

# Bhakti

(Origin and Development of Bhakti)



Dr. Shakuntala Gawde  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Sanskrit  
University of Mumbai

[shakuntala.gawde@gmail.com](mailto:shakuntala.gawde@gmail.com)

# *Bhakti* - meaning



- ❧ Root *bhaj* -*sevāyām* (service)
- ❧ *Bhakti*- service
- ❧ To partake of, to engage in, to turn and to resort to, to pursue, to practice or to cultivate, to prefer or choose, to serve and honour, to love and adore

# Definitions



- ❧ सा त्वस्मिन् परमप्रेमरूपा । (*Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*)  
Highest love towards any object
- ❧ सा तु भगवन्महिमोक्ति : । (*Madhvācharya*)
- ❧ ध्यानं च तैलधारावदविच्छिन्नस्मृतिसंतानरूपम् । (*Rāmānuja*)

# Nature



- ❧ *Bhakti*- movement, way, means, yoga
- ❧ Initially an antithesis or revolt against *Jñāna* and *Karma*
- ❧ Way to equality, way to liberation

# Wide connotation



- ❧ *Bhakti*- loving devotion or attachment / emotive state of mind
- ❧ *Bhakti* cannot be only religious centric
- ❧ Sectarian as well non-sectarian
- ❧ Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, Śākta *bhakti*, Śaiva *bhakti*
- ❧ It gets particularized with its object
- ❧ *Gurubhakti*, *Deśabhakti*, *Matṛbhakti*, *Pitṛbhakti*

# Bhakti personified



- ❧ *Bhāgavata māhātmya-*
- ❧ Bhakti as youthful lady weeping due to pathetic condition of her sons
- ❧ *Jñāna* and *Vairāgya* as two sons
- ❧ Both are facing old age
- ❧ *Bhakti* took birth in South India, grown in Karnataka then went to Maharashtra but now sorrowful in Gujarat
- ❧ Nārada assured *Bhakti* to take away her sorrow

# *Saguna and Nirguna*



- ❧ *Saguna* and *Nirguna* forms of Bhakti
- ❧ *Saguna bhaktas*- Chaitanya, Tulasidas, Suradas, Meera
- ❧ *Nirguna bhaktas*- Kabir, Nanak
- ❧ *Saguna bhakti*- belief in highly personalized god, awareness about dualism but firm belief in oneness of two
- ❧ *Nirguna bhakti*- strict commitment to impersonal nature of God, devotion of an individual soul to submerge itself into Ultimate Reality

# R̥gvedic devotion



- ❧ Germs of Bhakti in different forms
- ❧ Polytheism, Henotheism, Kathenotheism, Pantheism
- ❧ Hymns in the praise of different deities
- ❧ Indra, Agni, Varuṇa, Sūrya, Rudra, Viṣṇu
- ❧ Prayers for fulfilment of different desires
- ❧ Special relation between Seers and god



# VII maṇḍala



- ❧ Literary traces of *Bhakti* concept
- ❧ RV VII.86- cosmic majesty and the activity of Varuṇa
- ❧ Varuṇa props asunder the two worlds, even though they are enormous
- ❧ Vasiṣṭha as true *bhakta* has a hope of being able to establish a personal communion with his special divinity (*iṣṭadevatā* -personal deity Varuṇa)

- ❧ Vasiṣṭha feared a wide gulf separated him from Varuṇa. (unsurpassable greatness of the God against the humble position of devotee)
- ❧ Vasiṣṭha asserts- I may be within the innermost presence (*Varuṇe antar*) of Varuṇa.
- ❧ Natural and inevitable difference between the cosmic majesty of Varuṇa and the earthly and mortal significance of Vasiṣṭha
- ❧ Vasiṣṭha is aware of his sins and feeling guilty  
(basic constituent of *bhakta*)

- ❧ Vasiṣṭha sincerely repented on his sins
- ❧ Complete surrender to Varuṇa
- ❧ Sincere keenness for moral improvement
- ❧ Vasiṣṭha had great faith over Varuṇa's compassion
- ❧ Vasiṣṭha established a personal relation with Varuṇa
- ❧ Friend of Varuṇa even though he might have sinned against Varuṇa

❧ He would also serve Varuṇa like a slave or *dāsa*

(सृजा वत्सां न दाम्नो वसिष्ठाम् ।)

❧ Vasiṣṭha was like a tethered calf ever longing to be united with the mother cow

❧ Vasiṣṭha looked upon the face of Agni as the face of Varuṇa

❧ Visible Agni served as the medium to see Varuṇa

❧ Vasiṣṭha was further privileged to share in some mystic experiences in the company of Varuṇa

❧ Varuṇa has shown special grace to Vasiṣṭha

# Fear -Element of *bhakti* ?



- ❧ Bhakti has nothing to do with the feeling of fear in the mind of people.
- ❧ Feeling of whole hearted devotion is *bhakti*.
- ❧ Faith and devotion are always for a personal deity (*samūrta*) which is not found in *RV*
- ❧ *Bhakti* is monotheistic- cannot be traced back to *RV*

# *Bhakti in R̥gveda*



- ❧ Devotional service or highest service cannot be seen in *RV*
- ❧ *Bhakti* can be Highest, medium and lower type
- ❧ Nature of *bhakti* can get manifested at different places in different times...dependent on aim to be achieved
- ❧ *RV*- aim of *bhakti* differs (material prosperity)

# *Brāhmaṇas*



- ❧ Revolve around sacrificial details
- ❧ Particular deity presides over sacrifice
- ❧ Sacrifice bears fruit if performed with accuracy
- ❧ Faith, respect, trust are required

# Principal *Upaniṣads*



- ❧ Called as *jñānakāṇḍa*
- ❧ Criticize ritualistic approach
- ❧ Urge towards eternal liberation
- ❧ Knowledge of Absolute Brahman- superior
- ❧ Knowledge of Self
- ❧ Word Bhakti is not found---
- ❧ first occurrence in *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*
- ❧ Traces of *bhakti* in other forms



# *Upāsanās* earlier form of *bhakti*



- ❧ Various *upāsanās*
- ❧ Meditations on Saguṇa Brahman
- ❧ Worship through various symbols
- ❧ **Hirriyanna-** *upāsanā* includes *Śravaṇa*, *manan*, *dhyāna*. It may be said to contain the germs of later *bhakti*
- ❧ **Bhandarkar-** Origin of *Bhakti* may be traced back to *upāsanā*
- ❧ *Gurubhakti* is explicit – *Praśna Upaniṣad*

# Meditation



❧ *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* - Meditation on Aum

❧ Quest for self knowledge

❧ Yājñavalkya Maitreyī dialogue

❧ न वा अरे पत्युः कामाय पतिः प्रियः भवति ।

❧ आत्मनस्तु कामाय सर्वं प्रियं भवति ।

❧ आत्मा वा रे श्रोतव्यो द्रष्टव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यो ।

# Knowledge



- ❧ Knowledge of Brahman and ātman
- ❧ 'Knowing the Self, formless among forms, stable among the unstable, all pervading, great, a wise man does not grieve.'  
(*KathUp* I.2.22)
- ❧ Theory of five sheaths in *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*
- ❧ *Nirguṇa Bhakti* / *Sūkṣma bhakti*
- ❧ **Grace of God**
- ❧ नैष आत्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन ।
- ❧ यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यः तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनूं स्वाम् ॥ (*KathUp*)

# Later *Upaniṣads*



- ❧ *Saguṇa* and *Nirguṇa* bhakti
- ❧ Something more than abstract philosophical ideas
- ❧ Desire of seeing god though either personally or through mental vision
- ❧ Glorify deities like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī, Gaṇeśa
- ❧ Follow the path of monotheism
- ❧ Synthesize different paths of liberation
- ❧ Yoga, bhakti, karma and jñāna

# *Bhakti* → Simple path



❧ *Tripādvibhutimahānārāyaṇopaniṣad*

*Bhakti* is most essential element without which knowledge of Brahman is not possible

तस्मात्सर्वेषामधिकारिणामनधिकारिणां भक्तियोग एव प्रशस्यते ।  
भक्तियोगो निरुपद्रवः । भक्तियोगान्मुक्तिः ।

**Path of *Bhakti***- suitable for all and without any hurdle.

# Fruit assigned....



❧ *Sarasvati Upaniṣad*

‘He who worships Sarasvati with the ten verses with **faith** and devotion, obtains the fruit within six months’.

सोऽभ्यर्च्येनां दशश्लोक्या नित्यं स्तौति सरसवतीम् ।  
भक्तिश्रद्धाभियुक्तस्य षण्मासात्प्रत्ययो भवेत् ॥

# Concentration of mind



❧ *Vāsudevopaniṣad*

❧ Hari himself declared---

एकाग्रमनसा यो मां ध्यायते हरिमव्ययम् ।  
हृत्पङ्कजे च स्वात्मानं स मुक्तो नात्र संशयः ॥  
मद्रूपमद्वयं ब्रह्म आदिमध्यान्तवर्जितम् ।  
स्वप्रभं सच्चिदानन्दं भक्त्या जानाति चाव्ययम् ॥

# Reverence to devotee



❧ *Śivopaniṣad*

- ❧ शिवयज्ञोपयोगार्थं प्रवक्ष्यामि समासतः ।
- ❧ सर्वेषां शिवभक्तानां दद्यात्किञ्चिदादरात् ।
- ❧ दत्त्वा यज्ञफलं विज्ञात् किमु तद्वस्तुदानतः ॥

Giving *dāna* to the devotee of Śiva is capable of attaining highest fruit.

तस्मादीश्वरमुद्दीश्य तद्यदात्मनि रोचते ।  
तत्तदीश्वरभक्तेभ्यः प्रदातव्यं फलार्थिना ॥



# *Mānasa Pūja*



☞ Mental worship

☞ Concrete offerings to be visualized by devotee and were imagined to have been offered to the deity. If any material for worship is not available , the devotee is asked to perform the worship just with water

☞ अथ रक्तपुष्पैरचयेत् । तदभावे जलैस्तदभावे मानसीं  
भक्तिमाचरेत् ।

# Japa, dhyāna



- ❧ Worship of *Ātman* in *Ātmapūjopaniṣad*
- ❧ *Japa*- muttering the name of God , easiest method
- ❧ *Kalisantaropaniṣad*-  
भगवत् आदिपुरुषस्य नारायणस्य नामोच्चारणमात्रेण निर्धूत कलिर्भवति ।
- ❧ *Siddhantasāropaniṣad*  
मानसपूजेन जपेन ध्यानेन कीर्तनेन स्तुत्या मानसेन सर्वेण नित्यस्थलं प्राप्नोति ।

# *Bhagavadgīta*



- ❧ Confluence of *jnana*, *karma* and *Bhakti*
- ❧ Early Vaiṣṇava text
- ❧ Transformation of the absolute Brahman into personal god Kṛṣṇa
- ❧ Sāttvika, Rājasika and Tāmasika *Bhakti*
- ❧ मय्यावेश्य मनो ये मां नित्ययुक्ता उपासते ।
- ❧ श्रद्धया परयोपेतास्ते मे युक्ततमो मता : ॥ (*BhG XII.2*)

# *Bhakti* of Kṛṣṇa as personal –impersonal god



## ❧ *Ekāntika bhakti*

अनन्यश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासन्ते  
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥

## ❧ *Complete Surrender*

मय्येव मन आधत्स्व मयि बुद्धिं निवेशय...।

यत्करोषि यदश्रासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत्  
यत्तपस्यसि कौन्तेय तत्कुरुष्व मदर्पणम् ॥

## ❧ *Saguna Bhakti*---- > *Nirguṇa Bhakti*

*Viśvarupa darśana*-----

Śrī Kṛṣṇa is all-pervasive *Brahman*

# *Jñānī bhakta-* superior



- ❧ *ārta-* distressed with sufferings
- ❧ *Arthārthī* –seeking for object
- ❧ *Jijñāsu* – seeks knowledge
- ❧ *Jñānī-* realized God

- ❧ तेषां ज्ञानी नित्ययुक्त एकभक्तिर्विशिष्यते ।
- ❧ प्रियो हि ज्ञानिनोऽत्यर्थमहं स च मम प्रियः ॥ (BhG VII.17)

- ❧ **Contemplation –**  
मय्येव मन आधत्स्व मयि बुद्धिं निवेशय ।

# Purāṇas



- ❧ Authors of *Purāṇas* replaced the institution of sacrifice with simple means-
- ❧ Vows, donations and *tīrtha*
- ❧ Simplified religion with stress on faith and devotion  
श्रद्धापूर्वाः सर्वधर्माः मनोरथफलप्रदाः ।  
श्रद्धया साध्यते सर्वं श्रद्धया तुष्यते हरिः ।  
यथाऽऽलोको हि जन्तूनां चेष्टाकरणतां गतः ।  
तथैव सर्वसिद्धीनां भक्तिः परमकारणम् ॥ (नारद पु.)
- ❧ *Nārada Purāṇa*-Thousand faces of goddess Lalitā
- ❧ Importance of *mantras* in honour of Viṣṇu
- ❧ Enable people to attain their desired object and by mere utterance of these *mantras* sins get dissolved.

# Nāmamāhātmya



- ❧ *Liṅga Purāṇa* - thousand names of Śiva
- ❧ He who reads then or listens to them attains the merit of thousand sacrifices
- ❧ *Padma Purāṇa* - importance of meditation on Viṣṇu
- ❧ Those who do not worship Viṣṇu as Supreme Lord, go to hell
- ❧ *Garuḍa Purāṇa* - Meditation is the greatest *dharma*, greatest *tapas*, greatest purity
- ❧ Destruction of all sins in a moment .
- ❧ Idol worship and temple worship
- ❧ Theory of *Avatāra*

# Śravaṇa



❧ *Purāṇa Śravaṇa*

❧ Eulogized as removal of sins

❧ *Vāmana Purāṇa*

❧ Diseases do not attack him, not should poisons and magic have any effect on the body who hears *Vāyu Purāṇa* .

❧ *Vāyu Purāṇa*

❧ Listener attains entire merit of horse sacrifice



# Navavidha Bhakti



❧ *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* -

❧ श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम्

❧ अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम् ॥

❧ Kṛṣṇa as Lord Himself and not *Avatāra*

❧ Līlā's of God

# *Vedānta ācāryas*



❧ *Nirguṇa Bhakti-*  
*Śaṅkarācārya,*

❧ *Saguṇa Bhakti-*  
*Madhvācārya,*  
*Rāmānujācārya,*  
*Nimbarkācārya ,*  
*Vallabhācārya*

❧ *Rāmānujācārya-*  
*Prapatti ,*  
*Mārjara Bhakti , Markaṭa Bhakti*

❧ *Vallabhācārya ---*  
❧ *Maryādā Bhakti and Puṣṭi*  
*Bhakti*  
❧ *Madhurā Bhakti*

# Bhakti movement



❧ Bhakti yoga

❧ Bhakti *Mārga*

❧ Revolt against *jñāna*. Reaction against caste division, untouchability and ritualism in India

❧ Way to equality and Salvation

# Bhakti -*Rasa*



- ❧ Abhinavagupta mentions Bhakti as an important accessory for the development of Śānta rasa
- ❧ Hemādri in 1300 CE- applied components of Rasa to *Bhakti*
- ❧ Rūpa Gosvāmi- 1600 CE
- ❧ Pre-eminent theorist on *Bhakti rasa*

# Rūpa Gosvāmi



- ❧ Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition
- ❧ *Bhakti Rasamṛta Sindhu*
- ❧ *Bhakti*- not just aesthetic pleasure but spiritual delight
- ❧ Rasa not extra-ordinary but other worldly

# Kṛṣṇa-essence



- ❧ Kṛṣṇa -embodiment and essence of all *rasas*
- ❧ *Līlās* of Kṛṣṇa as centre of devotional practice
- ❧ *Rāgānugā bhakti* – One becomes through meditation an actor imitating in Kṛṣṇa *Līlās* .
- ❧ Rasa is experienced by all involved-
- ❧ Actor , playwright, characters, audience, Kṛṣṇa and his companions