

BHAKTI: HISTORICAL

The history of bhakti or religious love in India is capable of being viewed as falling into three major periods each of a thousand years. In the Rg vedic period bhakti was in response to the challenge of the animistic pre-historical religious spirit. It restored to the human mind the spiritual radiant concept of a real deity, the One supreme Being who was the lord of all other deities or gods. In fact it concluded with the note that they are just powers (brides) of the One Being. Or they were but functional names of the One Divine. Prayer-sacrifice symbolically conceived – was the manner of union. This spiritual yajña or prayer was followed by a sacrificial mysticism and consequently by the philosophical mysticism of the up. The decadence that usually happens when mysticism is sought to be generalized and universalized in the mass led to the gross or literal understanding of the mystic truth of bhakti and yajña.

The Mahābhārata which is considered to be the fifth Veda already presents the need for a proper appraisal of the Vedic brāhmanic situation. The Gītācarya, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, presents the most luminous conception of the Vedic – Āgamaic though (āgama being a purist yet catholic presentation). yajña, sacrifice, is a fundamental emanation when applied to jñāna-yoga as jñāna -yajña, prayer being considered to be jñāna -yajña with devotion, bhakti.

The Buddhist and Jaina movements which started about 500 b.c. saw the need to be a deeper level of spirituality through personal and ethical – social practices. It was clear that these two movements were negative in their direction. The period was a return to a new type of search for the Reality. This period lasted for 500 years roughly, for we are already presented with the phenomenon of decadence in the Buddhist organization on the levels of philosophy, work and devotion, which more and more centered round human personalities.

Buddhism and Jainism hardened into materialism and became not quite distinct from the cārvākas, those who were without any moral or ethical preparation and refused to have any. Thus humanistic hedonism was the challenge offered to Āḷvār and nāyanārs.

This challenge was met by the Āḷvār who with a fervor and character that recalled the Vedic Age, brought to the people the sense and climate of the Divine Presence in the temples. The Nāyanārs with a like cry 'Back to the Veda' instilled the love of the Supreme Godhead in the mass of the people reviving the worship in the temples. The bhakti movement facilitated a God-centered divine dedicated life. It liberalized bhakti to include prapatti which was open to all classes and masses while preserving the more disciplined bhakti as the development of prapatti. Individual effort came after the divine acceptance in prapatti which was open to seekers and sinners alike. This was followed by jñāna the Ācāryas and ritualism which led to the congealing influence of all habit, the triumph of letter and form over the spirit.

The challenge next came in the form of Islamic monotheism and fanaticism and was met earlier by the monotheism of the Śrī Rāmānuja's philosophy and Śaivism of the Nāyanārs. It was a southern phenomenon which spread to the north.

The Third period began with the dominance of the Western Civilization with its economic and political frames of reference exaggerated by the materialistic scientific discoveries and hedonistic impulse to comfort. It is not confined to India, but extends to the entire world which sciences has rolled into one. The seers of the modern India – those who claim to have direct vision are Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Maharsi Ramana movement with their indomitable faith in the Divine Presence Bhakti is again the way through prayer and inner sacrifice, through jñāna , karma and prapatti (integral surrender).

In attempt in an historical study and appraisal of the Bhakti movement I wish to consider it as that which delineates the series of human movements at

different epochs. It is therefore the approach of a philosopher of history rather than that of an historian.

The successive epochs could be described as the Age of Devotion, as the Age of Reason and as the Age of Rite, rituals and action. We know that history has been demarcated into religious, cultural rational) Political and economic periods. According to the ancients there are four ages or yugas, names Kṛṣṇa Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali. It was represented in other cultures as the Ages of Gold, Silver Copper and iron. These broad divisions notwithstanding, the ancients had a sense of the presence in however obscure a manner of the other forces (of other ages) besides the main one, more or less animating a small body group or circle of men and women. Thus we have to take into consideration the dominant not able features at certain periods as designating an age. Further so complex is the people and a period that it is necessary to take into account all features. Social and religious experience go along with the intellectual and rationalizing process, sometimes leading to superstitions, and at other times leading to a more appropriate appraisal of them. I must be remembered that the human is not only not solitary in the world and in a complex environment, but even within itself it is a complex being, more complicated in respect of its inner desires and goals and ideals. Ages of Devotion are capable of degenerating into superstitious faith or belief and thus set up as reactions the ages of reason which in turn tend to become dogmatic which is another kind of blindness to the existence of more things than philosophy knows of and as a recoil from both, men take anxiously to the pursuit of economic satisfactions which lead to hedonistic pleasure pursuit ushering the Ages of Karma. This in turn produces the challenge which is met by the spiritual nature. This has opened again and again in the history not only of India but almost everywhere. We must however beware of any simplicity. Undue simplification of any problem or the solution would be specious, if not suspect. It is no less true of the historical process of bhakti.

Bhakti is a devout expression of the love of the Spirit owing to the perception of the majesty and wonder behind all. It is a timeless and dateless

experience. even natural =love and human love of beauty could not be referred to anything other than the spirit felt to be present in them. There have always been men who have had the experience of the super-natural behind all nature, animating it and making it attractive to the discovery of the Transcendental behind all the forms and forces around man is a revelatory experience. it is spiritual. The Vedic Rṣis were the first to devote themselves to this revelation. They had spiritual perception, spiritual audition of the truth behind all; to hem this knowledge came in significant integral manner of vision, audition and meaning though practice of spiritual sensing (drṣṭavya, śrotavya and mantnya). The Mantras which they had sung reveal their love and śraddhā (faith) to the Gods. That bhakti helped them to pure out their lauds to these Gods in respect of everything that they received from them. Bhakti broke out in song through a personal revelation of the personality of the Divine. They gave themselves up to the Divine and sought everything from the Divine alone. The famous Śunaśśepha hymn to Varuṇa was said to be in lieu of sacrifice of himself (for he was the yajñā paśu) and resulted in his being liberated from death. It made him also one of the most illustrious of the Rsis. The Gods were not competitors with each other or with meant but collaborators They were in spite of their innumerable number (33,000) recognized as powers (śaktis) of the One Transcendent Puruṣottama. They were also hierarchically arranged differentiating the several words (lokas such as earth, mid-air, and heaven-sky). But all these were at bottom on per only they were their other names or powers or instruments or delegates in the vast Universe.

The polytheistic superstition passed away leaving the monotheistic view which did not abolish the many gods but subordinated them to the One, whose functions and names and delegated they became.

When we pass to the age of the Upaniṣads, the speculations were devoted to the realisation of the Divine within and the soul's relation to that. The metaphysical philosophical(jñāna)approach clarified the manning of the yajñā (karma) which were of the form of devotional rites at the beginning but which

were to become either meaningless ritual or converted into causal instruments for bringing about certain results of svarga, progeny and etc. The Upaniṣads were indeed a corrective to the exuberance of the early mystics and to the extraordinary mystifications of the ritual or their reduction to sacrificial causality.

The itihāsas and the purāṇas which succeeded this period made the knowledge of the wonderful nature of God available to the mass of the people. In one sense they annotated the Vedic hymns sometimes it was a modification and sometimes a transformation, but always helpful. In another direction, they gave a wide open field of bhakti to the large mass of mankind, illustrating the practice of bhakti with anecdotes taken for 'true-life'. The supreme deity or His delegates or powers were not faraway powers but near enough to man, even as they were to Rṣis. God is not afar but quite near to the devotee who prays and strictly follows the path of ahimsā, steya, āsteya and aparigraha, and who has above all the willingness to sacrifice offer everything that he has to the Godhead, undoubtedly there emerged several types of worshipers, worshipping different powers, according to their svabhāva, psychological nature; but worshipers never congealed into fanatical parties. The Bhagavad Gītā played and even today plays the most important role of synthesis and understanding. The Bhagavad Gītā (Vaiṣṇava document as it is) clinches the entire hierarchical position by saying 'In whatever way my devotee worships me, in that form do I manifest myself to him'. But he also counsels 'Those who worship the devas go to the devas, those who worship the pitṛs they go to them, but My worshippers come to Me'. In any case the process or method of devotion should be strictly complied with. It should be vidhi-pūrvakam as ordained and not as indifferent to the method or rule, avidhi-pūrvakam. Bhakti should be displaying the sincere faith in the worship of the supreme Godhead. Ultimately only that Godhead who could be realised within oneself as self and as the self of the entire universe, which is His body and of all souls, of whatever stature and nature, is the supreme. He is ineffable, beyond all description, and beyond the reach of all senses and the mind He could be known only by being confronted with, and at His will alone does one get His knowledge and Vision.

We are surely in a difficult position as to the dates of these urāṇa and itihāsa periods. even so, thanks to the work of the Indologists in this vast field, we are having some agreement. It may be placed roughly between 500 BC to A.D 500. The Āgama literature already anticipated and referred to in the Mahābhārata also grew to full proportions during this period. Śrī Kṛṣṇa himself is stated to have propounded the Sātvata or Pāñcarātra āgama. The Śaiva āgamas also were being written. Tirmūlar later writes about several āgamas which he distils to present the Tirumantiram.

But in the broad development this purāṇic age was submerged or relegated to a corner by the emergence of the Buddhist and Jaina movements. Both these movements in one sense reacted against the sacrificial spirit and the grossening of the sacrificial practices. They insisted on the moral and impersonal and social development of man. They inculcated the love of dharma (in its non-sacrificial sense) and mokṣa, freedom from the samsāra that binds, restricts and corrupts the soul or self.

Though divorced from the personal worship of God and His service and God's existence, they could not divorce themselves from the worship and adoration and gratitude to these 'godly' men, for they did evoke the religious emotion of love. Bodhisattvass and Buddhas and Tirthankaras became objects of bhakti. They were substitutes for God. But it meant the humanization of bhakti by presenting people with men eminently worthily of worship. Buddhism whilst helping the renaissance from the dark ritualistic mind also abolished God. The negative definition of God prevailed, and worship was abolished to set up the way of reason. Along with the cultivation of ethical virtues there arose the feeling that the godly one must be the practice of them and none other. The holy was a perfect ethical being (siddha). But mere ethical practice or personal askesis could hardly stand long without the saving truth of the Self, one's inward worthiness. Neither the nihilism of the individual nor the nihilism of God could offer a solution to this innate need for God. It could only lead to an absolute nihilism. This undoubtedly took a long time.

After this period the purāṇic and āgamāic and tantric systems, which lay low during the triumphal march of Buddhism and Jainism, returned through inspired Mystics in the South. The Āgamas from the very beginning following ādhyātma path taught the ethical virtues of ahimsā, satya, āsteya, aparigraha, and the worship of the Divine through surrender to him entirely. The return of āgama was therefore ethically and spiritually justified as the virtues of both Buddhism and Jainism were inherent to them. Let it be said that the return of the Deity in this period was a resolute restoration of the one thing that matters to the religious hankering for God. The Āḷvār and Nāyanārs met the challenge of the impersonal Nugatory experience of Buddhism by their very personal, real experience of the Deity. So direct, so every revelatory was the experience of the Personal Godhead who was Beauty itself personified, that they bough to man the possibility of mystic union and vision in the temples which they established. Whether it was aḷagar or Aḷagia Maṇavāḷan or the Sundaras it was the experience of real spiritual Beauty, incomparable, ineffable and above all so personal. The worship of the revealers of the virtue and the truth was not given up. they were āptas, truth speakers. Unlike the earlier substitution of the Buddha or the Tīrhtankara in the place of the Divine Transcendent Super-personality, beyond all comprehension of the mind, the Āḷvār and Nāyanārs revived the Deity out of love for all, and retained the ācāryas. The teacher was important, for he was playing the most important role of leading the disciple to the experience of the Divine Lord. Thus we have the story of Poygai Āḷvār who led Bhaktisāra to the vision of Nārāyaṇa. so too Nambi led Yāmuna to the vision of Śrī Ranganātha. In recent times we have read how Swami Vivekānanda (Narendranath) was led to the vision of the Divine by His master Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This capacity of the teacher to show the Divine, to lead the disciple and seeker to the Divine experience, is his specific qualification. The early Āḷvār were seer-knowers of the Brahman: they were strictly following the path of the Mahābhārata and the Gītā and the Bhāgavata and Viṣṇu Purāṇas. There was thus a great movement—a movement of Hymnists (even like the Mantra period of the Vedas), who sang and praised and worked to bring men to the feet of God, to the acceptance of the

Divine Self in all and in everything. Thus we find a new energy of discovering God through song and love became a radiant way. We see it almost as the rediscovery of God. Divine emotion was infectious and the movement spread among the classes and the masses who were almost dying for the love of God, to express love and were promised a direct experience of the Divine.

Thus Vaiṣṇavism we find the twelve men of God-including that paragon of devotees who welted the path of bridal-hood, Āṇḍāḷ. The saints of devotion were not less saints of knowledge, for they had, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa stated-seen Him after many lives – bahūnām janmanām ante jñānavān mām prapadyate I to be the One Supreme Being worthy of being loved and lost in. indeed it must be stated that many of them were not of the highest caste but their fitness for the realisation was perfectly their dedication, praptti to God alone, and the grace of God. Thus from birth they were dedicated souls. Tirumangal otherwise known as Para Kālan or Kalidhvamsan, was initiated into the great Mantra of freedom by God Nārāyaṇa Himself to whom he ran. God needs not any intermediary as such, but it does not rule out His having great and wonderful knower as His pure and beneficent instruments, namely Ācāryas.

As I have stated earlier, during this period (between 500 B.C and A.D. 500) extraordinary developments took place in the mantra śātra, especially in respect of letter symbolism. This is traceable to the grammarian's sphoṭa-vāda (sound mysticism), and a great literature grew up in the āgama-tantra śāstras. It was in a sense the extension of the Māṇḍākyopaniṣad-analysis of the integral sound of the Praṇava into its component three sound. This sound and letter analysis was developed to extraordinary and even arbitrary lengths. Surely we have no uniform system of sound or letter symbols. However a new type of mysticism held full sway. It affected Buddhism as well in its latter stages. It influent the āgamas. The Mantra-dīkṣa or initiation which is an integral part of the bhakti yoga and makes for the individual being accepted on the path became indispensable in the Āgamas. The mere unceasing repetition of the mantra which was of the form of surrender (namaskāra) to the chosen God (Īṣṭamūrti or

iṣṭadevatā) was held to be supremely mystical beneficial. Even in this there is close correspondence to the vedic imitation into the Gāyatri mantra for the real spiritual birth of the individual, which has restricted to the higher castes (dvijās) capable of undertaking the path of spiritual life. Here it was extended to all those who seek the Lord. Thus as large mass of people belonging to all classes and castes initiated into this mantra became devotees of the Lord. The Aṣṭākṣarī of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas and the Pāñcākṣrī of the Śaivas and the Dvādasākṣarī of the Vaiṣṇavas were given to the seekers (ārtas) after God. It was even in the case of the śākta and Vīraśaiva schools. Caste was not a consideration, indeed it was necessary to drop the sense of caste on this pirtual path of the Agama. We find thus complicated buyt interdependent multiple developments by the tiem we arrive at the seventh century.

The Purāṇas had taken full shape. They had given an historical tradition, however mystically adulterated by the supra-historical and metaphysical subolisms. Their value may be anything or nothing at all. There have been garbled versions of the earlier traditions. Broadly speaking we find the religious spirit sought to unite tieself with got great hoary past. The Bhaktas provided these ancient traditios with a new emotional sentiment backed by their personal experiences of the Transcendent – immanent but no less historical and personal Godhead. This was true of Southern India. Vernacular thought revived by this great flood of light from above, permeating and infusing spiritual life into the life of the people dissipated the agnosticism, skepticism and materialism that had taken hold of them. Such was the age that was under way. The age of the Ālvār and nāyanārs was drunk with love of God; those divers of the deep ocean of God's infinite attributes which thro0ug God's illimitable grace they could enjoy and delight in called on all to share in that delight: such was the age of bhakti which became a *rasa* beyond the range of the nine *rasas* of Aesthetics.

The brief account in the last lecture of their approaches to the Divine has given us some glimpse of the birth of the Vedic Age. It was the age of fellowship with God. They infused a new faith in the Transcendental; and as practical

mystics, which mystics in their own way always are, they age the symbolic-real presence of the Divine to worship and meditate and adore and serve. Religion was no longer with them a mere matter of moral life or strict tapasyā of renunciation of the world and the body, but a sharing of the immortal life with God in mystical union. The age of the dark disintegrating Kali was proclaimed to have come to a close with this appearance of the rain-cloud of true love of God. Such was the enthusiasm, and the great St Śaṭhakopa sang about the coming of the Kingdom of Vaikuṅṭha on Earth. The religion of love spread to all strata of society. It gave a unity of culture. Around the shrines and temples which began to grow wherever the Āḷvār and Nāyanārs involved the Divine, a new vicilisation grew which was significant revive of the eternal Vedic Religion. Āḷvār and Nāyanārs specialized in her worship of the icon which was accessible to mediation by the mind and to worship. The saṅuṅopāsana led to savikalpaka samādhi: it easily facilitated the experience of the mystical transcendent presence in the worshipped icon.

Western religions condemned the worship of the idols deeming that to be a limiting of the Infinite to a finite figure. It is indeed difficult to conceive of this in a philosophical manner. But religious experience and intuition are of a different plane of being from the philosophical. What is philosophically self-contradictory becomes in intuition perfectly true and real. The Unknowable becomes know, the infinite's presence is seen and heard and mediated upon in the finite. It would perhaps be heretical to affirm that the finite is infinite or to reduce literally the infinite to the level of the finite. Indian spiritualism always saw the interpenetration of the two levels spiritual vision that presents the infinite and the incomprehensible and the natural vision that presents the finite 'The point intersection of the timeless with time is an occupation for the saint' as T.S.Eliot has said.

Temples embody this helpful accessory conception. Wonderful sculptures and architecture, the like of which had not appeared earlier, sprang into being. art found itself to be the grand medium of devotional vision and knowledge and

service. The creative spirit in its purest sāvika form was released and became the source of joy. It was a result of the co-operative fusion of bhakti karm and the mastery of the sciences dedicated to the inspired execution of such marvels of beauty. It sublimated the instincts in a manner that was inconceivable to ordinary reason. They had discovered the Yoga of karm to the Divine. Unlike as in Buddhism and Buddhist art, there was a sense of enjoyment of the presence of the Infinite, Timeless Being, who had descended amidst men to redeem them and release them by accepting their yoga of free service. The change wrought by them was very great.

About the seventh century the seventh century the great period of philosophical revival supported by experience was ushered into being by Śrī Śāṅkarācārya. It was to lend support to the devotion and realisation of the Infinite, the truth which was incapable of being known through ordinary reason, ordinary experience. infected with all illusions we experience difference which indeed separates that which is united and one. Spiritual direct experience verifies this truth declared by the Pāñcarātra Śrī Śāṅkara however recognized that the dual experience in its most sāvika form is the necessary preliminary to the non-dual experience. thus bhakti is the sāvika love-relationship between the Divine and the soul. He himself has written or rather should we say, hymned and sung and praised the Lord and the Mother inseparable and identical with the Divine. God is the delegate of the transcendent. Saccidānanda and is not illusory though in the phase of Union the tadātya reaches the annihilation of difference between the worshipper and the Worshipped. This bhakti is there as the gateway to the transcendent experience of identity—and as such considered by some to be less than the Absolute Experience. but the saint like Madhusūdana Sarasvati who was a lover of Śrī Kṛṣṇa loved this lover-relationship more than the laya pose, though he was a convinced philosopher of non-duality. This philosophic resurgence of the Hindu thought which alongside the experiential knowledge of the Absolute who was loved philosophically made a wonderful conquest of the cultured mind of the people. Though the ultimate experience of the Absolute was beyond the measurers of the mind and the senses, it was within the reach of those who

dared to love it with a love that is pure, exalted and sublime, with renunciation of the lesser ends of artha, kāma and even the ordinary dharma of the secular day. A greater dharma – an inner law of devotion to the Ultimate experience and truth was the need stressed and practiced by Śrī Śankara and his most wonderfully loyal disciples. They bore witness to the Transcendent Reality of the Spirit behind all, which could be loved, known and entered into in the yogic nirvikalpa samādhi, and in the Philosophic moments of Insight. Here too was love restrained, canalized, something that recalled the atmosphere and climate of the woods of the philosophic seers of all time. The age of ācāryas had begun under such circumstances. Their mission was not merely to experience and enjoy the Divine and show the Divine to all those who sought them but also to instruct them in the path of attainment of the transcendental state: not only to permeate the people with the sense of the Divine and its urgency, but to lay the foundation of a more permanent character. Śankara, Bhāskara, Yādavaprakāśa, and other great thinkers flourished. All of them were attempting to reconcile the several teachings. Śankara developed a theory of two planes, the spiritual and the empirical phenomenal, one of them being true and the other issuing. This theory was not accepted by others who tried to establish the double reality of both, one being subordinate to the other.

The bhakti movement gets its full fledged character only when we get the Viśiṣṭādvaita teachers, Nāthamuni, Yāmunācārya and Rāmānuja. Nāthamuni was soaked in the direct vision of the Divine thanks to the grace of St Śaṭhakopa. He undertook the task of founding a line of ācāryas who would uninterruptedly continue the teachings verily like devotion itself-tailadhārāvachchinnavat. It is important to remember that what these ācāryas did was to reconcile the effortful devotion and jñāna and karma of the individual with the transcendent love jñāna and karam which are gifts of the grace of the Lord Brahman. This was firmly expounded by the organic thesis of śarīra-śarīrī-bhaāva. The ācāryas tried to reconcile karma of jñāna under bhakti. They tried to reconcile individual effort devotion to God with the utter dedication including – one's individual effort to God. They tried to restore the Vedas to the people by means of personal

experience of the Divine according to the Vedic teachers and Rsis but hymned in the language of the people. They were enabled philosophically to affirm the aikyaa-kanṭha (univocality) of the two mystic literatures – Veda and the Āgama or Veda and the Prabandha. Sanskrit (Northern) Veda got its incarnation and a new body in the Tamil literature.

Rāmānuja's heart yearned to redeem mankind further by organizing institutions for carry in on the dual function of divyānubhava and divyakainkaray in the temples which had sprung up, thanks to the Āḷvār and of training a large body of disciples in the philosophy of This which emphasizes the doctrine of Unity through the coneptional of arīra-āarīrī (body-soul). As I have pointed out, it is a yogic conception of innerrealisation, now being extended to every filed of life. The guruparampara which plays an important part was shown to be necessary for the preservation of the doctrine through the study of the three fundamental works: Śrī Bhāṣya (with its abridgements; Vedānta DīPāñcarātra, and Vedānta Sāra); Vedārtha samgraha: and the Gītā-bhāṣya: for yogic purposes the Śaraṅāgati and Vaikunṭha and Śrīranga-gadyas. All other and later writings have been more or less to expand and comment on these. The great teacher also has the 3000 hymns of the Āḷvār handed down by Śrī Nāthamuni commented upon, specially the 1000 and odd hysmn of St Śaṭhakopa which he undertook to comment or have a commentary written on which was done during his own life-time. All works in the sampradāya asie again were later profusely commented upon. Broadly the sampradāya has worked, even as the great Pīṭhas of the Advaiia school had been working. Devotion to the teachings and the teachers (Ācāryas), loyalty to the fundamentals, a daily practice of communion with God in ārādhana and worship, arcane, have been generally the technical bhakti.

The special features of these great souls was the joy in life with and for God. Life lived for God here in this world is glory. Prapatti. Resignation and utter surrender to God, furnished a wonderful opportunity to delight in God, feel and know and enter into His presence. Renunciation meant only renunciation of self, selfishness, relationships built around these and the desires evoked by these. It

was a living for the Divine in every direction. It was a fundamental world of ānanda rasa. Joy which was shunted out of lie , and perhaps enjoyed in renunciation only in the cloisters and in fear of life and its seductive entanglements, was resorted to the Temple and the home, granting rich profusion and exuberance of expression which is the condition of great Art. Realisation got its manifest meaning in the life of Delight in God.

This is yet a continuing process; at least it retained the vitality and power of appeal till the middle of the seventeenth century.

The dualistic school of Śrī Madhavācārya almost began to have a firm realisation of the Divine Lord. Madhava's thesis that the soul is different from Brahman and is subordinate to Him absolutely. At no time could it ever get God's nature. Religious life was dependent – life on God absolutely, prayer, worship and strict following of the ways of devotion and ordained duties or dharmas is the way to liberation. Great souls and scholars earned on this wonderful theism to the people¹. Mystics of the dualistic experience (dāsas) also contributed hymns in Kannada language. The great works of Mahābhārata, Bhāgavata and the Rāmāyaṇa also were translated into the several languages: What was already done in the Tamil language now found extension to other languages. Cultural dynamism has a way which cuts asunder barriers of language. It is not a strange fact at all that all three schools of religious bhakti found origin, or refuge, in this wonderful soil of Mysore, in the Kannada country.

The age was already in the grips of a new danger. Islam

¹ The great devotees were metaphysicians as well. It is well known that metaphysicians were of the highest order continuing the tradition of dualism: which they consider alone provides for a true bhakti or love. Musicians soaked in bhakti like Purandara Dāsa and Kanakarāya Dāsa and others have contributed to the spread of the culture of Bhakti to all people

with its militant religious zeal and political imperialism, the successor the Roman spirit so to speak, had entered Indian soil. Already in the eleventh century the winds of this spicity were blowing fiercely in the North. Echoes of it had begun to penetrate the South. Thanks to the prophetic insight and spirit of the Āṽvārs and the Nāyanārs they had provided a bulward against this new threat. The worse had yet to come. It came a couple of centuries later. Venkaṭanātha and Piḷḷai Lokācārya had to flee the country. The former took refuge in the Mysore state which was sheltered from the invasion from the north. Both Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism which throve as rivals found themselves confronted by this new phenomenon. A seri0us threat to their civilization and tradition built round the temples had come at last. All the spirituality of the ācāryas was needed to keep the spirit of Divine love alive. We do have a great period of divyānubhava of he ācāryas which sustained the inner life of the people and did not permit the institutions to fall. Bhakti of the more liberal kind, prapatti, that was the route to be taken by men in utter despair (kāṛpanya) came into greater vogue. Ācāryas administered this parapatti to all their followers and thus put the people directly under the Divine guidance. As a consequence the threat to religion was met by aneo-enthusiasm for the revival of Hindu art and culture during the Vijayanagar Empire. In the North quietly but continuously the spirit of Bhakti spread thanks to the follower of Śṛī Rāmānuja called Rāmānanda who resided at benaras. Babir and Caitanya, who traveled in he South and learnt Tamil (so says Dinesh Candra Sircar) sang songs or hymns, and others were soaked in God – love and spread the doctrine of Nāma-sankīrtan as the surest method of becoming prapannas and attaining blessedness. Nānak was also influenced. All these emphasized Divyānubhava (God-experience) as more important than doctrinal philosophizing. The yogic ādhyātma devotion was sought after to give authenticity to the theor of Diivine grace. The Vīraśaiva cult of devotion to the mystic truth of God in the temples and in the heart and realised as the void, also came into vigorous expression. Śāraṣas-those who had utterly surrendered to the Divine Spirit, resigned themselves to Him, and lived and moved in the atmosphere of that presence, through the length and breadth of the country. These devotees

belonged to all castes and there was no restriction as to sex even. Even the caste system was sought to be given up not only in the spiritual but also in the secular sphere. A theocratic world was the aim. And men almost vied to build the world on the pattern of their conceptions of the spiritual world. Divergent though these were, they revealed a unity of purpose and ideal imagination. But the spirit of casteism almost vied with the spirit of sectarianism in the South which marred the growth of the broad religious Oneness which ever one sought to bring about with method which could hardly have led to that consummation. Further one truth had come to be realised, that religious experience cannot sustain a purely secular conception of the society and the ideals of the spirit require a good moral and spiritual foundation of ahimsa and charity of main and absence any effort to win members and places in the courts of kings and chieftains.

Thus the bhakti movement. Helped the freedom of the soul of the people to inward experience and dedication. The Vallabha movement founded on the experience of the beauty of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā episode stimulated the exuberance of the emotional approach with a philosophy of śuddhādvaita. The bridal approach was also practiced by Jayadeva. And Annamācāryas, one of the earliest epic composers of Musical Hymns in the sixteenth century, devoted more than 24,000 songs to the Lord at Tirupati. For three generations, let us say, till the beginning of the eighteenth century this went on. In the meanwhile , musical devotees, Hymnist inclined to revelation and anubhava, even like the Āḷvār-hymnists of a 1000 years earlier, came into being: Purandara Dāsa the first among the classical musicians, contemporary of Annamācārya of Tirupati, was followed by Kṣetrajñā, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Tyāgarāja, Muthuswāmi, Dīkṣitar and Śyāma Śāstriar of the Tanjore District. Music, classical, artistic and yet perfectly soaked in personal experience became one of the most potent modern forces of the cult of devotion. It had languished as a force for enjoyment of the senses: Śrī Kulaśekhara's hope that the ears are for hearing the praises of the lord and the mouth to sing his praises, was fulfilled by this ecstatic restoration of the Song to God, a hope which the epic but real figure

of Nārada, the Divine singer, cherishes and cultivates in these great songsters and composers of this wonderful century.

The bhāva of devotion – bhakti – rasa – became a central rasa by these processes of dedication of all powers one has to God. All emotions now became part and parcel of the sentiment of dedication to God, chastity and purity in thought, word and deed. These minstrels were indeed equal to the best philosophers of the intellect: for them the reality of the Divine, the immanent, transcendent, lived and moved and had its being in them.

The beginning of the nineteenth century was marked by the power impact of the Christian civilization, with its similar bhakti for the person and symbol of Christ. We would have seen in Nānak the same sense of perception of the bhakti of Islam to its Founder and the Transcendent God. In Sufism we could see the rarified or sublimated expertise of the Divine which cut across racial barriers. Several wonderful but unsuccessful attempts had been made to see the identity of this love fanatically dividing what it had to unite. This was a problem of general psychology: was it due to the human nature itself? Was it the incapacity of love to be universal and non-personal? Philosophers in arriving at the universal dispersed the devotional love to a contentless idea—at least that is what happened in western thought after Kant. Patriotic fervor rather than religious devotion moved the earlier men like Ram Mohan Roy; but Keshub Chandra Sen was more moved by the presence: Rabindranath and others found the need for God-love most.

The last mystic poet was a lover of the beautiful, not merely that which attracted the body and the senses but which was of the spiritual. The spiritual was the soul of outer beauty, and lack of it was the destruction of beauty. The world was wonderful because the Divine spirit was pervading it and perceived by those who have known how to love the Divine. Rabindranath loved God because beauty was the most fundamental factor about Him and His creation alike. A materialistic mind or even a mind intent on renunciation of the world

deeming it to be all māyā, was repugnant to his consciousness. In this he was allied to the view of the Āḷvār who saw the beauty of God in everything – with a true poetic sensibility. He found that all were manifestations of the presence of the Divine and to look out for it all the world over in everything was the true intuitive insight. His songs are of the truly eminent quality of bhakti love of God in all. Art became once again the means of restoration of the spiritual beauty of God to expression.

We find that one of most eminent of bhaktas was born at about this time in Bengal—Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. His love of God was centered on the Mother Kali and found its magnificent fruition in his life. In him we find that bhakti gets its pregnant fulfillment in all the approaches of religion. He was also the Yogi who reveled in the experience of the Divine both in the saḡuṇa, Sākāra form of savikalpaka samādhi and in the nirguṇa nirākāra nirvikalpaka samādhi. He held both to be simultaneously real and should be known as such. He also experienced and related the several attitudes of the Christian and Islamic as well as the bridal approaches and so quickly too that it was a remarkable testimony to the saying of Śrī Kṛṣṇa: as whatever form one worships as that form will the Divine appear to him. It was of the same order and intensity as the old Āḷvār and Nāyanārs or the Bhaktas who lived and moved and had their being in God alone. In addition, he became a Guru of the inimitable path of bhakti that grants true knowledge and true karma or right knowledge and right works.

Till the last he was a bhakta whose knowledge was of the infinite and whose service was the service of the Lord, living as He (She) willed. He is one of the finest flowers of the Hindu Religion. His disciples were trained in the same spirit of jñāna and bhakti and karma yogins all. We find the spirit of the bhakti in Gandhiji, Our Mahātmā. Here bhakti is overflowing even in song and common prayer, Bhajan and all, true to the bhāgavata tradition, to see God in all religions and as the one supreme. The dynamic possibility of this approach for the securing of the spiritual approach to individual as well as social and political problems has been immense as we know today. A bhakti that is divorced from

ahimsā and satya is not only fruitless but a contradiction. Love must be supported by brahmacarya – satya and ahimsā and aparigraha (niyama and yama of yoga). Without moral preparation and love of God and faith in His beneficent will and trust in Him, and surrender to Him, there can be no bhakti in the real sense of the term., mere ritual bhakti without thyis ādhyātma śuddhi and ādhyātma śauca is meaningless and hypocritical and self-defeating. But the technique of prapatti and processes of bhakti have to a certain extent been abandoned. In any case, the combined effort of these tow movements of Ramakrishna and Gandhiji has brought back bhakti as a fundamental social force for resisting the inroads of materialism and atheism and subversion of values. These two movements of bhakti are native to our cultural pattern during the past thousand and odd years. We have during the present period a host of bhaktas, like Haranāth, Sai Bābā, Rāmadas, and others who have in a general way sought to insist upon bhakti as a way to the realisation of peace. But it must be confessed that these have more the character and nature of a diluted bhakti which is not firm in its understanding of the fundamental need of of yama, niyama & etc., conditions. They stand midway between Bhakti and prapatti but without its angas, or elements of ānukūla samkalpa, pratikūla varjanam, Mahāviśvāsa, varaṇa & etc., for it is hoped that God in His infinite mercy would and could save because of His omnipotence. The concept of day which tolerates all and can work out the destiny of each individual in spite of his refractoriness in respect of t each individual in splite of his refractoriness in respect of the basic moral virtues of yama and niyama, is surely a catholic idea though not quite desirable. The Āḷvār were aware of this conditions as one of helplessness in respect one's own practices and thought that a mricale alone would transform man's nature.

Bhakti in its more dynamic and transfigurative form has been again reiterated by the pūrṇa yogi, Sri Aurobindo. It bears the same stamp of the Vaiṣṇava bhakti of being an illuminated devotion or love of God expressed through an integral surrender to the Divine followed up by unconditiona Kainkarya. Once this perfect surrender happens (and it is a long or short process according to one's evolutionary state or condition) the transformation of the

human mind soaked in ignorance happens, thanks to the mediating action of the Supermind and Mother. Bhakti here does not run to excess of emotional sentiment: it is the self – recollected love of the soul confident of the goal of being accepted by the Divine and fulfilled in and through Him. It expresses a fundamental attitude of loving dependence on God for God's supreme work. All prayers, meditations, contemplations and bhajans are of the illuminated quality, which do not seek merely the emotional strain but lead to sthita-prajñā-bhakti. Rightly, he concludes also that the emotional excesses or the creation of the emotional condition for the dawn of illumination or union are due to the over-flow of the energy of desire (very similar to the sexual or erotic dynamis) but which ultimately must result in the śānta – state (peace state) not of mere resignation but joyful acceptance of the Divine Voice and Word and Work.

Bhakti then is a phenomenon of exceeding complexity but expression one of the fundamental need of the human soul, not only as an expression of the soul itself in its integral nature but as being a means to its highest destiny of full freedom. It is the transfigured or sublimated emotion or sentiment of love directed to the highest Object, God in all His richness and fullness.