

Bhakti Movements in Other Regions of India

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Bhakti Movement in Karnataka

In Karnataka, the **Shaiva bhakti** cult of the Kannada-speaking **Virashaivas** developed during the 12th and 13th centuries.

- The Virshaiva Movement was initiated by **Basavanna** and his companions like **Allama Prabhu** and **Akkamahadevi**.
- This movement strongly argued for the **equality** of all human beings.
- It was **against Brahmanical ideas** about caste and the treatment of women.
- They were also **against all forms of ritual and idol worship**.
 - **Endowment to temples** was also forbidden because Veerashaivism believed that such acts as these encouraged inequality between one devotee and another.
- Veerashaivism also came to be known as **Lingayatism** because the most important component of the faith was the **Ishtalinga** (a phallic image of Shiva worn on the body).
- One of the most important steps taken by Basava to popularise this movement was the establishment of the **Anubhava Mantapa** (Hall of Discussion of Experience) at **Kalyana**.
- It emphasised the **worship of only one God, namely Lord Shiva**.

- The Veerashaivism doctrine enjoined upon its members to abstain from observing the '**Pancha Sutakas**' or **Five Pollutions**, namely the pollution arising from
 - Birth
 - Death
 - Menstruation
 - Spittle and
 - Caste contact, i.e. contact with the so-called inferior castes.
- Since Veerashaivism did not believe in or encourage temple worship, **mathas** served as institutional alternatives to temples.

Bhakti Movement in Maharashtra

Like other Vaishnava bhakti movements, the Maharashtra bhakti tradition **drew basic inspiration from the Bhagavad Purana**.

- In Maharashtra, the Bhakti movement is centred on the temple of Vithoba or Vitthal, the dwelling deity of Pandharpur.
- In addition, however, it was **also influenced by the Shaiva Nath Panthis**, who were quite popular in the lower classes of the Maharashtrian society during the 11th and 12th centuries and composed their verses in Marathi.
- The Bhakti Movement in Maharashtra is broadly divided into two sects:
 - **Varakaris:** The mild devotees of **God Vitthala** of Pandharpur are more emotional, theoretical, and abstract in their viewpoint.
 - **Dharakaris:** The heroic followers of the cult of Ramadasa, the devotee of God Rama, who are more rational, practical, and concrete in their thoughts.

Jnaneshwar (1275-1296)

- He was the pioneer bhakti saint of **Maharashtra**.
- He wrote an extensive **commentary on the Bhagavad Gita**, popularly called **Jnaneshvari**.
 - This was one of the earliest works of Marathi literature and served as the foundation of bhakti ideology in Maharashtra.
- He was the author of many hymns called **Abhangas**.
- He taught that the **only way to attain God was bhakti**, and there was no place for caste distinctions in bhakti.

Namdeva (1270-1350)	• He was a poet-saint from Maharashtra belonging to the 14th century who belonged to the Varkari sect. • He is considered to be the link between the Maharashtrian bhakti movement and North Indian monotheistic movement. • He is one of the five revered gurus in Hinduism's Dadupanth lineage, the other four being Dadu, Kabir, Ravidas, and Hardas. • He lived in Pandharpur but travelled to North India, including Punjab. • His bhakti songs have also been included in the Adi Granth. • In Maharashtra, Namdev is considered to be a part of the Varkari tradition (Vaishnava devotional tradition), but in the North Indian monotheistic tradition, he is remembered as a Nirguna saint. • Other prominent bhakti saints of Maharashtra were Eknath and Tukaram.
Eknath (1544-1599)	• He was a poet-saint and mystic of Vaishnavism. • Eknath is best known for translating various Sanskrit texts into Marathi. • He restored the corrupted version of Jnaneshvari. • His scholarship aimed to bring the means of salvation through bhakti within the reach and understanding of ordinary people, including outcastes and women. • He rejected caste differences. • Eknath was the only saint from Maharashtra to be a father and a family householder. • He was renowned for resolving the conflicts between household duties and the demands of religious devotion through an unswerving faith in Krishna, a popular avatar of Vishnu.

Vaishnava Bhakti Movement in Bengal

- Vaishnava, bhakti in Bengal, differed from its North Indian and the older South Indian bhakti.
- The **sources which influenced** it can be traced to two different traditions – the Vaishnava bhakti tradition of the **Bhagavad Purana**, with its glorification of Krishna Lila on the one hand, and non-Vaishnava **Sahajiya Buddhist and Nathpanthi traditions** on the other.

Jayadeva	• The Vaishnava influence was transmitted by various bhakti poets, beginning with Jayadeva in the 12th century. Jayadeva's Gita Govinda was composed in Sanskrit. • He also wrote songs in the Maithili dialect, later absorbed into the Bengali Vaishnava bhakti tradition.
Chandidas and Vidyapati	• Both Vaishnava bhakti poets came under the influence of the non-Vaishnava cults of Sahajiya Buddhist and Nathpanthi traditions. However, the Bhagavata tradition was always the primary source of influence. • The songs of Chandidas, the first Bengali bhakti poet and those of Vidyapati, who wrote in Maithili, highlighted the Krishna-Radha relationship. • These songs became part of the growing Vaishnava movement in Bengal.
Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534)	Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was Bengal's most prominent Vaishnava saint. • He popularised Krishna-bhakti in many parts of Eastern India. • The advent of Chaitanya marks the shifting of the focus of the Bengal Vaishnava bhakti from devotional literary compositions to a full-fledged reform movement with a broad social base. • Chaitanya disregarded all distinctions of caste, creed and sex to give a popular base to Krishna-bhakti. • His followers belonged to all castes and communities. One of his favourite disciples was Haridas, who was a Muslim. • He popularised the sankirtan (group devotional songs accompanied by ecstatic dancing). • Chaitanya's exposition of Rasalila is one of his most profound contributions to Indian philosophy. • He did not question the authority of the Brahmins and the scriptures. • His disregard for caste distinctions in the sphere of devotional singing promoted a sense of equality in Bengali life. • For him, God was Krishna or Hari, who would be pleased only by the intense love and devotion of the devotee. Such adoration is known as Madliura bhava.

Bhakti Movement in Assam

In Assam, **Sankaradeva** (1449-1568) introduced bhakti both in the Brahmaputra valley and in Cooch-Behar.

- He preached **absolute devotion to Vishnu** or his incarnation, Krishna.
- Monotheistic ideas influenced his concept of bhakti, which came to be known as the **eka-sarana-dharma** (religion of seeking refuge in one).
- Though eka-sarana acknowledges the **impersonal** (nirguna) God, it identifies **personal** (saguna) one as worshipful, which it places in the Bhagavad- Puranic Narayana.
- He **denounced the caste system** and preached his ideas to the people in their language (an Assamese form of Brajaboli).
- He made some significant innovations in devotional practice, such as including **dance-drama-music form in the preaching of bhakti**.
- He also founded the institution of **Satra**, a sitting during which people of all classes assembled for religious and social purposes.
 - Later, the Satras grew into full-fledged monasteries.
 - It gave rise to **Sattriya**, a new dance form.
- His sect is called **Mahapurashiya Dharma**.

Bhakti Movement in Kashmir and Gujarat

- **Kashmir:** Saiva bhakti flourished in Kashmir in the 14th century. Most prominent of the Shaiva bhakti saints was a woman, **Lal Ded**.
- **Gujarat:** Bhakti was preached by the **Vallabha sect** of Vallabhacharya and another important saint, **Narsimha Mehta**.
 - He knew of Jayadeva and Kabir and was followed by a number of poet-saints.
 - The Vallabha sect became **popular among merchants and landowners** of Gujarat.

Thyagaraja (1767-1847) and Bhakti Movement

- Thyagaraja, a saint-poet who spread bhakti through **kritis and kirtans**. The Sahitya is of primary importance in kirtan, unlike kritis, whose significance mainly lies in music.
- Tyagaraja is believed to have composed more than 1000 kritis.
- He was a **devotee of Lord Rama**.
- **The majority of his kritis are in Telugu; others are in Sanskrit.**
- He has composed several **Samudayakritis (Group Kritis) such as Ghana Raga** Pancharatna, kritis and also other Pancha ratna groups like Kovur, Lalgudi, Tiruvattiyur and Srirangam Pancharatna.
- He has also composed the groups of **Utsava Sampradaya kritis, Divyanama Sankirtanas**, and Upachara Kritis, which readily lend themselves to congregational singing.
- **Divyanama Kirtana:** These songs contain Lord's name and his praises, usually sung in Bhajans. There are two types of Divyanama Kirtana,
 - **Ekadhatu type:** In this type of singing, the Pallavi and charanas are sung to the same dhatu or swaram.

- For example, Sri Rama Jayarama-Yadukulakambhoji ragam, Tava Dasoham-Punnagavarali ragam- Adi Talam, composed by Thyagaraja.
- **Dvidhatu type:** In this type of singing, the music of charana is different from that of the Pallavi.
 - For example, Sri Rama Sri Rama-Sahana ragam, Pahi Rarnachandra Palita Surendra-Sankarabharana ragam, composed by Thyagaraja.

Utsava Sampradaya Kirtana: The concept of adoration through several procedures or Upachares for invoking God and the particular composition introduced for singing along with these upacharas is known as Utsava sampradaya Kirtana. They are 24 such compositions.

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