compassionate and spiritually enriched collective consciousness. The poetry crafted by Bhakti saints and poets wielded a profound influence, functioning as a potent instrument for catalysing social reform by articulating compelling critiques of societal injustices, challenging oppressive norms, and advocating for transformative change, thereby serving as a stimulus to awaken collective conscience, inspire introspection, and ignite movements aimed at manufacturing social equality, justice, and moral transformation in Indian society. Devotional poetry was a powerful and transformative aspect of the Bhakti movement, using regional languages to express deep devotion, challenge social norms, and advocate for a more direct and inclusive approach to spirituality. The poetry of Bhakti saints continues to be revered and cherished in India and beyond. The Bhakti hagiographies exhibit a complex interplay of sincere devotional sentiment, genuine egalitarian motivation, self-interest, and power-driven ambitions, reflecting an inherent tension within both Indian cultures and the individual hagiographers. In this context, Linda Hess states that “bhakti and orthodoxy are in some important sense opposed, and...the struggle between them can be observed in both the poet and the culture” (247).

Bhakti poetry incorporated elements from local folk traditions, songs, and narratives, making it relatable to the common people. This integration of folk elements enriched the literary landscape and connected it with indigenous cultural expressions. During the Bhakti movement in India, there was a significant integration of folk elements into the devotional practices and expressions of the Bhakti saints and poets. This integration of folk elements enriched the movement by making it more relatable to the common people and by incorporating the cultural traditions and narratives of various regions. Bhakti saints and poets composed their devotional songs, hymns, and poems in regional languages rather than Sanskrit,



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

[www.daathvoyagejournal.com](http://www.daathvoyagejournal.com)

Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023

which was the language of the elite. This decision made their teachings more accessible to the local population and allowed them to incorporate colloquial and folk elements into their verses. Bhakti saints frequently employed traditional folk music and instruments as integral components of their devotional expressions, embracing the cultural richness of the regions they hailed from, thus infusing their spiritual messages with the melodic charm and rhythms of local folk music, and utilising instruments like the *tabla*, *dholak*, *tambura*, and various indigenous instruments. It helped to create a harmonious synergy between spirituality and regional cultural heritage that echoed deeply with the masses, making their devotional music more accessible and relatable to diverse communities while enhancing the emotional and spiritual impact of their teachings. The use of these instruments added a distinctly folk flavour to their devotional performances. Indeed, Bhakti poets and saints, who drew inspiration from local folk stories, legends and folklore, adeptly wove these regional narratives, often rooted in everyday life experiences, into their spiritual teachings, utilising relatable stories, anecdotes, and cultural elements to effectively convey their profound spiritual messages. By employing these narratives, rich in local customs, folklore, and symbolism, the Bhakti saints made their spiritual teachings more accessible and comprehensible to the common people, making a deeper connection and resonance with their audience, thereby facilitating a seamless transmission of their spiritual wisdom and values through the familiar and captivating medium of storytelling embedded within the fabric of local traditions and narratives. For example, the stories of Lord Krishna's childhood pranks and adventures were incorporated into many Bhakti compositions. Bhakti gatherings often included folk dances and rituals that were an integral part of the local culture. These dances, such as the Raas Leela, were performed as expressions of devotion to Lord Krishna and other deities. Bhakti saints actively participated in various local festivals and celebrations, often using these occasions to spread their spiritual teachings and connect with the community. For example, Meera Bai would participate in the Holi festival and sing devotional songs dedicated to Lord Krishna. Bhakti poets used symbols and imagery from local folk traditions to convey their devotion and love for the divine. For instance, they often used images of natural elements like rivers, trees, and animals to describe the divine. Bhakti saints advocated for a simpler and more direct form of devotion that could be practised by all, regardless of their social or educational background. This approach resonated with the simplicity and



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

[www.daathvoyagejournal.com](http://www.daathvoyagejournal.com)

*Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023*

practicality often associated with folk traditions. This inclusivity was a departure from the exclusivity often associated with traditional religious practices. The Bhakti movement often encouraged cultural syncretism, where elements from different cultures and traditions were blended. This resulted in a rich tapestry of artistic expressions and practices that were both spiritually meaningful and culturally diverse. The integration of folk elements during the movement was a deliberate and successful strategy to connect with the common people and infuse spirituality with the rich cultural traditions of various regions in India. This fusion of the sacred and the folk not only made the Bhakti movement more inclusive but also contributed to the diversity and vibrancy of Indian culture and devotional practices.

### **Conclusion**

The Bhakti movement revitalised and transformed the Indian literary tradition by promoting regional languages, advocating for social reform, emphasising individual devotion, and infusing literature with spiritual and humanistic values. It transformed the Indian literary landscape by democratising access to religious and spiritual ideas, challenging social hierarchies, and producing a more inclusive and emotionally charged literary tradition that resonated with the common people. Its influence continues to be felt in modern Indian literature, where echoes of its themes and principles can still be found. The Bhakti movement in India, through its fervent devotion, emotional expression, and emphasis on the accessibility of religious experience, fundamentally influenced and provided a seminal framework for modern Indian literature, fostering subsequent literary movements and themes rooted in personal spirituality, social consciousness, and cultural inclusivity. Its emphasis on individual experience, emotional depth, and spirituality left a lasting impact on various literary genres, including novels, short stories, and modern poetry. Ranajit Guha's perspective on the bhakti mode of religion underscores it as an unparalleled "ideology of subordination par excellence" extensively employed across Indian history, serving as a strategic tool "to endear the dominant to the subordinate and thereby justify servitude, spiritualising the efforts and frustrations experienced by the lower classes in the labor they provided to the elite," and this approach ingeniously renders the act of submission as if it were "self-induced, voluntary, and collaborative" (54).



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023

### Works Cited

- Burchett, Patton. "Bhakti Rhetoric in the Hagiography of 'Untouchable' Saints: Discerning Bhakti's Ambivalence on Caste and Brahminhood." *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2009, pp. 115-141. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-009-9072-5>.
- Gokhale-Turner, Jayashree B. "Bhakti or Vidroha: Continuity and Change in Dalit Sahitya." *Tradition and Modernity in Bhakti Movements*, edited by Jayant Lele, E.J. Brill, 1981, pp. 29-42.
- Guha, Ranajit. *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*. Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Hawley, John S. 1988. "Introduction." *Songs of the Saints of India*, translated by John S. Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 3-7.
- Hess, Linda. "The Poet, the People, and the Western Scholar: Influence of a Sacred Drama and Text on Social Values in North India." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1988, pp. 236-253.
- Lorenzen, David N. "The Kabir-Panth and Social Protest." *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, edited by Katherine Schomer and W. H. McLeod, Motilal Banarsidass, 1987, pp. 281-304.
- Mokashi-Punekar, Rohini. "On the Threshold: The Songs of Chokhamela." *Untouchable Saints: An Indian Phenomenon*, edited by Eleanor Zelliot and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar, Manohar, 2005, pp. 123-142.
- Nandakumar, Prema. "The Bhakti Movement in South India." *Theistic Vedānta*, edited by R. Balasubramian, Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2003, pp. 760-865.
- Omvedt, Gail and Bharat Patankar. "Says Tuka...: Songs of a Radical Bhakta." *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2003, pp. 277-286.
- Pande, Rekha. "The Bhakti Movement—An Interpretation." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 48, 1987, pp. 214-221. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44141682>.
- Pandey, Manager, and Alka Tyagi. "Bhakti Poetry: Its Relevance and Significance." *Indian Literature*, vol. 45, no. 6, 2001, pp. 129-138. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23345761>.
- Raghavan, V. *The Great Integrators: The Saint-Singers of India*. Publications Division, 1966.



: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

[www.daathvoyagejournal.com](http://www.daathvoyagejournal.com)

*Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023*

Ramanujan, A. K. *Speaking of Çiva*. Penguin Books. 1973.





: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English  
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

[www.daathvoyagejournal.com](http://www.daathvoyagejournal.com)

ISSN 2455-7544

*Vol.8, No.4, December, 2023*